

destinationnorthernontario.ca



2018-19

Annual Report







MESSAGE FROM The **President**

After a rebranding in 2018, Destination Northern Ontario (formerly known as Tourism Northern Ontario), continued to raise the bar in all four of its Ministry-mandated pillars including marketing, product development, workforce and industry training and investment attraction. The organization also maintained its position as a provincial leader in partnerships, successfully leveraging its Ministry allocation by over three times the original investment.

2018-19 did see its share of challenges, however. The organization faced a significant budget cut and had to reallocate resources while adjusting to a new fiscal reality. This resulted in increased in-house activities as well as streamlining partnerships and investments to ensure maximum return on investment and leveraging wherever possible.

2018-19 marked another significant milestone in the tourism industry, not only in Northern Ontario but across the entire province. The Mandatory Accommodation Tax (MAT) was implemented by a number of communities across Ontario, including those in the North. As a result, millions of dollars in future funds became a part of the long-term planning for tourism development in Northern Ontario. Destination Northern Ontario began the process of working with its urban partners to develop strategies that will leverage and maximize this new investment in tourism in the North and ultimately, roll out a plan that will grow tourism receipts in communities that are implementing the MAT to benefit the region as a whole. Destination Northern Ontario is investing in rural partners as it has in the past to ensure support across all areas of the region.

Workforce and industry training continued through the Tourism Excellence North (TEN) program as the organization completed a three-year pilot with Regional Tourism Organization 12 (Explorers' Edge). Destination Northern Ontario amended its programming within TEN to respond to industry needs and will make ongoing adjustments as required.

I am pleased to report that product development initiatives continue under the guidance of 12 product development teams and we are looking forward to new projects under this pillar including the World's Best Snowmobile Destination project and Francophone tourism development in 2019-20.

Under our partnership program, we joined with industry to undertake a wide range of innovative initiatives focused on wayfinding and strategic planning. A very significant partnership this year was our pilot project with Indigenous Tourism Ontario and the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada to develop an Indigenous food tourism strategy for our region and eventually for all of Ontario and beyond.

As always, I am pleased to present you with Destination Northern Ontario's annual report which outlines the exceptional work the organization has undertaken over the 2018-19 fiscal year. The Destination Northern Ontario Board of Directors continues to support staff with their collective experience and knowledge. We acknowledge the Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport for its ongoing assistance through the Regional Tourism Organization program and look forward to continued tourism growth in Northern Ontario.

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 Tourism, Culture & Sport, the Ministry of Northern Development & 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.

2018-19 Board of Directors

NAME	POSITION	SECTOR
Marty Kalagian	President	Operator – Retired
Gerry Webber	Vice President	Government – Retired
Betty McGie	Secretary Treasurer	Operator
Ray Nadeau	Director	Operator
George Stivrins	Director	Operator
Lori Branch	Director	Operator
Tammy Frick	Director	Festivals
Dr. Rhonda Koster	Director	Academic
lan Wood	Director	Municipal

Government Advisors

NAME	POSITION	SECTOR
Laurie Brownlee	Advisor	Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport
Graham Campbell	Advisor	Ministry of Northern Development and Mines
Jim Grayston / Laurie Pella	Advisor	Destination Ontario
Nancy Rosset	Advisor	Industry Canada – FedNor
Greg Wilson	Advisor	Ontario Parks
Pamela Jalak	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
Nicki Schiewe	Senior Coordinator, Product Development
Kathy Carlson	Senior Coordinator, Corporate Services
Karen Peacock	Senior Coordinator, Workforce and Industry Training
Gillian McCullough	Tourism Excellence North Administrative Assistant
Tiina Keranen	Visual Communications Designer
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 Northwest 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.

Photo: Destination Northern Ontario



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. The execution of a new strategic implementation plan allowed a more holistic approach to priority pillars. A dedicated staff person is now responsible for each of the four priority pillars with support staff as needed. Destination Northern Ontario continues to align with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport in both its programs and coordination of staff.

Governance

The Board of Directors meets nine times per year or more as required, including four meetings in person and the balance via teleconference. In order to keep attendance at acceptable levels, meetings via teleconference enabled the Board to travel less, while still sharing resources and weighing in on decisions from their respective locations. Board attendance in 2018-19 was 91%. The Board monitors organizational performance through oversight of the various strategies in the business and marketing plans through the review of detailed performance reports.

Over 50% of Destination Northern Ontario's Board of Directors is comprised of representatives from private sector businesses.



Corporate Communications

In the fall of 2018, RTO13 (previously operating as Tourism Northern Ontario) relaunched under the new tradename Destination Northern Ontario at the Northern Ontario Tourism Summit in Sault Ste. Marie. The relaunch was extremely successful, and the new brand has now been fully integrated into all corporate communication tools.

- Visits to www.destinationnorthernontario.ca remained stable through a significant website redevelopment at approximately 14,300 visits per year. Time on page was up by 8%, demonstrating greater engagement.
- Industry-focused social media grew 15% yearover-year with total followers reaching nearly 14,000. As part of its engagement objectives, Destination Northern Ontario continued to share monthly newsletters as well as program-specific communication through Constant Contact, with the total number of communication pieces being 44.
- Destination Northern Ontario continued implementation of its external and internal style guide with logo use policies.

- The Northern Ontario Tourism Summit was held in Sault Ste. Marie with an attendance of 322, an increase in attendance of 10% year-over-year.
- Destination Northern Ontario sponsored several events in outreach efforts including the Northern Ontario Municipal Association Conference (NOMA), Superior Country's AGM, the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities Conference (FONOM) and the Attractions Ontario AGM among others





14,300 visits to tourismnorthernontario.com



8% increase in time spent on website



Social Media grew by 15%



Total number of communication pieces: 44



Marketing

2018-19 marked the second year of the implementation of streamlining NorthernOntario.travel, Northern Ontario's online marketing portal, through a centralized content strategist. It was also the second year of the implementation of a brand alignment strategy which guided all six lead marketing organizations to align with the provincial marketing playbook. The results were overwhelmingly positive; due to successful ad buys and centralized efforts, **NorthernOntario.travel** saw **3.2 million** visits to the portal between April 2018 and March 2019 – **a record high**. All six marketing leads implemented provincial branding activities including social media campaigns, digital asset development and the creation of new tradeshow booths for hunting and angling shows in the Northwest.

Key pan-northern marketing projects included expanding opportunities for international & U.S. travel trade marketing, continued growth of packages and online sales in both rural and urban areas and a large urban partnered campaign that promoted communities as gateways for snowmobile tourism. Destination Northern Ontario also partnered with Destination Ontario and the City of Temiskaming Shores to start the development of a re-tooled trip planner that will live on the NorthernOntario.travel site.

International marketing continued to be a cornerstone for Destination Northern Ontario marketing activities. Destination Northern Ontario attended Rendez-vous Canada in Halifax this year and increased efforts in international marketing through the work of an International Marketing Specialist saw an increased number of inbound and outbound tour operators carrying Northern Ontario product in all key markets.

Northern Web Portal: northernontario.travel

The Northern Web Portal is a content rich website featuring Northern Ontario experiential and regional product. The website offers visitors the ability to book trips online as well as browse through travel blogs by marketing leads in the area. The website reached nearly **2.5 million visits** (up 10% YoY) with a cost per visit of **\$0.20**, and cost per referral of **\$1.12** (compared to \$2.23 in 2016-17). Work was completed on creating a search system that would produce product-based landing pages – a key in the marketing of the region's priority experiences in years to come.



Sub-regional Marketing Highlights:



Investment: \$1,715,000

Destination Northern Ontario continued to support Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) in all three sub-regions, investing \$1,715,000 into sub-regional marketing efforts, supporting six DMOs. Sub-regional marketing activities aligned with the priority products and experiences outlined in the Northern Ontario Marketing Strategy and included Nature and Adventure, Touring, Culture and Heritage, Angling and Hunting and Gateway and Destination Communities products. Investment also supported content creation for NorthernOntario. Travel. In addition, Destination Northern Ontario contributed \$210,000 to Northern DMOs in order to support brand alignment with provincial branding.



Destination Marketing Organizations:



13a Northeastern Ontario





13b Sault Ste. Marie-Algoma







13c Northwest Ontario









Product Development

Research

Tourism research plays a significant role in understanding current and future traveler motivations and trends. It also provides the foundation of the creation of product development strategies and the basis of decision making.

The following activities took place in 2018-19 to support our research initiatives:

- ✓ Annual accommodation performance tracking by sub-region.
- Lake Superior Watershed research with bi-national stakeholders in partnership with the Council of the Great Lakes.
- Accommodations analysis on the North Shore of Lake Superior as part of the Lake Superior Circle Tour enhancement project.



Experience Shift

In 2018-19, a fourth annual product development symposium was held at the Northern Ontario Tourism Summit in conjunction with a francophone tourism session and an information session on the Experience Fishing program. Three new product development strategies for Francophone tourism, motorcycle touring and boating along with a supporting product team for each respective sector were created and began to be implemented in 2018-19.

The 12 product teams met in each quarter to discuss strategies surrounding implementation. As a result of the work of these product teams, the following actions were completed in 2018-19:

- Secured funding for **Experience Fishing** from both NOHFC and FedNor as well as partnering Destination
 Marketing Organizations (DNOs) and pan-Northern implementation got underway;
- Partnered with communities and DMOs to move the **World's Best Snowmobile Destination** project forward. Applied to both FedNor and NOHFC for three-year support;
- Supported product development along **Lake Superior Circle Tour** through the revitalization project with bi-national partners and communities;
- Conducted two major research studies on Northern Ontario accommodations infrastructure and bi-national partnership opportunities;

- Leveraged FedNor and partnering organizations and communities to undertake identified **Francophone tourism** itinerary initiative;
- Collaborated with cycling partners across the north to produce a **Premier Pan-Northern Cycling Events** rack card and supporting webpage that was distributed provincially and into Quebec; and
- Supported **three new** festivals/ events in growing their events by assisting with their participation in the **Festivals Events Ontario** conference.

Wayfinding/Travel Information Centres

Through outreach and word of mouth regarding early success stories, momentum continued to grow for Destination Northern Ontario's bilingual community wayfinding partnership program with FedNor and Northern Ontario communities. This year, partners for this popular initiative included **Kenora**, **Terrace Bay**, **Sioux Lookout**, **Timmins**, **Greenstone**, **Schreiber**, **Blind River**, **East Ferris** and **Nipigon**.

This was year two of the three-year program which will see **\$1.275 million** spent on enhancing wayfinding across the north and offering partners **2/3rds** of the funding required for their wayfinding programs. In addition, Destination Northern Ontario continued to reach out and provide needed services to its Northern Ontario Travel Information Centres (TICs) based on the recommendations of its Northern Ontario Visitor Information Centre Strategy.

2018-19
Bilingual
Community
Wayfinding
Partners:

- 01 Kenora
- 02 Sioux Lookout
- 03 Nipigon
- **04** Greenstone

01

- 05 Schreiber
- 06 Terrace Bay
- 07 Timmins

04

03)05

06

07

08

02

- 08 Blind River
- 09 East Ferris

Quality Shift

In November of 2015, Destination Northern Ontario launched Tourism Excellence North (TEN) at the 2015 Northern Ontario Tourism Summit. TEN is a tourism development program that addresses the Quality Shift recommendations found in the Northern Ontario Tourism Product Development Strategy and is designed to help operators, organizations, communities and destinations make significant, quality investments in their business, operation or community, guiding them to increase the quality of their product anddevelop innovative experiences that raise the bar on visitor value, ultimately increasing positive visitor experiences and increasing operators' bottom line in the region.

In its fourth year, TEN saw the successful delivery of all proposed TEN training solutions. This includes;

- Over 443 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 2,582 times.
- 18 operators participated in the Fast Track to Success (FTS) personalized coaching program, totaling 78 operators altogether who participated since TEN's launch. Input from operators who have responded to surveys about the value and impact of the FTS program have made it very clear that FTS is having a positive impact.
- Six group learning workshops (for operators and two for communities) were facilitated with 76 participants. Registrations exceeded expectations for all workshops.

- Three International Market-Readiness training workshops were facilitated in Kenora, Temiskaming Shores and Sudbury with 37 participants.
- Three Best Practices Missions
 (BPMs) were facilitated and focused on cycling, auto/RV tourism and snowmobiling, with 26 participants.
- Consultant services were retained for the Experience Fishing training, resulting in program content development and design and 30 participants in attendance at the training session.

Culture Shift

Culture Shift recommendations in Destination Northern Ontario's Product Development Strategy centre around the dedication of resources to product development and creating a culture of excellence for Northern Ontario. In 2018-19, more resources were applied to the non-marketing pillars and communication continued highlighting the importance of tourism through the Tourism Rocks! campaign and other media.

Tourism Excellence North continued to monitor the program and move forward to achieve a 'Culture of Quality' that generates investment, commitment and support for strategic tourism product development in Northern Ontario.



STATS 100% FOR 2018

of attendees said they would participate in Tourism **Excellence North training** opportunities in the future.



opened for viewing



Three International Market-Readiness Workshops **Facilitated**



participants in Fast Track to Success program



Group Learning workshops delivered



participants in Best **Practices** Missions

Photo: Destination Northern Ontario



Workforce & Industry Training





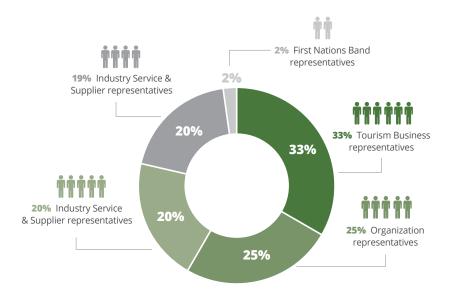
Workforce & Industry Training

In a move to consolidate workforce development and industry training efforts undertaken by the organization with the Tourism Excellence North program, Destination Northern Ontario's new Three-Year Strategic Plan involves fulfilling objectives under a single Training/Tourism Excellence North pillar area, with a dedicated TEN Training Senior Coordinator at the helm.

Highlights from the **fifth annual Northern Ontario Tourism Summit** included two days of workshops focusing on both operator and public-sector interests and pre-summit training from Tourism Excellence North and Workplace Safety and Prevention Services. Numerous industry experts led workshops, presentations, and consultation sessions throughout the event. Summit delegates also visited a tradeshow highlighting Northern tourism organizations, as well as product and service providers to the tourism industry.

The 2018 event was attended by approximately **322 delegates** (107 tourism business representatives, 63 industry service & supplier representatives, 81 organization representatives, 66 Federal, Provincial and Municipal government representatives and 5 First Nation representatives). Attendance was up approximately **15%** year over year.

All summit feedback was gathered through the event app. This year's data collection was **significantly higher** than last year's due to the heavy implementation and promotion of the event app's gamification feature, and due to the increased familiarity of the app which was introduced at the previous summit. One of every three attendees used the app and the average rating for sessions received **4.16/5** stars.



2018 NORTHERN ONTARIO TOURISM SUMMIT



- 33% Tourism Business representatives
- 25% Organization representatives
- 20% Federal, Provincial and Municipal Government representatives
- 20% Industry Service & Supplier representatives
- 2% First Nation representatives



Investment Attraction

In 2018/19, Destination Northern Ontario experienced a **64%** industry satisfaction level with investment attraction activities. The organization will make it a priority to ensure Investment Attractions activities, while tertiary in nature, are well communicated to the industry.

The communication and implementation of priority recommendations from the Destination Northern Ontario Investment Attraction Strategy outlines a limited role for the organization, essentially around inventorying opportunities, monitoring investments and connecting industry stakeholders to funding opportunities.

According to the 2018-19 industry satisfaction survey based on a sample size of approximately **200** stakeholders, **74.3%** of respondents ranked their satisfaction with Destination Northern Ontario activities as satisfied or higher (highest being very satisfied). Marketing remained the biggest priority for respondents with product development as second highest. Workforce and industry training jumped several points from previous years and is now being ranked close to product development in terms of important activity from an industry viewpoint.

2018-19



RESULTS

Out of **200** stakeholders, **74.3%** were satisfied with Destination Northern Ontario's activities.



Partnership Initiatives

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. Destination Northern Ontario implemented **over 30** partnered initiatives working with over **100 partners** and leveraging the Province's **\$605,000** investment upwards to over **\$1.2 million** of partnered activity. Some highlights of these partnerships by pillar area are as follows:

Workforce Development & Industry Training Partnership

Northern Ontario Tourism Summit – Pan-Northern

The fifth annual Northern Ontario Tourism Summit was held in Sault Ste. Marie and was once again a success. The event attracted 322 delegates, 53% of guests being tourism operators and industry suppliers, with the rest being made up of government officials and other industry stakeholders. The event provided operators and key stakeholders with practical training opportunities and access to expert keynote speakers. Hosted in conjunction with Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario (NOTO), this is now a Northern Ontario signature event which will be held annually for the tourism industry in the North.

Product Development Partnerships

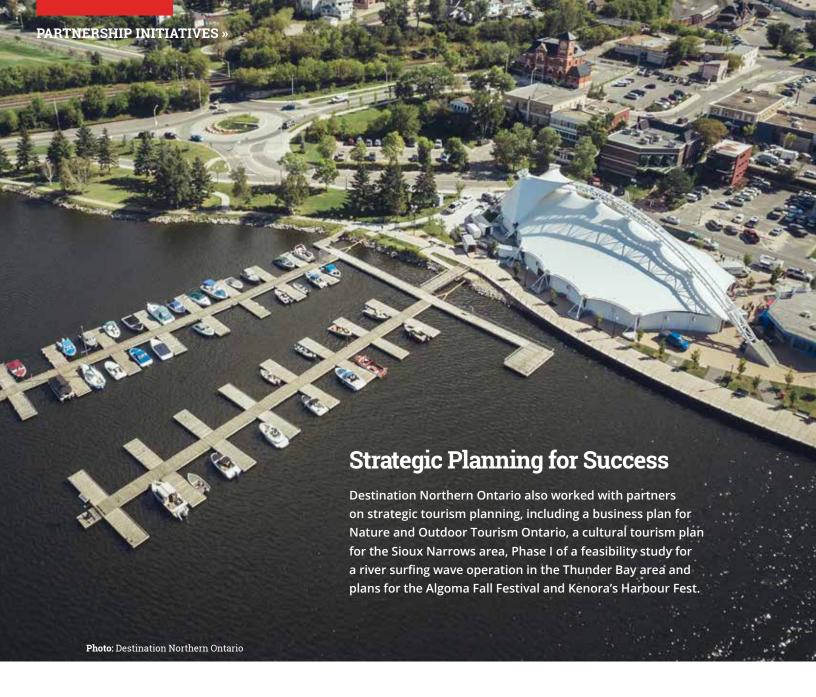
Developing Food Tourism in the North

Destination Northern Ontario partnered with Indigenous Tourism Ontario and the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada on phase one of a ground-breaking initiative to develop a Northern Ontario Indigenous Food Tourism Strategy as a pilot project for all of Ontario and beyond. New food tourism strategies were also initiated this year in Temiskaming Shores and North Bay. Where does food tourism development fit with Destination Northern Ontario's product development priorities? Everywhere! Tourists eat at least once a day but more likely three, four or five times a day. What's more, over 1/3 of tourist spending worldwide is devoted to food and an amazing 77% of U.S. leisure travelers (131 million tourists) are classified as food tourists.

5th Annual Northern Ontario Tourism Summit







Trails Wayfinding: Leading the Way

In total, **7070 maps and signs** were developed with Destination Northern Ontario's trails partners including Nipigon, the Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area, Algoma Sno-Plan, the Lake Huron North Channel Marina Marketing Association, the Township of Oliver Paipoonge, Voyageur Trails, Mattawa's Voyageur Multi-Use Trail System and trails in Northwestern Ontario. Outreach to existing and new trails partners is ongoing.



Marketing Partnership

The Ontario Experience

The Ontario Experience television series is a partnership in where **13 different lodges** located throughout Northern Ontario bought into the program and television shows were developed.

Thirteen (13) 30-second spots were developed that speak to the lodges and the regions in which the lodges are located. In addition, 13 stories were written, with photography shot by the crew and are now active on the angling landing page of the Northern portal. This was the second season of the Ontario Experience with **104 airings** reaching nearly **1.3 million** households on the Sportsmen Network.









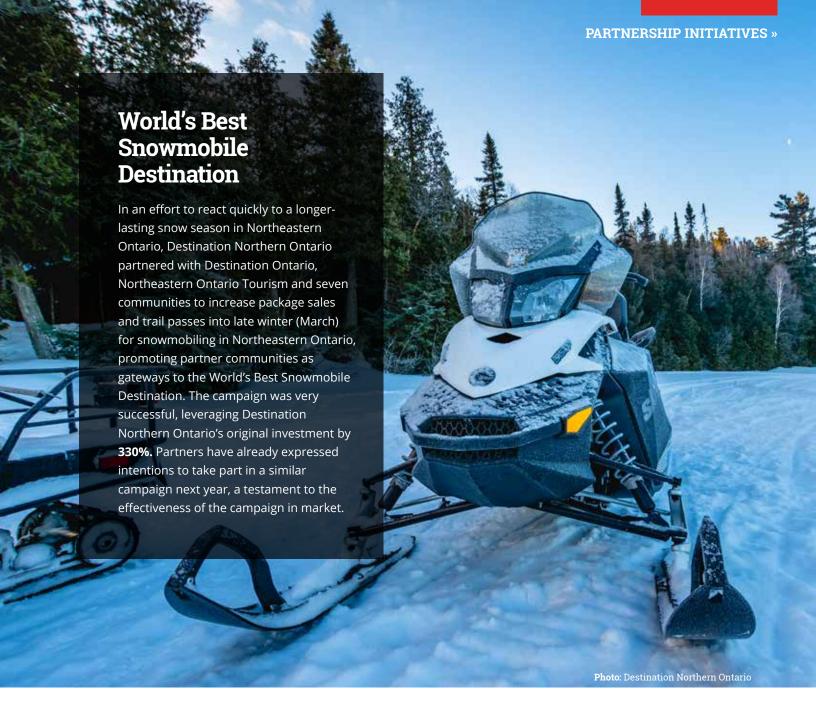


Tourism Awareness Campaign

The Tourism Rocks! campaign leveraged resources to work with identified partners to define, plan and implement marketing and communications initiatives that lead to increased visibility and advancement of the tourism sector in Northern Ontario under the "Tourism Rocks" banner.

Radio campaigns were undertaken in Sunset Country, Lake Superior North Shore communities, Blind River, Algoma and Temiskaming Shores. In addition, Destination Northern Ontario worked with The Labour Market Group to distribute Tourism Rocks toolkits to all six of the workforce planning boards in Northern Ontario for distribution to regional schools.

The Tourism Rocks! digital campaign undertook a different format in 2018-19 through a partnership with Village Media, a digital marketing agency in Northern Ontario. With an investment of \$10,000 in in-kind media, Destination Northern Ontario worked with a writer to create eight pieces of original content that focused on the importance of the tourism industry in the North. Those pieces of content were published on all of Village Media's news networks from Thunder Bay to North Bay and all in-between. The program was a tremendous success with nearly **42,000** views and over **500** shares of the developed content.



Stay2Play

Destination Northern Ontario continued the very successful "Stay2Play" partnership in 2018-19. Destination Ontario, Destination Northern Ontario, CTV Northern Ontario and **32 private operators** contributed to a multi-me campaign including 30-second television spots that promoted individual businesses under the "Ontario - Yours to Discover" banner as well as promexisting sub-regional brands. Destination Northern Ontario leveraged its investment by **four times** the original amount for this partnership.



Financial Plan 2018/19

Area of focus		\$	
Governance & Administration			518,691
Product Development		\$	514,716
Workforce & Industry Training		\$	656,027
Investment Attraction		\$	25,000
Marketing		\$	2,554,730
Partnership Initiatives		\$	605,000
Total (MTCS Allocation)		\$	4,874,164
Leveraged amount through partnership		\$	1,208,956

