



CULINARY EXPERIENCES



2013 Culinary Trail Development Project



Project Funded By:



Final Report

Bloom Strategic Solutions and Consulting Inc.

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Appendix A Stakeholder consultation



Stakeholder Survey and Interview Guide

Appendix B Design Workshop Participant Package



Design workshop agenda



Options for product development



Overall design considerations



Idea Bank - ideas shared through interviews and on-line survey



List of stakeholders to invite to inventory building session (March 2013)

Appendix B Best Practices – Culinary and Rural Tourism



Defining Culinary Tourism and Summary of Best Practices



Idea Map from University of Guelph, Rural Tourism Best Practices Workshop (Dec 2012)



Learning from Others- A Comprehensive Scan of Existing Culinary Tourism Products

Appendix C Product Development Resources



Experiential Tourism Overview and Toolkit for Developing Memorable Experiences

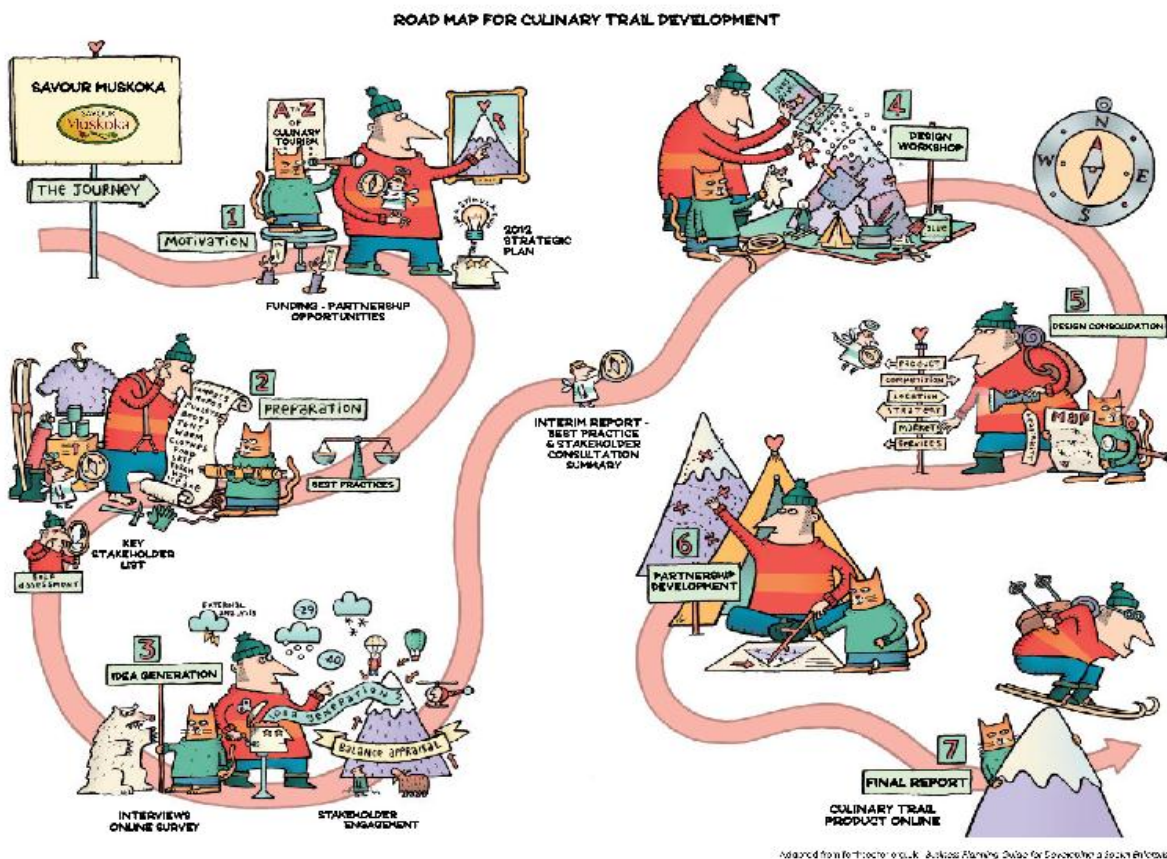
MUSKOKA'S CULINARY TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

1.0 CLARIFYING THE VISION FOR MUSKOKA'S CULINARY TRAIL

The roadmap was clear.

- 1. Start with a scan of research and best practices.
- 2. Consult Savour Muskoka members and community champions to glean their ideas and insights.
- 3. Then gather the most committed together for a design workshop that puts it all together into a vision for a unique Culinary Trail for Muskoka.

The design workshop accomplished just that. At the day's end, a clear culinary tourism product concept was developed through the collaborative efforts of an engaged working group of SAVOUR members – The resulting shared vision for a new culinary tourism product was built from a bank of ideas provided by SAVOUR stakeholders, assessed against best practices research, and then integrated with the local knowledge of what works in Muskoka. A full summary of the information that contributed to this is included in the Appendices.



2.0 DEFINING THE PURPOSE AND MARKET FOR THE TRAIL PROJECT

Development of a clear statement of purpose was seen as an essential first step in developing a quality and successful culinary tourism product for Muskoka. To be effective, it is critical that the product reflects a clear purpose of what it is intended to do – and then it must be designed specifically to meet those very explicit objectives.

What will this culinary tourism product accomplish and who is the market?

In the broadest terms, the Trail is about economic development. It is intended to be a tool to drive tourism in the area. **The Muskoka Culinary tourist is both those visiting from outside the region as well as the local community.** These local tourists will use the trail both as a tool to access healthier, locally grown and produced food with higher efficiency and convenience, as well as a guide of local producers and culinary experiences for people acting as “tourists” in their own community.

In More Specific Terms, This Trail Is:

- A way to promote Muskoka ... on a year round basis
- A way to create a market for and consumption of local food
- A way to grow local businesses
- A way to generate interest in local culinary events
- A way to build connections among food and culinary providers ... and make the link to all that makes Muskoka special and appealing
- A way to build economic, geographic and social linkages among distinct areas within Muskoka
- A way to contribute to and complement other Muskoka tourism strategies
eg. Explorers’ Edge; Discover Muskoka (MTMA)



Addressing potential roadblocks ... Trying to be all things to all people:

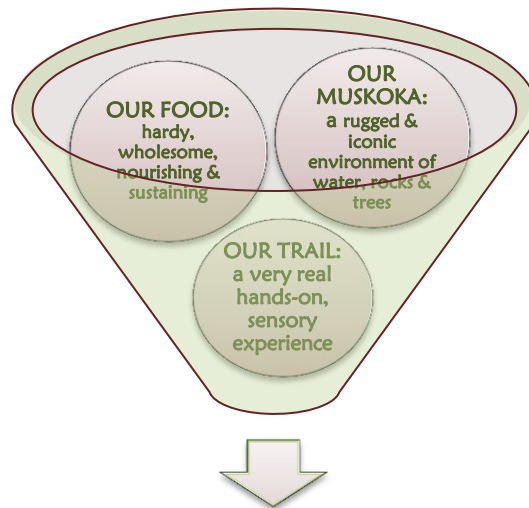
This product will target specific tourist segments. A tourism market consists of all those people with adequate opportunity, motivation, and ability to visit a destination or attraction – in this case the Culinary Trail. Market segmentation involves separating the tourism market into groups of like-minded people with similar needs and behaviours - who therefore respond to similar tourism marketing strategies. The more precisely segmented the market, the greater the likelihood that the trail will be able to implement targeted strategic marketing to identified, distinct groups of visitors rather than randomly marketing to the general public.

- Having a clear target market and purpose in place will help to alleviate confusion in the marketing stages. The intent of the product is to boost culinary tourism (both local and visiting tourists) – not to solely act as a directory of SAVOUR Muskoka members.

3.0 THEME ...EVERY TRAIL SHOULD TELL A STORY

The interest in culinary tourism and local food is exploding. This is a global phenomenon. This trend bodes well for Muskoka – an international brand with a reputation for exclusivity and high quality. It is no surprise that Muskoka was quickly identified by sector leaders at the beginning of this trend as a prime regional destination that could be an early leader in this movement. In reality though, Muskoka has been slow to respond to this opportunity while culinary tourism is thriving in other regions of Ontario. That being said, culinary and food (both value-added and agricultural) development in Muskoka has been quietly readying itself for years and now shows the capacity to make a successful and notable burst into the provinces Culinary Trail scene. But first, Muskoka must identify a culinary trail that tells a story that is unique and authentic to our region.

What is Muskoka's unique and authentic culinary story or theme?



DISCOVER, EXPLORE AND EXPERIENCE MUSKOKA'S CULINARY TRAIL



Addressing potential roadblocks ... Critical mass:

- While Muskoka offers agricultural products that are regionally-focused, this is not considered an agricultural area relative to other areas of the province. Muskoka does however have an abundance of offerings when local foods are combined with the presence of high quality chefs and restaurant experiences, and specialized food and beverage products.
- Will we have the critical mass to provide a trail that is exclusively culinary? Will we have to include the arts to round out offerings? It may be necessary to start small and phase in the trail to ensure an appropriate number of tourist-ready participants ... especially to address the year round market.

However!

- Muskoka has the organizational infrastructure in place that is needed to connect other tourism, arts, culture, and eco experiences with the culinary market. We are well organized on that level and have their support even now.

4.0 KEY SUCCESS FACTORS FOR MUSKOKA

The 2005-2015 Culinary Tourism Strategy and Action Plan identified 10 key criteria for success. This list provides a useful guide for those in the process of planning and developing new culinary tourism products. While the validity of all of these factors goes unquestioned, the working group asked themselves the question...

What does local knowledge tells us are the priority success factors for Muskoka?

- **LEADERSHIP** It must be established quickly. Who will take on the responsibility for leadership and management of the project over the long term? Who has the capacity and resources to make it happen?
- **QUALITY ASSURANCE & CONSISTENCY** It will be necessary to establish clear eligibility criteria for trail members and implement a monitoring process to ensure quality is maintained. Programs will be developed to assist any small business who would like to be on the trail, helping them to enhance their operations over time in order to meet required criteria.
- **AUTHENTIC & UNIQUE** Defining a truly unique Muskoka trail product is paramount.
- **FINANCIAL SUPPORT** Investment in the trail will be critical to the development of a quality product. There is optimism that a great product will attract appropriate investment. Ideally, the Trail will be self-sustained through participation fees – with additional financial assistance sourced for initial trail development and ongoing sponsorship for maintenance and growth.
- **PARTNERSHIP AND COMMUNITY-BASED COLLABORATION** The success of the trail will require a District-wide approach and will be predicated upon the commitment and collaboration of all Municipalities and economic development organizations.
- **INTEGRATED STRATEGY** The Trail project reflects common goals related to tourism development. Savour Muskoka is a ‘neutral’ body that is well positioned to facilitate a regional approach if sufficient resources are secured. Way-finding (common Trail signage) will be a fundamental element of a successful Trail system. This is an example of where a strong integrated approach is needed.

10 KEY SUCCESS FACTORS FOR CULINARY PRODUCTS

- Leadership
- Market-ready or near-market-ready culinary products and resources
- Integrated strategy
- Partnership and community-based collaboration
- Financial support and performance measures
- Destinations with good access from key origin markets
- Sufficient market intelligence
- Culinary tourism resources distinctive to the region
- Destination with multiple culinary tourism experiences
- An effective destination marketing organization (DMO)

from ... *The 2005-2015 Culinary Tourism Strategy and Action Plan*

“Prince Edward County is known for their culinary trail. Each individual municipality is responsible for their section but they all cooperate and work together as a part of the same group.”

Workshop participant and former PEC employee

5.0 DESIGNING THE MUSKOKA CULINARY TRAIL

The first culinary product developed must be practical, manageable and sustainable. The opportunity to expand the initial trail into multiple culinary tourism product offerings will come with experience, success and enhanced organizational capacity. As the initial trail is developed and evolves, consideration for future expansion of the trail will be constantly monitored so additional opportunities for growth can be harnessed. This evolution could include:

- ✚ Creating signature experience packages to complement the initial trail
- ✚ Integration with other sectors (arts, literary, etc.)
- ✚ Development of local community sub-trails (i.e. community/town sub-trails, full water-based culinary trail systems for cottages/visiting friends and family)
- ✚ Development of specialty sub-trails or packages (craft brewing trail, cranberry, etc.) that complement the initial signature SAVOUR Muskoka Trail

WHAT IS AT THE CORE? ...KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS

THEME	<p><i>SAVOUR THE BEAUTY AND RUGGEDNESS OF MUSKOKA THROUGH A CULINARY EXPERIENCE</i> Key words: rugged, water, rocks, trees, iconic beauty, hardy, wholesome, rich, indigenous, artful, learn, winding roads/forks in the road, Group of Seven, pioneering</p> <p>Note: Due to the limitations of agri-food production in Muskoka, the working group chose not to focus on a specific culinary ingredient or product – but rather a theme that would showcase the Muskoka experience infused with culinary experiences. There was also discussion of defining local food as regional or provincially sourced, again to address the production limitations in Muskoka.</p>
QUALITY STANDARD	A signature experience trail that ensures the highest quality product, service and knowledge. An experience that is special, engaging and uniquely Muskoka.
TARGET MARKETS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourists from outside Muskoka AND local to Muskoka • Tourists from upper socio-economic backgrounds AND the economy class tourist • Culinary tourists, local food and healthy food enthusiasts • Cottagers – their visiting families and friends¹ (RTO Research available) • Adventure seekers looking for an experience • Seniors and retirees (local and visiting tourists)
TRAIL MEMBERS ELIGIBILITY	<p>Eligibility will be tailored to specific sectors (Restaurants, farms, artisans, processors) address selection criteria related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourist-ready culinary experiences aligned with the Trail theme • Participation fee, pricing², code of conduct principles • Online presence with feedback/review option • Implementation of evaluation and monitoring measures, education • Hours of operation, parking, customer service and commitment to quality assurance • Facilities: demonstration areas, washrooms, gift shops • Communication – commitment to maintaining current information and participating in Trail marketing strategies

¹ See RTO12 report on characteristics of local tourist segments

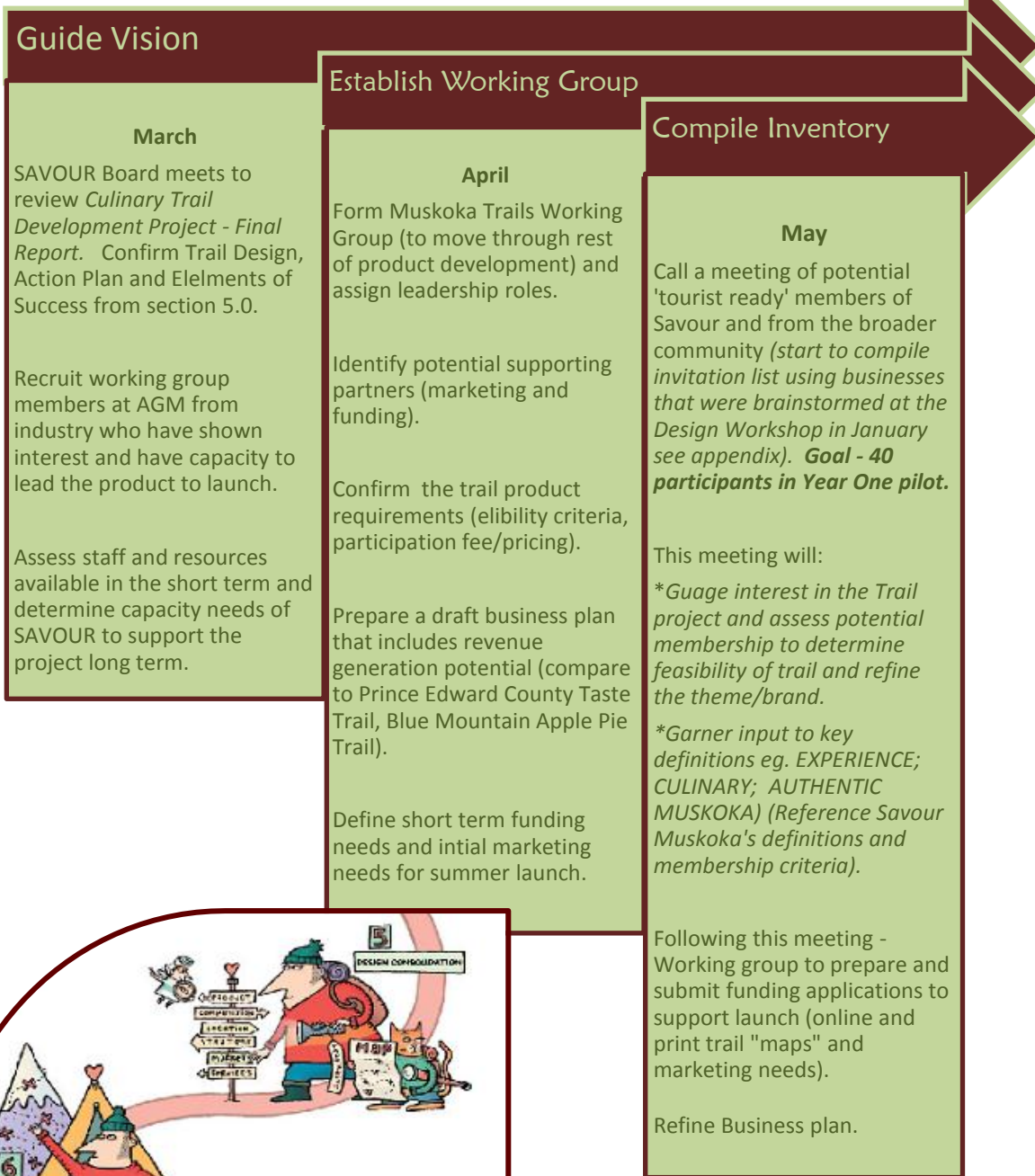
² Industry pricing standards are available through Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? ...INITIAL TRAIL DESIGN & EVOLUTION

STAGES	Format	Marketing Approach	Timing & Key Activities	Partners/Funding
<p>Stage One – <u>INITIAL SIGNATURE TRAIL PRODUCT</u></p> <p>Pilot Option Year 1:</p> <p>Brand Development \$5,000</p> <p>Brochure/Rack Card \$5,000</p> <p>Billboards \$9,000</p> <p>Advertising (Print and Online) \$5,000</p> <p>Online and Social Media Campaign staff time</p> <p>Total : \$24,000</p> <p>Participation Rate: 40 participants @ \$600. Next Step: Approach RTO12 to access Partnership Fund to leverage advertising budget</p>	<p>A district-wide, self-guided trail that acknowledges year round options - Includes water access options to reflect the unique Muskoka environment and geography</p> <p>Note: Restrict initial trail members to the culinary sector unless insufficient critical mass. If necessary incorporate other arts and cultural attractions...or phase in the trail while cultivating additional culinary members to the project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial trail will be marketed using mix of online tools (including existing Savour website - google mapping), social media integration, and production of a physical printed map (brochure or rack card -).\$5,000 Marketing strategy should be aligned with and linked to efforts of RTO 12 and Explorers' Edge (partnership funding and marketing campaigns) and MTMA (marketing campaigns) A mix of integrated print, digital, social media, and blogging to initially launch A local signage program will identify Trail participants (potentially 3 billboards to start at entry to Muskoka). \$9,000 - \$250/mth/sign – min. 12 agreement) A strong presence in local media will stimulate the participation of local residents e.g. Highlights in local media; social media 	<p>Spring/Summer 2013</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product Design Confirmed and Working Group / Leadership Recruited Eligibility Criteria, Pricing and Initial Inventory Assembled Online product creation and promotional materials Marketing Strategy and Partnerships Established (Explorer's Edge, DMO, EDO's, Chambers) Fund Development: Applications submitted to funding programs (marketing and further product development) Launch in Summer 2013 	<p>Product Launch Marketing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RTO 12 Partnership Funding <p>Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (MTCS) funds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tourism Development Fund Celebrate Ontario: http://www.mtc.gov.on.ca/en/invest/invest.shtml <p>OTMPC's Industry Partnership Proposal Program (IPPP): http://www.tourismpartners.com/partnerOps/industryPartner.xhtml?language=EN</p>
<p>Stage Two – <u>ENHANCE AND EXPAND</u></p>	<p>A) Enhanced trail features – Stronger online components, mobile app, and additional signage</p> <p><u>COMPLEMENTARY PRODUCTS</u>³</p> <p>B) Introduce the concept of packaged culinary experiences through limited offering of date specific package products.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue marketing strategies from stage one. Consider a local ambassador program targeted directly to local residents - a focus for the off-season. Collaborate with RTO12 and MTMA and tour operators to develop and market signature packages. Participate in relevant tourism industry tradeshows to market signature trail and new packages. 	<p>Fall/Winter 2013-14 to Spring/Summer 2014</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review, evaluate and success of initial product. Redesign where necessary. Build Inventory - Initiate workshops and resources to support growth of inventory by helping more SAVOUR members to become market-ready and meet trail eligibility requirements. Expand - Innovate initial on-line components of product and explore opportunity to develop an mobile app. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore funding to expand initial on-line component of product and explore opportunity to develop an app. Explore opportunity to align with other on-line mapping initiatives already underway in Muskoka (MTMA & MCN). CTC's Signature Experiences Collection: http://sec.keep-exploring.ca/ Initial trail itself may not be eligible but specific experiences included in the trail may be – focus is on International markets.
<p>Stage Three - <u>FUTURE CONSIDERATION</u></p>	<p>Integrate additional complimentary products to the trail – arts, literary, community sub-trails</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand marketing to include way finding signs, blade signs and billboards will be critical vehicles for gaining tourist attention and providing directional aids. 	<p>Summer 2014 –Spring 2014</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review, evaluate and success of initial product. Redesign where necessary Expand to complementary products and enhance signage. 	<p>Leverage early success of stage one and two to lobby local government and tourism stakeholders to address need for Trail identification /way finding signage.</p>

³ Packaged products will be piloted only at this stage. There is currently a gap in Muskoka in terms of any agency mandated to develop and deliver packaged tourist products.

NEXT STEPS ACTION PLAN FOR A MUSKOKA TRAIL ...



WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESS?

<p>LEADERSHIP / MANAGEMENT</p>	<p>There is a need to have one organization taking the leadership for the Trail product.</p> <p>Savour Muskoka is well positioned to champion the project and facilitate the development of a trail product rather than assume a leadership role.</p> <p>A Savour Trail Working Group will be formed to clarify the design of the trail, develop business plans, and oversee implementation and management.</p> <p>Dedicated staff working under the direction of Savour Muskoka will be required to support the Working Group.</p>
<p>POTENTIAL PARTNERS</p>	<p>LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RTO 12 • MTMA • Chambers of Commerce & BIAs • Municipalities – economic development officers <p>PRIVATE SECTOR:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resorts • Chef association • Travel and tour operators ... bus and boat <p>EDUCATION:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nipissing University • Georgian College <p>EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS (POTENTIAL LINKS):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat Local Sudbury • Simcoe Farm Fresh <p>EXTERNAL AGENCIES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Tourism • Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance • Canadian Tourism Commission • Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership <p>OTHER SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts • Environment • Trails
<p>SUSTAINABILITY</p>	<p>An education program open to those all aspiring to join the Trail will build capacity within the culinary sector and ensure a pool of prospective trail members.</p>
<p>PRE-REQUISITES OF LONG TERM SUCCESS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy-in from members, investors, municipalities. • Quality product: innovative, unique and dynamic ... a critical mass. • Quality delivery. • Effective way finding strategy supported by municipalities. • Proven value proposition for trail members and the tourists they serve. • Strong and consistent leadership through a single organization. • Stable funding.