

SMALL BUSINESS ACCREDITATION FRAMEWORK STUDY



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following study was a joint undertaking with RTO12 (Explorer's Edge), Muskoka Community Futures and Muskoka Community Network. The goal of the project was to assess the needs for training specific to small to medium sized tourism businesses in Muskoka.

Thank you to the 18 tourism businesses that provide valuable insights about the types of training that are needed as well as the 18 key stakeholder organizations who shared information about the existing programs that they offer.

Tourism Businesses

Colonial Bay Cottage Resort
Gravenhurst Opera House
Johnston's Cranberry Marsh & Muskoka Lakes Winery
Lake of Bays Brewing Company
Muskoka Lakes Museum
Muskoka Yoga Studio (on-water programs)
Oak Bay Golf & Country Club
Port Cunnington Lodge & Resort
Santa's Whispering Pines Campground
Shamrock Lodge
South Muskoka Curling & Golf Club
Summer Water Sports
Sunset Cruises
The Oar and Paddle
Tri Muskoka
Captain Action Charters
MJD Paintball
Muskoka Highlands Golf Course

Stakeholder Organizations

Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport
RTO12 - Explorer's Edge
Muskoka Tourism
Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce
Gravenhurst Chamber of Commerce
Bracebridge Chamber of Commerce
Muskoka Lakes Chamber of Commerce
Parry Sound Chamber of Commerce
Town of Gravenhurst
Town of Huntsville
Town of Bracebridge
Township of Muskoka Lakes
Township of Lake of Bays
Township of Georgian Bay
Muskoka Community Futures
Muskoka Community Network
Muskoka Small Business Centre
Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Planning Board

The primary and secondary research gathered was completed from April to August 2015.

Project research and reporting was completed by Carolyn O'Donnell, Tourism Economic Development and Research Specialist in consultation with RTO12 - Explorer's Edge, Muskoka Community Futures and Muskoka Community Network



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INTRODUCTION

The intention of this study was to explore the opportunities to allow small businesses to enhance their success by accessing the collective expertise of the Regional Tourism Organization (as it relates to marketing and communication), Muskoka Community Futures (as it relates to business development) and Muskoka Community Network (as it relates to technology and website development). The 3 organizations wanted to explore the potential to launch a pilot program intended to focus on seasonal tourism operators to enhance the sustainability of their businesses. The desired outcome of a potential accreditation program was to develop businesses that have a common set of skills, knowledge and assets, and are market ready.

The expected outcomes of this initiative were:

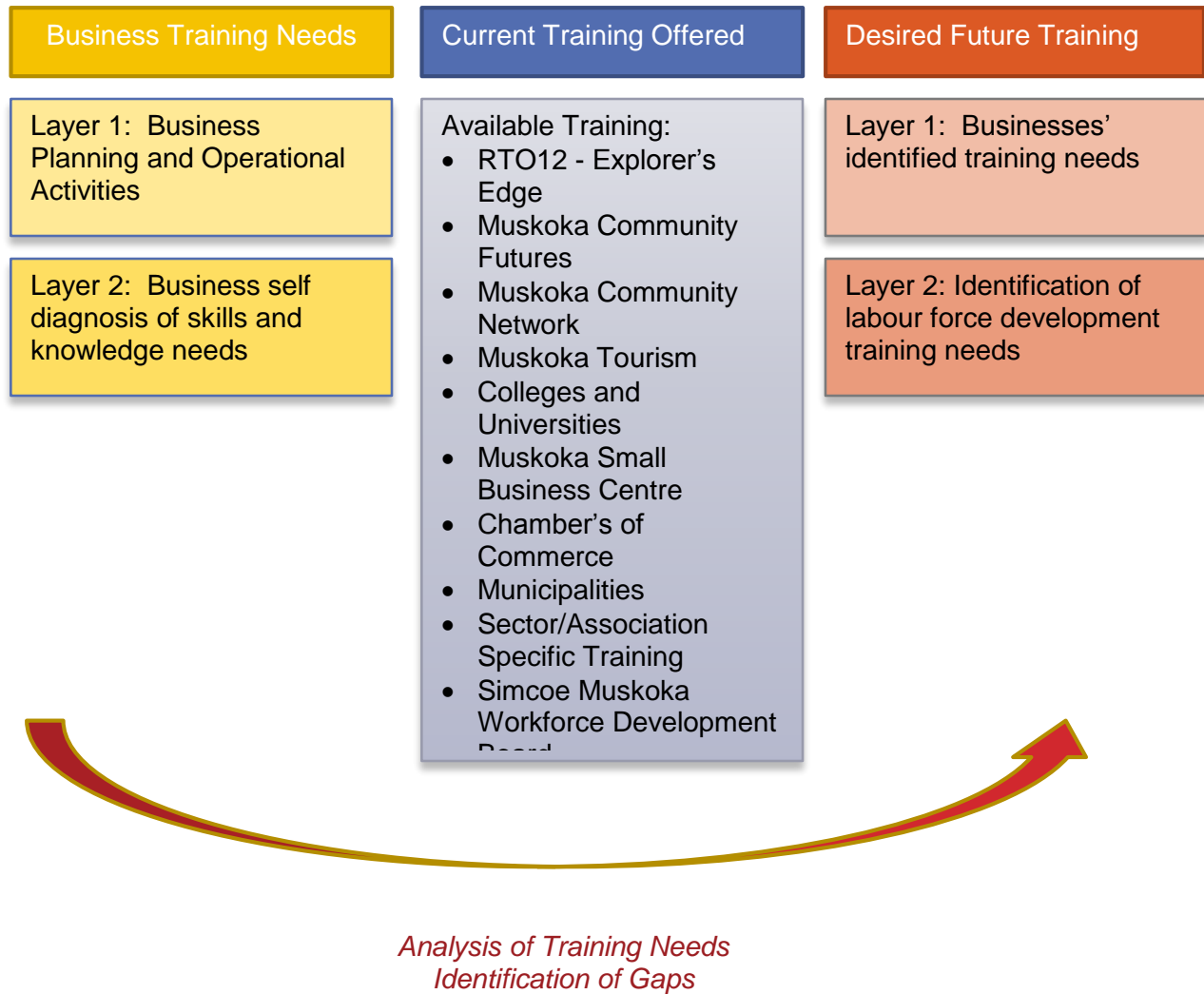
- The creation of an accreditation program framework that draws on the programs and services of the three participating partners
- An outline of the costs associated with the program and the resources required to assist participating businesses to complete the accreditation program. This could include branding review, professional marketing materials, core business upgrades, technology infrastructure, etc.
- Timelines involved in the execution of the program
- Regional small business feedback on the applicability and value of the program
- Recommendations of a Brand for the accreditation program including creative design ideas (Phase 2)
- Marketing Strategy to promote successfully accredited businesses (Phase 2)

“Today’s tourists are not just looking for a place to stay; they are seeking a very high level of service. This means the level of skills required from today’s tourism workforce is increasing. At the same time, attracting and retaining high-quality employees is critical to the sector. There is a pointed need to address labour gaps.”¹

¹ Discovering Ontario Report, 2009, p. 34.

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

As illustrated in the following diagram, the study approach, in its simple form, involved understanding the current business activities of Muskoka's small to medium sized tourism businesses related to strategic planning and on-going education, identifying skills and knowledge gaps, reviewing the training that is currently offered and determining what training is desirable and realistic to offer in the future to meet the needs of a competitive market.



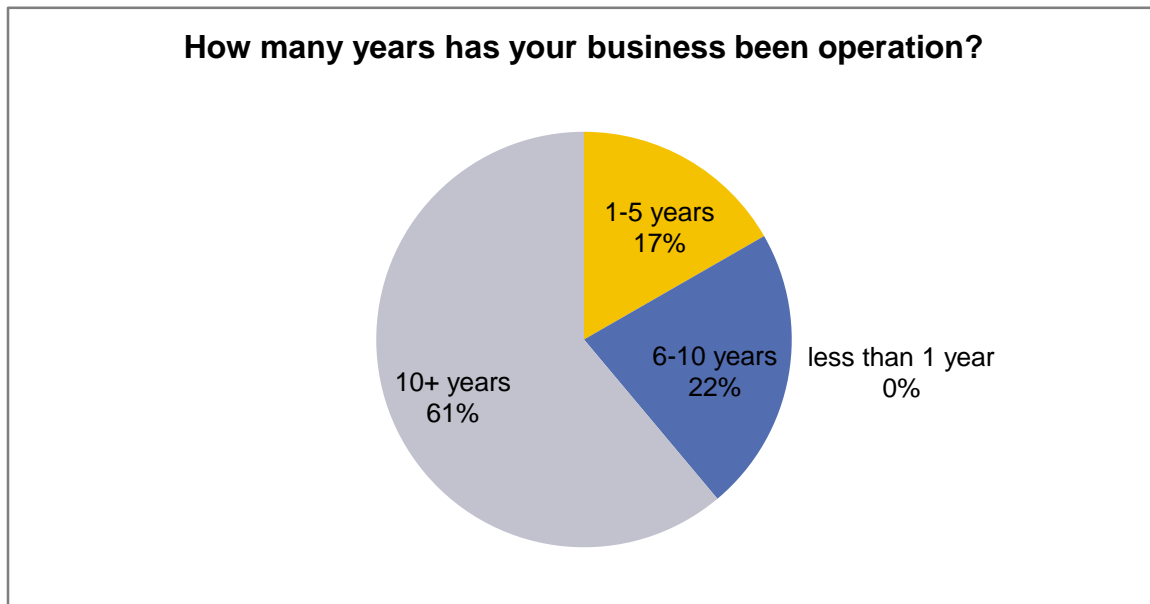
BUSINESS TRAINING NEEDS

The approach to identifying the current and future training needs of the tourism sector related to training included a review of businesses' current activities as well as their expressed needs for training and in the near future.

Layer 1: Current Business Planning and Operational Activities

A review of current business activities looked at the use of business and marketing plans, partnership and packaging activities as well as a third party analysis on the level of engagement the 18 participating businesses have with their customers using on-line tools.

The majority of participating businesses have been in business for over 10 years and have a solid understanding of their on-going challenges and opportunities.





Which of the following business planning and development tools/tactics do you use?

	I don't do this	I need to update this	I do this at least once every year
Business Plan	5 (28%)	2 (11%)	11 (61%)
Marketing Plan	3 (17%)	7 (39%)	8 (44%)
Partnership or Package Development	2 (11%)	6 (33%)	10 (56%)

Which of the following marketing tools do you use?

	Don't use	Limited use of	High dependency and usage
Website	0	1	17
Facebook	0	3	15
Instagram	10	3	4
Twitter	1	2	14
Trip Advisor	5	5	6
Blogging	6	4	6

On-line Visitor Engagement Review

Website Activities Snapshot									
Business	Website	Photos		Call to action	Maps	Reserve Online	Blog		
		Infra-structure	Experiences					Link	Link
1	✓	✓	✓	✓					
0	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
0	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
0	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓
0	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
0	✓			✓	✓	✓			
0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
0	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
00	✓	✓	✓		✓				
00	✓	✓			✓		✓		
00	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
00	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			
00	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓
00	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
00	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
00	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Totals	18	17	9	15	17	9	6	4	11
	100%	94%	50%	83%	94%	50%	33%	22%	61%

Trip Advisor Snapshot

Business	Account	Number of reviews	Number of responses by business (last 10 reviews)	Number of visitor photos	Post professional photos	Rating out of 5
1						
0	✓	51		59	✓	4.5
0	✓	2		0		4
0	✓	4		0	✓	5
0	✓	18		0	✓	4.5
0	✓	116	1	7	✓	4
0	✓	9		1		4
0	✓	4	1	7	✓	5
0	✓	190	1	45	✓	4
00	✓	9		0	✓	4.5
00	✓	6		3	✓	5
00	✓	207	6	87	✓	5
00	✓	15	9	16	✓	4.5
00				0		
00				0		
00	✓	50	1	28	✓	4.5
17						
00	✓	43	4	17	✓	4.5
Totals	14	724	23	270	12	
	78%				86% of TA users	

Facebook Snapshot						
Business	Facebook Account	Number of Likes	# Posts in last 14 days	Link to Google map	Post photos	Post videos
1						
☐	✓	10847	4	✓	✓	✓
☐	✓	412	12	✓	✓	
☐	✓	5003	6	✓	✓	✓
☐	✓	5030	0	✓	✓	✓
☐	✓	531	0	✓	✓	✓
☐	✓	293	12	✓	✓	✓
☐	✓	8825	3	✓	✓	✓
☐	✓	38,084	14	✓	✓	
☐☐	✓	226	9	✓	✓	✓
☐☐	✓	68	3	✓	✓	
☐☐	✓	576	3	✓	✓	✓
☐☐	✓	2381	15	✓	✓	✓
☐☐	✓	122	11	✓	✓	
☐☐	✓	1354	27	✓	✓	✓
☐☐	✓	672	1	✓	✓	✓
17						
☐☐	✓	348	0	✓	✓	✓
Totals	16	74,772	120	16	16	12
				Percentage of those with a facebook account		
				89%	100%	100%
						75%

Common Trends:

Trend #1: There is a gap in businesses planning. (Only 61% of participating businesses do this annually).

Trend #2: There is a gap in marketing plans. (Only 44% of participating businesses do this annually).

Trend #3: There is a gap in partnership and packaging development. (Only 56% of businesses are active in this area)

Trend #4: There is a high dependency on the use of core on-line promotional and trip planning tools including websites, facebook and twitter by participating businesses.

Trend #5: There is less dependency on the use of tripadvisor, blogs and instagram.

Trend #6: There are opportunities to further leverage existing websites:

- Only 50% of participating businesses showcase photos of visitors engaged in experiences
- Only 50% of the websites have the ability to make on-line reservations
- Only 33% of websites feature blogs
- Only 22% have a link to a tripadvisor account
- Only 61% have a link to a facebook account

Trend #7: Those using trip advisor are enabling positive conversations (4 of the 18 businesses have accounts all with ratings between 4-5):

- Only 50% of owner operators are taking the time to respond to visitor reviews.
- 43% of businesses with a tripadvisor account have less than 10 reviews

Trend #8: the 18 participating businesses are reach almost 75,000 people collectively but could be sharing more regular content on their pages.

- Some businesses need to ensure they are sharing information with their followers. Only 44% of the businesses with a facebook account have are actively posting information on their page (more than 6 posts in the last 2 weeks)

Layer 2: Business self diagnosis of skills and knowledge needs

The following information was gathered from one-on-one interviews with 18 tourism businesses located in Muskoka. These interviews were completed from May to July 2015. A copy of the interview questions are included in Appendix A.

Each business that participated in the interview process was asked to consider that their greatest challenges are related to skills and knowledge? The common themes that emerged were:

- Knowing how to effectively market for corporate events
- Marketing - especially social media
- Leveraging social media with limited time
- Attaining sponsors, community engagement
- Creating alliances
- Finding staff each summer
- Finding time to network with other operators

What type of training would be ideal for you?

Preferred Method	I could commit to a 1 day course	2 day intensive course	1 day per week for 6 weeks
Classroom location within Muskoka	13	1	0
Online	3	0	1
Hybrid, classroom and online	4	1	0

Time of Day	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Number	8	8	2

Location preferred	Huntsville	Bracebridge	Gravenhurst
Number (some indicated being ok with more than 1 location)	7	8	7

What would you be willing to pay?	Up to \$25 per course	\$26-\$50	\$50-\$75	\$76 - \$100	\$101-\$200	\$200+
Number (some indicated being ok with more than 1 price point)	3	7	4	6	1	0

Answer Options	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Number of responses	11	0	2	6

Common Trends:

Trend #1: There are gaps in skills and knowledge as expressed by tourism owner/operators

Trend # 2: There is a strong desire to participate in specific training courses that will enhance business success

Trend #3: Businesses want to select topics that interest them rather than having to complete a set of mandatory courses.

Trend #4: Businesses indicated that they would prefer training that is in a classroom, for one day during working hours.

Trend #5: Q1 and 4 are the ideal times of the year for training. Ideally goals setting or strategic planning would be done in the late fall while new ideas and other training would occur in the new year. Customer service training for employees is best done in May.

CURRENT TRAINING OFFERED

There are several organizations that play a role in training delivery. The types of training fall into 3 main categories; training for individuals, training for businesses, and training and partnership building for communities. The following is a snapshot of the primary and secondary research that was gathered in this area. More robust details about the organizations and their offering are included in Appendix B.

Training Target Audiences			Individuals			Businesses		Communities	
Organization	Location	No Training	Basic Skills	Diploma/Degree	Professional Development	Start-Up	Operational Phase	Industry Networking	Partnerships/Packaging Development
Post Secondary Institutions <input type="checkbox"/>									
Nipissing University - Muskoka Campus	Bracebridge		<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Georgian College - Huntsville Campus	Huntsville		<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> ✓	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Georgian College - Bracebridge Campus	Bracebridge		<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
University of Waterloo - Huntsville	Huntsville		<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tourism Agencies <input type="checkbox"/>									
Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport	Muskoka		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	✓
RTO12 - Explorer's Edge	Muskoka +		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
Muskoka Tourism	Muskoka	limited	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chambers of Commerce <input type="checkbox"/>									
Huntsville/Lake of Bays	Huntsville		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gravenhurst	Gravenhurst		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bracebridge	Bracebridge	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>		✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
Muskoka Lakes	Port Carling	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parry Sound Chamber	Parry Sound		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓ ***	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
BIAs <input type="checkbox"/>									
Huntsville	Huntsville		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gravenhurst	Gravenhurst		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bracebridge	Bracebridge		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Training Target Audiences			Individuals			Businesses		Communities	
Organization	Location	No Training	Basic Skills	Diploma/Degree	Professional Development	Start-Up	Operational Phase	Industry Networking	Partnerships/Packaging Development
Municipal Government <input type="checkbox"/>									
District of Muskoka	Bracebridge		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Town of Gravenhurst	Gravenhurst		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	✓
Town of Huntsville	Huntsville		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Town of Bracebridge	Bracebridge	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Township of Muskoka Lakes	Port Carling	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Township of Lake of Bays	Baysville	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Township of Georgian Bay	Port Severn		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business Support Agencies <input type="checkbox"/>									
Muskoka Community Futures	Bracebridge		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Muskoka Community Network	Bracebridge		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Muskoka Small Business Centre	Bracebridge		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
YWCA Bracebridge	Bracebridge		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Planning Board	Barrie		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Northern Lights Employment Resource Centre	Bracebridge		✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business Enterprise Resource Network	Bracebridge		✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>
Academic Upgrading <input type="checkbox"/>									
Bracebridge Alternate Ed & Training Centre	Bracebridge		✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gravenhurst Alternate Ed & Training Centre	Gravenhurst		✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Huntsville Alternate Ed & Training Centre	Huntsville		✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Literacy Society of South Muskoka	Gravenhurst		✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Simcoe/Muskoka Literacy Network (SMLN)	Orillia		✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tourism Specific									
OPEC	Toronto				✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓		

In terms of training that is specific for businesses owner/operators there are a variety of organizations that are seeking to support Muskoka's small to medium sized businesses. Training topics can vary from year to year as needs are identified. The following is a snapshot of the current activities.

Training Offered		Business Training Topics								
Organization	No Training	Financial	Business Planning	Health and Safety	HR/ Leadership	Sales and Marketing Strategy	Web & Social Media	Technology	Customer Service	Other
Post Secondary Institutions										
Nipissing University - Muskoka Campus		No training offered related to businesses training								
Georgian College - Bracebridge Campus		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
University of Waterloo - Huntsville		No training offered related to businesses training. The campus is used to host special workshops								
Tourism Agencies										
Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport		The ministry offers tourism workshops from time to time as new programs are introduced. There is nothing scheduled for the remainder of 2015								
RTO12 - Explorer's Edge		☐	☐	☐	☐	✓	✓	☐	☐	☐
Muskoka Tourism	☐☐☐☐☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	one-on-one	one-on-one	☐	☐	☐
Chambers of Commerce										
Huntsville/Lake of Bays		☐	☐	✓	☐	✓	✓	☐	✓	✓
Gravenhurst		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	☐	✓	☐
Bracebridge	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Muskoka Lakes	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parry Sound Chamber		✓	☐	✓	✓	☐	✓	☐	✓	☐
BIAs										
Huntsville		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Gravenhurst		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Bracebridge		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Municipal Government										

Training Offered		Business Training Topics								
Organization	No Training	Financial	Business Planning	Health and Safety	HR/ Leadership	Sales and Marketing Strategy	Web & Social Media	Technology	Customer Service	Other
District of Muskoka	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Town of Gravenhurst		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓
Town of Huntsville		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Town of Bracebridge	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Township of Muskoka Lakes	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Township of Lake of Bays	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Township of Georgian Bay		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business Support Agencies										
Muskoka Community Futures		✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓
Muskoka Community Network		<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Muskoka Small Business Centre		✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/> ✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
YWCA Bracebridge		✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	✓
Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Planning Board	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓
Northern Lights Employment Resource Centre		<input type="checkbox"/> Focuses mainly on basic skills					<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business Enterprise Resource Network		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Academic Upgrading										
Bracebridge Alternate Ed & Training Centre		These organizations focus on basic skills								
Gravenhurst Alternate Ed & Training Centre										
Huntsville Alternate Ed & Training Centre										
Literacy Society of South Muskoka										
Simcoe/Muskoka Literacy Network (SMLN)										
Tourism Specific										
OPEC					✓				✓	✓

Common Trends:

Trend #1: There are a variety of training providers located throughout Muskoka. Training related to tourism can be classified in 2 main areas:

1. Basic skills offered for individuals looking to gain employment
2. Professional development mainly targeted at businesses owners

While colleges and universities operate satellite campuses in Muskoka, the courses that they offer are not in the tourism field.

Trend # 2: Of the organizations that offer training for businesses, the main areas of concentration are in the following topics:

- Sales and marketing (8 organizations)
- Customer service (9 organizations)
- Web and social media (10 organizations)
- Financial (6 organizations)
- Business planning (5 organizations)

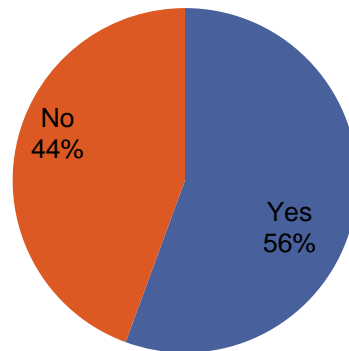
Trend #3: Most of the organizations involved in training collaborate with other key stakeholder groups to offer these jointly or to cross promote, especially when these organizations are located within the same municipality.

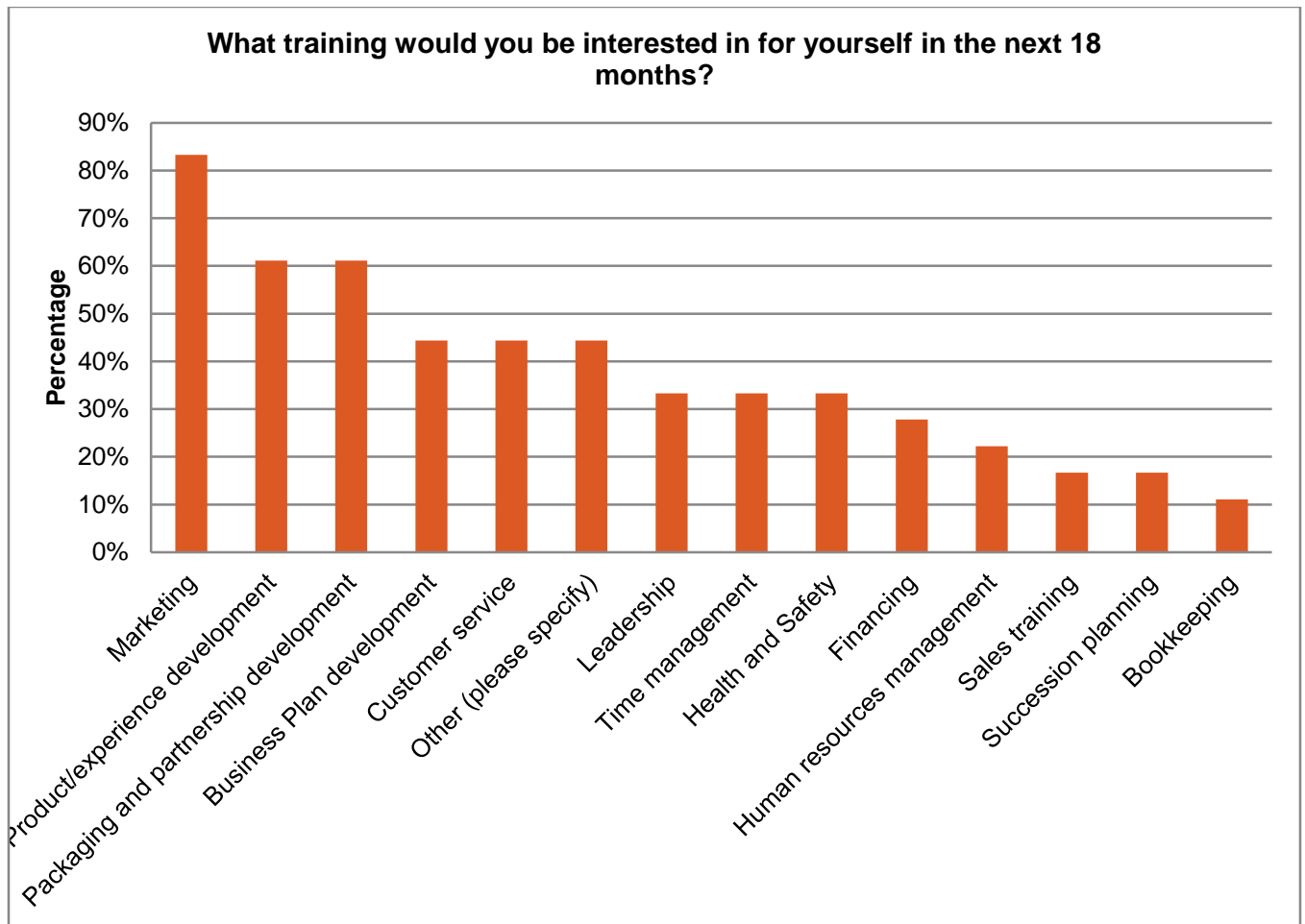
DESIRED TRAINING

Layer 1: Business Identified Training Needs

Businesses interviewed indicated a strong desire to participate in future training to enhance their businesses. Most businesses have limited time and resources to dedicate to training. Due to the seasonality of the tourism sector businesses need to schedule their training activities in their off-season.

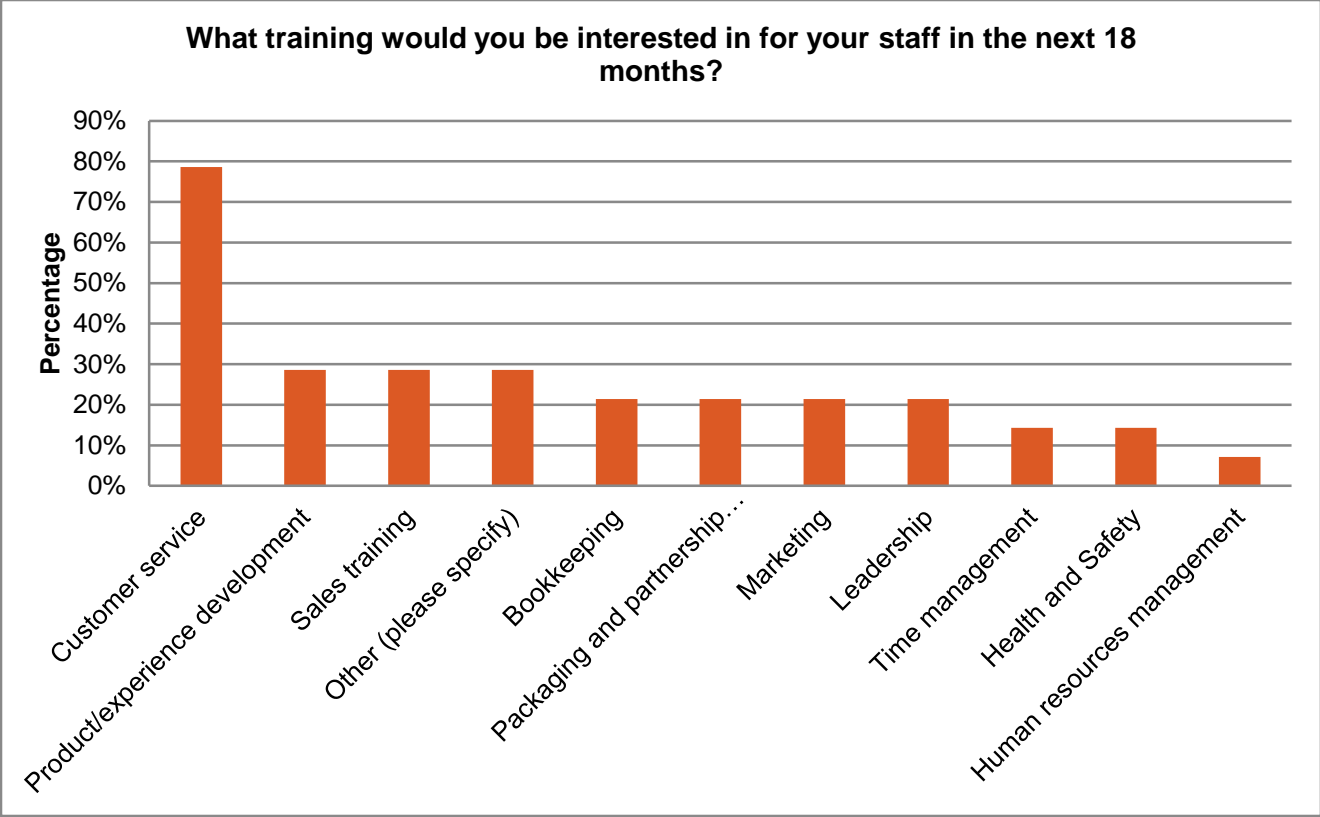
Have you participated in any other formal training in the past 18 months?





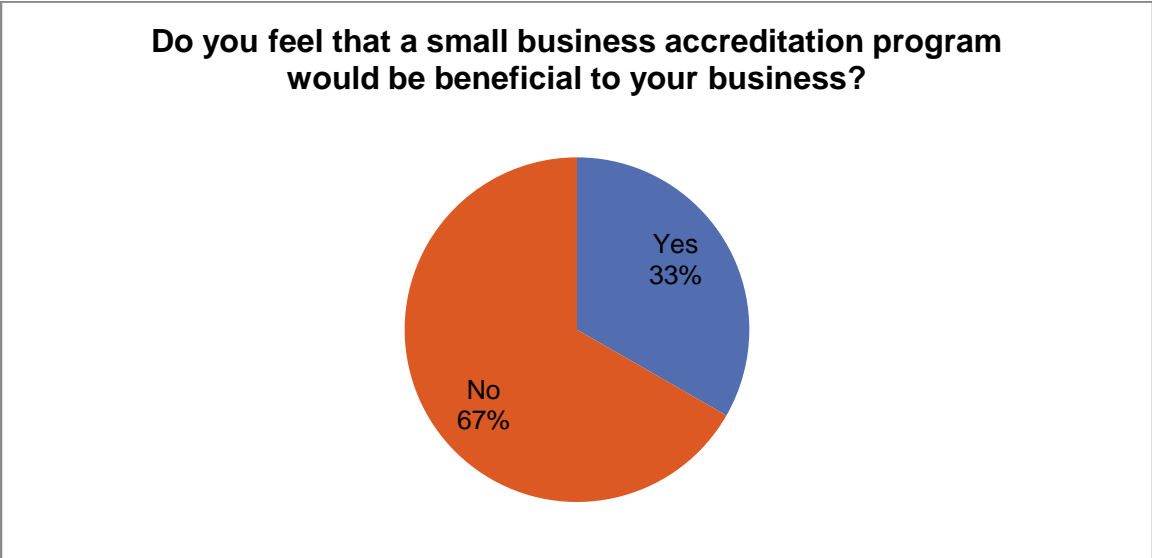
Other training identified:

- A business plan tune-up
- Only if these are high quality sessions (Tony Robbins calibre).
- SEO, Google analytics
- "Good host" ambassador training
- Volunteer/community engagement
- Workforce development (establishing relationships with colleges or others to find summer staff)



Other training identified:

- Smart serve, AGCO
- Leadership levels



While the idea of an accreditation program is interesting to some the overall consensus was that having the flexibility to pick and choose training topics that interest businesses and are highly applicable is more appealing.

Comments provided by the 18 participants included:

“An Accredited program is only beneficial to me if the program is recognized by lenders or for grant applications.”

“I like the idea of cost sharing and having modules that you can pick and choose.”

“The program should be people-focused rather than accrediting a business.”

“If accreditation helped with securing funding that would be beneficial. Let’s think about professional development modules and accreditation.”

“I feel that the single biggest opportunity is in networking/packaging with other operators but this is too time consuming. It would helpful if this could be facilitated.”

“On-going education is important but it is not going to attract more guests.”

Common Trends:

Trend #1: The most popular training needs mentioned for owner operators were in the areas of marketing (especially social media), product/experience development, partnership building/packaging with other businesses and ambassador/“good host” programs.

Trend #2: The most sought after training area for staff was customer service.

Trend #3: The majority of business owner/operators stressed that training needed to be highly effective/targeted and needed to provide a return on their time invested. Practically speaking owner/operators want to be able to implement what they learn immediately and want the topics to be results oriented rather than theoretical knowledge.

Layer 2: Identification of labour force development training needs

This area looked at the labour market needs and challenges that Muskoka's tourism sector will face in the coming years. Muskoka like many other tourism markets around the world is projected to experience significant labour and skills shortages that will impact businesses' ability to attract and retain the labour needed to market a competitive product. The labour shortages are forecasted to be the most significant in the province's food and beverage services sector, as shortages could rise to more than 50,200 full-year jobs by 2025. Similarly, the accommodation sector is projected to experience a shortage of 2,080 jobs; transportation a shortage of 7,010 jobs; and recreation and entertainment a shortage of 10,660 jobs

The Ontario Tourism Workforce Development Strategy 2012-2017² identified 4 key strategic priorities:

1. Foster an Environment of Collaboration & Coordination

It recommends the formation of Tourism Workforce Council to oversee the tourism workforce strategy implementation in Ontario and ensure the alignment of stakeholders' efforts and resources across the province.

2. Develop a High Performance Workforce

This is to be completed through the provision of a quality and consistent inventory of planning templates, standards, training and resources to local, regional and provincial industry stakeholders

3. Focus on Workforce Attraction & Retention

The idea is to provide a series of initiatives to grow the workforce through community engagement and the development of strategic tactics to improve attraction, retention and career awareness throughout the industry.

4. Enhance Information Management & Research

Aligning the industry research, terminology and distribution channels that enable businesses, regions and stakeholder associations to collaborate more effectively in workforce development planning.

As a service industry, any opportunities for Ontario's tourism sector to enhance its competitive offering will rest, in part, on the sector's ability to recruit, train, and retain, a skilled and committed workforce.³

² The Ontario Tourism Workforce Development Strategy 2012-2017, 2012, p.3-4

³ The Ontario Tourism Workforce Development Strategy 2012-2017, 2012, p.5

Common Trends:

Trend #1: The demand for skilled labour will become an increasing challenge for Muskoka's tourism operators who will be competing for workforce with all other Ontario destinations.

Trend #2: Collaboration on all levels is critical to the successful delivery of training to tourism stakeholders.

Trend # 3: A workforce strategy is critical for Muskoka's tourism industry. This will involve not only equipping business owner/operators so that they can reach peak performance but also creating a culture that encourages a future workforce to pursue careers in tourism and compels them to want to live, work and play in Muskoka.

TREND SUMMARY

	Good things are happening	Program is needed	Programs are in place	Existing programs need to be promoted	Needs to be an understood ROI for businesses to invest time	Collaboration is needed to create a workforce strategy
Current Business Planning and Operational Activities						
Trend #1: There is a gap in businesses planning			✓	✓	✓	
Trend #2: There is a gap in businesses use of marketing plans			✓	✓	✓	
Trend #3: There is a gap in partnership and packaging development		✓				
Trend #4: There is a high dependency on the use of core on-line promotional and trip planning tools	✓					
Trend #5: There is less dependency on the use of tripadvisor, blogs and instagram			✓	✓	✓	
Trend #6: There are opportunities to further leverage existing websites			✓	✓	✓	
Trend #7: Those using trip advisor are enabling positive conversations	✓					
Trend #8: Facebook users could share more regular content on their pages			✓	✓	✓	
Business self diagnosis of skills and knowledge needs						
Trend #1: There are gaps in skills and knowledge as expressed by tourism owner/operators		✓ (some topics required)	✓	✓	✓	
Trend # 2: There is a strong desire to participate in specific training courses that will enhance business success				✓		
Trend #3: Businesses want to select topics that interest them rather than having to complete a set of mandatory courses		✓ (some topics required)	✓	✓	✓	
Trend #4: Businesses indicated that they would prefer training that is in a classroom, for one day during working hours. Ideally these would be offered more than one time/day		✓				
Trend #5: Q1 and 4 are the ideal times of the year for training		✓				

	Good things are happening	Program is needed	Programs are in place	Existing programs need to be promoted	Needs to be an understood ROI for businesses to invest time	Collaboration is needed to create a workforce strategy
Current Training Offered						
Trend #1: There are a variety of training providers located throughout Muskoka	✓					
Trend #2: Main areas of concentration are sales and marketing, customer service, financial, business planning		✓ (some topics required)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Trend #3: Most of the organizations involved in training collaborate with other key stakeholder groups	✓					
Business Identified Training Needs						
Trend #1: The most popular training needs are marketing, product/experience development and partnership building/packaging and ambassador programs		✓ (some topics required)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Trend #2: The most sought after training area for staff was customer service		✓ (some topics required)				
Trend #3: Owner/operators want an ROI for their time and \$ spent on training				✓	✓	✓
Identification of labour force development training needs						
Trend #1: The demand for skilled labour will become an increasing challenge for Muskoka's tourism operators						✓
Trend #2: Collaboration on all levels is critical to the successful delivery of training to tourism stakeholders.						✓
Trend #3: A workforce strategy is critical for Muskoka's tourism industry						✓

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Establish a brand that elevates the importance of tourism as an industry** and positions it as one that offers exciting and rewarding careers. Explore a theme that encompasses the idea of “work, live and play” in Muskoka with a tourism twist.

Why? Muskoka needs to be seen as the place to start your tourism career with excellent training and an industry that has high standards. The focus on work/live/play demonstrates that there are rewarding jobs that are located in the most fantastic location. As a true tourism destination, the area has the opportunity to be known as a place where business owners and tourism/hospitality professionals can be successful and continue personal development.

2. **Create an on-line tourism industry hub through the RTO12 website.**

- Celebrate tourism as a vibrant industry
- Share success stories
- Feature all of the opportunities for networking and training
- Extend this to a job board in the future

MCN and MCF as well as other organizations can provide direct links to this information from their websites. When a brand is created a widget that links to this information could be shared by all key stakeholder agencies.



Why? Good things are happening related to training for tourism businesses in Muskoka. The greatest opportunity initially is to create a one-stop location where all training opportunities are easily accessible. Creating a platform to share success stories and best practices is a value tool and can become an important resource for the tourism industry.

3. **Pilot an 8-month training program that launches in November 2015.** Offer a series of 2-hour training sessions, once per month that cover the following requested topics:

November	Business plan tune-up
December	Understanding your Ideal Guest. Where/how do I reach my market?
January	Experience development - Fine tuning what I offer
February	Marketing plan tune-up (Builds on #2). Creating a full year strategy, where do I allocate my time and resources?
March	Leveraging social media, storytelling
April	Partnership and packing development. Who else aligns with me?
May	Fine tuning the customer experience
June	Measuring success, understanding metrics

Why? An 8-series program delivered in the off-season is likely an easier endeavour for business owner/operators to take on. The timing of the topics allows participants to build on the initial business plan tune up and take logical steps to business improvements.

4. **Create an ROI incentive for the pilot program participants.**

Complete entire series = \$500 marketing credit as well as being featured and celebrated on the new tourism industry hub (Recommendation #2). Use target marketing and track the success of this over a 1-year period to be shared with industry and used to evaluate phase 2 when the pilot program could be re-vamped and offered to a new group of business owners in 2015/16.

Complete 6/8 workshops = \$ 250 marketing credit

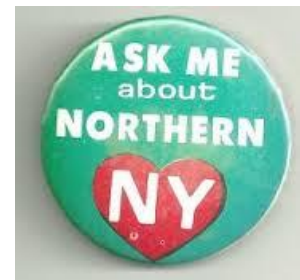
Complete 4/8 workshops = \$100 marketing credit

Why? Ideally all businesses would complete the entire series, but we asked the question and many indicated that they wanted to pick and choose. Allowing flexibility with the pilot program is important to get the ball rolling.

5. Collaborate with key tourism program delivery organizations (possibly Georgina College or OTEC) to **create a Muskoka Tourism Ambassador program.**

The target market for this is all employees who work in Muskoka's tourism industry. Offer this each spring as new staff come to work at the many tourism businesses in Muskoka. Create this an intensive half-day with optional "experiences" that follow in the afternoon. Roll this out twice in each of the main centres (Huntsville, Bracebridge and Gravenhurst) to allow employers to send half their staff one day and half the other.

Content to include an overview of what Muskoka has to offer and a customer service component. Provide a take-away ambassador guide. Explore the idea of a button that the employee can wear that shows they are a Muskoka Tourism Ambassador, something fun and catchy.



Why? This is an opportunity to ensure that the thousands of summer staff who work in Muskoka become positive ambassadors who are well informed and can share valuable information with the many visitors that they come into contact with. This is also an opportunity to make these seasonal employees feel part of an important and vital industry and instil a passion and interest that may lead to a future workforce who work, live and play in Muskoka long term.

6. **Create a tourism workforce committee** as part of the RTO12 structure. Hold meetings once every 2 months. This becomes the core group who help to contribute to the content hosted on the tourism industry hub. The idea is for RTO12 to be the facilitator of the conversation but not shoulder the responsibility on their own to face the challenges associated with current and future workforce needs. Ideally the committee would have representatives from:

- RTO 12 - Explorer's Edge
- Muskoka Community Futures
- Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Planning Board
- Georgian College
- At least 4 large employers representing accommodations and attractions
- Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sports
- Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities

Why? Muskoka's tourism workforce will be critical to its economic vitality in the very near future. It is critical for these organizations to come together with industry to understand the current challenges and seek creative solutions.

APPENDIX A

Business Information and Current Business Planning Activities

The overarching purpose of this project is to explore the need and appetite for the development a 10-12 month accreditation program to advance Muskoka's tourism businesses by equipping them with a common set of skills and knowledge to allow them to ensure that they are market ready and able to promote themselves effectively.

1. What is the name of your business?

2. Which tourism sub-sector best describes your business?

Other

3. Are you open year round or seasonal?

- Year Round
- Seasonal

4. How many employees do you have?

	Number
Year Round	<input type="text"/>
Seasonal	<input type="text"/>

5. How many years has your business been operation?

6. Do you have broadband infrastructure at your business?

- Yes
- No

7. What are your greatest business challenges related to required skills & knowledge?

8. Which of the following business planning and development tools/tactics do you use?

	I don't do this	I need to update this	I do this at least once every year
Business Plan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Marketing Plan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Partnership or Package Development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Use Marketing Tools and Affiliate Marketing

9. Which of the following marketing tools do you use?

	Don't use	Limited use of	High dependency and usage
Website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trip Advisor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Blogging	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

10. Who in your organization is responsible for marketing?

11. Do you participate in marketing programs offered by other organizations?

Other (please specify)

Interest in Training Programs

12. Have you participated in programs offered by Explorer's Edge?

	Yes	No
Explorer's Edge (RTO12)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Notes:

13. Have you participated in programs offered by Muskoka Community Futures?

	Yes	No
Muskoka Community Futures	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Notes:

14. Have you participated in programs offered by Muskoka Community Network?

Yes

No

Muskoka
Community Network

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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Notes:

15. Have you participated in any other formal training in the past 18 months?

Yes

No

16. Describe the training you participated in?

17. What training would you be interested in for yourself in the next 18 months?

Business Plan development

Financing

Bookkeeping

Product/experience development

Packaging and partnership development

Sales training

Marketing

Leadership

Human resources management

Time management

Health and Safety

Customer service

Succession planning

Other (please specify)

18. What training would you be interested in for your staff in the next 18 months?

- Bookkeeping
- Product/experience development
- Packaging and partnership development
- Marketing
- Sales training
- Leadership
- Human resources management
- Time management
- Health and Safety
- Customer service
- Other (please specify)

19. What type of training would be ideal for you?

	How often	Time of year	Time of day	Best location	I would be willing to pay
Classroom location within Muskoka	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Online	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Hybrid, classroom and online	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Other (please specify)

20. Do you feel that a small business accreditation program would be beneficial to your business?

- Yes
- No

21. What are the main benefits of an accreditation program for your business?

- Formal recognition of my business as a professional establishment
- Providing me with a full compliment of business training and development
- Other (please specify)

22. What other comments to you have?

APPENDIX B

Post Secondary Education Institutions

Nipissing University - Muskoka Campus

This campus located in Bracebridge offers 3 degree programs;

- Child and Family Studies;
- Culture and the Arts;
- Liberal arts degree.

Other professional development or part time courses are not available.

Georgian College - Bracebridge Campus

Georgina College offers a variety of post secondary credits, professional development and general interest courses.

In the upcoming 2015/16 academic year the following tourism or business related part time courses are offered:

- Bartending Introduction
- Business Law
- Communication Essentials
- Compensation
- Computer Business Documentation
- Computer Business Documentation Advanced
- Computer Coach
- Computer Keyboarding
- Computerized Accounting
- Cost Accounting 1
- Customer Service
- Developing Leadership
- Introduction to Entrepreneurship
- Excel
- Financial Accounting Principals
- Human Resources Management Foundations
- Introduction to Keyboarding
- Introduction to Marketing
- Microcomputer Applications
- Microcomputer Economics
- Microsoft Outlook
- Microsoft Publisher
- Office Procedures/Strategies
- Organizational Behaviour
- Payroll Administration
- Power Point
- QuickBooks
- Smartserve
- Spanish for travellers
- Success Strategies
- Taxation
- Windows Introduction
- Word processing
- Work environment communications

The following full time programs are offered at the Muskoka Campus:

- Bookkeeping
- Business
- Business Fundamentals
- Office Administration

University of Waterloo – Huntsville

The Waterloo Summit Centre for the Environment is a year-round teaching and research centre, which acts as an outreach facility for the University of Waterloo. Their goal is to connect research and educational opportunities to Muskoka and the surrounding regions. The campus is not currently promoting any business or professional development related training related to the tourism sector.

Tourism Agencies

Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport

The Ministry works closely with the tourism sector to help stimulate economic growth and investment and create an environment that allows Ontario to compete successfully in the rapidly changing world by focusing on:

- Market research in the areas of marketing, product development, and investment
- Encouraging private sector investment and new product development to expand Ontario's tourism sector and promote regional tourism economic development.
- Supporting and facilitating the development of new experiences and destinations
- Marketing Ontario as a tourist destination
- Investing in Ontario's tourism agencies (including RTO12)

In this capacity the Ministry provides insight and support rather than first line training delivery.

RTO12 (Explorer's Edge)

As a Regional Tourism Organization, RTO12 offers tourism businesses a variety of training opportunities. In the past year topics have included:

- Google Analytics and Trip Advisor Workshop
- Tourism Economic Development Breakfast
- Networking Events (Parry Sound Tourism Chit Chat, RTO12 Merry Meet and Greet)
- Ontario by Bike Workshop (in cooperation with the Parry Sound Area Active Transportation Committee and Ontario By Bike Network)
- Market Segmentation Workshop

RTO12 promotes training opportunities offered by other organization to their network of tourism businesses. In addition, RTO12 shares tourism indicators with the tourism industry on a quarterly basis.



Muskoka Tourism Marketing Agency

Muskoka Tourism Marketing Agency (MTMA) is a not-for-profit membership association funded by both the District of Muskoka and the private sector. They do not offer any formal training programs.

They do provide members with one on one support to help improve their digital products (website and social media). Themes that they have responded to include: better understanding of the travel customer's digital needs, their decision making process and making online purchasing decisions easier; managing relationships with 3rd party review sites (increasing traffic, bad reviews); SEO; effective use of web analytics; upgrading the quality of digital photos; and creating compelling stories.

MTMA also does organizational development work with other not for profits in Muskoka many of whom share the same challenges and opportunities.

Chambers of Commerce

Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber of Commerce hosts exciting social networking & business-related events including monthly Business After Hours (BAH) and Business at Lunch Time (BLT), seminars & workshops. Workshop topics have included such topics as:

- Digital Advertising
- 3 Steps to Creating Your Best Year Yet
- Transformational solutions to ensure continuous improvement
- 2 Keys to Unlock More of Your Desired Results
- Workplace safety

The Huntsville Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce also offers a CERTIFIED VOLUNTEER program. Participants must complete at least 6 courses provided, two of which are mandatory (Customer Service & Being a Difference Maker and Disability Awareness).

Gravenhurst Chamber of Commerce

The Gravenhurst Chamber of Commerce's mission is to provide leadership access to opportunities by promoting member engagement. They aim to do this by:

- Increased access to business resources for the local community
- Offering business development and training opportunities
- Increasing the community's online presence
- Furthering partnerships and collaborative opportunities
- Creating a long term plan for the organization

This past year the Gravenhurst Chamber in cooperation with the Town, offered Tourism Packaging and Building the Customer Experience workshops as a follow up to the Downtown

revitalization program. As well as 5 part series aimed at the Artists community in Gravenhurst and Georgian Bay in partnership with the Work in Culture organization.

Bracebridge Chamber of Commerce

The Bracebridge Chamber of Commerce is committed to assisting member businesses to enjoy a high quality of business with all residents and all visitors. Regular networking events are held throughout the year. The Chamber promotes workshop offered by other key stakeholder organizations including the Muskoka Community Futures and the Muskoka Small Business Centre to their members.

Muskoka Lakes Chamber of Commerce

The Muskoka Lake Chamber is an organization that offers networking opportunities for its members throughout the year. They are not currently offering training.

Parry Sound Chamber of Commerce

The Parry Sound Area Chamber of Commerce is a non-profit voluntary organization of individuals and businesses supported by member's fees and government contributions.

The Chamber coordinates with The Business Centre and Community Business and Development to join forces to offer monthly workshops on various topics related to business, such as accessibility standards, employee recruitment, social media, leadership training, etc.

They are also offering a Distinguished Speakers Series with business-related topics. The first event is Terry O'Reilly of CBC's "Under the Influence" to talk about marketing.

Currently the Chamber is looking to partner with Canador College in Fall 2015 to offer some training programs.

Business Improvement Areas

There are Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) in Gravenhurst, Bracebridge and Huntsville. Secondary research and attempts to gather primary information did not reveal any training offered by these organizations. Since the BIAs work closely with the towns it is assumed that each of the BIA's promote the training offered by other organizations (municipalities, chambers and tourism organizations) in their areas to their members. The BIAs provide an excellent conduit for this type of information sharing.

Municipal Governments

Town of Gravenhurst

As mentioned previously, this past year the Gravenhurst Chamber in cooperation with the Town, offered Tourism Packaging and Building the Customer Experience workshops as a follow up to the Downtown revitalization program. As well as 5 part series aimed at the Artists community in Gravenhurst and Georgian Bay in partnership with the Work in Culture organization.



Downtown Business Education Series

1 2 3

More Information & FREE Registration at:
www.gravenhurst.ca | or call 705.687.4432 x 101

Hosted at the Gravenhurst Opera House, these sessions are designed specifically to address some of the unique challenges facing businesses in Downtown Gravenhurst.

Tourism Packaging for Local Businesses.
Tue. March 3 | 9:00am - 4:30pm

Building the Customer Experience.
Tue. March 24 | 5:30pm - 8:30pm

Save time, paper, and a tree! *Subscribe to What's UP Downtown* www.gravenhurst.ca/en/Subscribe.asp

For more information about the Downtown Gravenhurst Revitalization Initiative, please contact Daniel Kerr, Downtown Gravenhurst Revitalization Coordinator at 705.687.2230 x 270, or Dan.Kerr@gravenhurst.ca

Town of Bracebridge

The Town of Bracebridge does not play a formal role in training delivery. They promote the offerings of other key organizations.

Town of Huntsville

The Town of Bracebridge does not play a formal role in training delivery. They work closely to support and promote the offerings of other key organizations, especially the Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce.

Township of Muskoka Lakes

The Township of Muskoka Lakes does not play a formal role in training delivery. They promote the offerings of other key organizations.

Township of Lake of Bays

The Township of Lake of Bays does not play a formal role in training delivery. They promote the offerings of other key organizations.

Township of Georgian Bay

The Township of Georgian Bay does not play a formal role in training delivery. They promote the offerings of other key organizations.

Business Support Agencies

Muskoka Community Futures

The Muskoka Community Futures' (MCF) mission is to promote economic growth and job creation throughout Muskoka. To accomplish this MCF empowers entrepreneurs to succeed by offering experienced guidance and financial investment in their ventures. Business training programs are offered in a variety of topics and are aimed at both new and existing businesses:

- Advertising
- Basic QuickBooks
- Costing and Pricing
- E-business
- Human Resources Basics
- Insurance
- Networking
- Social Media (Facebook, Hootsuite, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter)
- Taxes
- Website Planning
- WSIB

In addition, MCF offers one-on-one business coaching to help businesses develop business plans, acquire financing or fine-tune their existing operation.



BUSINESS SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

MuskokaFutures.ca



*This is only an illustration of the Business Skills Development Program. The order of the program components is designed to be flexible to accommodate the needs of participating businesses.



Muskoka Community Network

Muskoka Community Network (MCN) is a not-for-profit corporation that creates economic value by building technology capacity through partnerships in the digital economy. MCN works to build capacity and provide service in the following key areas:

- Broadband Infrastructure
- E-Business Development
- Digital Up-Skilling
- Innovation
- Research

Training topics include:

- Technology Learning Series
- Social Media Lunch and Learns (Pinterest/Instagram, facebook, twitter, Hootsuite)
- Plan Your Web
- Profit from E-business (with Muskoka Community Futures)
- Ladies Learning Code HTML and CSS
- Intro to Excel
- Social Media 101

Muskoka Small Business Centre

The Province of Ontario, in partnership with local communities, operates 44 Small Business Centres across Ontario, which assists small businesses by providing information, advice, and assistance. The Muskoka Small Business Centre is a joint venture between the Town of Bracebridge and the Province. Although located in Bracebridge, the Centre services clients throughout Muskoka.

The Centre provides:

- Free and confidential business consultations, by appointment
- Informational pamphlets on a wide range of business topics
- A computer workstation with up-to-date Microsoft Office applications and internet access for client use
- Business Name Searches and Registrations
- Resource library
- Starter Company, a Government of Ontario initiative to support youth between the ages of 15 and 29 to support them in becoming entrepreneurs, starting up and successfully running their own business

YWCA of Muskoka: Women/Men in Business Programs

The Women in Business program is designed to support women at critical turning points or crossroads in their lives. For many women considering their own business or already self-employed or in family businesses, this program has provided the foundation for sound business management practices. For others, this program has allowed women to examine their goals and interests and develop a plan to reach those including further education or pursuing career changes.

The Men in Business program built on the success of the Women's program. Not an ordinary classroom experience, the course is designed to support individuals as they consider change and navigate through transitions in their lives. These transitions may include unemployment, returning to the workforce, a change in career, being new in the community, or launching a new business. Men from all walks of life are welcome to access the training and the people who can support their ambitions and ideas.

Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Planning Board

The Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Development Board (SMWDB) is a community directed, non-profit corporation leading Simcoe County and the District of Muskoka in their approach to workforce development and labour market planning. The SMWDB functions as a neutral broker of research, disseminator of information, and facilitator of collaborative partnership development. SMWDB does not offer any formal training programs.

Northern Lights Employment Resource Centre

The Employment Resource Centre assists people who are trying to return to work, upgrade skills or considering different employment situations. Free workshops on topics such as job searching skills, resume development are offered. Currently their training calendar also includes social media workshops.

Business Enterprise Resource Network

Those who are unemployed and would like to start their own business may be eligible for the Self Employment Assistance (SEA) program which offers financial and business support for up to 42 weeks of business start-up. Participants who are accepted into the program develop and implement their business plan to start and operate their businesses. During the program, they receive financial assistance, business advice and support through seminars, workshops, coaching and mentoring sessions to help them be successful.

Academic Upgrading

Academic upgrading is offered at the following locations and support individuals who are looking to upgrade basic skills or improve their literacy levels. They do not offer specific business training.

- Bracebridge Alternate Education & Training Centre
- Gravenhurst Alternate Education & Training Centre
- Huntsville Alternate Education & Training Centre
- Literacy Society of South Muskoka
- Simcoe/Muskoka Literacy Network (SMLN)

Tourism Specific Training Organizations

Ontario Tourism Education Council (OTEC)

A leader in Hospitality and Customer Service Training and Community Workforce Development, OTEC is an independent, not-for-profit Training, Consulting, and Workforce Development organization that delivers innovative, high quality solutions for the development and growth of a professional, skilled workforce. OTEC offers a variety of tourism training topics both in a classroom setting (Toronto based) as well as on-line. Topics include:

- Leadership
- Service Excellence
- Diversity
- Tourism Ambassador programs
- Speaker series