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2025/26 Partnership Program Guidelines (April 2025)

Important: This program is **not a grant**. It is a shared-delivery initiative, subject to approval of our Transfer Payment Agreement with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, Board of Directors and Senior Staff.

Matching funds are provided by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming (MTCG) towards partnerships with approved industry partners that we manage and execute jointly and that align with Explorers' Edge mandate, goals, target audiences and activities as found in our current [business plan](#). The program is designed to encourage collaborations, strategic alignment and leveraging of regional resources to create awareness, visitation, and spending.

New product or evolving tourism product, projects that show they're working to new product — using clear and measurable plans—will be prioritized in the application review process. The Partnership Program application process is competitive, and many people apply for the available funds. We welcome applications from all eligible businesses and organizations.

Explorers' Edge Partnership Program for 2025/26 is contingent upon Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming (MTCG) approval of this plan. Applications will be open from May 21, 2025 until June 6, 2025 @ 5.00pm. A second, and potentially limited, intake will be held later in the year only if funds are not fully allocated in this intake. We highly recommend getting applications in before the deadline, regardless of when your project will occur during the year (Fiscal April 1, 2025 – March 31, 2026).

Explorers' Edge reserves the right to limit the number of programs/funds that one stakeholder may receive per year.

You will need to attest in your application to having read these detailed Guidelines. If the documents linked below do not appear automatically, you may find them in your downloaded documents or reach out to info@explorersedge.ca.

Application Process

Please contact Explorers' Edge info@explorersedge.ca prior to submitting to ensure eligibility of your proposed idea.

- Applications will be open from May 21, 2025 until June 6, 2025 @ 5.00pm. A second, potentially limited intake will be held later in the year only if funds are not fully allocated in this intake.
- Before applying, please read the entire application and review [Explorers' Edge Business and Operational Plan](#).
- Complete your on-line application
- If your project is approved (typically you will be notified with-in 20 business days) a Memorandum of Understanding MOU outlining timelines, performance measurement etc. will be signed by you and Explorers' Edge.
- Explorers' Edge will send a invoice to you related to the project cost. Payment (in the form of an electronic funds transfer, INTERAC e-Transfer or cheque) is due upon receipt of the Request for Reimbursement (prior to the project's start). Note that expenses incurred prior to the signing of the MOU will not be paid.
- Note that all projects must be fully completed (including your completion of a final report within 30 days of project completion) by March 31, 2026.

Partner Eligibility

To undertake a Partnership project, applicants must be:

- Established businesses or organizations (with all required operating permits), including:
 - private tourism businesses (i.e. consumer facing organizations that have direct access to the consumer and rely on that consumer for their income)
 - DMOs (Destination Marketing Organizations), tourism organizations, associations/interest groups or municipalities representing/managing tourism partners in the delivery of a specific project that has direct benefits for the tourism operators
- Capable of demonstrating financial and other capacity to execute the project in partnership (including meeting agreed upon timelines).
- Located within the District of Muskoka, District of Parry Sound, Port Loring Restoule, South Algonquin, Algonquin Park, Almaguin Highlands
 - organizations outside of District of Muskoka, District of Parry Sound, Port Loring Restoule, South Algonquin, Algonquin Park, Almaguin Highlands may apply if there is strong involvement from the relevant regional stakeholders.
- Joint projects with other RTOs will be considered (keep in mind each RTO has their own structure for Partnership programs).
- Legally registered to operate in Ontario, with all necessary permits in place (federal, provincial, municipal), and there must be no outstanding legal issues that would affect the processing and outcomes of this project and collaboration with Explorers' Edge.
- Future funding of partners will require timely completion of the project in question and the final partner report, a high level of responsiveness and communication and demonstration of favourable outcomes from previous funding.
- Explorers' Edge wants to see businesses continue to evolve, to learn from previous projects supported by Explorers' Edge and ultimately, stand on their own, therefore for 2025/26, Explorers' Edge may not support applications that are identical year over year.

Partner contributions (i.e. matching funds) must

- Be paid in cash (provided to Explorers' Edge by EFT, INTERAC e-transfer or cheque).
- NOT be funding from other Ontario Government programs, such as Experience Ontario, or Ontario Government agencies such as Destination Ontario, the Ontario Trillium Fund, OMAFRA or other RTOs.
- Payment in full must be made within 30 days of the invoice from Explorer's Edge. Partnerships greater than \$5,000.00 will require a deposit of 10% prior to the partnership commencing. Failure to remit payment in a timely fashion may cause delays.

Note that as part of the application, you will need to attest to having read the guidelines and relevant application(s), including all informational links.

Data Collection

There are project-specific metrics that you are required to commit to tracking and reporting on in your final partner report - these will be dependent on the type of project you are undertaking and your objectives. That may include but are not limited to:

- Event Attendance
- Program Outcomes
- Earned Media
- Anecdotal pieces from Attendees
- Visitor Exit Survey
- Website Analytics

There are also a number of broad tourism metrics we encourage you to consider tracking. As data is the backbone of good tourism planning, the metrics that are considered most useful to Explorers' Edge and/or stakeholders are elaborated during the MOU process.

Project/Partner Requirements

Project Requirements

- Projects must be conducted by third parties i.e. Partnership funds cannot be used to pay or reimburse partner organizations. Third parties may include one of Explorers' Edge Agencies of Record - or a subcontractor identified through a mutually led procurement process.
- The exception to Explorers' Edge leading the procurement process is for signage projects, in which the municipality/partner procures services from a supplier in a process that aligns with the Explorers' Edge procurement requirements.
- Signage is the only capital expenditure that is eligible within the Partnership Program.
- If an approved project is delayed/cancelled prior to start, you must advise Explorers' Edge as soon as possible to allow other projects/stakeholders to access funds made available. Any expenses incurred prior to cancellation of a project will be your responsibility.

Partner Requirements

You must:

- Have a current website/social media page(s), phone number and email address that are regularly monitored.
- Select one representative only to act as the decision maker and liaison with Explorers' Edge and the Agency of Record or consultant assigned to the project to ensure timely and constructive execution of the project. Failure to provide timely and constructive execution may lead to project cancellation, with costs incurred to date the responsibility of the partner.
- Identify Explorers' Edge and the Province of Ontario as partners (not sponsors) with logos on website with active links back to GreatCanadianWilderness.com with logos on all printed collateral supported through the program with 'Funded in Part by the Province of Ontario' on all digital ads supported through the program and in all press releases related to the project – press releases must be approved by Explorers' Edge and include recognition of the funding from Explorers' Edge.
- Tag @GreatCanadianWilderness using #greatcanadianwilderness on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts related to the project.
- Sign up for the Explorers' Edge E-Newsletter (funding updates, announcements, etc.).

Partnership Program Stream – NEW 2025

Product & Experience Development

- This category is typically for larger projects, often in the planning stages. Funding is available for large-scale product/experience development, sustainable tourism destination development plans, for feasibility studies, research and workforce development projects, etc.

Image Development

- This category includes development of videos and/or imagery through Explorers' Edge respective Agency(ies) of Record that can subsequently be used in advertising of assets/events, etc. e.g. the collateral developed may then be used in the Social Media Advertising Stream below. Please note that recruitment videos to be used in advertising for staff and videos related to sustainable tourism are also eligible within this category.

Marketing & Advertising Campaigns

(Limited number available and must include multiple tourism businesses)

- For the purposes of this program, marketing & advertising includes tactics that include adwords/search, Facebook/Instagram ads, banner/display ads, radio, print (with exception, print is not a priority) etc. to promote assets/events. This category does not include website design, upgrades, etc. Media buys are managed by Explorers' Edge Agency of Record. Please note that while these campaigns will be run through the organizations Agency of Record (for billing purposes).

Social Media Advertising

(Great for individual business owners)

- This category provides access to social media advertising (Meta/Facebook, Instagram) using short videos or images developed through Explorers' Edge or your own approved video/image collateral (priority will be given to videos of 60 seconds or less). Media buys are managed by Explorers' Edge advertising agency. Explorers' Edge has had great success with this in our Great Canadian Wilderness campaigns, and the lower buy-in of this partnership provides partners with a low- risk introduction to the benefits of social media advertising as an effective complement to other forms of advertising.

Tourism Wayfinding Signage

- Funds are available to conduct a signage plan for installation and installation of the physical signs in the region of Explorers' Edge. Tourism signage is a critical tool for enhancing the visitor experience, supporting local economies, and managing destinations effectively. The aim of the signage is to help travelers navigate unfamiliar areas, discover attractions, and engage more deeply with the region's identity and

stories. Signage also plays a key role in promoting safety, accessibility, and dispersing visitors to reduce pressure on high-traffic areas.

Trade Show Support

- Tourism operators may apply for reimbursement of up to 50% of eligible trade show booth space costs only to a maximum of \$1,750.

Applicants should be aware that Explorers' Edge, through funding agreements with the Province is bound by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (Ontario) and that any information provided to the Province in connection with the Project or otherwise in connection with the Agreement may be subject to disclosure in accordance with that Act, as amended from time to time, and that any information provided to Explorers' Edge in connection with their application, project or agreement may be subject to disclosure in accordance with the requirements of that Act. Partners agree to permit Explorers' Edge, if required, to verify/audit information submitted (at the discretion of the Province) to ensure that it is complete and accurate, and that funds were used for purpose(s) intended.