



EXPLORERS' EDGE  
**PARTNERSHIP  
PROGRAM**

# Explorers' Edge 2026–2027 Partnership Program

**Co-Invest. Collaborate. Create Regional Impact.**

*Information Webinar | February 19, 2026*



# Land Acknowledgement

*We acknowledge that the region we call “the Great Canadian wilderness just north of Toronto” is founded on the traditional lands and waterways of the Anishinabek, Algonquin, Mohawk and Métis peoples, and is part of the Robinson Huron (1850) and Williams (1923) Treaties territory, and the unceded territory of the Algonquins of Ontario.*

*We further acknowledge that as Canadians, we are all treaty people. Explorers’ Edge staff are committed to the ongoing truth and reconciliation process, including economic reconciliation through tourism development, and we will work diligently to listen, to learn, to take action, and to be respectful towards all First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.*



**Algonquins of Ontario (Whitney area)**



**Dokis First Nation**



**Henvey Inlet First Nation**



**Magnetawan First Nation**



**Moon River Métis Council**



**Moose Deer Point First Nation**



**Shawanaga First Nation**



**Wahta Mohawk First Nation**



**Wasauksing First Nation**

# Agenda

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1. Welcome & Introduction

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2. Program Overview

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3. Highlights from 2025-2026

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4. What's New for 2026–2027

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5. 2026/2027 Funding Streams

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6. Application Process

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7. Project , Partner and General Requirements

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8. Q&A

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# Program Overview

Co-Invest. Collaborate. Create Regional Impact.

***The Explorers' Edge Partnership Program is a strategic co-investment initiative supporting tourism planning, marketing, and experience development across the region. The program is not a traditional grant, but a collaborative effort to create regional impact.***

The Partnership Program is a shared-delivery, co-investment initiative that matches stakeholder contributions to support projects that:

- Drive visitation
- Enhance and evolve visitor experiences
- Support regenerative tourism and workforce development
- Encourage collaboration and regional storytelling
- Pilot scalable tourism products with long-term impact

**Important:** This program is not a grant. All projects are subject to approval through Explorers' Edge's Transfer Payment Agreement with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, and approval by the Board of Directors and Senior Staff.

# 2025/2026 Partnership Program Highlights

Co-Invest. Collaborate. Create Regional Impact.



EXPLORERS' EDGE  
PARTNERSHIP  
PROGRAM

**Budget**  
\$166,000

**Total Funded**  
42 partners



### **Partner Spotlight – Muskoka Marathon 2025**

Looking back on last month, we're still buzzing from the energy of the Muskoka Marathon 2025 in Bracebridgel...

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### **Partner Spotlight – Bracebridge BIA Downtown Market**

With support from the Explorers' Edge Partnership Fund, the Bracebridge BIA successfully delivered the second annual Downtown Autumn...

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### **Partner Spotlight – Commando Museum – Summerfest Celebration**

Supported by the Explorers' Edge Partnership Fund, the Commando Museum successfully delivered its 2025 Summerfest, building on the...

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### **Partner Spotlight – Town of Parry Sound – Cruise Ship Shuttles**

Explorers' Edge was proud to support a strategic partnership that successfully advanced cruise ship visitation to the Port...

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<https://explorersedge.ca/category/partnership-spotlights/>

# 2025/2026 Partnership Program Highlights

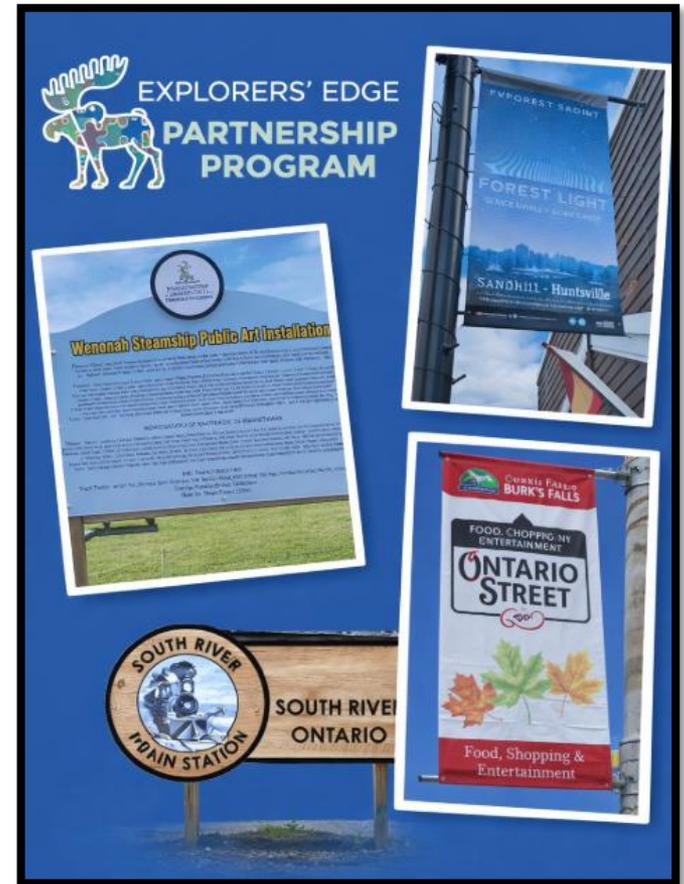
Co-Invest. Collaborate. Create Regional Impact.

## *Investing in Placemaking, Wayfinding, and Community Identity*

Several partnerships focused on improving how visitors experience and navigate communities while reinforcing local identity and pride.

Projects such as Life is Sweet on Ontario Street in Burk's Falls brought vibrant placemaking to the downtown core through custom-designed banners, while wayfinding and heritage signage initiatives in Magnetawan, Georgian Bay, South River, and Loring–Restoule improved navigation, accessibility, and storytelling.

Trail enhancements and interpretive signage at the Loring Deer Yard further strengthened low-impact outdoor recreation and heritage tourism, positioning the site as a key regional asset.



<https://explorersedge.ca/category/partnership-spotlights/>

# 2025/2026 Partnership Program Highlights

Co-Invest. Collaborate. Create Regional Impact.

## ***Strengthening Arts, Culture, and Signature Events***

Cultural tourism and community-led events remained a cornerstone of the Partnership Fund.

Longstanding and emerging events alike benefited from strategic support, including the Muskoka Arts & Crafts Summer Show, the Commanda Museum Summerfest, and the Muskoka Marathon.

Winter and shoulder-season initiatives—such as The Bracebridge Fire and Ice Festival, the Hidden Valley Highlands New Year’s Eve celebration, and the recent Ontario 55+ Winter Games—demonstrate a strong commitment to year-round visitation and economic resilience.



<https://explorersedge.ca/category/partnership-spotlights/>

# 2025/2026 Partnership Program Highlights

Co-Invest. Collaborate. Create Regional Impact.

## *Advancing Digital Tools, Marketing, and Storytelling*

Digital readiness and storytelling were key themes throughout the program.

Investments supported/supports enhanced digital wayfinding platforms in downtown Parry Sound, expanded social media storytelling by the Loring-Restoule Business Association, and high-quality photography and videography initiatives with Muskoka Tourism and Brennan's Hill Camping & Cabins.

These projects help ensure that communities and operators are better equipped to reach new audiences, tell authentic stories, and convert interest into visitation.



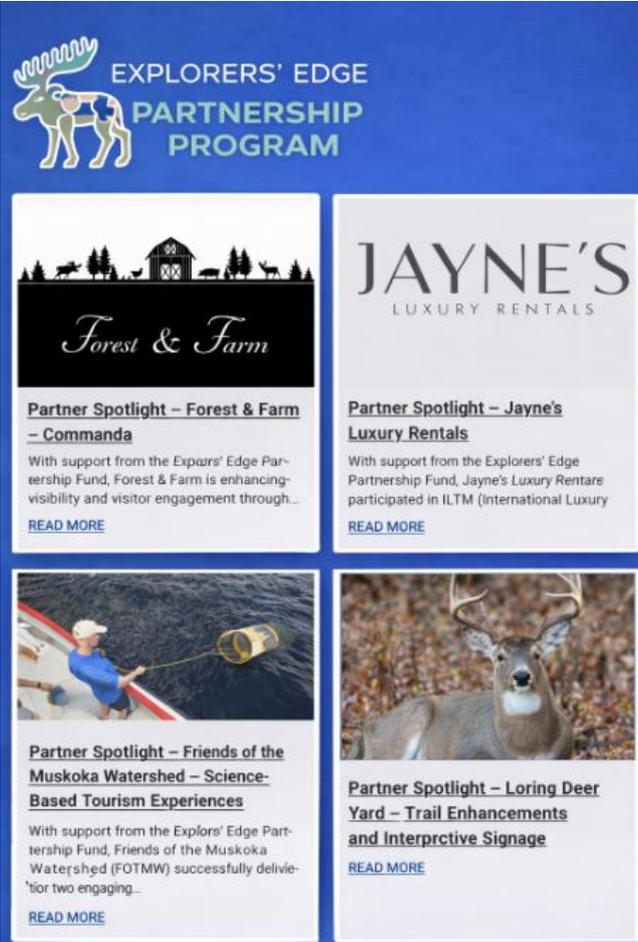
<https://explorersedge.ca/category/partnership-spotlights/>

# 2025/2026 Partnership Program Highlights

Co-Invest. Collaborate. Create Regional Impact.

## *Supporting Sustainable, Experiential, and Export-Ready Tourism*

The Partnership Fund also supported science-based and experiential tourism initiatives such as Friends of the Muskoka Watershed's educational programs, regenerative tourism storytelling with Forest & Farm, and international market development through Jayne's Luxury Rentals' participation in ILTM Cannes.



**EXPLORERS' EDGE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM**

**Partner Spotlight – Forest & Farm – Commanda**  
With support from the Explorers' Edge Partnership Fund, Forest & Farm is enhancing visibility and visitor engagement through...  
[READ MORE](#)

**Partner Spotlight – Jayne's Luxury Rentals**  
With support from the Explorers' Edge Partnership Fund, Jayne's Luxury Rentals participated in ILTM (International Luxury...  
[READ MORE](#)

**Partner Spotlight – Friends of the Muskoka Watershed – Science-Based Tourism Experiences**  
With support from the Explorers' Edge Partnership Fund, Friends of the Muskoka Watershed (FOTMW) successfully delivered two engaging...  
[READ MORE](#)

**Partner Spotlight – Loring Deer Yard – Trail Enhancements and Interpretive Signage**  
[READ MORE](#)

<https://explorersedge.ca/category/partnership-spotlights/>

# What's New for 2026

## Experience Creation and Travel Company Integration

As part of the launch of the Explorers' Edge Travel Co, the 2026 Partnership Program places a strong emphasis on experience development and collaboration. Priority will be given to projects that:

- Pilot new or evolving visitor experiences
- Package or bundle experiences across multiple operators
- Test bookable products that can be incorporated into the Explorers' Edge Travel Co
- Demonstrate collaboration between businesses, operators, or communities
- Align with co-investment models that grow regional value, not just individual promotion

Successful projects may be supported not only through funding, but also through experience design guidance, testing, and potential integration opportunities. Upon completion of the partnership, a consultation with Explorers' Edge Travel Co. will be coordinated to evaluate the success of the experience and explore opportunities for integration into regional sales and distribution channels.

# A Muskoka Maple Adventure at Windermere House

2 ADULTS  
\$1,650.00 CAD

BOOK NOW

 March 20 – 22, 2026



# What's New for 2026

## Sustainable, Inclusivity & Accessible Experiences and Product Development

### Inclusivity & Accessible Experiences

- Focused on inclusivity and accessibility
- Removes barriers to participation for visitors
- Creates welcoming, respectful, and accessible experiences
- Supports visitors of all abilities, backgrounds, and identities



ECONOMIC  
OPPORTUNITY



LOCAL  
PARTNERSHIPS



VISITOR  
EDUCATION

### Funded initiatives may include:

- Accessible experience design
- Inclusive storytelling and marketing
- Culturally respectful partnerships
- Operational practices that foster safety and representation



COMMUNITY  
BENEFIT



ENVIRONMENTAL  
STEWARDSHIP



CULTURAL  
HERITAGE

# What's New for 2026

## Sustainable, Inclusivity & Accessible Experiences and Product Development

### Sustainability & Responsible Tourism

- Supports eco-friendly and responsible tourism initiatives
- Protects the region's natural environments
- Encourages collaboration and co-investment
- Integrates sustainability into visitor experiences and operations



ECONOMIC  
OPPORTUNITY



LOCAL  
PARTNERSHIPS



VISITOR  
EDUCATION

### Supported initiatives may include:

- Low-impact outdoor experiences
- Sustainable transportation options
- Waste and energy reduction practices
- Visitor education promoting environmental stewardship



COMMUNITY  
BENEFIT



ENVIRONMENTAL  
STEWARDSHIP



CULTURAL  
HERITAGE

# What's New for 2026

## Sustainability Declarations and Commitments

**2026/2027 Program Focus** Stronger emphasis on: Sustainability | Inclusivity | Truth and Reconciliation

### Explorers' Edge Positive Impact Series:

- Access to educational webinars and practical resources
- Supports meaningful action in priority areas
- Participation strongly encouraged
- Engagement strengthens applications
- Deepens impact within organizations and communities



### Application Requirements:

Demonstrate commitment to sustainability and inclusivity principles. Reference relevant initiatives, such as:

- District of Muskoka Climate Hero Program
- GreenStep Sustainable Tourism 2030 Pledge
- Rainbow Registry (2SLGBTQ+ inclusivity)
- Indigenous-led initiatives aligned with Truth and Reconciliation principles

# 2026/2027 Funding Streams



**Product / Experience Development**



**Communication, Marketing & Advertising Campaigns**



**Image Development – Explorers’ Edge Agency of Record**



**Workforce development and training**



**Data Research**

# 2026/2027 Application Process

## 2026 / 2027 Budget | \$166,000

- Competitive program with demand generally exceeding available funds.
- Priority is given to measurable, evolving projects.
- Priority will be given to applications that demonstrate sustainability, inclusivity and accessibility.
- Identical year-over-year applications may not be supported.

### **Please note:**

If partnership funds are not fully allocated during the March - April intake period, a second intake may occur in Fall 2026, and again in Winter 2027 if funding remains available.

# 2026/2027 Application Process

Attend Information Session – Feb 19 2026

Review Guidelines –Posted to EE website Feb 27 2026

Submit application by March 27 2026 via Explorers Edge Website

Project Review & Approval approx. 30-day review period. MOU Executed.

Third Party Invoices Submitted to EE for payment. Project Completion by March 31 2027

Invoices and MOU reconciled by March 31 2027

Wrap Report and Partner Invoice Invoice Payment within 30 days of invoice date

# Who Can Apply

## Established Businesses

- Legally registered in Ontario

## Tourism Operators

- Private and Non-Profit

## Destination Marketing Organizations

- Tourism Associations

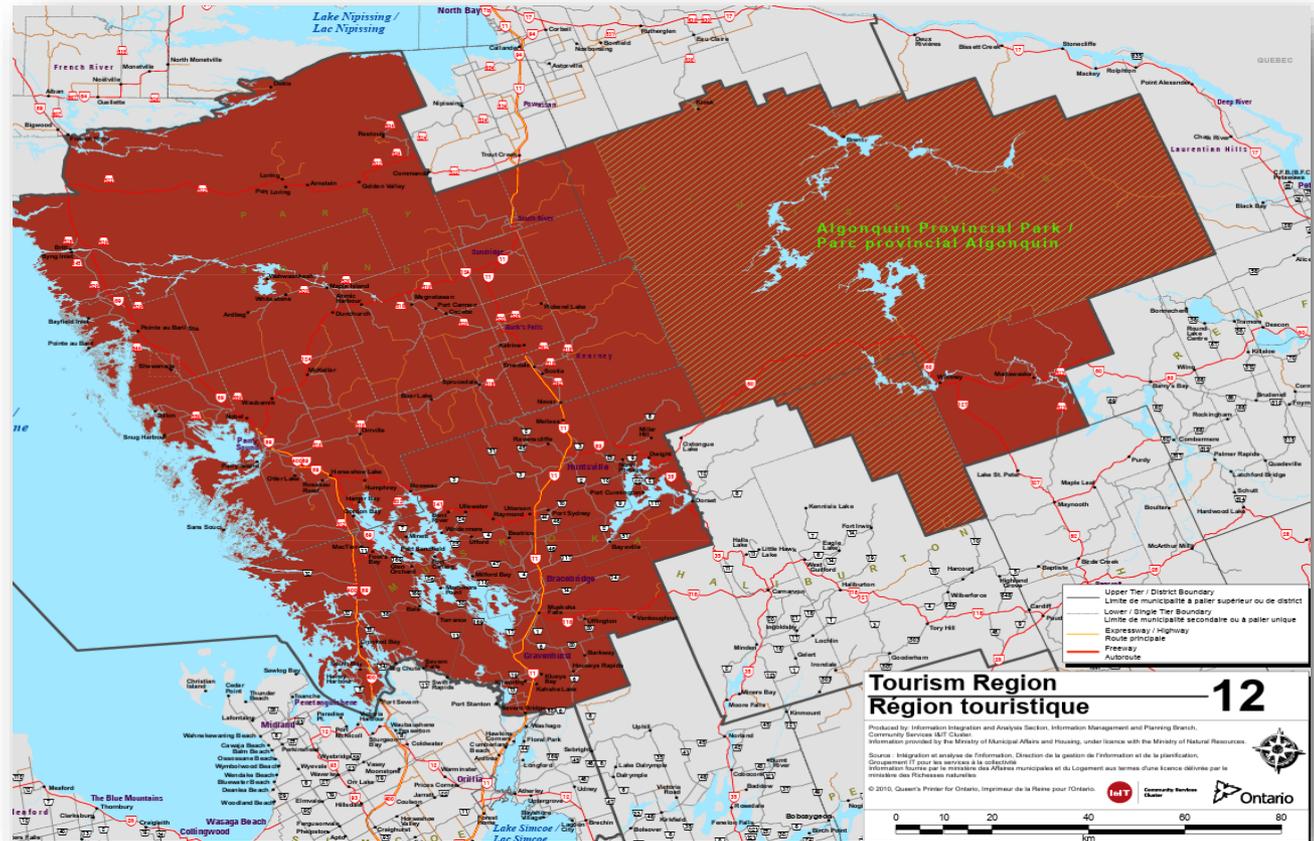
## Communities

- Indigenous Communities
- Municipalities
- Economic Development Officers

# Who Can Apply- Region

## Explorers' Edge Region

- District of Muskoka
- Almaguin Highlands
- Loring-Restoule
- South Algonquin
- District of Parry Sound



# 2026/2027 Project 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.
- 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.

# 2026/2027 Partner Requirements

## 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](http://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.

# 2026/2027 Partner Requirements

## Partner Requirements :

You must:

- 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.).
- Sign up for Positive Impact Series

# Partnership Financial Contribution

- Co-investment required in CDN dollars (cash match, 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
- 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 Explorers' Edge may not support applications that are identical year over year.

# Measuring Success

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.

# Program Benefits



# Key Dates

- Attend February 19th Webinar or coordinate pre-consult call with Jennifer Montpetit
- Application intake will go live on Explorers' Edge website Feb 27th 2026
- Application Period: February 27 - March 27, 2026 @ 5:00 PM
- Project Completion Deadline: March 31, 2027

Applicants are required to contact Jennifer Montpetit, Partnership Manager in advance to confirm project eligibility and strategic alignment

[jennifer@explorersedge.ca](mailto:jennifer@explorersedge.ca)

# Questions & Contact Information

Thank You!