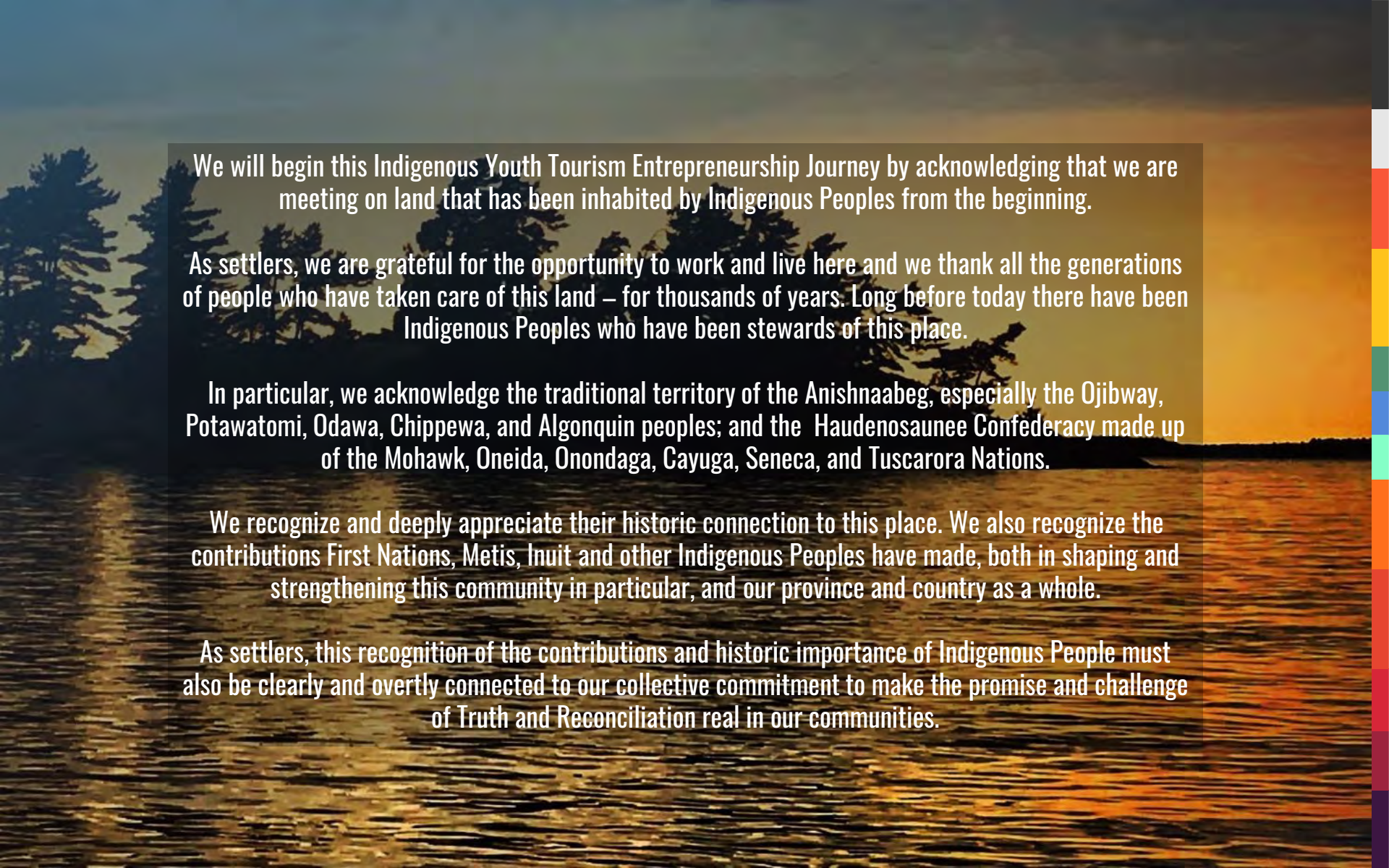
START WITH ONE

REGIONAL INDIGENOUS YOUTH TOURISM ENTREPRENEURSHIP JOURNEY
EXPLORERS' EDGE
21 SEPTEMBER 2026

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We will begin this Indigenous Youth Tourism Entrepreneurship Journey by acknowledging that we are meeting on land that has been inhabited by Indigenous Peoples from the beginning.

As settlers, we are grateful for the opportunity to work and live here and we thank all the generations of people who have taken care of this land – for thousands of years. Long before today there have been Indigenous Peoples who have been stewards of this place.

In particular, we acknowledge the traditional territory of the Anishnaabeg, especially the Ojibway, Potawatomi, Odawa, Chippewa, and Algonquin peoples; and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy made up of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora Nations.

We recognize and deeply appreciate their historic connection to this place. We also recognize the contributions First Nations, Metis, Inuit and other Indigenous Peoples have made, both in shaping and strengthening this community in particular, and our province and country as a whole.

As settlers, this recognition of the contributions and historic importance of Indigenous People must also be clearly and overtly connected to our collective commitment to make the promise and challenge of Truth and Reconciliation real in our communities.

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Acknowledgements

This plan was shaped by the communities and people who shared their time, knowledge, stories, and guidance. We are grateful to the Indigenous youth who participated in this process, sharing their ideas, experiences, aspirations, and perspectives that helped guide the direction of this work.

We thank the Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Chiefs, Indigenous community leaders, educators, and partners who shared their teachings, stories, and insights, and who helped create meaningful opportunities for dialogue and learning. We recognize the support of the local school board and all those who contributed their time and energy to this journey.

We would also like to thank the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario for its vision and financial support to help start this journey.

At its heart, this plan reflects a shared belief in the strengths and leadership of Indigenous youth and the important role they will play in shaping the future of their communities. We look forward to continuing this work together, building relationships, and creating pathways to support a future where Indigenous youth can lead, create, and share their stories, cultures, and connections to place through tourism.

All quotes in this report are verbatim from the workshops and interviews.
Due to the number of youth engaged, these quotes are provided anonymously.

The photos provided are for the purposes of this report only
and should not be shared or distributed.

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Engagement summary

In-depth interviews (18)

- Elders, Chiefs, Mayors, community members and leaders, and Indigenous community economic developers, social service organizations and other related supporting organizations

Community visits (6)

- First Nations communities: Shawanaga, Wahta, Wasauksing, Algonquins of Pikwakanagan (4)
- Community interviews (2)

Committee meeting (1)

- Indigenous Economic Developers and leadership

Site visits (2)

- Beaver Creek and the Misko-Aki exhibit

Presentation to all Chiefs and District Municipality of the Muskoka region

- Introduction to MAILT, Muskoka Area Indigenous Leadership Table

Rosseau Lakes College Pow Wow focus group

- Participants (6 Youth)
- Communities: Parry Sound, Bear Island and Wasauksing (3)

Youth tourism entrepreneurship summit

- Youth stakeholder survey (1)
- Participants (20 Indigenous youth)
- Edlers and knowledge keepers (4)
- Communities: Kawartha Lakes, Bobcaygeon, Six Nations, and Bear Island (4)

Participants spanned two generations of engagement and two kinds of connection to their communities. The high school participants (roughly grades 10–12) had direct everyday relationships with land and water.

The post-secondary participants were further along — navigating university, early employment, and active decisions about their relationship to their home communities. Several have already left their reserves and are thinking carefully about what would bring them back.

Across both groups, participants have views, plans, and in some cases already have businesses or careers underway.

Indigenous Youth Tourism Entrepreneurship *Journey* objectives:

- Identify opportunities for Indigenous youth-led tourism product development;
- Highlight challenges and system-level barriers to youth entrepreneurship;
- Outline community-led and culturally appropriate support mechanisms;
- Provide a roadmap for future investment, programming, and partnership development;
- Align with regenerative tourism and community economic development principles.

Every journey begins by choosing to walk the path.
This plan represents the very first steps.

Our vision

My name is Jess. I am twenty years old, and I run a boat.

That sounds simple when I say it like that. Three years ago, I did not think a person like me could run anything.

I grew up on the island. Everywhere I went, I went by boat. Visiting my cousins in town — boat. Picking berries on the far shore with my grandmother, my Nokomis — boat. The water was just how the world worked. I never thought of it as special. It would be like asking a bird if flying is special.

Tourists came every summer. I did not like them much. They left garbage on the rocks. They took pictures of us without asking. They acted like our home was a park someone built for them. My cousin Dez used to say, "Travel is when you visit. Tourism is when you take." I thought he was right.

So when a teacher at school asked if I had ever thought about working in tourism, I laughed. Me? I told her I was not that kind of person. I was just a kid from the rez. Business was for other people.

She did not push. She only asked, "What do you already love doing that a respectful visitor might value?" Then she let me think about it.

I kept coming back to the water.

That fall she invited me to a two-day gathering. There were about twenty of us, Indigenous youth from all around the bay. Some were in high school like me. Some were already in college. There were Elders there, and a few people from a tourism group called Explorers' Edge. They said right at the start that they were not there to lead anything. They were there to listen and to help where they could. I did not believe them yet. But I stayed.

We visited real businesses. I stood on a big tour boat and watched a guide talk to sixty people at once. I helped an artist run a workshop. And in the evening I sat by the fire with an Elder from up the shore who told stories about the islands. I had heard pieces of those stories my whole life, but never all at once. When he finished, he looked at me and said, "You know these waters. You just don't know that you know them yet."



By the end of the second day I had an idea on a piece of paper. A boat trip. Two hours. I would take a small group around the islands and tell them what I know. Where the herons like to stand. Why we call one point the name we call it. Just what I know, said plainly.

I was scared of two things. One, that nobody would pay for that. Two, that I would say something wrong about our culture. That I would mix up a story and embarrass my family.

Here is what happened instead.

For the culture part, I had my Nokomis and an Elder from the circle that Explorers' Edge helped set up. They told me I did not have to know everything before I started. I could learn as I went. My job was to share what I knew and be honest about what I did not. If a visitor asked something I was not sure of, I could say, "I'm still learning that one. Let me ask my grandmother." Nobody would think less of me. They said the learning was part of the work.

For the business part, I had a mentor from a boat company in town. He was not Indigenous, and he did not pretend to know our stories. What he knew was insurance and safety, how much gas really costs, and how to price a trip so you don't lose money. We met once a month, and I could text him when I panicked. I panicked a lot at first.

A small grant paid for my safety course and a better motor. It was not much money, and nobody made me fill out fifty pages to get it. I wrote one page and talked to a person. That was it.

Before I charged anyone, I ran two practice trips. Explorers' Edge helped with the insurance and the waivers. My cousins came. Some people from town came. Two Elders came. I got paid for those trips even though the riders came for free, and afterward everyone told me what worked and what didn't. Dez said I talked too fast. He was right.

My first real customers were the Explorers' Edge board. They held their meeting on my boat — eight people in suits and life jackets. I was so nervous I forgot the name of my own island for a second. But they listened, and they asked good questions. Afterward one of them said it was the best meeting she had been to in years.

That was two summers ago.



Now, before anyone books with me, they get a short message from our community about how to visit in a good way. Take your garbage with you. Ask before you take a picture of a person. Listen more than you talk. If someone does not want to follow that, they do not book with me, and I do not want them anyway. The visitors who come now are the ones who want to be here properly.

The boat pays for itself, and a little more. Some of that goes back to the youth program in our community. That was my choice. My Nokomis says the water gave me this, so I give some back. That makes sense to me.

The part I am proudest of, though, happened last spring.

A boy from my community, fifteen years old, came to find me. He wants to be a guide at our powwow — to meet visitors when they arrive and explain what they are seeing and how to act. He said the same thing I said once: "I don't think I'm the kind of person who can do this."

So I asked him what my teacher asked me. What do you already love doing that a respectful visitor might value? Then I let him think.

Now I go with him when he meets his mentor. I sit at the back. Sometimes I text him when I think he is about to panic. Explorers' Edge pays me a little for this. I would do it for free.

One day he will sit at the back of the room for someone else. That is the whole idea. Youth to mentor. Youth to mentor. Youth to mentor.

A lot of my friends left the island for school or work, and I understand why. There was nothing here for them. There was something here for me. It was always here. I just needed a few people to help me see that it was mine to share.



THE YOUTH

Cole

Cole is seventeen, in grade eleven, from Bear Island First Nation. He answers most questions in a handful of words, then stops, like he's checking the answer against something before he lets it stand.

Ask him what tourism means and he doesn't reach for a definition. He thinks about boats. Almost everywhere he's gone as a visitor, he's gone by water — Bear Island sits out on the lake, and a boat makes more sense than a road ever could. Cars, when he's had to use them, feel wrong somehow. Weirder. He says it plainly, like a fact about the world rather than an opinion: tourism is someone from somewhere else, looking around a place that isn't theirs yet.

He doesn't need to be asked twice about where he's from. It comes up on its own — in how he describes the lake, in the way he corrects the size of it when someone underestimates it, in the quiet certainty he brings to anything about the island itself. Bear Island isn't a detail he mentions. It's closer to the ground he's standing on when he answers everything else.

It's the same thing that makes him pause when the workshop turns toward business ideas. He doesn't jump in with a pitch the way some of the others do. But when someone asks if he could see himself actually doing this — running something, not just talking about it — he doesn't say no. He says it would have to be on the water. Not tourism in the abstract. Not a shop, not a stage. Something where the boat is the point, where being out on that lake, off Bear Island, is the whole reason someone would come to him in the first place.

That's the shape of how he thinks. He doesn't do much explaining beyond what's necessary — a lot of "yeah," a confirming nod in words rather than a built-out case. It's not that he has nothing to add. It's that he weighs whether it's worth saying before he says it, and most of the time the answer is no, not yet. But water is the one place he doesn't hedge, and Bear Island is the one thing he doesn't downplay. Ask him to imagine himself in a business and both of those come first, without his having to think about it.

William

William is finishing a bachelor's degree in Indigenous studies and history. He's Wasauksing First Nation, of the Martin Clan, though he left the reserve at seven when his family moved to North Bay, onto Nipissing territory. He says himself he didn't get a perfect cultural education growing up — there's still a lot he's learning. But there's one thread he came back to more than once, and it's his grandfather.

His grandfather, William Baker, ran the yacht out of Wasauksing back in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, after he left the Navy. Tourists came from the settler cities, sometimes from as far as Europe, and climbed aboard to be taken around Georgian Bay while his grandfather told them the stories of the islands. It was one of the only ways an Indigenous person could make independent money in that era — William says that plainly, without softening it. And there was a cost attached to it: his grandfather wore a Plains-style headdress on those tours, even though it isn't an Ojibwe piece at all. It's what tourists expected an "Indian" to look like, and appeasing that expectation was part of the job.

William has sat with what that meant. He says if someone asked him to put on a headdress and drive a boat today, he'd refuse — he'd be too upset to do it. So for a long time he wondered why his grandfather agreed to it. The answer he's settled on is simple: his grandfather did it with love, to support his family. And William has folded that into something closer to a philosophy — that doing anything in a good way means doing it with love, for yourself, for the community, for the world. He traces that back to a teaching about the seven grandfathers, where it's the eagle, representing love, who lifts the boy up to learn from them.

That history is part of why the current work matters to him. When Chief Tababadon asked him to be involved — specifically because he's William Baker's only grandchild, and had heard those stories firsthand — William describes it as recognizing his grandfather's dream finally becoming possible: tourism that doesn't require anyone to be a "pan-Indian" stand-in, where the community can be Anishinaabe on its own terms, proud of its own florals and its own stories, without performing someone else's idea of what Indigenous means. He talks about that shift as moving from survival into flourishing.

He was five years old, riding in his grandfather's boat, watching it pull back into the marina, when he first thought he'd like to open a coffee shop right there at the dock. He still mentions it. His other idea — the one he calls his dream now — is a dance studio, teaching youth to make regalia and to dance, the way he already does in workshops he helps run. Both ideas come from the same place: not performing culture for someone else's benefit, but building something at the water's edge that's actually his to offer.

These youth represent our best prospects to start a tourism business.
But they need a lot of drive and support to start doing something.

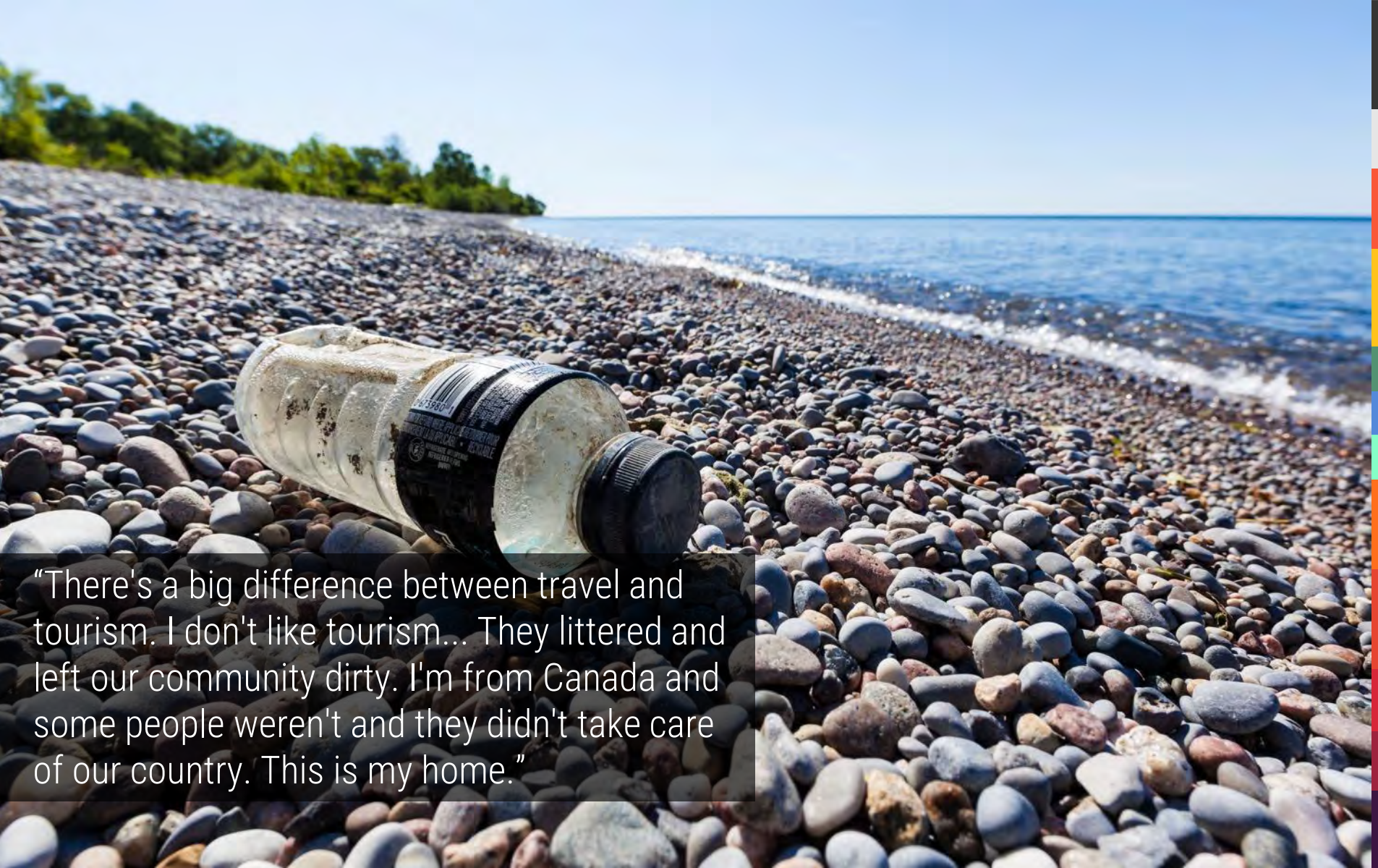
WHAT YOUTH BELIEVE

For many youth, tourism has baggage.

“

There's a lot of tourists who don't appreciate our lands... there's a lot of people who take it as a commodity.

”


“There's a big difference between travel and tourism. I don't like tourism... They littered and left our community dirty. I'm from Canada and some people weren't and they didn't take care of our country. This is my home.”

Seeing tourism “done wrong” raises the stakes
for doing it the right way.

Youth believe in the community benefit of tourism.

Not "how much could I make?" but "who gets the returns?”.

A tourism business that generates revenue while pulling culture away from the community is not a successful business.

Tourism is a potential answer to one of the biggest questions youth face:

Why stay?

Opportunity is what keeps youth in community or brings them back after leaving.

Youth held a consistent set of values associated with good tourism.

- The guide is responsible for visitor behaviour, not just their own conduct.
- Expectations need to be set before people arrive.
- The land deserves the same respect the visitor is expected to show a host.

Youth believe that visitors who won't accept those terms are not the right visitors.



"A lot of Indigenous youth, they don't see themselves as entrepreneurs, even if they have those stories. They see themselves as... Rez Kids."


“It just doesn't seem to be something that I am passionate about. I don't want to just talk about the history. It has to be my passion.”


The most compelling Indigenous tourism experiences are place-based, and the credibility to deliver them comes from a living relationship with place - not from training alone.

Barriers identified

Across all sessions the barriers were consistent and reinforce each other:

- Financial. Many Indigenous youth live with limited incomes, and this affects confidence in ways that compound.
- Confidence. Not just belief in a business idea — whether a young person sees themselves as someone who is able to be an entrepreneur.
- Cultural readiness. Uncertainty about whether they hold enough cultural knowledge to share it responsibly with visitors.
- Legitimacy and community trust. Operating publicly in a community's name requires community credibility that most youth don't yet have.
- Practical barriers. Permits, licenses, food handling, insurance, staffing, and seasonal cash flow — operational hurdles that feel overwhelming without guidance.
- Cultural integrity. Youth are aware that any business that comes out of this strategy needs to be built with culture and history front of mind.


Many youth have genuine tourism ideas
and real entrepreneurial drive, but
don't see themselves as entrepreneurs.

The Journey's most important output may not be the first business.
It may be the first mentor.

The youth who launch an idea, build something real, and are still doing it in five years are the people who will make the next cohort possible.

Success is not just whether one business gets off the ground, but whether the conditions are in place for the work to keep going without requiring the same level of external support each time.



A young person does not always see themselves as someone who is allowed to be an entrepreneur - as someone whose stories, knowledge, and relationship to land could be worth paying for. That is an identity question, not a skills question.

What support looks like

Youth named several distinct types of support they would like to have:

1. Elders and knowledge keepers hold the cultural authority and land knowledge.
2. Other mentors — including non-Indigenous ones — can provide operational guidance, entrepreneurship skills, and pathway knowledge.
3. Family and friends provide early confidence.
4. Chief and Council and funding organizations provide institutional support.

No one assumed these would be the same person or the same institution.

The support system needs to be easy to enter. Not bureaucratic, not requiring youth to already know how to navigate institutions. Meeting people where they are.


"We're going to partner you with someone who's older, who's already doing this. And then once you're confident, you can go it on your own... Youth to mentor, youth to mentor, youth to mentor."


"A lot of Indigenous youth have ideas, but they don't have a blueprint of what they want to do."

What youth need to succeed as tourism entrepreneurs

1. A genuine, specific passion, not a general interest in tourism.
2. A specialty or angle.
3. Confidence, specifically the belief that entrepreneurship is something people like them do.
4. Comfort with the visibility and public-facing demands of the role.


“We need (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) people to say ‘Look what you can do. We believe in you.’ it really is like organizations going out there and be like, hey, here's who we are. We want to know who you are and we believe in you."

What needs to be in place around them

- Startup capital and low-barrier financing.
- A business model to adapt, not a "build your own" exercise.
- Mentorship that isn't one thing. It can be direct instruction, encouragement, or help turning an idea into a blueprint.
- Support to represent culture accurately in public — the fear of "saying something offensive" is a barrier to entry.
- Practical infrastructure: certifications (food handling, canoe safety, first aid), permits, insurance, and transportation to work sites.

Most importantly, youth need to see "someone just like you who succeeded". This is evidence that the pathway is real.



Over the course of the Youth Summit, awareness of and interest in tourism as a possible career went from essentially zero to some youth nodding in agreement.


Awareness of tourism leads to
interest in tourism.

WHAT OTHERS SAID

What confirms the youth voice

Interviews with economic development staff, education partners, and community leadership across the region echo the youth engagement findings closely, often independently and in similar language:

- Mentorship needs to go beyond business mechanics. Encouragement, accountability, and help turning an idea into a plan are named as essential.
- The primary barrier is confidence and identity, not skill.
- Visible peer success changes what feels possible.
- A lack of accessible, youth-specific funding as a primary obstacle.
- The risk of tourism becoming performance for outsiders is a shared concern.
- "Doing things in a good way" means action, not language.

What stakeholder engagement adds

Interviews with adults working across governance, education, and economic development also surfaced considerations that did not come up directly in the youth sessions, largely because they sit outside a young person's day-to-day vantage point:

- Appetite for tourism varies sharply by community.
- Current tourism income flowing mainly to a small number of established operators or property owners.
- Governance and independence matter as much as funding.
- Healing is a precondition in some communities, not a parallel track.
- Not all youth aspire to found a business. Several interviewees describe youth wanting steady, tolerable employment more than entrepreneurial risk.

COMPARABLE PROGRAMS

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Youth entrepreneurship programs

NACCA's Indigenous Youth Entrepreneurship (IYE) Program

This is a national funding-and-mentorship program targeting Indigenous youth in Canada aged 18 to 39 who are curious about entrepreneurship, considering launching a business, or looking to grow or scale an existing business.

Rather than running programming directly, NACCA works through a national network of 30 Indigenous Financial Institutions (IFIs).

the funding relationship and the local relationship are the same institution. Youth aren't applying to a distant federal program and then separately hunting for a local mentor.

NACCA has also partnered with Futurpreneur Canada to extend its mentorship capacity. It's pairing federal funding with an already-built national mentorship infrastructure rather than building one from scratch.

Martin Family Initiative (MFI) — Indigenous Youth Entrepreneurship Program (IYEP) - Saskatchewan

This is model is embedded in the K-12 school system, not a post-secondary or post-launch program.

IYEP is comprised of two 1-credit courses, Entrepreneurship 11 and Entrepreneurship 12, intended for grades 11 and 12, though students in grades 10 to 12 may take them. The goal isn't primarily business launches. At the heart of the program is a simple hope that students leave with strengthened self-confidence and belief in their own potential.

MFI trains and supports local instructors who do not need to be certified schoolteachers to teach the course.

The program has ongoing government funding. Most recently, Saskatchewan renewed its partnership with MFI to deliver the program in 16 schools for the 2025-26 school year.

EntrepreNorth

This is a cohort-based accelerator for northern Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs. Geographically and culturally, it's the closest analog among the six.

It's designed as a community, not just a funding pipeline. Participants come together to share their culture and learn from a team devoted to them, with a stated purpose of supporting Indigenous-led businesses given how underrepresented Indigenous tourism operators are.

One 2019 cohort included nine entrepreneurs, four from Nunavut, two from the N.W.T., and two from Yukon, each offering something unique to their own region and culture. Through the cohort structure, a fixed group moves through the program together, rather than individuals entering one at a time.

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Youth entrepreneurship programs

Algonquin College / Ottawa Tourism Indigenous Tourism Entrepreneurship Training

This program closes the gap between having an idea and having something a visitor could actually book.

It was designed to help move Indigenous entrepreneurs from an idea to a market-ready product or experience. It was built through direct collaboration between a college and a destination marketing organization, not a funder working alone.

Ottawa Tourism isn't cheerleading from the sidelines. It's a working partner in curriculum and product development.

Native Nations: Tracing Indigenous Footsteps

This is the outlier of the group, and possibly the most philosophically relevant one. It's a youth exchange, not a business accelerator.

It uses Indigenous tourism, cultural exchange, and leadership development to connect young Indigenous people across nations, strengthening identity, confidence, and lifelong relationships, while creating pathways into leadership, education, employment, and community development.

Since 2023, it has brought together youth from Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, British Columbia, Yukon, and Vanuatu.

An academic write-up of the first cohort described its purpose in explicitly identity-first terms. It was about rebuilding participants' sense of dignity and restoring their spirit as much as it was about learning about each other's lives, cultures, and histories.

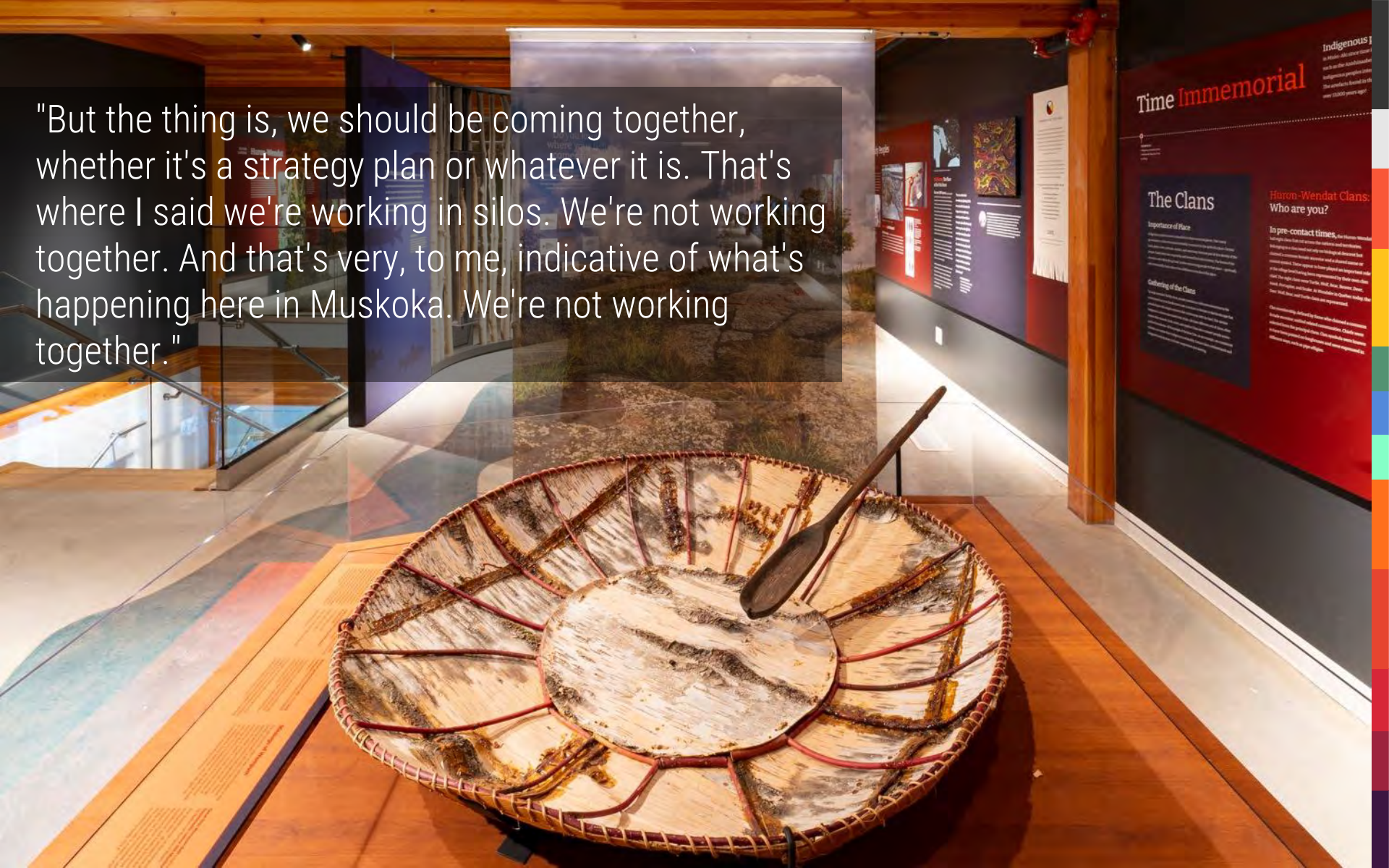
The program treats tourism itself as the mentorship and confidence-building mechanism. Tourism isn't just the business outcome, with confidence treated as a separate problem to solve first.

Australia's First Nations Tourism Mentoring Program

This is a national, government-funded mentoring scheme for First Nations tourism operators, run under Australia's Department of Industry, Science and Resources.

It's operator-facing rather than youth-specific, so it's less directly transferable. But it's a useful reference point for scale. An earlier iteration was tendered as a $10 million National Indigenous Tourism Mentoring Program, which is a useful data point for what "adequately resourced" can look like elsewhere.

THE OVERALL PLAN



"But the thing is, we should be coming together, whether it's a strategy plan or whatever it is. That's where I said we're working in silos. We're not working together. And that's very, to me, indicative of what's happening here in Muskoka. We're not working together."

An organization's intention statement should make clear why the organization exists and how it will go about its work.

Intentions should be collaborative and inviting.
"This is where we are going – do you want to come with us?"

Most importantly, an intention statement is a commitment.
A commitment to everyone you meet: youth, Elders, leadership, community members, partners, tourism operators, … everyone.

Our intention

Our intention is to support Indigenous youth who choose tourism in finding their own path - one that belongs to them and their communities and moves at the speed of trust.

We will listen first, bring what we can, and stay alongside them for as long as we are welcome and useful.

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Initial directions

Start with the candidate, not the program

Most youth entrepreneurship programs design their supports first and look for youth who fit them afterward. We recommend the reverse: define the candidate profile first, then build supports around it.

Solving for “how do we find them”

Finding the youth will be the most difficult challenge. It will require many partnerships and relationships.

Dual mentorships

Elders and community knowledge keepers hold the authority for cultural mentorship. Explorers' Edge's role is business support, connection, and promotion. Extending into the cultural side risks the credibility of the whole Journey.

Build from what already exists

Formalizing support for activity that's already happening is faster and more credible than launching something new and gives Explorers' Edge a real example showcase.

Support that outlasts the launch

Startup support that stops the moment a business launches sets youth up to fail. Most small businesses need help well past their first year, and a strategy that funds launch but not the two to three years after it will produce a string of one-off failures rather than a lasting pipeline.

Managing funder expectations

A relationship-based strategy takes time to show results, and funders accustomed to faster timelines may read that as underperformance. The first phase should focus explicitly on strategy and relationship-building, with a multi-year implementation plan attached.

How Explorers’ Edge shows up

Effective allyship here looks like connecting, convening, and supporting, and it depends on listening more than announcing intentions. Good intentions to a community are not the same as being useful.

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Our role

Explorers' Edge isn't here to lead this work. We're here to help start it, help it along, and step away as it grows strong enough to carry itself.

Connector

We link youth to the people and things they need: mentors, funders, training, operators who can host them, and each other. Finding interested youth is the hardest part of this work, so we also connect with the people who can help us find them. Our job is to open doors and make introductions.

Supporter

We give youth the practical help that keeps an idea alive — small grants, help with transport and costs, and a shared back office for the necessary but tedious things like bookkeeping, insurance, bookings and permits. We stay past the launch, because most businesses need help for two or three years, not two or three months.

Convener

We bring people together. We create the gatherings where relationships grow and confidence builds: the youth summit, cohorts, an Elder circle, community events, and regular talks with Chief and Council. Often, just getting people in a room together is the win.

Business mentor

We share what we know best, which is how to run a business. We help turn an idea into a plan, offer simple business templates, and guide youth through money, grants and day-to-day operations. This is our side of the mentoring. The cultural side belongs to Elders and knowledge keepers, and we leave it with them.

Advocate

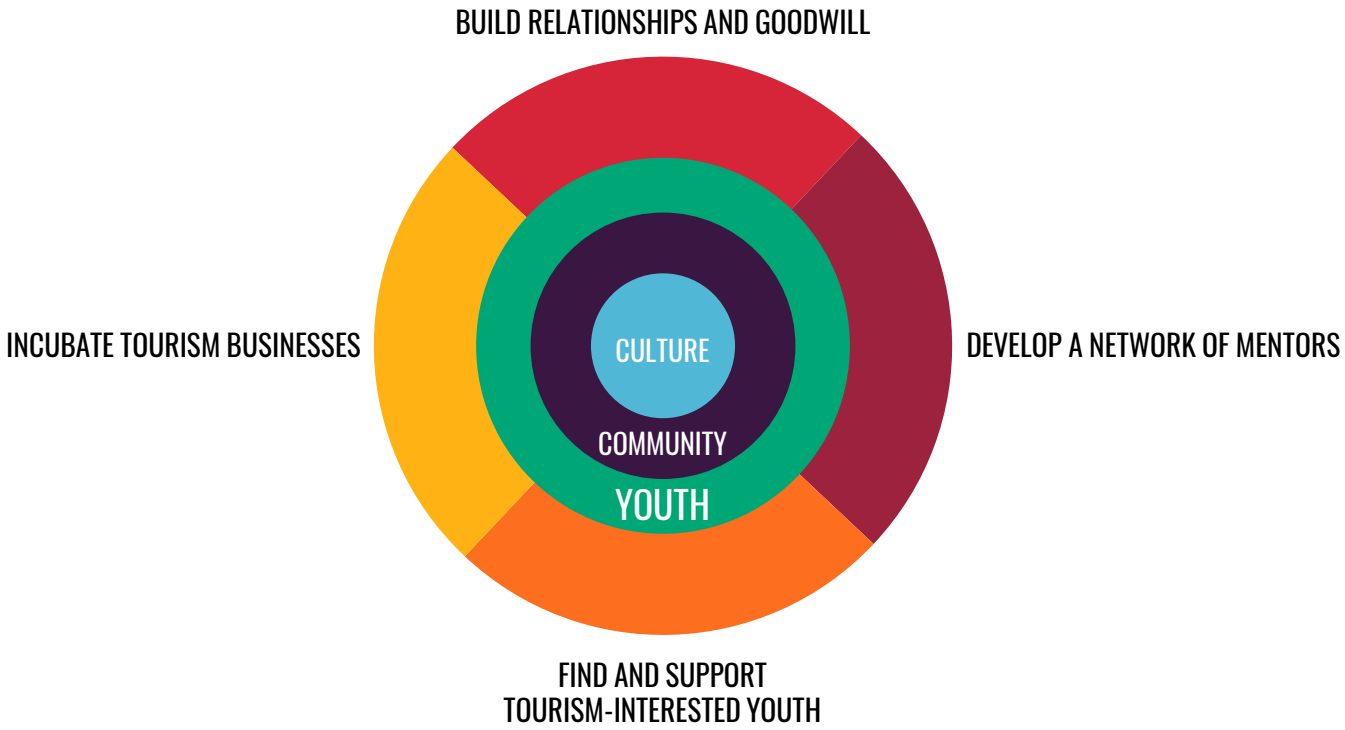
We speak up for youth and for this work. We tell their success stories, make the case to the region and the industry, and help funders understand that this kind of work takes time. We back it up too: we become the first customer, and we put youth-led experiences in front of real visitors.

None of these roles is about culture. That stays with the community, and keeping to that line is what earns and holds people's trust.

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Strategic framework



Community-led.
Settler-supported.

GOOD RELATIONS


Fish where the fish are

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Build relationship and goodwill

Clarify your intentions

- Create a statement of intentions to use in all engagements – within and beyond the tourism community.

Initial budget: time only.

Assess community readiness for tourism

- Focus efforts on communities most interested in moving forward. Using the recommended framework below.
- Co-develop Readiness Assessment with community members through casual conversations.
- Respond as others become interested.
- Move at the speed of trust

Initial budget: time only.

Find structured and unstructured opportunities to meet.

- Make regular presentations to Chief and Council about opportunities and supports for youth interested in tourism.
- Attend as many community events, such as Pow Wows, as possible.

Initial budget: time only.

Support cultural learning

- Provide modest financial support to cultural learning opportunities for youth. (Such as culture camps.)

Initial budget: $7,500.

Create a visitor expectations resource

- A guide on how to respectfully engage with Indigenous people.
- Consult with Communities to develop this guide.
- Allow each Nation to draft content specific to them.
- Distribute electronically.

The win is in the working together to build the resource as much as it is to influence visitor behaviour.

Initial budget: $7,500 plus design.

Build relationship and goodwill

Build relationships beyond the Communities

- Work with the Muskoka and Parry Sound Friendship Centres, Hope Arises, Rosseau Lakes College, and others.
- Tie into the regional/provincial partners, such as Anishinabek Nation and Indigenous Tourism Ontario.
- Initiate relationships through coffees and lunches.
- Attend relevant events at these organizations.

Initial budget: $2,000 meal allowance.

Broaden the relationship base

- Ensure relationships extend beyond one or two people at Explorers' Edge.
- Support staff members so that they can attend cultural events (especially time and workload).

Initial budget: $1,000 for staff expenses.

Board engagement

- Encourage board members to build personal relationships with Indigenous community members.
- Bring youth tourism entrepreneurs to Board meetings.
- Bring Indigenous cultural teachings to the Board.

Initial budget: $2,500 for honoraria and expenses.

Create an Elder Advisory Circle for Explorers' Edge

- Find 3 – 4 Elders from across the region.
- Start with the relationships built while developing this plan.
- Meet quarterly to review all Indigenous-related work. Very locations across the communities.
- 2 hours, plus a meal and an honorarium.

Initial budget: $1,250 per meeting.

Through the course of this project, many relationships have been deepened.

MENTORS


"We have our elders. Our elders are our mentors. A lot of adults, they have that knowledge. They just need a platform to share it."

MOCCASIN TRAILS

STORMY LAKE

Develop a community of mentors

Locate existing Indigenous Tourism operations

- Include arts and crafts
- Build individual relationships
- Provide marketing support

Initial budget: time only.

Build a dual mentorship model

- Indigenous mentors for cultural growth
- Business owners for business support
- Develop a printed and electronic brochure that describes the mentorship program.

Initial budget: $5,000 plus design.

Grow the business mentor network

- Identify tourism business operators who might be interested in mentoring Indigenous youth.
- Support their growth in cultural awareness (e.g., University of Alberta course, Misko-Aki).
- Create written mentor expectations
- Provide an annual mentor orientation in the shoulder season

- Conduct monthly mentor check-ins
- Allow mentors and mentees to switch if there is no fit
- Look for business mentors at:
  - Muskoka Art & Culture Centre (MAC)
  - Algonquin Outfitters
  - Deerhurst Resort
  - Muskoka Cruise
  - Island Queen
  - Muskoka Discovery Centre
  - Indigenous Tourism Ontario training sessions and offers

Initial budget: $2,000 for mentor gatherings.

Support cultural mentorship

- Support opportunities for youth to participate in cultural activities (time, space, volunteers, funds)
- Work with Elder group

Initial budget: $5,000 for expenses.

Explore partnership opportunities

- Start with the Indigenous Tourism Ontario Skode Program.

Initial budget: time only.

Create summer internships for Indigenous youth

- Secure wage subsidies for employers (hello FedNor!)

Initial budget: time only.

Encourage existing businesses to create Indigenous-led products and experiences without claiming ownership of the cultural content.

- Youth-led cultural delivery

Initial budget: $5,000 for expenses

Ensure youth have cultural support

- As youth express interest in joining the program, ensure they have cultural support.
- Connect youth to Elders in the Advisory Circle.

Initial budget: $2,000 for expenses

YOUTH

The perfect youth will be hard to find.


LAND


COMMUNITY


CULTURE


PASSION



Primary audience

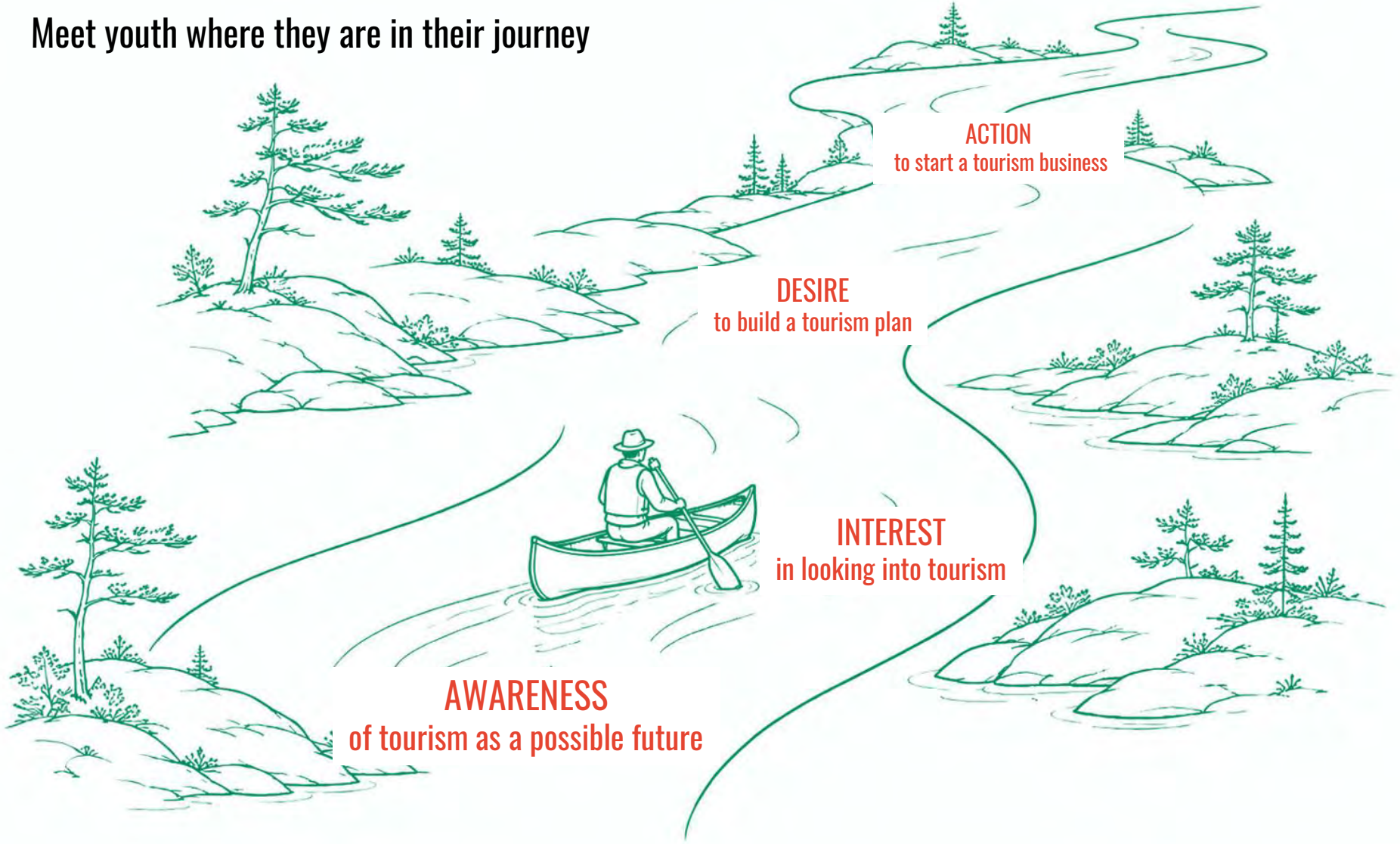
Youth aged 20 – 29 with

- Passion
- Connection to culture
- Connected to the land
- Mindset and curiosity
- Community supports
- Comfort with public-facing visibility

Secondary audience

Youth aged 15-19

Meet youth where they are in their journey



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STORMY LAKE

Attract and support tourism-interested youth

Make the program less overwhelming

- Avoid branding every opportunity as "entrepreneurship." Promote opportunities around interests such as water, food, art, horses, culture, land, music, storytelling or events.
- Introduce youth to tourism through the question: "What do you already love doing that a respectful visitor might value?"
- Create a "not ready yet" pathway so interested youth remain connected rather than being rejected.

Initial budget: $10,000 for display booth.

Increase awareness of the tourism opportunity

- Promote internships and micro-grants
- Share success stories
- Build interest through media relations
- Work through Facebook groups in Communities

Initial budget: time only.

Promote youth tourism employment

- Create an Indigenous youth tourism job posting site.

Initial budget: time only.

Solo and teams

Not all youth will be interested in being a sole entrepreneur.

- Ensure all strategies and tactics support small groups.
- Recognize family businesses and intergenerational ventures.

Initial budget: time only.

Cohorts

As interest in tourism grows amongst youth, create "cohorts" of interested youth.

- Launch small cohorts of six to eight youth.
- Meet regularly in person, rotating among communities where appropriate.
- Use peer problem-solving sessions rather than classroom-style instruction.
- Pair participants as accountability partners.
- Maintain an alumni group after the formal program ends.
- Pay returning alumni to support the next cohort.
- Create an annual Indigenous Youth Tourism Gathering led increasingly by alumni.

Initial budget: $25,000 for youth gathering.

MOCCASIN TRAILS

STORMY LAKE

Attract and support tourism-interested youth

Pathfinders

Enroll Teachers, operators, community leaders, and partner organizations to identify youth who may be interested in tourism-related opportunities.

- Focus on identifying interest, not on "selling" tourism.

Initial budget: time only.

Map tourism opportunities

Conduct an analysis of where tourism opportunities exist in the region.

- Focus on opportunities adjacent to Indigenous Communities.
- Profile the target audience.
- Identify what types of experiences will be in demand.

Initial budget: time only.

Cultural development

- Fund youth participation in land camps, language programs and cultural workshops as legitimate business-development expenses.

Initial budget: $10,000

Create seasonal models (i.e., summers)

- Offer summer venture models for post-secondary students.
- Create weekend and school-break models for high-school youth.
- Time training and grants so businesses are ready before the visitor season.
- Allow winter planning grants followed by spring startup funding.
- Support hybrid income models that combine tourism with other seasonal work.

Initial budget: time only.

INCUBATION

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STORMY LAKE

Incubate tourism businesses

Tourism discovery labs

- Offer a two- or three-day Indigenous Tourism Discovery Lab where youth visit operators, try tourism roles and build a small concept.
- Provide transportation, meals, accommodation where needed and compensation for missed work.

Initial budget: $15,000

Business model blueprints

Create business model templates for youth to complete. These might include

- two-hour land or water experience
- workshop with an artist or maker
- food demonstration or community meal
- guided fishing or boating experience
- cultural event support business
- youth-led visitor orientation
- seasonal pop-up retail
- storytelling walk
- Pow Wow guides

Initial budget: time only

Opportunity workshops

Small sessions where youth are helped to translate an interest into a possible business idea.

- Initially designed as a workshop/mentor session
- Can be developed into an online tool

Initial budget $5,000 per workshop

Micro-grants as a first mechanism

Every person engaged names financial barriers, without identifying a mechanism to overcome them.

- Offer micro-granting as a concrete first step: small, low-friction grants that let a youth test an idea without the delay of a conventional funding application.

Initial budget: $10,000

Experience test kitchen

Let youth run one or two supervised pilot experiences before formally launching.

- Provide shared insurance, booking support, waivers and payment processing for approved pilots.
- Recruit a small test audience of local residents, operators and invited visitors.
- Pay the youth for delivering the pilot, even when the visitor experience is offered free for testing.

Initial budget: 2,500 per experience

Provide grant writing support

- Identify grant funding opportunities
- Provide grant funding support
- Connect youth to funders.

Initial budget: time only

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Create incubators

Create an Indigenous Youth Tourism Host Employer designation.

- Provide participating businesses with:
  - wage subsidies;
  - cultural safety preparation;
  - mentoring reimbursement;
  - transportation support;
  - clear expectations around progression.
- Require each placement to include a small youth-led improvement or product-development project.
- Encourage existing businesses to create Indigenous-led products without claiming ownership of the cultural content.

Initial budget: Significant time commitment

Create a tourism back office:

- bookkeeping setup;
- basic contracts and waivers;
- insurance navigation;
- booking systems;
- payment processing;
- grant administration;
- licence and permit checklists;
- photography and basic web content.

Initial budget: Significant time commitment

Be the first customer

- Have Explorers' Edge, municipalities, conferences or regional tourism partners become the first purchaser of youth-led experiences.
- Guarantee each pilot participant at least one paid booking if the experience passes safety and community review.
- Incorporate youth-led experiences into:
  - familiarization tours;
  - board meetings;
  - conferences;
  - media visits;
  - operator workshops;
  - regional events.

Initial budget: Significant time commitment

MEASURING SUCCESS

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STORMY LAKE

Holistic measurement

Relationship-led measurement

Beyond typical tourism measures of success, this initiative should focus on:

- youth referred into the program
- mentor matches
- community partnerships
- community engagements
- pilots tested
- first paid bookings
- # youth employed in tourism
- youth returning for a second season
- businesses surviving one, two and three years
- alumni becoming mentors
- youth confidence and sense of possibility

Community success measures

Through engagement with communities and elders, additional success measures should be developed and tracked under their guidance.

Managing Funder Expectations

There may be a need to educate funders on the most appropriate measures of success for the long-term and holistic nature of this strategy.

GETTING IT DONE

Knowing when a community is ready

This isn't a test to run on a community. It's a way to think through what you're seeing and hearing, so the choice of who to work with first gets the same care every time, instead of coming down to who we happen to know best. The real read comes from the conversations themselves. This is just here to help make sense of them and compare notes with each other.

A community is rarely all the way ready, or all the way not. Most sit somewhere in between, and further along in some ways than others. That's normal, and it's useful — where a community is strong, and where it's still early, is what tells you where to start.

A few situations usually mean it's kinder, and wiser, to wait. None of these is a hard line. They're judgment calls, and worth talking through together before you decide anything.

The community isn't interested in tourism. If people, or leadership, are set against it, a youth program won't take root, and pushing spends goodwill we'll want later on. Being undecided is a different thing, and just a reason to keep talking.

There's healing that comes first. Some communities are working through hard things. Until there's room for it, a conversation about business won't feel real, and shouldn't be forced. A number of people we spoke to were clear about this.

Leadership is in flux. An election, a dispute, or a crisis means there's no one with the time to partner, and no agreement that will hold once things settle. Better to wait for the other side of it.

There's no relationship yet. If there's no one we really know, and no sign the door is open, the work right now is getting to know each other — not talking tourism. That's what moving at the speed of trust looks like.

If one or two of these are in play, it usually means "not yet" rather than "no." Jot down what would need to change, and check back.

What does readiness look like

When the timing's right, here's what to pay attention to. It falls into three parts — the community's interest in tourism, whether it's ready to get behind the work, and its youth. A community can be strong in one part and just getting started in another, and that's worth noticing on its own.

The community and tourism

- Is anyone here already keen on tourism, or is it only us raising it? The strongest sign is someone in the community naming it themselves.
- Is there already some tourism happening — a powwow, an event, one operator? Something to build on and point to beats starting from scratch.
- Who does tourism benefit here? It's a good sign when people are thinking about the whole community sharing in it, and a harder start when the money already flows to just a few.

The community getting behind it

- Do we have real relationships here — more than one, and more than just business? A few people across different roles is stronger than a single contact.
- Are there Elders or knowledge keepers who'd want to guide the cultural side? This one lets Explorers' Edge stay on the business support and leave the culture where it belongs, with the community.
- Is there someone with the time to be our person on the ground?

The youth

- Are there youth around? In some communities, a lot have left.
- Are any of them curious about tourism, or already starting something? Even one or two is a start; a group is a strong sign.
- Do the interested ones have that spark — a real tie to the land, their community and their culture, and something they're genuinely passionate about? That's what will carry a youth through the hard parts, more than any training does.

The goal is not for Explorers' Edge to make this assessment on its own, but to do it with the community. Let them decide their readiness.

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STORMY LAKE

Implementation plan

	EE Role	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Build relationships and goodwill						
Clarify your intentions	Advocate	Develop				
Assess community readiness for tourism	Supporter	Ongoing				
Find structured and unstructured opportunities to meet.	Convener	Ongoing				
Support cultural learning	Supporter		Ongoing			
Create a visitor expectations resource	Advocate		Develop	Maintain		
Build relationships beyond the Communities	Connector	Develop		Maintain		
Broaden the relationship base	Connector		Develop	Maintain		
Board engagement	Advocate			Develop	Maintain	
Create an Elder Advisory Circle	Convener	Develop	Maintain			
Develop a community of mentors						
Locate existing Indigenous Tourism operations	Supporter	Ongoing				
Build a dual mentorship model	Mentor	Develop	Maintain			
Grow the business mentor network	Mentor		Ongoing			
Create summer internships for Indigenous youth	Connector		Develop	Maintain		
Create Indigenous-led products and experiences	Supporter		Develop	Maintain		
Ensure youth have cultural support	Supporter		Ongoing			

MOCCASIN TRAILS

STORMY LAKE

Implementation plan

	EE Role	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Find and support tourism-curious youth						
Make the program less overwhelming	Advocate	Develop	Maintain			
Increase awareness of the tourism opportunity	Advocate	Ongoing				
Promote youth tourism employment	Connector		Develop	Maintain		
Solo and teams	Mentor			Develop	Maintain	
Cohorts	Mentor			Develop	Maintain	
Pathfinders	Connector		Develop	Maintain		
Map tourism opportunities	Supporter		Develop	Maintain		
Cultural development	Supporter		Develop	Maintain		
Create seasonal models	Mentor		Develop	Maintain		
Incubate tourism businesses						
Tourism discovery labs	Mentor		Develop	Maintain		
Business model blueprints	Mentor			Develop	Maintain	
Opportunity workshops	Connector			Develop		
Micro-grants as a first mechanism	Mentor		Develop	Maintain		
Experience test kitchen	Mentor			Develop	Maintain	
Provide grant writing support	Mentor			Develop	Maintain	
Create incubators	Connector			Develop	Maintain	
Create a tourism back office:	Supporter			Develop	Maintain	
Be the first customer	Mentor		Develop	Maintain		

APPENDIX

SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT

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STORMY LAKE

How youth experience tourism now

Youth's dominant experience of tourism is that it happens to Indigenous communities rather than being led by them. The specific complaints were shared by all participants:

- Tourists litter, disrespect the land, and behave as though Indigenous spaces are extensions of their own.
- Visitors photograph community members without consent.
- Seasonal price increases hurt locals disproportionately.
- Communities bear the costs of tourism without seeing meaningful benefit return to them.

Indigenous people have been participating in tourism for generations — not always by choice, and not always on their own terms. There is living memory of having to perform cultural stereotypes that were not one's own because it was what visitors expected and what survival required.

That history is not abstract for these youth. It shapes what "doing tourism wrong" means to them, and it raises the importance of doing tourism the right way.

Environmental responsibility is a related concern. If a tourism business generates revenue from the land, it carries obligations to the land. Visitor impact — littering, ecological damage, treating natural spaces as disposable — is a concern that any tourism model needs to address.

"There's a big difference between travel and tourism. I don't like tourism... They littered and left our community dirty. I'm from Canada and some people weren't and they didn't take care of our country. This is my home."

"There's a lot of tourists who don't appreciate our lands... there's a lot of people who take it as a commodity."

What tourism could do — and what it's really for

Youth describe tourism as a vehicle for something larger than economic activity.

Across sessions, youth framed benefit in community terms. The question they returned to was not "how much could I make?" but "who gets the returns?" — and the answer they consistently gave was that the whole community should benefit.

Several youth went further: tourism as a way to share cultural knowledge, to create an audience for Indigenous stories, and for the cultural transmission that happens when a community sees its own stories told and heard.

The economic and the cultural are not separate motivations. For these youth, a tourism business that generates revenue while pulling culture away from the community is not a successful business.

Tourism also surfaced as a potential answer to one of the biggest questions they face in their future lives: why stay? Opportunity is what keeps youth on reserve or brings them back after leaving.

Seasonal, land-based economic activity — including tourism — is something many youth already return to their communities for. A summer tourism business isn't just a business. It's a potential node of community belonging for youth who might otherwise see no economic reason to stay.

"It's nice to know that people care for our culture even though it is dying a little bit... it's nice to hear our language again and for people to learn our language is nice. So that could be a good side to the tourism is learning."

"It's like a good way to... uncolonize ourselves sort of."

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Entrepreneurship: excitement and hesitation

Youth described entrepreneurship as exciting — and also as something that doesn't quite feel like it's for people like them. Many have genuine ideas and real entrepreneurial drive, but don't see themselves as entrepreneurs. The gap between having an idea and believing you're someone who could build a business around it is not primarily a skills gap. It's a confidence and identity gap.

When youth said tourism entrepreneurship wasn't for them, their reasons were about path and passion, not capacity. They had other plans, other careers already in motion, other things they loved more. Several said they'd consider it if it connected to something they already cared about: horses, land, water, art, medicine.

The youth who said yes — or who built convincing business concepts on the spot — were those for whom the connection already existed. The self-selection was happening in real time.

What makes tourism worth doing

The workshops surfaced a consistent set of values that youth associate with good tourism. The guide is responsible for visitor behaviour, not just their own conduct. Expectations need to be set before people arrive. The land deserves the same respect the visitor is expected to show a host. Youth believe that visitors who won't accept those terms are not the right visitors.

Youth with the strongest land connection produced the most grounded business concepts and articulated the responsibilities of a guide most clearly. The most compelling Indigenous tourism experiences are place-based, and the credibility to deliver them comes from a living relationship with place — not from training alone.

"It just doesn't seem to be something that I am passionate about... I don't want to just talk about the history. It has to be my passion."

"A lot of Indigenous youth, they don't see themselves as entrepreneurs, even if they have those stories. They see themselves as... rez kids."

Barriers identified

Across all sessions the barriers were consistent and reinforce each other:

Financial. Many Indigenous youth live with limited incomes, and this affects confidence in ways that compound. Grants and scholarships are necessary but not sufficient on their own.

Confidence. Not just belief in a business idea — whether a young person sees themselves as someone who is able to be an entrepreneur.

Cultural readiness. Uncertainty about whether they hold enough cultural knowledge to share it responsibly with visitors. This shows up as a specific fear: of saying something wrong, of representing their community incorrectly.

Legitimacy and community trust. Operating publicly in a community's name requires community credibility that most youth don't yet have.

Practical barriers. Permits, licenses, food handling, insurance, staffing, and seasonal cash flow — operational hurdles that feel overwhelming without guidance.

Cultural integrity. The risk of tourism becoming cultural performance for outside consumption is not new. Youth are aware that any business that comes out of this Journey needs to be built with that history front of mind.

What support looks like

Youth named several distinct types of support they would like to have. Elders and knowledge keepers hold the cultural authority and land knowledge. Other mentors — including non-Indigenous ones — can provide operational guidance, entrepreneurship skills, and pathway knowledge. Family and friends provide early confidence. Chief and Council and funding organizations provide institutional support. No one assumed these would be the same person or the same institution.

"I would hire authentic voices until we have the learning ourselves."

The mentorship model that emerged most clearly across sessions partners a young person with someone already doing this; let them build confidence alongside that person; when ready, let them go independently; and when that person grows, they become the mentor for the next cohort.

Youth to mentor, youth to mentor — a continuous timeline. Elders know the land and hold the stories. Many adults in community hold knowledge they simply need a platform to share. The mentorship model needs to connect that knowledge to what young people are trying to build, rather than treating cultural grounding as a separate prerequisite.

On accessibility: the support system needs to be easy to enter. Not bureaucratic, not requiring youth to already know how to navigate institutions. Meeting people where they are.

"I'm worried about saying something that is not true, messing up... accidentally saying something racist. Saying something offensive."

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STORMY LAKE

Other key learnings

Tourism as a retention strategy

The question of why Indigenous youth leave their communities, and whether tourism could be a reason to stay, was not raised explicitly in any session. But it sits just below the surface of what many participants said.

Opportunity is what keeps people on reserve or brings them back. Seasonal, land-based economic activity is something many youth already return home for. A youth-led summer tourism business is a potential anchor for community belonging at exactly the age when the pull toward cities and universities is strongest.

The identity gap is as real as the skills gap

A young person does not always see themselves as someone who is allowed to be an entrepreneur — as someone whose stories, knowledge, and relationship to land could be worth paying for. That is an identity question, not a skills question, and the Journey needs to address it as directly as it addresses practical training. What that looks like in practice: visible Indigenous entrepreneur role models, honest mentors who share their own early uncertainty, and early wins that let youth experience being someone who built something.

Cultural transmission runs both ways

Tourism creates an audience for Indigenous stories — and community members hearing those stories told in that context is itself a form of cultural transmission. Youth don't have to be cultural experts before they start. They can begin, build their knowledge alongside the business, share what they know, and in doing so create conditions for their own community to hear those stories more often. Tourism becomes a cultural practice, not just a commercial one. This reframes the "cultural readiness" problem: readiness is not a prerequisite but a process.

"A reason why a lot of people leave the reserve is because the lack of opportunity."

"We're gonna partner you with someone who's older, who's already doing this. And then once you're confident, you can go it on your own... Youth to mentor, youth to mentor, youth to mentor."

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STORMY LAKE

Other key learnings

The commodity risk needs to be built into the model

The concern about replicating historical patterns of cultural performance for outside consumption is significant. Any business model the strategy develops needs mechanisms to prevent it: visitor protocols, cultural authority over what is and isn't shared, community oversight of how the business presents itself. These are operational questions youth would benefit from support to address.

The mentorship pipeline is the long game

The mentorship arc — youth to mentor, youth to mentor, continuous — suggests that the strategy's most important output may not be the first business. It may be the first mentor. The youth who launch this summer, build something real, and are still doing it in five years are the people who will make the next cohort possible.

That perspective changes how success is measured: not just whether one business gets off the ground, but whether the conditions are in place for the work to keep going without requiring the same level of external support each time.

Passion is the real filter — and that is appropriate

The consistent refrain — it has to be my passion, not just a job — reflects something real about what Indigenous tourism requires and what makes it sustainable. The framework should not try to recruit reluctant youth. It should identify and accelerate those already drawn to it, and give them the cultural grounding, business structure, mentorship, and seasonal timing they need to take a real first step. The Land + Community + Culture + My Passion formula is critical. Passion is not a personality trait can sustain everything else when the work gets hard.

"A lot of Indigenous youth have ideas, but they don't have a blueprint of what they want to do."

"We would need a specialty or angle and that is interesting... Uniqueness that can't be found elsewhere... Would need lots of passion."

SUCCESS FACTORS

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STORMY LAKE

What youth need to succeed as tourism entrepreneurs

The summit and interview data point to two distinct categories: what youth need to have internally, and what needs to be in place around them. Conflating these has been a common mistake in youth entrepreneurship programming generally — treating a functional gap (no grants, no mentor) as a personal deficit (not motivated enough), or treating a personal readiness issue (no clear passion yet) as something a grant program can fix.

What youth need to have

A genuine, specific passion, not a general interest in tourism. Youth were explicit about this distinction. Several said they'd only do it "if it is something I like" or that it has to be their passion rather than a job to be assigned. Passion functions as both the foundation of the model and a self-selection filter — youth without it are telling us, clearly, that this isn't their path, and that's useful information rather than a problem to solve.

A specialty or angle. Youth named the need for "uniqueness that can't be found elsewhere" and something distinct from generic shop-and-souvenir tourism. This connects to the land-connectedness pattern: youth who described strong ties to land, animals, or place had a much easier time articulating what their business would actually be.

Confidence, specifically the belief that entrepreneurship is something people like them do. Youth have ideas and excitement, but many don't see themselves as entrepreneurs — they see themselves as, in the words of youth, kids from the rez, not founders. Bridging this gap requires seeing someone recognizable succeed first.

Comfort with the visibility and public-facing demands of the role. A number of youth opted out on exactly this basis — not shy about the business idea, but clear that they don't want to be "on call 24/7," don't want to deal with people constantly, or worry about representing culture incorrectly in front of strangers. This is a legitimate issue, not a confidence problem to be coached away.

"People that I would like to have are investors, loans and grants officers, family, friends and other businesses... Mentors like Jackie."

"The most important thing we need is Authentic Indigenous voices!"

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STORMY LAKE

What needs to be in place around them

Startup capital and low-barrier financing. Named across engagement interview as the top barrier — grants, scholarships, and low-cost entry points specifically designed for Indigenous youth, since conventional financing assumes a financial cushion many of these youth don't have.

Consistent with what we've already said: youth want a business model to adapt, not a "build your own" exercise. The tables show youth naming very concrete unknowns (permits, insurance, hiring, marketing) rather than conceptual ones — they're ready to execute against a plan, less ready to author one from scratch.

Youth re looking for mentorship isn't one thing. It can be direct instruction, encouragement, or help turning an idea into a blueprint. Once successfully launched, a youth mentored today becomes the mentor in twenty or thirty years, building a continuous chain rather than a one-off relationship. This supports the case for separating cultural mentorship (elders, community knowledge) from operational mentorship (business mechanics.

Already identified as a distinct barrier, and consistent with what youth said about representing culture accurately in public — the fear of "saying something offensive" or getting a story wrong shows up multiple times. This is a barrier to entry, not a personality trait to overcome.

Practical infrastructure: certifications (food handling, canoe safety, first aid), permits, insurance, and transportation to work sites. These appeared as concrete, specific line items rather than vague concerns, suggesting youth have already thought through the operational reality more than they're often given credit for.

Youth need to see "someone just like you who succeeded".

This matters beyond confidence-building. It's evidence that the pathway is real, which is part of why getting the first business off the ground carries weight beyond that one business.

"We need (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) people to say 'Look what you can do. We believe in you.' it really is like organizations going out there and be like, hey, here's who we are. We want to know who you are and we believe in you." lot of Indigenous youth have ideas, but they don't have a blueprint of what they want to do."

"I feel it has ample opportunities, just have to figure out your own way to seek these opportunities. People are willing to pay for it, just have to try it. Jared does it and I'm not a tourism entrepreneur, but I know people are willing to pay for it."

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

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STORMY LAKE

What confirms the youth voice

Interviews with economic development staff, education partners, and community leadership across the region echo the youth engagement findings closely, often independently and in similar language:

Mentorship needs to go beyond business mechanics. Encouragement, accountability, and help turning an idea into a plan are named as essential across nearly every interview, matching what youth described needing.

The primary barrier is confidence and identity, not skill. Interviewees describe young people not yet believing they could be the next generation of their community's leaders or business owners — the same gap youth described when they said they saw themselves as "rez kids," not founders.

Visible peer success changes what feels possible. Interviewees repeatedly point to a specific local youth who has already built something as proof the path is real — the same dynamic youth themselves described needing.

Financial barriers are structural. Interviewees consistently name a lack of accessible, youth-specific funding as a primary obstacle, reinforcing the youth-identified need for low-barrier grants.

The risk of tourism becoming performance for outsiders is a shared concern. Interviewees describe this in terms close to youth's own — something to guard against deliberately, not something that resolves on its own.

"Doing things in a good way" means action, not language. Interviewees define this consistently as follow-through and inclusion in decisions, matching what youth expect from any organization working with them.

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STORMY LAKE

What stakeholder engagement adds

Interviews with adults working across governance, education, and economic development also surfaced considerations that did not come up directly in the youth sessions, largely because they sit outside a young person's day-to-day vantage point:

Appetite for tourism varies sharply by community. Interviewees range from active resistance to enthusiastic support, a spread the youth engagement, concentrated in a smaller set of communities, could not fully capture.

Existing tourism revenue is concentrated. Several interviewees describe current tourism income flowing mainly to a small number of established operators or property owners — a distributional problem the strategy needs to design around rather than assume away.

Schools are a structural bottleneck, not just a recruitment channel. Transportation costs, busing logistics, and competing priorities inside schools all limit how young people actually accessing programming.

Governance and independence matter as much as funding. Several interviewees describe a tourism initiative needing structural independence from outside partners, and in some cases from Band Council itself, to be sustainable over the long term.

Healing is a precondition in some communities, not a parallel track. For communities working through trauma or internal division, interviewees describe that healing as necessary before any economic development conversation can be genuine.

Not all youth aspire to found a business. Several interviewees describe youth wanting steady, tolerable employment more than entrepreneurial risk, reinforcing from a different angle the case for building non-entrepreneurial pathways alongside the founder track.

LEADING WITH INTENTIONS

new



BLLT recognizes that since time immemorial, Indigenous Peoples have stewarded the lands now encompassed by Banff National Park. Not being able to connect with Mother Earth and these lands in traditional ways is a source of pain and loss.

BLLT's intention is to support the sharing of Indigenous stories, language, and culture on these traditional lands. We intend to be students, connectors, advocates, mentors, and friends.

TOURISM NANAIMO

We will only support tourism that is for the benefit of our community.



Our intention is to make someone's life a little bit better – today.

new

TRAVELLERS RESPONSIBIITY CODE

SIGN THE PLEDGE TO THE PEAKS

CANMORE KANANASKIS

I acknowledge that I travel, explore, and play in the Canmore area, known as "Chuwapchipchiyan Kudi Bi" (translated in Stoney Nakoda as "shooting at the willows") and the traditional Treaty 7 territory and oral practices of the Îyârhe Nakoda (Stoney Nakoda) – comprised of the Bearspaw, Chiniki, and Goodstoney – as well as the Tsuut'ina First Nation and the Blackfoot Confederacy comprised of the Siksika, Piikani, Kainai. I acknowledge that this land is also home to the Rocky View Métis District within the Battle River Territory. I acknowledge all Nations who live, work, play, and steward this land, and honour and celebrate this territory.

I promise to honour and celebrate the land, history, and habitants of this sacred space, for I am a guest in their home.

I will do this by:

✔ Respecting the local culture, exploring with an open mind and gentle heart.

✔ Sharing the space, showing care and consideration for others.

✔ Treading lightly, leaving no trace behind.

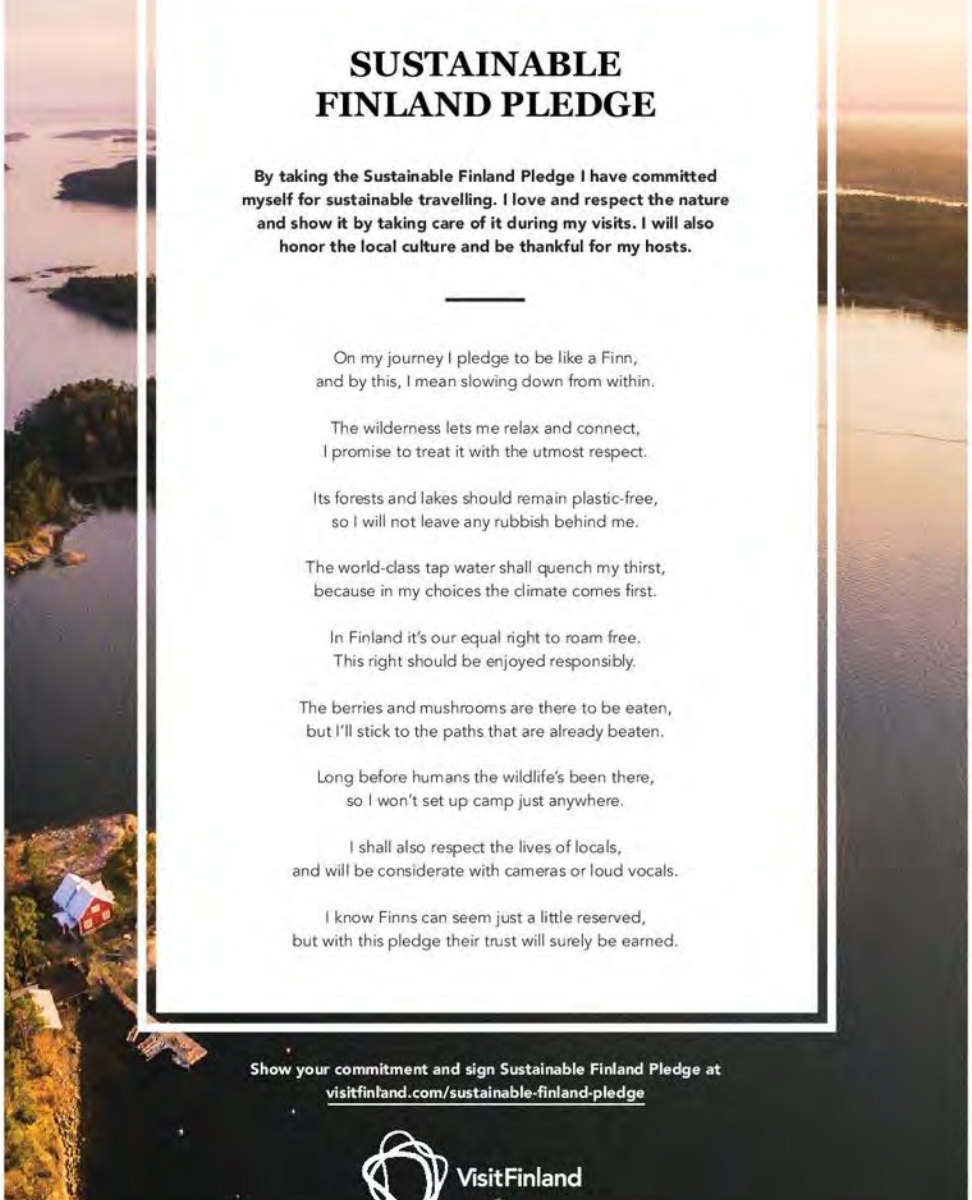
✔ Gathering memories rather than mementos, leaving rocks, plants, and artifacts in place.

✔ Watching wildlife from a distance, keeping myself—and the animals—safe.

✔ Preparing for my adventures, respecting the mountains and my abilities.

✔ Travelling mindfully, being kind to all people, wildlife, and plants.

I pledge to preserve and protect these peaks for now and for future generations.



SUSTAINABLE FINLAND PLEDGE

By taking the Sustainable Finland Pledge I have committed myself for sustainable travelling. I love and respect the nature and show it by taking care of it during my visits. I will also honor the local culture and be thankful for my hosts.

On my journey I pledge to be like a Finn,
and by this, I mean slowing down from within.

The wilderness lets me relax and connect,
I promise to treat it with the utmost respect.

Its forests and lakes should remain plastic-free,
so I will not leave any rubbish behind me.

The world-class tap water shall quench my thirst,
because in my choices the climate comes first.

In Finland it's our equal right to roam free.
This right should be enjoyed responsibly.

The berries and mushrooms are there to be eaten,
but I'll stick to the paths that are already beaten.

Long before humans the wildlife's been there,
so I won't set up camp just anywhere.

I shall also respect the lives of locals,
and will be considerate with cameras or loud vocals.

I know Finns can seem just a little reserved,
but with this pledge their trust will surely be earned.

Show your commitment and sign Sustainable Finland Pledge at
visitfinland.com/sustainable-finland-pledge

VisitFinland

TIAKI MEANS TO CARE FOR PEOPLE, PLACE AND CULTURE.

New Zealand is precious, and everyone who lives and travels here has a responsibility to look after it. The Tiaki Promise is a commitment to care for New Zealand, for now and for future generations.

By following the Tiaki Promise, you are making a commitment to New Zealand. To act as a guardian, protecting and preserving our home.

Nau mai, haere mai ki Aotearoa. Welcome to New Zealand.



PROTECT NATURE



KEEP NZ CLEAN



BE PREPARED



DRIVE CAREFULLY



SHOW RESPECT