

2025/2026

EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT SHOULDER & WINTER SEASONS

PARTNERSHIP
FUND PROGRAM

Presented by:

BEV SCOTT, RT03 HAMILTON HALTON BRANT



ABOUT PARTNERSHIP FUND PROGRAM

DRIVING OFF SEASON
TOURISM IN HAMILTON
HALTON BRANT



The RT03 Partnership Funding Program is a co-investment initiative designed to support tourism product development within the Hamilton Halton Brant region.

Administered by RT03, this program aligns with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming's guidelines and is not a grant but a partnership requiring a matching cash contribution from applicants.

PURPOSE PARTNERSHIP FUND PROGRAM

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- **Stimulate** visitation during Winter and Shoulder seasons
- **Support** tourism operators in creating bookable, unique experiences and offers
- **Strengthen** our visitor economy through trip motivators
- **Match** operator investment with funding

QUICK FACTS PARTNERSHIP FUND PROGRAM

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The Ministry sets guidelines and restrictions on expenses that RT03, as part of the Partnership Fund Program, is permitted to support.

1. Eligible businesses may submit their Experience Development for Shoulder and Winter season offers in an application and agree to the program eligibility policy and guidelines.
2. Partnership Fund projects receive 50% for their eligible project. Costs are inclusive of HST. RT03 manages all funding and expenses.
3. This is our Intake 2 period for applications in the Product Development stream, opened in June, 2025 and closing on October 31st, 2025 - based on allocation availability - ***get your application in early as funding is limited!***
4. Projects applying to the Partnership Fund Program must have all invoices (submitted for payment) between November 1st, 2025 - March 20th, 2026.
5. Refer to the RT03 corporate website at rto3.ca for full guidelines and access to the electronic application.

OBJECTIVE PARTNERSHIP FUND PROGRAM

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An initiative dedicated to highlighting the RT03 region's unique experiences and positioning it as a leading Ontario travel destination. RT03 will work with eligible partners that encourage tourism by:

Extending the reach, breadth and depth of partnerships between RT03 and industry partners.

Expanding Winter and Shoulder Season product within the region will benefit your business by:

- **Offering** experiences that diversify revenue
- **Gaining** staff retention
- **Building** your year-round business
- **Brand** differentiation and resilience to climate and market shifts



KEY ELEMENTS OF SEASONAL EXPERIENCES

EVERY SEASON,
EVERY EXPERIENCE,
WE ARE GROWING
TOURISM
TOGETHER

AUTHENTICITY

Showcase local culture, heritage, or nature to create a memorable sense of place.

ACCESSIBILITY

Consider age, mobility, weather readiness, and provide clear info on what to expect.

ENGAGEMENT

Include interactive elements like workshops, tastings, or storytelling.

COMFORT & SAFETY

Provide warm spaces, shelter, and safety briefings, especially in the cold of winter.



BENEFITS FOR OPERATORS

Revenue Diversification

Smooths cash flow beyond summer, reducing reliance on short peak seasons.

Resilience to Climate & Market Shifts

Less vulnerable to extreme weather or summer-only over tourism.

Staff Retention & Development

Keeps trained employees longer, lowering rehiring and training costs.

Infrastructure Efficiency

Maximizes use of fixed costs - buildings, products, equipment; instead of sitting idle.

Brand Differentiation

Builds reputation as a year-round destination, not just a warm weather region.

OUTDOOR EXPLORERS

- **Seek** adventure and nature.
- **Explore** unknown landscapes, challenge themselves physically, connect with outdoors experiences.
- **Care** about authenticity and being able to impact positively (responsible travel).

CULTURE SEEKERS

- **Motivated** by history, art, local culture, meeting people, festivals, events.
- **Enjoy** smooth travel.
- **Seeking** for authenticity and uniqueness but with comfort.
- **Immersive** cultural experiences.

REFINED GLOBETROTTERS

- **Experienced travellers** who prioritize higher-end experiences: gourmet food, exclusive and smooth travel.
- **Guided** tours, cultural immersion, and luxury.

PURPOSE-DRIVEN FAMILIES

- **Families** who want meaningful, educational experiences; value connection, authenticity, sustainability or regenerative travel.
- **Enriches** both adults and children

DC'S TRAVELLER SEGMENTATION - HIGHLY ENGAGED GUESTS

PRIORITY
MARKETS -
DATA DRIVEN
INTELLIGENCE

BEST PRACTICE

GLOBAL CURATED
EXPERIENCES FOR EVERY
EXPLORER

Kimpton Hotels & Resorts Winter Chalet

Accommodation

Product: Transformed spaces into themed “Chalet & Lounge” evenings. with warm drinks, fondue, cozy decor.

Best Practice: Creates novelty and surprise - transformation of regular spaces which gives reason to re-visit.

Prince Edward County

Destination

Product: Farm-to-Table meals, cheese and wine pairings, seasonal cooking classes.

Best Practice: Builds shoulder season as a time for cozy, gourmet discovery.

London, UK

Urban, Arts

Product: Evening museum openings, gallery nights, curated “indoor heritage walks”.

Best Practice: Converts shorter daylight into a cultural advantage with night economy.

Patagonia Shoulder Season Treks

Outfitter, Operator

Product: Guided trekking in late Fall/Early Spring avoids crowds, offers stunning colours, and extends seasonality.

Best Practice: Reframes shoulder season as “premium” for exclusivity and nature immersion.

Québec City’s Carnaval de Québec

Signature Event

Product: Night parades, snow sculptures, traditional Québécois food & music, snow baths

Best Practice: Shoulder season transformed into a globally recognized festival by layering heritage, spectacle, and culinary identity.

CASE STUDY

IHG Kimpton Hotels & Resorts - Winter Chalet Campaign



Key Features of their Winter / Cold-Weather Urban Stay Concept

- Transformed spaces, like the library lounge in Kimpton Hotels into themed “Chalet & Lounge” evenings with warm drinks, fondue, cozy decor.
- Winter Social Password campaign: guests find a secret password via social media, say it at the front desk for a surprise amenity.
- Seasonal menus (fondue, cocktails), local businesses pop-ups.

What They Did Well - Unique Innovations

- Creates novelty and surprise (passwords, transformation of regular spaces) which gives reasons to re-visit.
- Blends social media/experiential marketing with physical experience.
- Warm communal spaces - lounges, shared meals to mitigate cold drawbacks.

CASE STUDY

Prince Edward County



Key Features of their Shoulder Season / Farm-to-table Late Fall & Early Spring Culinary Experiences

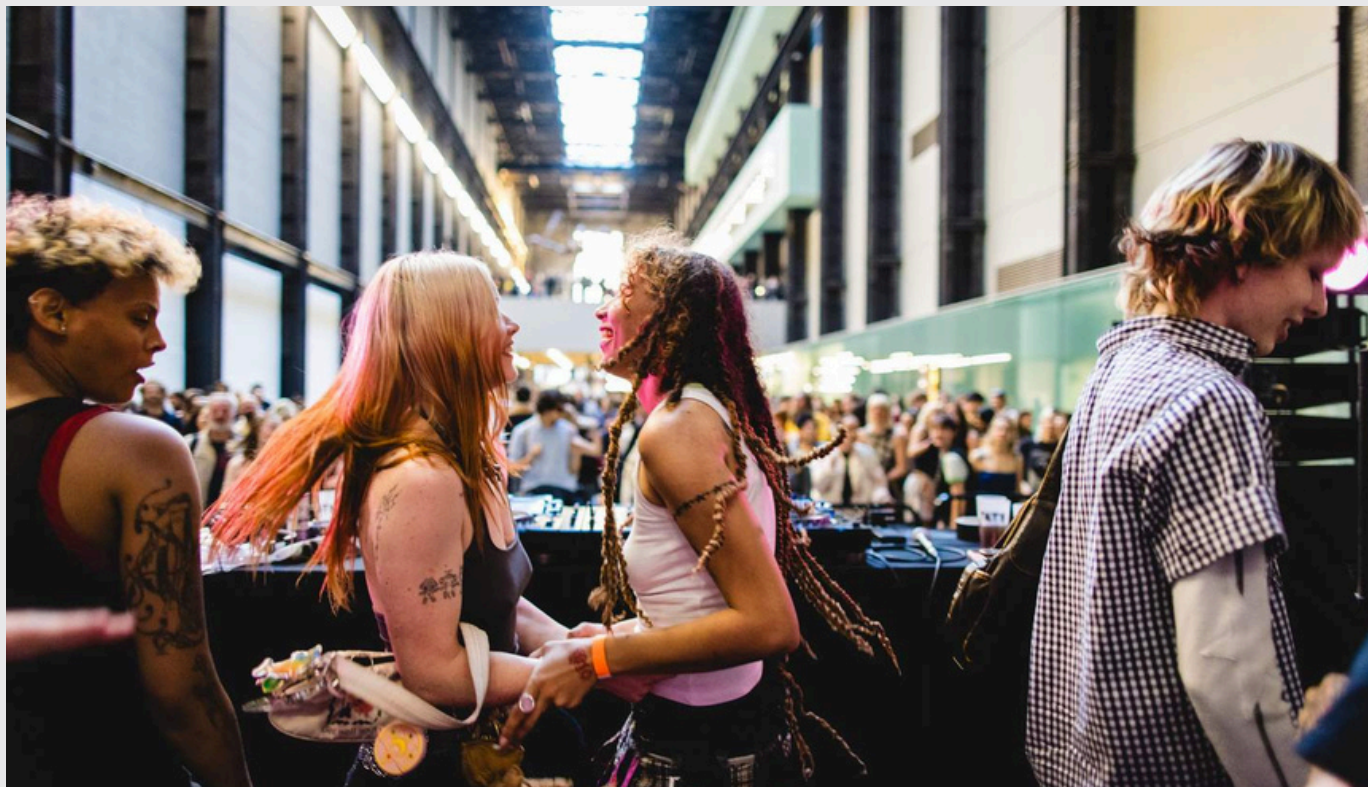
- Seasonal, terroir-led menus and events that amplify harvest and early-spring producers (greenhouse, root-cellar cuisine) with experiential elements: chef-led farm dinners, harvest festivals, winery/farm tours and hands-on workshops.
- Tight local supply chains - chefs work directly with small farms, cidermakers and vintners; many experiences combine tasting, cooking demo element and storytelling about production.

What They Did Well - Unique Innovations

- Created seasonal reasons to visit outside summer for fall flavours and spring re-awakening programming attract foodies and weekend visitors from nearby urban centres.
- Cluster of wineries, chefs, arts creates multi-day appeal in shoulder and winter months.
- Adaptive vents that scale to weather - long table meals to heated barns or covered pavilions; chef pop-ups inside galleries and studios to cross-pollinate audiences (food and art).

CASE STUDY

London, UK



Key Features of their Winter Arts and Museum Evening Concept

- Regular extended-hours programming (monthly or weekly nights) that mixes exhibitions with live music, DJ's, performances, talks and bar-service offerings so the museum becomes a social night-time destinations.
- Targeted audience segmentation including young adults, professionals, culture-seekers with programming curated for artists, DJs, late-night tours, themed workshops.

What They Did Well - Unique Innovations

- Repositioned museums as part of the night-time economy, increasing weekday footfall and engaging younger demographics who can't visit during daytime. Tate Museum extension of Friday/Saturday hours is a recent example of scaling late openings because of demand.
- Mixed formats of talks, music, participatory workshops keep the audience inside longer and increase F&B and retail spend.
- Curated night identities that create buzz and repeat visitation.

CASE STUDY

Patagonia - Shoulder Season Guided Treks, Torres del Paine and broader Patagonian treks



Key Features of their Winter / Cold-Weather Outdoor Nature Concept:

- Guided, small group treks in shoulder months (Nov, March, April) that trade peak-season certainty for fewer crowds, vivid seasonal colour, lower prices, and high photographic/interpretive value. Guides are essential for safety and route choice when weather is more variable.

What They Did Well - Unique Innovations

- Marketed shoulder season as a feature (unique light, autumn colours, solitude) rather than a drawback - tailoring itineraries for photographers, experienced hikers, and travellers seeking quiet. Operators often lower group sizes and increase interpretive guiding to add value.
- Shoulder-season “expedition style” products that combine trekking with specialist add-ons (birding, geology, photography instructors) and flexible start/finish points as itinerary can be adjusted to local conditions.

CASE STUDY

Québec Winter Carnival



Key Features of their Winter Signature Event Concept:

- Multi-site, multi-day celebration anchored by iconic programs
- Strong cultural branding (Bonhomme as ambassador) and symbolic assets - the Ice Palace, that make the event instantly recognizable and highly marketable.

What They Did Well - Unique Innovations

- Turned harsh winter into a major tourism driver - Carnival was explicitly created in the 1950s to stimulate winter economic activity and now attracts thousands annually with measurable economic impact for the city.
- Deep layering of family, adult, and niche experiences so the festival appeals across segments and extends length of stay.
- Institutionalized mascot and symbolic architecture to build a recognizable festival brand.



GATEWAY ALIGNMENT

Turn our gateways into your guest lists.

Our powerful entry points connect us to both domestic and international markets. By aligning with these transportation gateways, tourism businesses can tap into new visitor flows, attract non-driving markets, and turn arrivals into meaningful opportunities.

Leveraging these gateways helps extend visitor stays, increase spending, and build year-round business while positioning RT03 as Southern Ontario's starting point for unforgettable experiences.

COMMITMENT TO DRIVING MOTIVATION



LEVERAGING REASONS TO
VISIT AND STAY LONGER

Inbound to YHM Go Transit & VIA Rail Gateways

- Increased Market Access
- Extended Stays and Higher Spend
- Competitive Advantage
- Sustainable Tourism
- Packaging and Partnerships
- Year-Round & Shoulder Season Growth
- Event Tie-Ins
- Storytelling and Branding

NEXT STEPS & HOW TO APPLY

READY TO DEVELOP
OR ENHANCE?

Step 1 Craft your Shoulder or Winter Season Offer idea.

Step 2 Contact Bev Scott to discuss your idea.

Step 3 Complete the application. Remember that funds are limited so get your application in asap.

Step 4 Applications will be reviewed and anticipate a response.



Contact Me : Bev Scott
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“Every experience has the power to transform. Through the people you meet, the places you explore, and the activities you create, your winter and shoulder season offerings can leave lasting memories. The stronger your project and partnerships, the deeper the impact for every guest.”

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CONCLUSION & CALL TO ACTION

Contact **Bev Scott**, Manager, Business and
Visitor Experience Development

bev.scott@theheartofontario.com

Industry-facing Website:

www.rto3.ca

Consumer-facing Website:

www.theheartofontario.com



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**Call to
Action:**

*“Unlock funding and support for your
winter and shoulder season project—apply
to the RT03 Experience Development
stream now!”*

QUESTIONS & THANK YOU!

