Destination Market Readiness

A Destination Development Program

Growing Tourism in Atlantic Canada

The ACOA Tourism Innovation Action Plan (TIAP) guides tourism development in Atlantic Canada. The TIAP is designed to advance Atlantic Canada's tourism competitiveness and capacity by placing a greater emphasis on small and medium enterprise (SME) growth and innovation. The Plan supports business development and capacity building throughout the region. The focus is on clustering, value-added product development, season extension, and mobilizing destinations to leverage the power of the internet and social media. The Destination Market Readiness (DMR) program has been developed with the following TIAP pillars in mind:

1. **Increase revenues and profits** from tourism efforts and operations by adding value to existing products and experiences, creating new products and experiences, extracting a higher return from visitors, and attracting new visitors.

2. **Season Extension** by working with tourism operators and industry stakeholders to build capacity to extend the season beyond the traditional high season.

Three core activities are key to achieving tourism growth and are promoted in the TIAP:

- **Product clustering** focused on geographic areas and sectors within tourism
- **Development of unique, value-added products and experiences** within tourism (e.g., craft breweries, wineries, cycling, outdoor adventure, culinary, etc.)
- **Strengthening online connectivity and digitization**, including innovative marketing approaches that incorporate advocate/influencer marketing, social media strategies, and online advertising

The Destination Market Readiness (DMR) Program

The **DMR** program is a community tourism assessment and business improvement program. **DMR** is designed to enable communities to understand their tourism potential, improve tourism product and engage the broader network of tourism stakeholders in the area.

DMR is a four-phased program, ideal for communities in the initial stages of tourism planning or who may want to focus planning attention on a key tourism thruster (culinary, outdoor, waterfront, etc.). Communities who undergo the process will better understand their potential to become a sustainable tourism destination. The four phases guide communities through assessment, individual support for tourism operators in the area, broad community capacity building sessions tailored to the needs of the region, and mentoring/reporting.

Over the course of approximately six months, a qualified tourism Consultant will guide communities through the process, providing tailored insights unique to the tourism industry of the specific area. Combining broad community assessment and capacity building combined with one-on-one business mentoring enables communities to see their tourism potential while improving existing product and strengthening collaboration. Communities will finish the program with a sense of renewed focus on tourism and clear direction to move forward.

DMR is best suited to communities who intend to action recommendations and for operators looking to maximize their ability to deliver high quality experiential tourism products. Led by a project committee, participation is required from all tourism stakeholders in the area for optimal results.

Objectives

- To enable focused tourism development in communities across Atlantic Canada with strategic planning support
- To bring tourism operators together with the support of a qualified tourism Consultant, exposing them to new ideas and approaches
- To provide a baseline understanding of the community's tourism potential and formalize structure around leadership
- To set clear goals and priorities in order to unite tourism stakeholders and enable cohesive direction
- To build innovation and product-cluster expertise within a specific geographic area
- To encourage understanding of tourism trends and how they impact a community and their small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs)

The Phases of DMR

Before launching into the DMR phases, the first step is to establish a Working Committee comprised of diverse industry champions (4-6) as well as representation from the Province and ACOA.

The Consultant will develop a work schedule with the Working Committee, which is necessary to keep all phases on track and to communicate progress.

Phase One: Community Tourism Assessment

The community will engage a qualified tourism Consultant to begin a comprehensive assessment process. Using results from the Sustainable Tourism Community Screening Tool, interviews with key stakeholders, onsite visits and high-level digital assessment the Consultant will identify opportunities to increase tourism destination potential.

Key activities in Phase One include:

- **"Partner Kick-Off"** meeting with Working Committee and Consultant
    - Set clear goals, expectations and responsibilities within the process
    - Review findings of the Sustainable Tourism Community Screening Tool (conducted before project application)
    - Review current Municipal/Provincial/ACOA strategies, brand, research, etc.
    - Schedule bi-weekly partner updates with Working Committee and Consultant
    - Identify list of strategic stakeholders for engagement, interviews, AMRs, etc.
- Host a **"Stakeholder Kick-Off"** session to set the stage and provide an introduction to the process, Consultant and partners. A guided community tour is also recommended key assets. The Consultant should provide a list of questions to help gather observations on asset tourism opportunities
- Conduct **interviews** with key tourism stakeholders interviews – to help identify challenges/opportunities
- **Community Tourism Assessment** – any additional required site visits, review leadership, digital review, etc.

- **Baseline findings** reviewed with the Working Group by the Consultant
- **Stakeholder engagement session** on initial findings, gather additional insights
- **Draft Tourism Assessment Report and Action Item Grid** – is presented to the Working Committee and stakeholders. These documents are finalized in Phase Four following all phases.

Key Deliverables:

- At the end of phase one communities will receive a Tourism Assessment Report outlining the tourism potential of the community including identified opportunities, gaps and areas for improvements.
- This will include an Action Item Grid that outlines immediate next steps for the community, including lead, budget, timeframe, etc.

Phase Two: Accelerated Market Readiness (AMR)

AMR is an innovative business improvement program that strives to grow Atlantic Canada's tourism industry one operators at a time by offering tourism operators one-on-one expert business coaching. Consultants will conduct site assessments and interviews with individual operators to get an in depth understanding of business operations. Through coaching the operator will receive guidance on implementing actionable, affordable, achievable and measurable initiatives to increase revenues, profits and extend the season.

A group of 5-10 operators typically participates in AMR through the **DMR** program, receiving individualized work plans and mentoring support. Initial site visits and assessments take place in the early weeks of the program, and follow up coaching sessions are scheduled for six months and 12 months after receiving the individualized work plan. A comprehensive AMR program booklet can be found in Appendix A. The Working Committee will work with the Consultant to help identify AMR participants based on a cluster of diverse businesses with potential to develop/enhance experiences.

Key Deliverables:

- Participating business will receive individualized work plans with actionable recommendations.
- The organizing community will also receive a top line report following initial site visits and work plan development to highlight commonalities and consistent challenges or opportunities.
- A top line report will also be provided following the six and 12-month follow up mentoring sessions.

Phase Three: Capacity Building Sessions

The Consultant will identify and recommend topics and associated experts for capacity building sessions based on results from the community assessment and AMR insights. These sessions will be advertised to the broader community of tourism stakeholders in the area.

The community undergoing **DMR** will have a separate budget for these sessions and will be responsible for organizing content based on recommendations from the Consultant.

Key Deliverables:

- The primary Consultant will provide a summary of the capacity building sessions including feedback from participants.
- Considerations for future training will also be provided.

Phase Four: Final Reporting and Mentoring

Following the three phases, the Consultant will revisit the Tourism Assessment Report and Action Item Grid to ensure it is reflective of any additional findings in the AMR process (i.e. common challenges, opportunities identified) and Capacity Building sessions (i.e. feedback on future training needs, etc.). The Consultant will present the final Tourism Assessment Report and Tourism Action Plan back to stakeholders.

After care is also built into the process to ensure the community has support in the initial implementation phase. This also builds in accountability and helps ensure momentum is sustained.

Key activities in Phase Four include:

- Present additional findings and updated Final Tourism Assessment Report and Tourism Action Plan to Working Committee and Stakeholders for feedback. Integrate any additional feedback.
- Approval of Final Report and Action Plan (Working Committee and Council)
- Circulate Final Report to stakeholders
- The Consultant provides follow-up 6 and 12 months following completion of the plan to support Working Committee through implementation of recommended actions

Roles and Responsibilities

DMR Stakeholder and Role	Responsibilities
ACOA: Tourism Atlantic *Program champion, custodian and strategic link to ACOA's Tourism Innovation Action Plan*	● Maintains **DMR** Program and associated materials for relevance ● Educates ACOA regional offices and potential partners on **DMR** ● Undertakes regular and meaningful evaluation of the program ● Investigates Consultant qualifications for **DMR** and ensures Consultants have access to up-to-date materials needed to deliver the program effectively
ACOA Regional Office *Regional program champion and ACOA partner in AMR project*	● Understands **DMR** and recommends regional utilization ● Provides an overview of the **DMR** program to the community using the program booklet ● Supports the community in the development of its funding application ● Provides stakeholders with relevant program materials ● Supports the community throughout the project, including participating in the initial meeting with the Consultant and review of any deliverables ● Retains project information, including evaluations, assessments, reports, Operator AMR Coaching Reports, Market Readiness Work Plans, and incorporates into client files where appropriate
Community ***DMR** project coordinator and strategic link to local or regional tourism plan(s)*	● Overall project coordinator ● Prepares application for funding to ACOA and other funders ● Establishes and coordinates a Project Committee ● Promotes the program ● Leads the phases of the **DMR** including contracting a Consultant, facilitating any assessment requirements, recruiting operators for AMR, introducing Consultant to key stakeholders, coordinating capacity building sessions, organizing project committee to review assessments and reports ● Ensures all assessments and reports prepared by the Consultant are sent to ACOA account manager
Consultant *Responsible for key deliverables, acts as coach and mentor to operators in AMR program, overall sounding-board*	● Meet with community/Project Committee for project overview and review of current tourism initiatives ● Conducts regional research ● Provides the Proponent with bio for email introduction to stakeholders ● Schedules site visit and conducts assessments ● Prepares community assessment including opportunities to increase tourism development potential and clear action items with defined next steps ● Follows the AMR Process as defined in Appendix A ● Develops coaching reports and work plans and reviews them with Operators through the AMR program ● Conducts 6 and 12 month coaching sessions with Operators who participate in AMR ● Develops recommendations for capacity building sessions, and summary report once sessions have been completed ● Leads meetings with Project Committee to review assessment, AMR topline insights and plans for capacity building sessions ● Prepares and presents final Tourism Assessment Report and Action Item Grid to key stakeholders ● Provides follow-up mentoring at the six and twelve month mark post plan completion
Operators *Implementer of recommendations from*	● Engage with Consultant to provide assessment information and interviews as required

assessment, AMR and capacity building insights	● Enable site visits in the assessment phase for the Consultant to better understand the tourism context in the community ● Those participating in AMR sign MOU with organizing community and commit at least ten hours to the program including initial site visits, discussions with the Consultant, review of the work plan and follow up mentoring sessions ● Attend community capacity building sessions and provide feedback ● Completes any evaluations of the program
Project Committee *Monitor the project, work with consultant as required*	● Assists Consultant in finding required information for the assessment ● Reviews assessment and provides feedback to the Consultant ● Supports recruitment of optimal operators for the AMR program ● Meets with Consultant following the coaching sessions to discuss topline reports ● Works with relevant stakeholders to develop capacity building sessions and plans for future tourism development ●Engages with Consultant at the six and twelve month marks following plan completion for mentoring session

DMR Budget

The total budget for **DMR** may vary based on the number of Operators participating in AMR, as noted below.

Sample Budget with 5 Operators in AMR:

Costs		Financing	
Overall Assessment	$10,000	AMR Registration Fees (5 operators @ $400 per operator)	$2,000
AMR (5 Operators @ $3,200 per operator)	$16,000	ACOA/Province/In-Kind/Other	$38,775
Capacity Building Sessions	$8,000		
Reporting/After Care	$4,275		
Admin	$2,000		
Total Costs:	**$40,775**	**Total Financing:**	**$40,775**