

THE COMMUNITY LEVEL STAGING GROUND FOR NEW ATLANTIC TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

A man and a woman are hiking on a rocky trail in a lush forest. The man is wearing a blue t-shirt and grey shorts, and the woman is wearing a pink tank top and dark shorts. They are walking on a path made of large, moss-covered rocks. In the background, there is a wooden staircase leading up a hillside. A waterfall is visible on the left side of the image, cascading over mossy rocks into a stream.

STEP

STRATEGIC TOURISM EXPANSION PROGRAM



Atlantic Canada
Opportunities
Agency

Agence de
promotion économique
du Canada atlantique

Canada

STEP: Strategic Tourism Expansion Program
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GLOSSARY

COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST – Communities of Interest connect people with a shared interest or passion through social media. The concept combines advocacy marketing and influencer marketing in a unique way to reach a much larger audience than has been seen in the past through traditional media. The concept also stimulates and supports product innovation.

DIGITAL or ONLINE FOOTPRINT – Describes the online profile and the “trail” a community/region leaves behind online, e.g. on social media, websites and online forums. A digital footprint reflects a destination’s online identity and presence at a particular point in time and offers insights into the “brand” of an area through visitors’ eyes.

EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM – Engages visitors in a series of memorable, participatory activities revealed over a period of time, that are inherently personal, engage the senses, and make connections on an emotional, physical, spiritual and/or intellectual level.

DEMAND GENERATOR – A tourism asset with sufficient attributes and benefits to singularly motivate individuals to visit a destination – the #1 reason(s) causing the visit decision.

PRODUCT/EXPERIENCE CLUSTERS – Clusters of products/experiences create reasons to visit, make an area more enticing and add value to an area. Three product/experience clusters most relevant to sustainable planning efforts are:

- 1. Like-Product Clusters:** clusters of product/experience sub-sectors (e.g. hiking trails, wineries, crafters, ceilidhs).
- 2. Diverse-Product Clusters:** clusters of a variety of several types of products/experiences (e.g. many Atlantic Canada cities, different products and experiences in various sectors, mapped on a trail).
- 3. Composite Clusters:** destination is robust with both like and diverse products/experiences (e.g. the Niagara region with its wine, culinary, gaming and golf products).

RESEARCH/PRODUCT/MARKETING CONTINUUM – This guiding principle underlines that sound and effective business decisions are founded in an ongoing process of: 1) research to understand the marketplace; 2) product/experience development to anticipate and respond to the marketplace; and 3) marketing to create awareness, motivate and successfully sell to the marketplace.

SIGNATURE EXPERIENCE – Officially designated by Destination Canada, Canadian Signature Experiences are once-in-a-lifetime travel experiences found only in Canada. <https://www.destinationcanada.com/en/programs>

DEMAND SUPPORTERS – Tourism assets that, in combination with other tourism assets, motivate individuals to visit a destination – the extra reason(s) contributing to the visit decision.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM – Sustainable tourism actively fosters appreciation and stewardship of the natural, cultural and historic resources, and special places by residents, the tourism industry, government and visitors. It is tourism which can be sustained over the long-term because it results in a net benefit for social/cultural, economic, and natural/built elements in the area in question.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLAN – A plan that focuses a community to become a sustainable tourism destination with a defined vision, goal and objectives. The plan is created using the framework outlined in this manual as a guide and tailored to the specific needs of a destination.

INTRODUCTION TO STEP

Growing Tourism in Atlantic Canada

The ACOA Tourism Innovation Action Plan (TIAP) guides tourism development in Atlantic Canada. The Plan is designed to advance Atlantic Canada tourism's competitiveness and capacity by placing a greater emphasis on small and medium enterprise (SME) growth and innovation, and supporting their development and capacity building throughout Atlantic Canada. The focus is on clustering, value-added product development, plant maximization, and mobilizing destinations to leverage the power of the internet and social media. The Strategic Tourism Expansion Program (STEP) has been designed with these key elements in mind.

The two pillars of the TIAP are straightforward: 1) increasing yield (revenues and profits) from tourism efforts and operations by adding value to products/experiences and extracting a higher return from visitors during the traditional tourism season; 2) Plant Maximization by encouraging Destination Marketing Organizations, provinces and private sector operators to collaborate and extend the traditional tourism season and therefore, to operate at the highest annual capacity possible. Tourism projects supported by ACOA moving forward – including Strategic Tourism for Areas and Regions (STAR) and STEP – must demonstrate potential to increase yield and/or maximize the plant.

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

1. **Product Clustering** continues to be a development priority with opportunities sought among clusters of like-products, diverse products and composite products;
2. **Strengthening Online Connectivity** for all tourism stakeholders is essential for competitiveness and growth of Atlantic Canada's tourism industry; and
3. **Communities of Interest (COI)** concept connects local community with the visitor community through a shared interest or passion through strategic and proactive social media programming. COI is distinctly tied to online connectivity and uses the expertise and enthusiasm of advocates and influencers in a specific product/experience category to target and engage like-minded individuals to share photos, ideas and experiences, regardless of where they live.

The Strategic Tourism Expansion Program (STEP)

The Strategic Tourism Expansion Program (STEP) is a sustainable tourism development planning process with a focus on tourism experiences, and is designed to help Atlantic Canada communities and SMEs with above-average potential to develop experiential tourism products and techniques for digital/online marketing enhancement and tourism investment in collaboration with SMEs.

STEP: "This is how our community will succeed in tourism."

STEP is a framework for tourism development that is customized to the needs of communities in Atlantic Canada. A series of steps guide communities through a strategic process of building and executing a Sustainable Tourism Plan that focuses on product clustering, SME excellence, digital/online enhancement, and value-added product/experience development. Tailored to meet the specific

needs of a community, the STEP process involves a local industry-led Working Committee¹ collaborating with a certified STEP Consultant to guide the community through the process over the course of a year and beyond. The STEP process results in an achievable and affordable STEP Sustainable Tourism Plan for a period of three to five years. Effective private sector leadership is essential.

¹ Working committee involvement is hoped to go beyond one year.

Combining community leadership, entrepreneurship, tourism experience and community ambition with the proven expertise of leading external Consultants, STEP engages a cross-section of tourism SMEs and stakeholders and focuses a community's tourism thinking: "This is how our community will succeed in tourism!" At its core, STEP harnesses the science and the art of creating local conditions which help entrepreneurs invent and grow dynamic new travel experiences.

STEP Goals and Outcomes

The goals of STEP are threefold, to:

1. Assist communities in becoming sustainable tourism destinations;
2. Accelerate SME exposure to the need for product clusters, value-added experiential tourism products and techniques for digital/online marketing enhancement and tourism investment; and
3. Generate a platform for tourism operators to better communicate and cooperate toward a common goal.

At the end of the STEP process, a community will:

1. Understand the steps in destination development.
2. Understand dynamic tourism trends and how they impact a community and SMEs.
3. Have the tools and knowledge to create experiential products, understand innovative marketing techniques, and strengthen online/digital presence.
4. Have an actionable Sustainable Tourism Plan.
5. Have a network and Working Committee of community leaders and stakeholders engaged in executing the Sustainable Tourism Plan.



Snapshot – The Steps in STEP

STEP 1: Introduction to STEP (On-site visit) (Months 1-2)

Virtual meeting with Proponent/Working Committee to review steps/launch STEP elements
Working Committee finalized
Tourism Asset Inventory completed by Working Committee
Develop community communications approach
Site-visit:
– Meet face-to-face with Proponent/Working Committee
– Conduct site visit/tour and meet with key players
– Stakeholder Session #1: *Introduction to STEP*



STEP 2: Setting the Stage (Month 3)

Consultant Tourism Diagnostic report to Working Committee
Tourism Asset Inventory refined by Consultant
Online/Digital Footprint conducted by third party
Secondary Research Review by Consultant



STEP 3: Destination Planning (On-site visit) (Months 4-5)

Stakeholder Session #2: *STEP Vision, Goals, Idea Generation and Priority Setting*
Post workshop debrief with the Working Committee
Consultant drafts Sustainable Tourism Plan



Step 4: Draft Sustainable Tourism Plan and Introduction to Capacity Building Sessions

(Months 6-7)

Consultant submits Draft Plan to Working Committee
Plan identifies Capacity Building Sessions required
Gather Draft Plan feedback from Working Committee (in person if possible, remotely if not)



Step 5: Sustainable Tourism Plan Refinement and Launch Capacity Building Session

(On-site visit) (Months 8-9)

Capacity Building/Stakeholder Session #3; as identified in the Draft Plan
(*e.g. experiential travel, online skills development*)
Ongoing Sustainable Tourism Plan refinements



Step 6: Final Sustainable Tourism Plan and Capacity Building Session (On-site visit)

(Months 10-12)

Plan finalized and accepted by Working Committee
Ensure project management is in place
Presentation of Plan to community (Consultant and Working Committee)
Capacity Building/Stakeholder Workshop #4: as identified in the Plan



Step 7: Follow-up (May be on-site or virtual)

At 3, 6, and 12 month marks post Plan completion
Ongoing Capacity Building/Stakeholder Workshops as needed

STEPS IN DETAIL

STEP 1 – INTRODUCTION TO STEP (Months 1-2)

Consultant: On-site

Key Elements of STEP 1

- Once funding is approved, a Request for Proposal (RFP) is issued by the community to select a certified STEP Consultant who, with the Working Committee, leads the community through the STEP process over the next year.
- Working Committee and the Consultant are introduced by conference call/video conference (or in person if distance permits) and key project elements launched.
- The Working Committee is finalized.
- The Working Committee completes the **Tourism Asset Inventory Framework**, (*Appendix B*) in advance of site visit by the Consultant.
- Consultant reviews the Sustainable Tourism Screening Tool in advance of the site visit.
- The Consultant travels to the community and meets with the Working Committee face-to-face to set timelines and expectations.
- The Consultant leads the development of a **communication approach** for STEP community awareness and gathers input/consensus from the Working Committee.
- The Consultant conducts a comprehensive tour and community scan organized by the Working Committee.
- Consultant leads a Stakeholder Session #1 to introduce and discuss the STEP process with community stakeholders.

Introductory Call/Video Conference

Once hired, the Consultant will have an introductory call with the Proponent and community tourism leaders where the project requirements are reviewed, the Tourism Asset Inventory detailed and launched, and the Digital Footprint Tool discussed. Next steps and understanding the division of duties are reviewed during this call.

Initial documents required by the Consultant to research and understand the community in advance of the site visit are identified and gathered. The Proponent possesses the local understanding of regional nuances and sensitivities and will assist the Consultant by gathering/compiling reports, tourism plans, strategies, inventories and other documents relevant to the tourism planning process. The Consultant and Working Committee will discuss key documents to be assembled, understanding the STEP Sustainable Tourism Plan will align with and complement, not duplicate, the key planning efforts that have been undertaken in the region. The Proponent should discuss the make-up of the Working Committee with the Consultant during this call.

Working Committee Finalized

The Working Committee should be finalized in Step 1 with all members committed to and supportive of the process. While the initial Working Committee should have been selected in the pre-planning stages of STEP, the process is still worth reiterating here, underlining the importance of appropriate Working Committee selection.

Identify Key Working Committee Members

In preparation for STEP, the Proponent should have identified key and credible tourism leaders in the region to form the nucleus of an effective Working Committee. It is important that the Proponent and core Working Committee members understand the commitments and the benefits associated with the STEP program.

The Working Committee Selection Framework (below) helps in identifying key members of this leadership team. It is essential that **strong tourism industry operators** lead the Working Committee and are engaged and enthused about the year-long project. Experience has proven that powerful industry leadership is critical to the overall and long-term success of the program.

There are several options for finalizing a Working Committee. Some leaders will be evident and willing; in other cases, potential Working Committee members may not be as obvious. In one case, the Proponent asked individuals who were previously identified in the pre-planning stage to generate a list of potential representatives. These names were then voted on by the initial individuals and sorted by the highest to lowest votes, with the top names being approached to serve ensuring there were no conflicts of interest.

Working Committee Selection Framework

Suggested Steering Committee Members <i>(Completed would total 8-12 people)</i>		
<u>High Priority</u>	<u>Medium Priority</u>	<u>Resource</u>
Potential Chair(s) *		

**Strongly recommend the Chair is an industry representative*

Once selected, the Working Committee should strongly consider identifying an ad-hoc Executive Committee (recommended three people, two of whom are the Chair and Proponent) who can continue to move the process forward with the Consultant when committee engagement is more difficult in the prime and demanding tourism season. Should an Executive Committee be assigned, regular communication between the Executive and the Consultant is recommended during the busiest of months.

Once completed, the STEP Plan should recommend a governance model for regional tourism development in subsequent years and indicate how the Working Committee participates and transitions over time. The go-forward governance model will be tailored to the needs of the community and the actions required post-completion of STEP.

Over time, the Leadership Team could evolve from the Working Committee; in addition, the Team could include standing sub-committees for long-term projects, and employ task teams for specific initiatives. Funding and administrative support for the governance model should be delineated in the final Plan, and core responsibilities evident in the implementation requirements of the STEP Sustainable Tourism Plan.

Consultant Role

The Consultant guides the community through the STEP process with a strong understanding of required inputs and early outcomes. The Consultant takes the lead in penning and presenting the Draft, and eventually the final Plan. Although working with a structured STEP program, the Consultant must be alert to the individual needs and aspirations of the community as they surface and be available as needed for “creative adjustments” to the program addressing community needs.

The Consultant is expected to **be open to frequent and honest communication with the Working Committee**. Establishing a mutually trusting working relationship with the Working Committee early on will facilitate the overall success of STEP.

As the Plan develops, the Consultant begins to work more as a mentor, delivering professional expertise and capacity building resources, and ensuring the final Plan captures the ambitions and the potential of the region with plenty of regional input.

Both the Consultant and Working Committee responsibilities are presented in more detail in *Appendix A*.

Tourism Asset Inventory

The Tourism Asset Inventory is a starting point for any planning. Communities must understand the landscape, what their strengths are, and where the gaps lie for tourism development. In advance of the Consultant’s visit, the Working Committee will complete the Tourism Asset Inventory using the framework shown in *Appendix B*.

Site Visit

Four key activities need to be accomplished during the Consultant’s first site visit to the community:

i. Meet Face-to-Face with Working Committee

This first meeting with the Working Committee kickstarts the actual STEP process outlining the STEPS, timelines and expectations going forward. The meeting agenda will include reviewing work to date on the Tourism Asset Inventory, details of the Digital Footprint Tool, site-visit details, and an overview of Stakeholder Session #1.

ii. Community Communication Approach

A Sustainable Tourism Development Plan requires community engagement. It is important to establish how the community will be informed about the process and how community members can provide input to the Plan. The Consultant takes the lead in drafting the Communications Framework; however, it is the responsibility of the Project Manager and the Working Committee to execute it.

The Proponent and Working Committee help to identify the priorities of this framework; they know the community best. Monthly communication should be considered in the form of e-mail updates, e-newsletter, STEP project website, Facebook page and other forms of communication. A combination of these works best. Once Working Committee members are confirmed, this group should be introduced to the community by the methods established in the Communications Framework.

The “golden” tool for communications with the community is an up-to-date database of industry stakeholders developed over the course of the project. This database includes tourism operators, SMEs, not-for-profit leaders and volunteers, local businesses and municipalities; this list grows throughout the process. Participants attending sessions are included in the list beginning with the participant list from the initial STEP Stakeholder Session #1.

Some communications tactics to consider are listed in the checklist below.

Communications Checklist:

- Database of stakeholders for direct communication on announcements and meetings
- Website/page with separate URL to post agendas, reports, surveys and research links
- E-mail blasts and notifications
- Local media (radio station, cable, newspaper) lists and contacts
- Meetings as required with communities/influencers
- Posters/flyers for events, and meetings posted online and circulated
- Social media (i.e. Facebook page to post updates and allow broader stakeholders to engage with STEP initiative)

iii. Site Tour/Community Scan

Arranged by the Working Committee, the site tour involves a first-hand look at the community and its tourism assets. This is the Consultant’s opportunity to appreciate “the lay of the land,” the distance and juxtaposition of communities and tourism assets, and to meet with key tourism contributors in individual communities. The tour may involve meeting with other key community leaders, as relevant.

iv. Stakeholder Session #1: Introduction to STEP

While on-site, the Consultant will deliver a presentation to the broader community outlining the need for a sustainable tourism process, STEP process and steps, players involved, and the role the community overall plays in STEP. The Working Committee takes the lead in organizing the session and ensures participation.²

Key Messages for the Presentation to Community

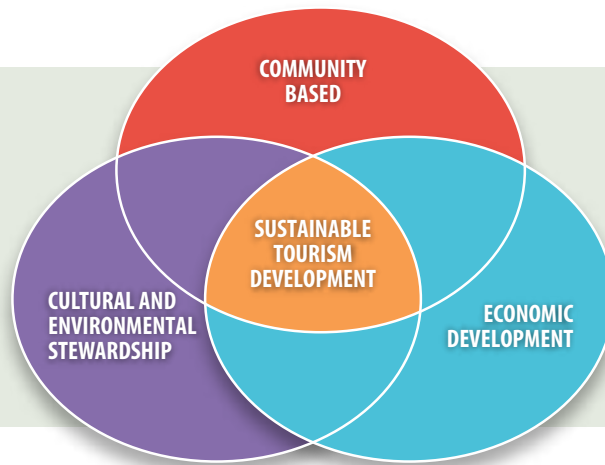
1. STEP and Sustainable Tourism

STEP was created to facilitate development of sustainable tourism destinations across Atlantic Canada. This means looking at the long-term – tourism that can be sustained down the road – and paying attention to three basic components of sustainability:

- i. The economics of tourism – revenues, yield and profits;
- ii. The need to care for our culture and natural environment, as these affect our livelihood; and
- iii. The need for community leadership, input and support (*Figure 1*).

These three components are emphasized in the Sustainable Tourism Screening Tool.

² Stakeholder Sessions are for all stakeholders in the Community.

Figure 1: Sustainable Tourism Development Components

With sustainable development in mind, planning needs to proceed with a framework. What are the most important elements to guide us? And how should our community address these elements?

2. Research/Product/Marketing Continuum

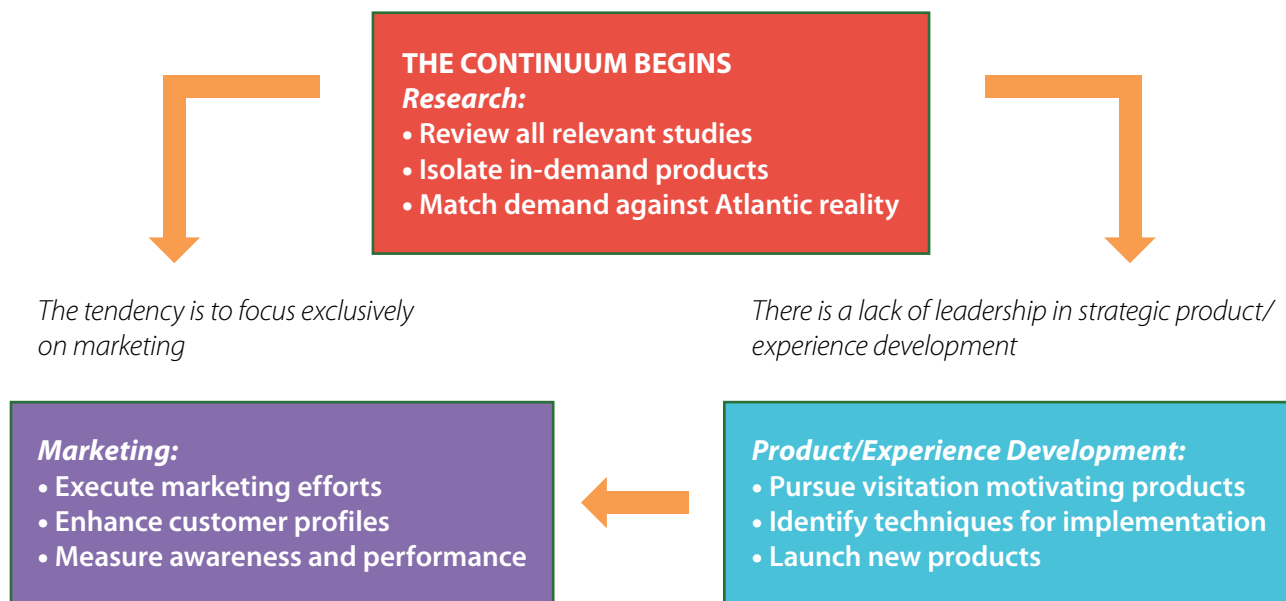
Broadly speaking, the key elements to be addressed for the STEP Sustainable Tourism Plan are:

- i. **Research** - to provide an objective foundation for planning;
- ii. **Product/Experience Development** - to ensure offerings meet evolving visitor wants and needs; and
- iii. **Marketing** - to create awareness of offerings.

These elements are shown in the Research/Product/Marketing (RPM) Continuum (*Figure 2*). The RPM Continuum shows that research drives product development which drives marketing. Together, these elements help drive visitation. The RPM Continuum is a never-ending process of investigation, invention and intervention. All three elements (research, product and marketing) must work in concert to achieve optimum results. The continuum also shows that tourism operators and organizations often leap-frog from research to marketing without thinking through the product/experience challenge.



Figure 2 – RPM Continuum



3. The STEP Process

The Consultant should include the process chart identified on page 3 of this Guide as part of the presentation, and indicate successful STEP communities to date – reach out to Tourism Atlantic for most up-to-date list. Also, *Appendix C* includes a case study on Parrsboro Shore for reference.

4. Consultant's Preliminary Thoughts on the Destination

The Consultant should provide some preliminary positive observations on the destination to help motivate and mobilize the community.

5. Introduction of the STEP Working Committee

The presentation introduces the STEP Working Committee, who are working on the community's behalf.

STEP 2 – SETTING THE STAGE (Month 3)

Key Elements of STEP 2

- Consultant provides a Tourism Diagnostic Analysis resulting from the site visit and the previously completed Sustainable Tourism Screening Tool, identifying potential opportunities for improvement and gaps that need to be considered.
- Consultant refines the Tourism Asset Inventory.
- Online/Digital Footprint Tool is contracted to a third party.
- Secondary Research Review: Consultant conducts a secondary research review of existing plans and provincial/local tourism information.

Four major research inputs are important foundations of STEP; three are completed by the Consultant – with input from the Working Committee – while the community’s online/digital footprint is measured/assessed by a third party.

Tourism Diagnostic Analysis

This report is a brief summary of the site visit and Sustainable Tourism Screening Tool results for the Working Committee’s information. This brief report is provided to the Working Committee.

Based on the community scan and working with the Tourism Asset Inventory completed in STEP 1, the Consultant provides a summary report that examines community tourism features and identifies key strengths and weaknesses resulting from the community scan. In addition to assessing the spatial/physical attributes of the community, this process will examine the following: status quo and potential brand and positioning; the community’s competitiveness and unique selling propositions; resident tourism and other enterprises; web presence; marketing collateral; events; and programming. The results of the assessment results will be presented in the Stakeholder Session #2 during STEP 3.

The results from the Sustainable Tourism Screening Tool are also highlighted in this report and included as indicators of gaps and what may need improvement.

Tourism Asset Inventory Refined

Once the inventory has been populated by the Working Committee (Step 1), the Consultant revises the inventory based on observations and online research. The inventory also points to strengths and weaknesses of the destination.

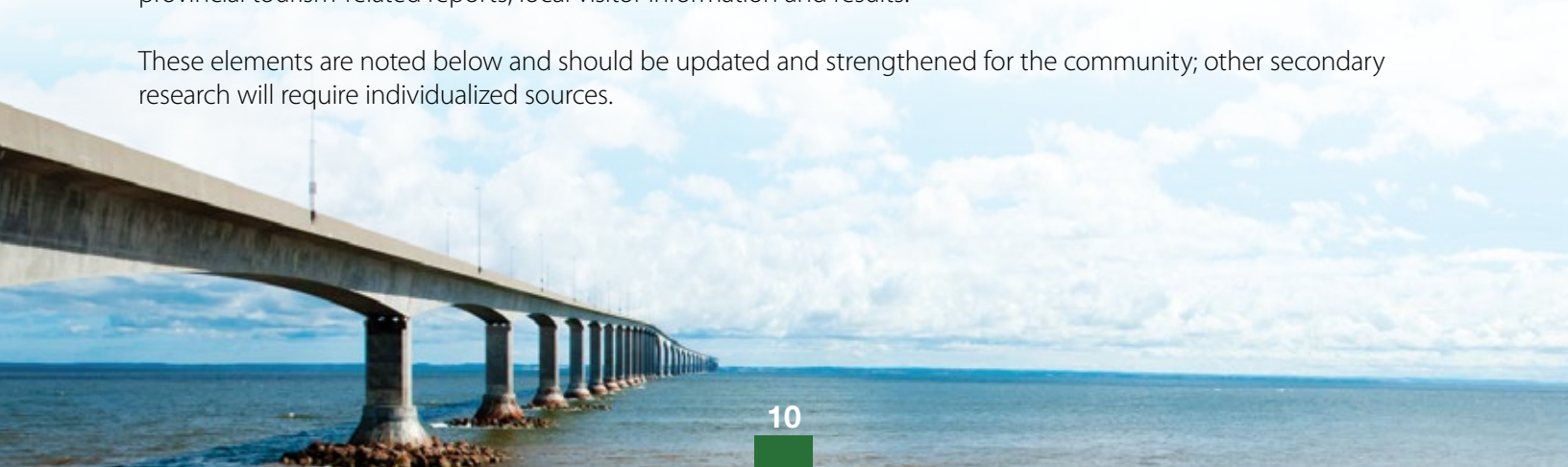
Online/Digital Footprint

An online/digital footprint is intended to identify the community’s online status and need for tourism websites and social media. With ACOA’s TIAP focused on enhanced SME digital capacity and online marketing tactics, the baseline information from this assessment is essential for the STEP work. Conducted by a third party, funds for this assessment are included as part of the STEP program. An RFP is managed by the Consultant and Working Committee and the results of the footprint are reported to the Consultant and Working Committee for use in the Plan and for capacity building sessions.

Secondary Tourism Research Review

As the RPM Continuum illustrates, research is critical to understand the visitor and what they are seeking. Elements to be included in the Secondary Research Review should all relate specifically to the destination and include: 1) trends, 2) the Atlantic Canada tourism picture, 3) the provincial tourism situation, 4) online review, and 5) local/regional tourism reports; preliminary research provides a comprehensive overview of the region through existing provincial tourism-related reports, local visitor information and results.

These elements are noted below and should be updated and strengthened for the community; other secondary research will require individualized sources.



i. Trends: A Dynamic Tourism Landscape

Tourism is a global industry; to compete effectively and to grow destinations, operators in Atlantic Canada must be alerted to changes in customer demands and vigilant in striving to meet them. Tourism trends shift and though they are felt globally, many are relevant to Atlantic Canada. The TIAP has captured and adjusted for shifting global factors. Communities must appreciate these global factors in the context of Atlantic Canada realities. It is important to stay in tune with changing trends as these provide product development opportunities for SME's.

Global Issues/Trends

Key global issues³ impacting tourism in Atlantic Canada are the following:

1. Maintaining a destination's sustainable tourism development from the standpoint of economic, social/cultural, natural and built resources.
2. Concerns for safety and security.
3. Impact on the travel and tourism industry resulting from global economic, social/cultural and political directions.
4. Long-term impacts on tourism of climate change and global warming.
5. Necessity for increased local/regional/national/international leadership in tourism policy and strategic planning.
6. Resolving barriers to travel, e.g. visas, passports, immigration issues, airline services, fees, and delays.
7. Educating businesses and travelers in optimizing the application of new technologies within the tourism industry.
8. Maintaining a sustainable, engaged, skilled and experienced workforce in order to deliver quality tourism experiences.
9. Effect on travel and tourism from natural/human-induced disasters, health issues, and political disruptions.
10. Using tourism as a vehicle for bringing Indigenous and rural populations out of their state of oppression and marginalization.

Changing Consumer Patterns and Interests

These trends drive tourism development and include:

- Aging populations and changing households
- Immigration
- Advances in technology, digital/online marketing
- Shifts away from longer trips to multiple, mini-vacations
- Increased demand for quality products/experiences and services
- Shifts away from rural to urban destinations
- Environmental conscience
- Demand for something new, different, unique and memorable
- Shift to experiential tourism that involves local culture

³ Edgell 2019.

Atlantic Canada's Competitive Challenges

Atlantic Canada must successfully compete in a global arena. Several key issues affect our ability to compete and need to be considered in all tourism development efforts, whether at the regional, community or operator level.

- **Sustainability:** Atlantic Canada must remain committed to sustainable tourism development as it brings: 1) economic benefits (revenues and jobs), 2) positive social impacts so that tourism is a positive experience for residents, businesses and tourists; and 3) positive environmental practices that take a long-term approach. Protection of both built and natural resources should be paramount.
- **Tourism Infrastructure:** Atlantic Canada is well-positioned with the core natural assets to offer distinctive and unique travel experiences to various consumer traveler segments.
- **Accessibility:** How you get here – affects industry growth; once travelers arrive in our area, we want to ensure they are able to visit the various corners of the four Provinces, whether by road, sea and air. It is expensive to travel to and throughout Atlantic Canada, and rural distances from urban destinations compound this difficulty.
- **Seasonality:** A short primary tourism season, concentrated in 8 to 12 weeks in summer, limits growth, and affects profitability and cashflow. Expanding the season to allow for increased revenues is a region-wide issue which means that everyone must cooperate to be open and provide visitors with a top-notch experience. Season extension is relative to the location – a community that shuts down Labour Day would experience season extension if operations were extended later into September. Conversely, a community that typically stays open until late September would experience season extension if operations committed to staying open until late October.
- **Technology:** Destinations and operators in Atlantic Canada lag with respect to adopting tourism technology, social media and innovation. Visitors need to access information whenever and wherever they travel, and regions and communities need to push for this in order to be competitive.
- **Shift to Urban Destinations:** Although Atlantic Canada is marketed primarily as a rural destination, tourism-related visits are concentrated in urban destinations which are increasing, while the rural market share of arrivals has declined.
- **Human Resource Challenges:** It is difficult to access labour during the peak tourism season and the growing shoulder seasons. Competition for skilled employees is high, especially in rural areas. The misalignment of season extension and the school calendar compound the difficulty in obtaining employees when attempting to extend the season. This is exacerbated by the lack of awareness and/or low regard for tourism as a potential career path.
- **Lack of Investment:** Accommodations and attraction visitation remains concentrated in summer months so it is difficult for SMEs to secure the investment required to generate significant returns during off-peak seasons. SMEs often attest to having difficulty in accessing capital. Underinvestments in tourism marketing also make it difficult to compete.⁴

STEP is designed to guide destination leaders and operators to understand and help tackle these issues and incorporate them into planning where relevant.

⁴ McKinsey and Company, *Unlocking the Potential of Canada's Tourism Economy*; commissioned by Destination Canada, December, 2018.

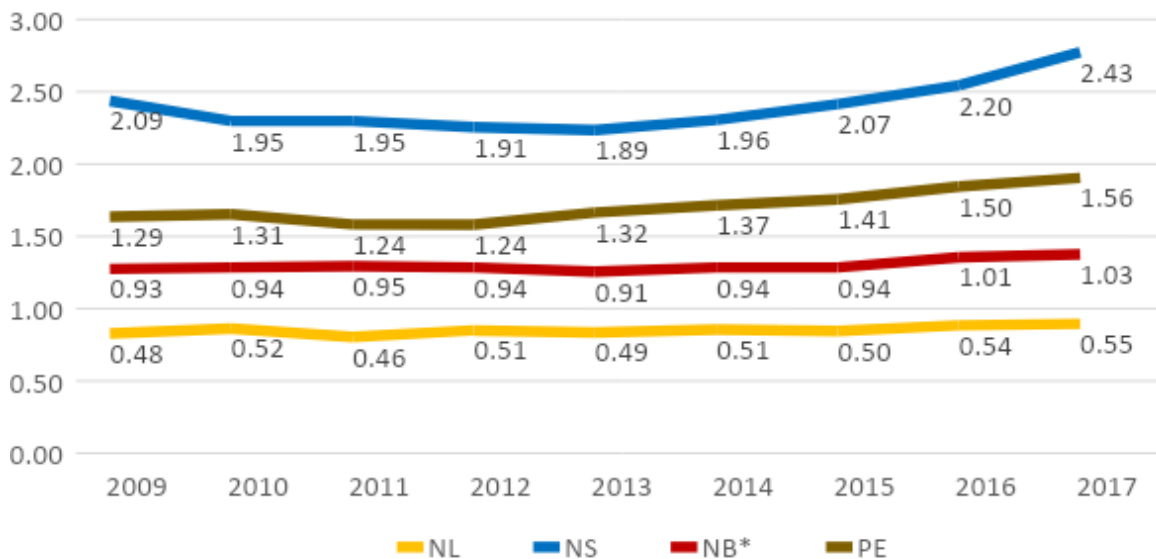
ii. Atlantic Canada Tourism Picture

Atlantic Canada: Visitor Overview

In 2017, tourism represented \$4.5 billion in non-resident spending in Atlantic Canada. Rooted in the ACOA TIAP, ACOA has a goal, vision, mission and clear objectives to grow this economic sector.

Tourism is a growing sector in Atlantic Canada. *Table 1* (below) shows the non-resident visitor growth in each province since 2009. Atlantic Canada has experienced consecutive years of growth in visits and revenues since 2012, and the industry outlook is positive. Visitation is expected to grow by 2% a year until 2021, and revenues are expected to grow by 5% over the same time period (*Table 2*).

Table 1: Non-Resident Visitation Estimates (in millions)



Source: Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation (TCII); Tourism Nova Scotia; New Brunswick Tourism, Heritage and Culture; Tourism Prince Edward Island (preliminary estimate)

*NB reports room sales in lieu of visitation estimate



Table 2: Atlantic Canada Tourism Growth to 2021

Short & Medium Term Outlook Percentage Growth						
		2018	2019	2020	2021	Avg
NL	Visits	2.4%	2.5%	1.4%	0.7%	1.75
	Revenues	5.8%	5.2%	4.0%	3.3%	4.57
NS	Visits	2.6%	2.2%	1.9%	1.8%	2.13
	Revenues	5.8%	4.9%	4.5%	4.3%	4.88
NB	Visits	2.4%	2.0%	1.9%	2.0%	2.08
	Revenues	4.6%	3.3%	3.8%	4.2%	3.98
PE	Visits	2.7%	2.8%	2.3%	2.1%	2.48
	Revenues	6.2%	5.5%	5.0%	4.6%	5.33
CA	Visits	2.6%	2.3%	2.2%	2.1%	2.30
	Revenues	6.3%	5.3%	5.0%	4.8%	5.35

Source: Conference Board of Canada

iii. Provincial Travel Markets

Information about visitors, their demographics, motivations and visitation patterns (e.g. occupancy rates) is critical in defining the target markets to be served. The Atlantic provinces partner on joint-marketing efforts in the United States and internationally (e.g. United Kingdom and China) through programs like the Atlantic Canada Agreement on Tourism and the Tourism International Markets Expansion Program. Each province also has provincial priorities, for instance, Prince Edward Island targets the Japan market; New Brunswick, France; and Nova Scotia, Germany. In general, the major visitor markets to Atlantic Canada are from the Atlantic region. A great deal of valuable information can be found on websites with visitor research applicable to Atlantic Canada and each province.

Tourism Research Links for Atlantic Provinces

- New Brunswick: Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture:
<https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/thc/tourism/content/rsp.html>
- Prince Edward Island
https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/publications/current_monthly_indicators.pdf
<https://www.tiapei.pe.ca/research/>
- Newfoundland and Labrador
https://www.tcii.gov.nl.ca/tourism/tourism_research/stats/index.html
- Nova Scotia
<https://tourismns.ca/research/research-overview>

Understanding visitors to the community is an important step in any planning and marketing approach. Every destination should have market knowledge at their finger tips to assist in attracting visitors and include the key questions noted below.

Knowing Target Markets: Key Questions Every Destination Should Consider

1. How many visitors does your destination receive annually?
2. Who are the current visitors to the community/region?
3. Why do visitors come to the community/region?
4. When do visitors come to the community/region? a) summer? b) autumn? c) spring? d) winter?
5. How long do they stay?
6. What experiences/activities do they pursue while visiting the community/region?
7. How much do they spend? (In total? Per person?)
8. What do they like about the community? And what do they dislike?
9. What are some of the suggestions made to improve the tourism product/experience in the community/region?
10. What marketing methods are you currently using to reach these markets?
11. How strong is your online/digital presence?

STEP 3 – DESTINATION PLANNING (Months 4-5)

Consultant On-Site

Key Elements of STEP 3

- Stakeholder Session #2 generates the framework for a tourism vision, sets goals, generates ideas and sets priorities for the STEP Sustainable Tourism Plan.
- Best practice: Parrsboro (*Appendix C*) is reviewed by the Consultant.
- Post-session debrief with the Working Committee.

Stakeholder Session #2: STEP Vision, Goals, Idea Generation and Priority Setting

Using a PowerPoint format, the results (strengths, weaknesses, guidance) of the tourism diagnostic and research are shared with the community in enough depth to paint the current tourism picture of the community in order to look ahead, and begin goal setting, generating tourism development ideas and setting priorities for the STEP Plan.⁵

Key objectives of the session:

1. A tourism vision statement is essential for engaging stakeholders in a common direction for the longer term, up to 10 years. Drafting the elements for a tourism-specific vision leads to a shared focus for how tourism in the community should be planned, developed, managed and marketed over time.

⁵ **A Note on Stakeholder Sessions:** It is important to note from the outset that, **at all stakeholder sessions and consultations**, consideration should be given to SME needs – the Consultant should make sure to stress this when meeting with stakeholders. In addition, Consultants should be familiar with the **Tools and Solutions** noted in **Appendix H** and integrate them into at least one of the Stakeholder Sessions. A handout for stakeholders listing these Tools and Solutions and their applicability to SMEs should be considered.

2. Developing goals, objectives and community priorities (focused on a 3-5 year timeframe) identifies the indicators of sustainable tourism going forward. Goals include a balance of economic (infrastructure, employment, revenues), environmental (protection and/or enhancement of natural and/or built environments) and socio-cultural components (preservation of parks, landscapes, traditional ceremonies). Identifying community priorities demands making choices among a plethora of potential actions and isolating the priorities that will help achieve the longer term vision and shorter term goals and objectives.

Exercises for the entire group or sub-groups (reporting to the larger group) are conducted during Stakeholder Session #2.

Vision

A vision question asks, "Where do you want tourism to be in 5-10 years?" These points can be recorded on a flip chart and serve as the underlying basis for a vision. Sub-groups can be asked the same question, and responses shared and recorded. The vision is refined as the Plan is developed.

Goals are broadly based *(Examples may include)*

The goal(s) of this Plan is to:

- Increase visitation by 2% per year.
- Increase visitor revenues by 5% annually over the next three years.
- Develop an online technology strategy that benefits all tourism businesses.

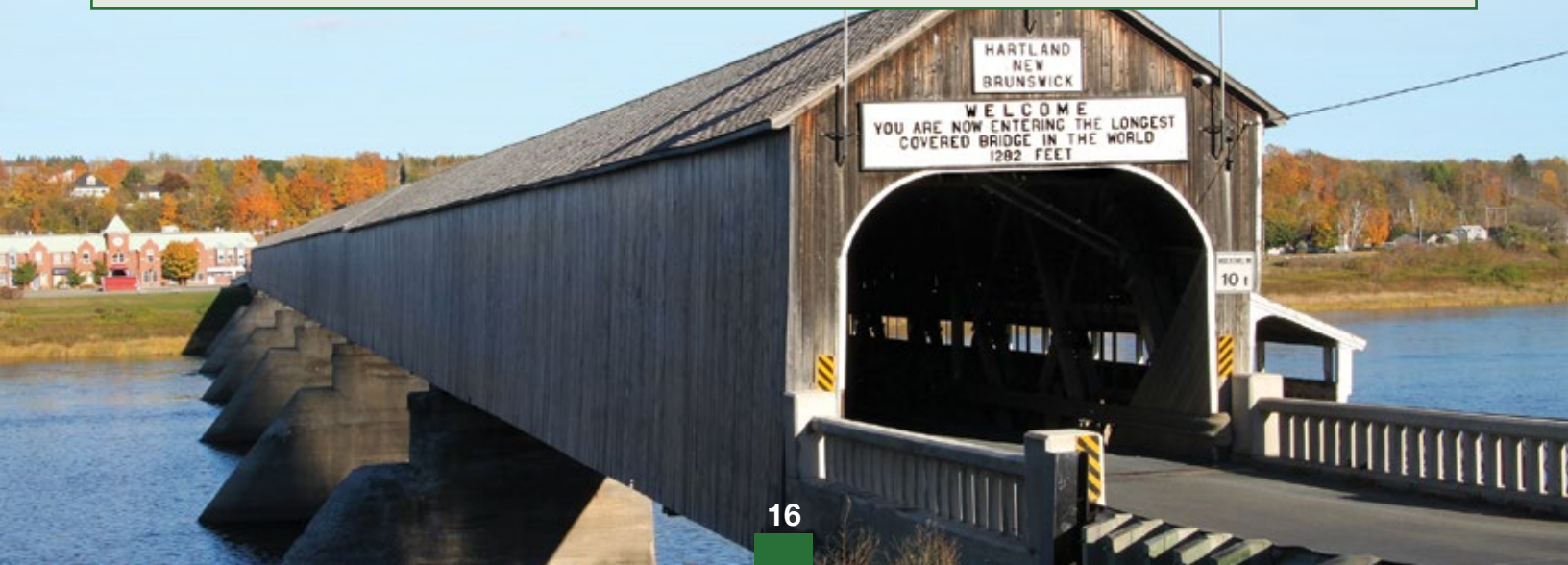
Objectives are more specific and measurable *(Examples may include)*

If one of the overall goals is to identify potential new markets for your community, the specific objectives associated with this goal might be to:

1. Assess which markets (geographic or product) offer the best potential (and/or revenue potential) for the community.
2. Estimate potential market size of each identified market.

Priorities are community choices to realize the goals; what do we do first? *(Examples may include)*

1. Staff training and housing within a year.
2. Extend the season by two weeks in the fall.
3. Implement an online social media channels education program next year.



STEP Best Practice – Parrsboro Shore

Use Parrsboro Shores Case Study in *Appendix C* to highlight what has been accomplished in another Atlantic Canada STEP community.

Post-Workshop Debrief with Working Committee

Following Stakeholder Session #2, the Consultant debriefs with the Working Committee to help put the session into context and discuss how the inputs from the session will be incorporated into the Sustainable Tourism Plan (Step 4).

STEP 4 – DRAFT SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLAN'S INTRODUCTION TO CAPACITY BUILDING SESSIONS *(Months 6-7)*

Key Elements of Step 4

- Using the background research (Step 2) and ideas generated from the Stakeholders Session (Step 3), the Consultant creates and submits a draft of the Sustainable Tourism Plan to the Working Committee.
- The Plan outlines additional capacity building/stakeholder sessions required.
- The Working Committee provides feedback to the Consultant, either virtually or in person.

Draft Sustainable Tourism Plan

The Consultant drafts the Sustainable Tourism Plan using the findings and ideas generated from the Stakeholder Session #2 which identified a vision, goals and priorities, the secondary research review and site visits, insights from the Digital Footprint Tool and the Tourism Asset Inventory. The Plan is specific to the community; it highlights key recommendations and capacity building sessions for the community and operators going forward, and includes a recommended destination theme. *Appendix D* highlights partnership and possible funding sources that should be considered in Plan development.

A first draft of the Sustainable Tourism Plan is provided to the Working Committee in advance of the Draft Plan discussion for input, feedback and “buy-in”. In a session preferably face-to-face (depending upon proximity) or alternatively by video conference, the Consultant presents the Plan in context to the Working Committee who critiques and provides feedback.

A suggested outline for the STEP Sustainable Tourism Plan is outlined below.

STEP Sustainable Tourism Plan Outline

- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Background and Research
- Tourism Vision
- Strategic Goal, Objectives and Priorities; Recommendations and Tactics to Achieve Objectives/
Priorities
- Product/Experience Development
- Marketing
 - Community Theme
 - On-line/Social Media Approach
- Capacity Building Workshop Themes
- Possible Funding Sources
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Timing
- STEP Implementation Plan

STEP Implementation Plan Template Choices

An Implementation Framework (sample templates below) is developed to prioritize recommendations from the Sustainable Tourism Plan and help keep implementation on-track.

Two templates are included below as options for guiding the Plan moving forward. The Consultant and community can choose the template they feel will serve them best, or combine both to obtain a hybrid.

Template Choice 1

Action Item	Budget	Person Responsible	Timeline	Measurement	Status
					Update #1
					Update #2
					Update #1
					Update #2
					Update #1
					Update #2

Template Choice 2

STEP GOALS, PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS				
Goal: To strengthen xx				
Associated Objective: xx				
Rationale: Increased xx				
Markets Implicated: xx				
Overall Timeframe: xx				
TOTAL COST: \$ xx				
PRIORITIES/ACTIONS	WHEN/TIMING	RESPONSIBILITY/ WHO?	COST	EXPECTED RESULTS (& WHEN)
1. Develop...				
2. Seek...				
3. Decide...				
4. Determine...				
5. Institute ways of...				

Identify Capacity Building/Stakeholder Sessions

Several Capacity Building Sessions are identified in the Plan to help enhance capabilities and skills of SMEs and tourism operators to achieve goals of the Plan.

Capacity Building Sessions topics for consideration are offered below; however, sessions and workshops in the Plan need to be relevant to the community and are based on tourism goals, objectives and needs as identified by the community and Working Committee. Three to five Capacity Building Sessions are anticipated and should be identified in the Plan for approval by the Working Committee.

Examples of Capacity Building/Stakeholder Sessions*

- Experience/Product Building*
- Experience/Product Packaging and Pricing
- Experience/Product Clustering* (may include COI)
- Digital/Online Understanding and Skills including social media* (may include COI)
- Marketing
- Labour Issues, HR Best Practices
- Season Extension*
- Storytelling
- Partnerships
- Succession Planning
- Community Engagement
- Community Based Fundraising
- Ambassador Program Development
- Spatial Planning
- Tourism Forum*
- Best Practices Missions*

*A snapshot of Capacity Building Sessions that have worked well in the past is found in **Appendix G**. An overview of existing STEP Tools and Solutions noted on the following page is provided in **Appendix H** (e.g. AMR, GMIST, Best Practices Missions).

Appendix E provides a more in-depth view of Experiential Tourism. The building of experiences may occur as part of a two-stage process, first during an experiential building session targeted at several stakeholders, then as a more of a one-to-one session involving a smaller group of interested tourism operators.

STEP Tools and Solutions

In detailing the Draft Plan, the Consultant will consider employing various tools and resources available from ACOA including Tourism Atlantic, and incorporate them into Plan recommendations. Tools and Resources to consider are shown below. The Tourism Asset Inventory Framework is included in *Appendix B*. As noted above, a description of the tools and solutions is found in *Appendix H*.

Planning Tools

(during process)

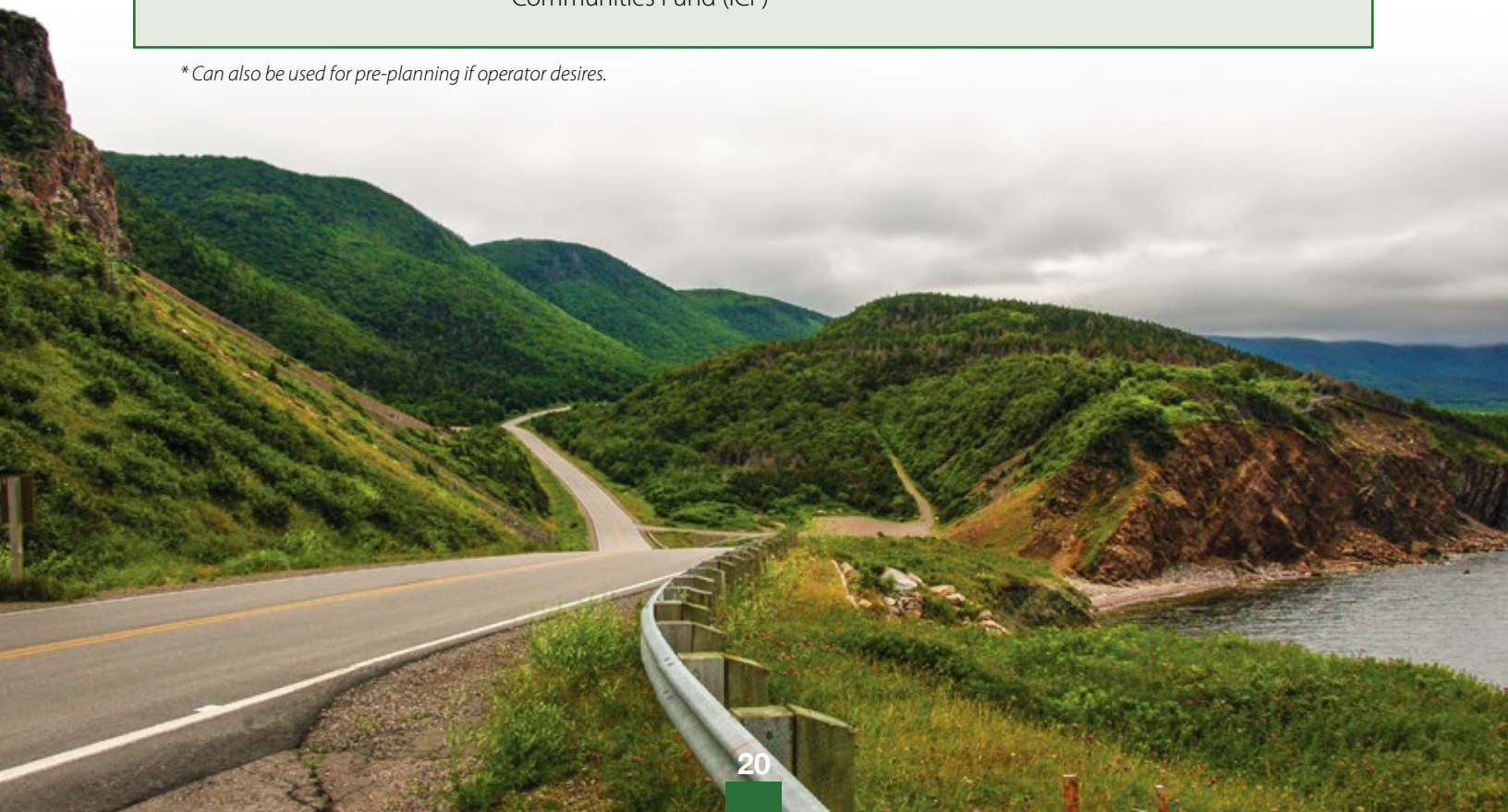
- Tourism Asset Inventory
- Built Heritage Community Walkabout Exercise
- Digital Footprint Tool
- COI Discovery Questionnaire
- Site Assessment Tool*
- VX (Visitor Experience) Evaluation Tool*

Solutions (Post-Planning)

(See *Appendix H* for details)

1. Tourism Best Practices Program
2. Accelerated Market Readiness (AMR) (*operators included for 5-10 operations as part of STEP program*)
3. Gros Morne Institute for Sustainable Tourism (GMIST)
"Edge of the Wedge" (*best for a cohort of operators from the same destination*)
4. Travel Trade Market Readiness Program (TTMR)
6. CanExport
7. Consulting Advisory Services Program
8. ACOA programming – Business Development Program (BDP), Regional Economic Growth through Innovation Program (REGI) and Innovative Communities Fund (ICF)

* Can also be used for pre-planning if operator desires.



Working Committee Feedback on Plan

The Working Committee reviews the Plan and provides feedback to the Consultant for refinement. The response should include:

- Draft Plan critique and adjustments
- The Sustainable Tourism Plan process from here
- Capacity building workshops review and scheduling

STEP 5 – SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLAN REFINEMENT AND LAUNCH CAPACITY BUILDING SESSIONS *(Months 8-9)*

Consultant is On-Site

Key Elements of STEP 5

- Refine and present Draft 2 of Sustainable Tourism Plan to Working Committee.
- Capacity Building/Stakeholder Workshop #3.
- Presentation to Stakeholders of results to date.
- A post-workshop debrief is held with the Working Committee.
- Ongoing refinements to the Plan.

Refine and Present Draft 2 of Plan to Working Committee

Using Working Committee feedback from STEP 4, the Consultant refines and presents Draft 2 of the STEP Sustainable Tourism Plan to the Working Committee. This may take place virtually or in person (e.g. the day before the next Stakeholders Session).

Presentation to Stakeholders of Results to Date

This presentation to stakeholders outlines results of the Plan inputs (current tourism situation, digital footprint information, reminder of priorities) which only the Working Committee has seen to date. Feedback is gathered from stakeholders.

Capacity Building/Stakeholder Session #3

Following the Presentation to Stakeholders, Capacity Building/Stakeholder Session #3 is held based upon a topic outlined in the Plan decided with the Working Committee in Step 4.

Post Workshop Debrief with Working Committee

Following the presentation and Capacity Building/Stakeholder Session #3, a debrief is held with the Working Committee and Consultant, and future capacity building sessions are confirmed.

Ongoing Plan Refinements

Refinements to the Plan continue, based on input/feedback from stakeholders and the Working Committee.

STEP 6 – FINAL SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLAN PRESENTATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING/STAKEHOLDER SESSION #4 *(Months 10-12)*

Consultant On-Site

Key Elements of STEP 6

- Submission and sign-off of final Plan by Working Committee.
- Formal Plan presentation.
- Capacity Building/Stakeholder Workshop 4 is held after Plan presentation.

Submission and Sign-off of Final STEP Sustainable Tourism Plan

Once the final Sustainable Tourism Plan has been submitted by the Consultant, the Working Committee signs off on the Plan and schedules a formal presentation of the Plan to stakeholders.

Formal Presentation of STEP Sustainable Tourism Plan

Once the Working Committee has signed off on the final Plan, the Working Committee helps organize Stakeholder Session #4 to present the final STEP Sustainable Tourism Plan to the community. With a PowerPoint presentation that focuses on the go-forward, the Plan is presented jointly by the Consultant and Working Committee; the recommendations and capacity building sessions are outlined, roles and responsibilities are identified, and the implementation timeline and budget is detailed.

The STEP Plan is the initial focus of this session. The Plan presentation should also reinforce the value of community cooperation, a quick review of the past season, and highlight recent tourism accomplishments that support priorities identified through planning.

The Working Committee leads this session; however, the Consultant may present the final report to “close the loop” on the planning. Next steps are identified and the role of stakeholders, including SMEs, not-for-profits, government, etc. are emphasized. A representative from ACOA attends this wrap-up session.

Capacity Building/Stakeholder Workshop #4

Once the presentation is completed, Capacity Building/Stakeholder Workshop #4 is conducted, as identified in the final Plan.

A sample agenda for the Plan presentation and workshop is shown below.

Sample STEP Final Plan Presentation and Capacity Building/Stakeholder Workshop Agenda

STEP Final Sustainable Tourism Plan Presentation and Capacity Building/Stakeholder Workshop #4

(Estimated time: 3-4 hours)

1:00 – 1:15 pm	Season update and accomplishments to date
1:15 – 2:00 pm	Presentation: Final STEP Sustainable Tourism Plan
2:00 – 2:15 pm	Q & A and participant feedback
2:15 – 2:30 pm	Break
2:30 – 5:00 pm	Working Committee Chair introduces topic and presenter of the Capacity Building/Stakeholder Workshop

STEP 7 – FOLLOW-UP/MENTORING

(at 3, 6 and 12 month mark post plan-completion)

Key Elements of STEP 7

- Follow-up by the Consultant with the Leadership Team, check-in and submission of an interim report – identifying progress to stakeholders, and funders – check-in with Leadership Team at 3 months, 6 months and 12 month mark post plan completion.
- Ongoing Capacity Building/Stakeholder Workshops as required.

Working Committee Transition

Consideration should also be given to making the transition between the Working Committee established for STEP Plan development, and the group that will help propel the Plan forward, referred to as the Leadership Team. The governance model to execute recommendations going forward and the “shape” of the Leadership Team will be addressed in the Plan’s recommendations. The Leadership Team should be established for implementation, in hope that some Working Committee members will stay on for purposes of continuity, complemented by new members. The level of activity and responsibility for the Leadership Team is evident in the actions’ roles/responsibilities outlined in the implementation Plan.

Mentoring and Interim Reports

Consultant formal follow-up and aftercare is built into the STEP process. Once recommendations are “in play”, continuity is important to the Plan’s success. Accountability to both stakeholders and funders, along with mentoring by the Consultant are key to ensuring that recommendations progress. The Working Committee or its successor (depending upon governance recommendations – now called the Leadership Team) is responsible for on-going monitoring of Plan progress and tracking these initiatives.

The Consultant performs a “check-in” with the Leadership Team at three months to ensure progress is on track. At six months post completion of the Plan and again, at the 12 month mark, the Consultant initiates contact with the Leadership Team and works with the Team to generate the Interim Report on Plan achievements, timeframes and priorities to be shared with original STEP project funders, ACOA (including Tourism Atlantic) the Proponent, the Province and community tourism stakeholders. A template for the interim report is shown in *Appendix F*.

The interim report is an opportunity for the Committee to review and assess directions, initiatives and re-calibrate if needed. These meetings and discussions will, unless proximity allows, be conducted by video conference.

Ongoing Capacity Building/Stakeholder Workshops

Ongoing capacity building/stakeholder workshops may be required; these should be continued as specified in the final Sustainable Tourism Plan.

As part of the commitment to SME improvement, implementation of the AMR Program is included in STEP for five tourism operations in the community. A description of AMR is found in *Appendix H*.

Appendix A:

Roles and Responsibilities

Consultant's Roles

- Discuss the overall STEP process with the group of pre-selected stakeholder leaders.
- Assist in nominating the wider and complete Working Committee.
- Be responsive and flexible to the Working Committee and community needs.
- Conduct an on-site, multi-categorical Diagnostic Assessment of the community, and provide a written report of this assessment.
- Lead the Working Committee and Stakeholders through all Stakeholder Sessions.
- Complete and present a real world, functional Sustainable Tourism Plan to the Working Committee, and guide the Working Committee through intensive planning and capacity building sessions.
- Develop an implementation plan to prioritize recommendations from the Sustainable Tourism Plan.
- Within 12 months of the start of the process, the Consultant, along with an ACOA representative, will attend the anniversary presentation, a formal community-stakeholder presentation reporting on the progress of the Sustainable Tourism Plan.
- Using the Sustainable Tourism Plan, the Consultant will check in with the leadership team at three months, then prepare final reports to Tourism Atlantic, evaluating the status and momentum of the community at 3, 6 and 12 months post plan submission.

Working Committee Roles

- Work with the Consultant to identify the members of the Working Committee and determine a champion/chair or co-chairs. The champion/chair will be the liaison between the Consultant and the Working Committee.
- Identify a champion(s)/chair.
- Engage the community at large using both traditional and new communication vehicles. These can include, but are not limited to e-mail, town hall meetings, blogs, social media, networking, etc.
- Where necessary, accompany the Consultant during the on-site multi-categorical Diagnostic Assessment.
- Participate in all workshops that are crucial to the development of the Sustainable Tourism Plan. The Working Committee will be responsible for arranging breaks/lunches during Workshops.
- Work with the Consultant on critiquing Draft 1 of the Sustainable Tourism Plan presented.
- Using Draft 2 of the Sustainable Tourism Plan provided by the Consultant, the Working Committee will meet with the Consultant during capacity building sessions to flush out, complete, and begin to action the Sustainable Tourism Plan.
- Lead and report on experiential developments.
- Within 12 months, the Working Committee will present their updated Sustainable Tourism Plan to the community at large.
- Collaborate with the Consultant on development of the interim reports (at 3, 6 and 12 months).

Appendix B:

Tourism Asset Inventory Framework

Date:

CATEGORY	Community Name
Population	
Tourism Industry Leadership	
Local Tourism Group/Committee	
Chair/Champion	
Annual Budget (if relevant)	
Available Partners/Volunteers	
Demand Generators (DG), Demand Supporters (DS) - Classify each with symbols	
1. Natural Assets: Scenic view points, trails, parks, etc.	
2. Cultural Assets: Human activity sites (tangible and intangible), art, heritage, culinary, and industrial	
3. Built Assets: Heritage homes, unusual buildings and structures unique to the area	
4. Festivals/Events Designed for Visitors: Include dates, and indicate Quality Assurance Compliance	
5. Experiences Designed for Visitors: Indicate Quality Assurance Compliance	
6. Special Projects for Distinct Markets: Meetings, cruise, training, etc.	
7. Underdeveloped Prospects Projects identified for development	
Traveler Services	
1. Accommodations: Indicate Canada Select, TAP Quality Assurance Compliance	
i. Fixed Roof	
ii. Campgrounds/RV Parks	
2. Restaurants/Dining: Indicate Fine Dining (FD), Fast Food (FF)	
3. Shopping: Indicate crafts and unique retail	
4. Visitor Information Services	
5. Support Services: Groceries, banking, liquor stores, health services, parking, and transportation	
Marketing	
1. Marketing Strategy	
2. Marketing Resources: Staff, budget	
3. Other	

Appendix C: Parrsboro Shore Case Study

Summary of STEP Sustainable Tourism Process and Plan

The Strategic Tourism Expansion Program (STEP) along the Parrsboro Shore was triggered in summer 2015 by a community along Nova Scotia's Bay of Fundy, committed to working for tourism growth.

The Proponent for Parrsboro Shore STEP was the Town of Parrsboro (now merged with the Municipality of Cumberland) who "thinking broadly" encouraged communities from economy to advocate (the Parrsboro Shore) to participate. The Town committed a portion of time of an existing staff member (approximately 10 hours per week) to the project's management. In partnership with ACOA including Tourism Atlantic and Tourism Nova Scotia, both of whom were engaged with active representation and support throughout, all three governments invested dollars in the STEP project to develop a Sustainable Tourism Plan and to deliver Capacity Building Workshops specifically designed to meet the needs of the Parrsboro Shore. A certified STEP Consultant (Marsha Pond, Broad Reach Strategies Ltd.) was contracted to provide professional guidance and mentorship.

A strategically-selected, industry-led and nimble Working Committee with a strong Chair/Champion led the initiative and continues to manage project execution. Representatives are shown below.

Parrsboro Shore Working Committee Members

- Gillespie House Inn & Parrsboro Board of Trade (Chair)
- Parrsboro Creative & Art Lab
- Ship's Company Theatre
- Fundy Geological Museum & Geopark initiative
- Former Counsellor, Town of Parrsboro
- Staff, Town of Parrsboro

Ex-Officio:

- ACOA
- Tourism Nova Scotia
- Town of Parrsboro*
- Municipality of Cumberland

** Provided project management support.*

All STEP Working Committee members brought a positive attitude toward growing tourism, rich understanding of the Shore, deep appreciation of its history and culture, and determination to succeed. Parrsboro Shore's enthusiasm to participate in STEP was clearly aligned with the Nova Scotia tourism goal to double tourism revenues by 2020.

The Plan outlines the context for the Plan, its goal and objectives and key development benchmarks, culminating with a detailed go-forward Sustainable Tourism Plan for Parrsboro Shore.

1. Purpose of STEP Parrsboro Shore

At the time, STEP was designed as a six-stage process carried out over a 12-month period. Parrsboro was granted an extension of time to implement additional capacity building sessions.

The STEP process in Parrsboro and area focused on:

- Strategic planning
- Building tourism capacity
- Experiential product development
- Achievable implementation and measurement

2. Building Blocks of Parrsboro Plan

The Parrsboro STEP Plan was thoughtfully prepared and captured insights from influential plans and research, extensive community and Working Committee input and the practical insights gained from working through tactics. These included:

- **Benchmarking:** The Sustainable Tourism Screening Tool gauged the “tourism temperature” of Parrsboro Shore as the project began in late summer 2015. It was recommended that every 18 months beginning in January 2017, the Screening Tool be administered to a group of community members, tourism influencers and leaders to measure progress over time.
- **Community Input:** A well-attended and energetic, Ideas Generation Workshop in September 2015 gathered 48 tourism operators, local business people, municipal leaders and interested residents who offered their insights and ideas for the Plan.
- **Working Committee Involvement:** An active and knowledgeable Working Committee with an influential Chair encouraged community participation and kept the process relevant to local expectations.
- **Tourism Asset Inventory:** An inventory was conducted to view the area’s assets through a visitors’ eyes. The inventory exposed gaps in tourism experiences and services and highlighted tourism opportunities along Parrsboro Shore.
- **Research Review:** Research, interviews and environmental scanning conducted to prepare the Plan was extensive and continued throughout the course of the project.
- **Market Overview:** A snapshot of visitors to the Parrsboro Shore was assembled from Atlantic Canada, provincial and available regional information.
- **Plan Alignment:** Tourism Nova Scotia’s goals, product/experience focus, and marketing approach formed the Plan. It was important for Parrsboro Shore to understand, embrace and complement the Nova Scotia Brand.

Environment scanning and input from industry/community consultations influenced development of the capacity building sessions/developmental workshops of STEP Parrsboro and the final Plan recommendations.

3. Parrsboro Shore STEP Sustainable Tourism Plan

The STEP Sustainable Tourism Plan for Parrsboro Shore was crafted and supported with direction and full participation from the STEP Parrsboro Working Committee.

Guiding Principles

Six guiding principles were established to guide the Parrsboro Plan:

1. Visitor focus is of foremost importance in everything we do.
2. Optimize strong, existing assets and connecting-the-dots can be profitable.
3. Commit to evolving world-class experiences and “learn from the best”.
4. Adhere to pillars of the Sustainable Tourism Plan.
5. Communicate effectively everyday with visitors, partners, residents and stakeholders.
6. Work collaboratively and cohesively among local operators and with provincial and regional efforts to reach target markets.

Parrsboro Shore Tourism Goal

By 2020, the Parrsboro Shore is recognized as the outstanding Bay of Fundy destination for coastal geology and dinosaurs, the power of the Fundy tides and cultural participation. The Parrsboro Shore tourism economy will grow at a rate that contributes strongly to Nova Scotia's goal of doubling tourism revenue.

Tourism Objectives

To realize the tourism goal, Parrsboro Shore focused on five objectives that worked together to:

1. Develop, enhance and deliver outstanding Parrsboro Shore-specific, Bay of Fundy experiences generating longer stays and increased expenditures.
2. Action key opportunities for cultural development in collaboration with Parrsboro Creative.
3. Work as active Ambassadors for the Parrsboro Shore as a tourism destination.
4. Communicate online creatively and precisely, speaking to target/niche visitors.
5. Benchmark, measure and report progress.

Plan Activities and Accomplishments

In order to execute the capacity building actions outlined under each objective, the Working Committee recruited industry/community volunteers to help as "fresh legs" for short term/project assistance. The workshops and activities completed during the STEP Parrsboro year-long project are summarized below. In the case of two Capacity Building Sessions, topic "specialists" were employed to manage a workshop and in both cases, those specialists met (the next day) for personal mentoring/discussion sessions with industry operators best positioned to take action on the topics.





**This brief Toolkit was developed as a special project by the Working Committee and was circulated. There is no information on follow-up; it had not been implemented at the time of writing.*



4. Go-Forward Recommendations 2017 - 2020

The STEP Parrsboro Working Committee achieved milestones and progress throughout 2015 and 2016. In moving forward, the recommendations offered for 2017 - 2020 align with the guiding principles, tourism goal and objectives agreed upon during the STEP process. The Go-Forward Recommendations are designed to continue the momentum generated by STEP Parrsboro.

Objective	Recommendation	Lead	Timeline
Keep the Plan Relevant!	Establish a tourism leadership model for Parrsboro Shore (PS) to drive the Plan to 2020.	PS Working Committee/ Municipality	In place by January 2017
	Work with the Municipality to identify a staff "point person" and sources for funding to support Plan priorities to 2020.	Leadership Team/ Municipality	In place by January 2017
	Ask tourism leaders and influencers to update the Tourism Community Screener to assess progress since 2015.	Leadership Team	March 2017; subsequently every 18 months
	Update Tourism Asset Inventory annually; review for gaps and opportunities.	Leadership Team/ Municipality	Annually
	Update Visitor Data with information from Nova Scotia 2015 Exit Survey and EQ updated information.	Leadership Team	For 2017
	Ensure achievable measures to track progress/success are identified (2016) and reported annually to the industry.	Leadership Team	2017 - 2020
Experience/Product Development	Undertake an Accelerated Market Readiness (AMR) initiative with operators along PS. In 2017, involve 5 to 10 operators. Contact: Johanna Egan, Tourism Atlantic-ACOA; johanna.egan@canada.ca	Leadership Team/ Municipality/NS Tourism/ Tourism Atlantic	July-September 2017. Additional years pending operator interest.

	Survey PS operators for preferences/needs re: professional development sessions for 2017/18. Consider PD/BP sessions online and social media, small business development and St. John Ambulance.	Leadership Team	November 2017, beginning with Plan Presentation
	Work with Tourism Nova Scotia to offer Best Practices training and experience training sessions as indicated by the operator survey.	Leadership Team/Tourism Nova Scotia	As required for 2017-2020
	Support efforts of the committee working to develop a brand-consistent, Global Geopark in the region.	Leadership Team	On-going to 2020
	Continue to leverage priorities of Parrsboro Creative into Plan activities, capturing cultural tourism opportunities.	Leadership Team/ P-Creative	On-going to 2020
	Festival planning: Support planning efforts (underway) for new season - extending fall festival and enhancements to the established Gem and Mineral Show.		



Objective	Recommendation	Lead	Timeline
Community Capacity Building	Develop Parrsboro Shore Ambassador Program including Tourism Fair and operator familiarization initiatives.	Tourism Fair sub-committee/operators	May 2017. Annual evaluation drives planning for subsequent year.
	Identify priority game-changing infrastructure for PS. Consider tourism goal, brand-consistency, uniqueness, and opportunity to connect-the-dots among primary and secondary motivators. Use Tourism Inventory + visitor information to inform.	Focused brain-storming session among key stakeholders	2018
	Continue World Host training with frontline staff	Leadership Team/TIANS	May/June 2017; 2018-2020 as required.
	Update Operator Toolkit		January 2018
Marketing	Discuss with Municipality next steps for positioning of PS tourism information on centralized website including coordinated approach to social media connections/positioning of Route 2 as “the road to the Bay of Fundy” in Nova Scotia.	Leadership Team/ Municipality	2017
	Enhance placement and use of online Calendar of Events as important visitor and operator tool.	Leadership Team	2017
	Ensure branding efforts align with Municipality and provincial efforts.	Leadership Team	2017 - 2020



Important Lessons Learned from STEP Parrsboro Shore:

- ▶ A balanced and well-structured Working Committee which embraces its role as project leader is essential for success.
- ▶ Employ task teams and existing community organizations to assist with STEP initiatives as needed.
- ▶ Where appropriate, expanding the geographic scope of the STEP initiative makes for a Sustainable Tourism Plan that is ultimately more relevant to a visitor and therefore more beneficial to an area.
- ▶ Project management assistance is essential.

Some initiatives that have progressed since completion of the 2016 STEP project include:

- ▶ Geopark has moved forward, application pending approval by UNESCO.
- ▶ Parrsboro Creative has added the Parrsboro International Plein Air Festival and has expanded the 10 Days in October Festival.
- ▶ Community consultations have continued.
- ▶ Main Street improvements have proceeded - Two Island Brewery, Rising Tide Bakery, and Love Jill Gift Shop.
- ▶ Enhanced signage program in the works.



Appendix D:

Partnerships and Funding Options

IDENTIFYING PARTNERSHIPS AND ALLIANCES

The tourism industry, business community, municipality or local community government must form partnerships and include sponsors in the development of a successful sustainable tourism destination both within and outside the community. For example:

- Corporate sponsors for developing and operating community events and attractions;
- Regional and provincial government support, particularly in tourism development and marketing;
- Partnerships with the tourism industry in other communities in the region in event programming and marketing;
- Partnerships within the community, particularly local community service organizations; and
- Volunteerism plays an essential part in community development; this is particularly true in the initial stages of planning. Special attention to the needs of volunteers is required for a successful plan.

Funding Overview

Finding the funding to support major community tourism projects and operations takes time and will require considerable effort. It will be necessary to undertake fundraising program to accumulate the necessary monies to develop major tourism projects, including raising funds for the project's capital costs, day-to-day operating costs, and soft costs such as marketing. Potential funding sources include:

- Government Funding: various public sector sources at the regional, provincial and federal levels
- Destination Levy
- Sponsorship and Donations
- Community Fundraising

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Some potential funding sources at the government level include:

- Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency
- Human Resource and Skills Development Canada
- Provincial government departments (i.e. Tourism, Culture and Heritage and Economic Development)
- Local/regional municipalities
- Other Federal government departments (e.g. Canadian Heritage, Fisheries, Agriculture, etc.)

When approaching public sector departments/agencies for funding support, a community will need to have a business case and a proposal in hand linking the proposed project to the community's Sustainable Tourism Plan.

The proposal should include:

- Objectives and rationale for the community project;
- Description of the concept including target markets;
- Estimated capital costs and proposed sources of funding;
- Projection of operating revenues and costs, and sources of monies to cover operating costs;
- Proposed management and staffing plan;
- Marketing strategy; and
- Potential economic and tourism impacts.

Government funding partners will typically expect the community to contribute to some portion of the total capital budget from non-public sources, either through corporate or community donations, or other fundraising initiatives.

SPONSORSHIP AND DONATIONS

There is increased competition for sponsorship dollars, and it is important a sponsorship program is carefully developed. A key to success in attracting sponsorship and donations is having a clear, realistic, creative, and professional approach. This includes identifying goals, objectives, strategies, markets, and expected visitation. Build a case for sponsorship support: What is this sponsor going to receive as benefit from providing support to the community project? Potential sponsors can include:

- Local area businesses and organizations that stand to benefit from tourism and increased economic activity generally, such as retailers; and
- Large corporations including national/international corporations with a link to the community and a willingness to support community initiatives.

Another form of fundraising is to solicit funding support from philanthropic organizations, foundations, private benefactors, legacy giving programs, and the like. This form of fundraising gives special recognition to supporters and can be the cornerstone of community tourism development.

COMMUNITY FUNDRAISING

There are numerous ideas for community fundraising, from traditional bake sales and community suppers, to more ambitious programs such as auctions and lotteries. In-kind contributions can also be very helpful as there may be local companies and individuals who are unable to donate cash but are able and willing to donate materials, supplies and services toward the development of the community project or program.

OTHER POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

Other ways of raising funds include:

- Admission fee charged at an arrival/parking centre
- A tourism levy, essentially a tax on revenues from visitors, usually a hotel tax
- Fees for local tours, guides
- Direct sale of branded products to visitors (gifts, souvenirs, clothing)
- Royalties from sales by other local businesses of branded items
- Commissions on reservations
- Project/program management fees
- Cooperative contributions from tourism operators in support of special events and tourism marketing.



Appendix E: Experiential Tourism Overview

There is a different take on travel and tourism as we have known it traditionally. Tourism operators and companies throughout Canada and the world are offering visitor experiences and programs today that offer engagement of the senses, enrichment, a sense of community, and personal growth. Travel experiences drive contemporary tourism because they deepen the visitor's appreciation of the destination on a highly personal level through exposure to authentic cultural, historical, human and natural values and attributes.

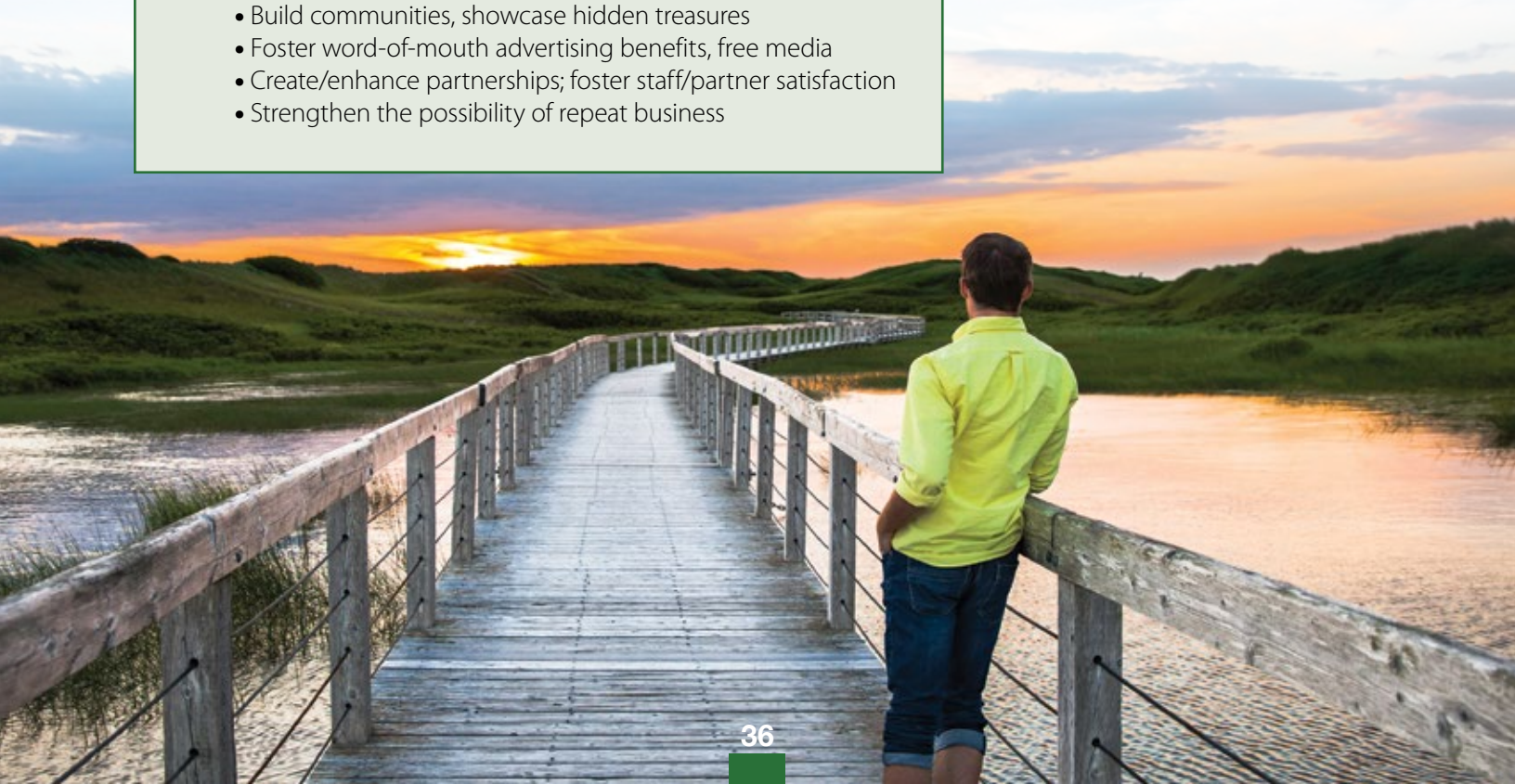
What is Experiential Tourism?

Learning something, by doing something, with someone in the community.

Consumers are increasingly seeking, and are willing to pay for, travel opportunities that deliver new experiences, satisfy curiosity and add novelty and exoticism to their lives. Travel tour operators are responding to travelers' holiday needs by introducing a range of new activities, experiences, itineraries, and tours for luxury travelers. For increasingly sophisticated travelers, travel is becoming more and more about new experiences and adventures for their own personal fulfillment, while also seeking value for money.

Why Create New Travel Experiences? The Benefits:

- Create a competitive, differentiating advantage
- Shift the selling price – attract new markets
- Attract higher yield customers
- Build communities, showcase hidden treasures
- Foster word-of-mouth advertising benefits, free media
- Create/enhance partnerships; foster staff/partner satisfaction
- Strengthen the possibility of repeat business



What makes a compelling experiential product?

- **Know your ideal guest:** Learn as much as possible about your guests; go beyond age, education, and where they come from, and learn about their values, motivations and the type of experiences they want, the environment they most enjoy, etc.
- **Identify:** Begin with market orientation – mass, niche, or customized.
- **Celebrate:** Identify people and places that make your community special and bring them to life.
- **Themes and stories:** Build a theme-based itinerary that tells a story.
- **Optimize:** Local, community resources, people or experts who can tell the stories, share their knowledge, culture and insights.
- **Memories:** Ask yourself “What memories do I want my guests to take away?”
- **Element of surprise:** Think about how to build in those “special moments” that are unexpected, meaningful and will connect in relevant ways with travelers.
- **Authenticity:** Be trustworthy, genuine, and sincere. Respect the people and places, and engage visitors with an accurate story, not one that is sensationalized.
- **Collaborate to compete:** Identify traditional and non-traditional partners and work together to engage and retain the guest and share the wealth.
- **Invest:** Identify, train/mentor, reward, and retain excellent staff and community partners, people who can shift from presenting information to engaging guests.
- **Customize, personalize, socialize:** Know how to connect people and plan the personal touch.
- **Memorabilia:** Identify a take away that will remind them of the people, place and experience.



APPENDIX F:

STEP Plan Interim Results Report Template

STEP Plan Interim Results Report (to be completed six months and one year post-completion of the Plan)

Name of Community: _____

Title of Sustainable Tourism Plan: _____

STEP Plan Completion Date: _____

This Interim Results Report is intended to be shared with regional tourism stakeholders and STEP Program funders, six months following the Plan's completion and again, one year following the Plan's completion, to monitor activities outlined in the Plan and help guide priority initiatives.

1) Timeframe for report: When to when? _____

2) Name and title of person reporting: _____

3) a. Please identify the Tourism Working Committee and Chair who are moving the Tourism Plan forward. Please indicate community and/or organization represented by each a committee member represents.

Chair: _____

Committee Members: _____

b. Is the Community well-represented on the Working Committee? e.g. A balance of industry stakeholders and geographic representation. Are additional members expected?

4) Briefly identify the key recommendations that the Community has moved forward over the last six months in the following areas. Refer to recommendations and implementation timeline in the report and report on priorities within the six-month (and one-year) timeline. If no progress has been made, please skip to the next section.

Examples of priorities:

i. Committee/management structure: _____

ii. Regional tourism funding: _____

iii. Regional communications/collaboration: _____

- iv. Regional tourism marketing: _____
- v. Regional tourism product/experience development: _____
- vi. Benchmarking, performance evaluation of regional efforts: _____
- vii. Special regional projects: _____
- viii. Other (please specify): _____

5) What are the top three tourism projects which the Community has prioritized to address and advance over the next six months?

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____

6) What specific assistance/mentoring is needed to move the priority projects forward?

Project Name/Initiative	Assistance/Mentoring Needed
i. _____	_____
ii. _____	_____
iii. _____	_____

For further information and questions on the STEP Program contact:
 ACOA-Tourism Atlantic

Appendix G: Snapshot of Capacity Building Initiatives that Have Worked Well in the Past

Experience/Product Building: An important focus of STEP is experience development and enhancement. Several STEP efforts (e.g. Parrsboro and Twillingate) have employed the expertise of the Gros Morne Institute for Sustainable Tourism (GMIST) to conduct sessions on experience development. Depending on the nature and needs of the area, the sessions have included a hands-on “experience building” session; an informational presentation with a guest speaker, an industry leader renowned as a signature experience provider; and a roundtable session with sector specific stakeholders (e.g. festival and event organizers) and key individuals from successful sectors in other provinces (e.g. successful festivals/events).

An approach that has also been effective is to have a group of operators or Working Committee members attend GMIST “Edge of the Wedge”.

Experience/Product Clustering: Using the expertise of GMIST as a facilitator, conduct a session involving groups of like or similar experience providers, walking them through a workshop on effectively bundling, partnering and pricing clusters of experiences for sale. GMIST has modularized programming that can work with a group of operators through all aspects of developing an experience with a direct outcome of experiences developed. **There is budget in the project for this type of training.**

Skills including Social Media: It is important to have information on the digital footprint of the area and the online skills of area operators in order to generate a capacity building session to meet needs, and share this information with participants at the outset of the session. It is advisable to use a credible expert in social media to facilitate the session, and where possible, to have participants with devices in hand to experiment in real-time.

Season Extension: Communities and areas throughout Atlantic Canada have advanced season extension at different levels, in different ways and along different timelines. It is important to have information on the season extension experience and results of the area to craft a relevant session/workshop to advance season extension. Share this information with participants at the outset of the session. A session that follows could brainstorm prioritizing a list of season extension ideas and/or could focus on extending the season around a particular theme (e.g. building a cluster of festivals/events in the extended season). It is important to have some concrete go-forward steps as a result of the session, detail a checklist of requirements to move the initiative forward, and possibly strike a taskforce to address specifically the season extension initiative.

Tourism Forum: A Tourism Forum involves presentations by various community stakeholders and members of the Working Committee to present a summary overview of their season, as well as intended plans for the future. Presentations should be about 15-20 minutes in length and might include a panel of stakeholders addressing go-forward intentions/challenges.

Best Practices Missions (BPM): Are hands-on learning opportunities outside the destination and organized for targeted tourism SMEs within the destination (e.g. operations that would benefit most). The BPM program is designed to expose private sector operators and representatives of sustainable tourism communities to successful tourism SMEs and outstanding products/experiences and services outside of Atlantic Canada. During the STEP program, it is encouraged that a group of stakeholders conduct a small best practices mission to a like-destination that is exemplifying best practices as a tourism destination. The BPM program is outlined in more detail in the Solutions section of this Guide. **There is budget in the project for this type of BPM.**

Accelerated Market Readiness (AMR): **There is a budget included in the STEP program for a group of operators to undergo the AMR program.** The AMR program is outlined in more detail in the Solutions section of this Guide.

Other suggested Capacity Building Sessions

- ▶ Sessions to address human resources challenges and labour issues
- ▶ Regional marketing workshops
- ▶ Speed networking where regional tourism stakeholders meet with the intent of forming partnerships
- ▶ Frontline staff training
- ▶ Succession planning
- ▶ Benchmarking and measurement
- ▶ Group of operators or Working Committee members attending GMIST “Edge of the Wedge”
- ▶ Entrepreneurial training – round table discussion on programs with funding partners on opportunities for SMEs
- ▶ Start-Up Weekend – liaise with the start-up community to organize a Start-Up Weekend focused on the tourism sector

An evaluation of each session is conducted and results considered for future actions.

Note: Evaluations of capacity building sessions should follow a similar format to evaluations for other stakeholder sessions.



Appendix H:

STEP Tools and Solutions

STEP TOOLS

Please note: These tools are optional during the STEP process and are designed to be used independently, with a Consultant, or with industry colleagues, but stakeholders should be made aware of their existence.

Built Heritage Community Walkabout Exercise

a) What it is and what it is used for

- The Walkabout is a subjective observation exercise designed to open people's eyes to the built heritage elements in their own communities.
- The tool specifically hones in on older residential properties and landmark buildings, gardens/landscaping, circulation routes, industrial structures, open spaces and their preservation.

b) Application: When to use it

- The tool is particularly useful for communities that may tend to overlook the value of the built heritage in their midst and how these features contribute to a sense of place that might interest travelers.

c) How to use it

- Community members fill out forms individually or in small groups, walk to various areas in their community and answer built heritage questions that they previously may not have thought about.
- This exercise leads to discussion and generation of ideas for preservation and enhancement of unique features that may appeal to tourists.



Built Heritage Community Walkabout Exercise

Community Feature	Questions	Notes
Older Residential Properties	1. Are there typical patterns for traditional housing types in the community (building shapes, orientation, number of openings)?	
	2. What are the distinctive features that characterize older residential buildings (roof forms, windows, materials, colors, decorative detailing, chimneys)?	
	3. Identify outstanding/well-preserved examples.	
	4. How have these structures changed over time? Have the changes been sympathetic? Why or why not?	
	5. How does new construction fit in with older residential neighborhoods?	
	6. What kinds of outbuildings are associated with these buildings (sheds, root cellars etc.)? Are there many of them left?	
	7. What are the typical setbacks of buildings from roads?	
Gardens/ Landscaping	1. What types of plantings are traditionally found in and around older residential properties? Along streets/roadways?	
	2. Are/were properties typically fenced? What patterns of fencing exist/existed in the community?	
Circulation Routes	1. Identify road and circulation patterns including old pathways and trails.	
	2. What is it like for pedestrians to walk to the community? (i.e. is it Safe? Scenic? Convenient?)	
	3. What is the condition of roads and pathways?	
Landmark Buildings	1. Identify the special landmark buildings in the community (churches, public buildings, etc.).	
	2. How have they changed over time (alternations/use)? Have these changes been in keeping with the period? Why or why not?	
Commercial/Industrial/ Fisheries Structures	1. What types of structures exist/existed in the community? Describe them in terms of form, materials, location and function.	
	2. What changes have they undergone over time? Have these been sympathetic? Why or why not?	
	3. Are many of the structures vacant or under-used?	
	4. What community needs could be accommodated in vacant structures (e.g. recreational, social, housing, cultural activities)?	
Open Spaces	1. Describe the open spaces in the community (empty lots, shorelines, parks/recreational areas, wetland areas). What condition are they in (i.e. well-maintained, neglected, polluted)?	
	2. How do they contribute to the quality of life in the community?	
	3. How could under-utilized spaces best be used to contribute to the quality of life in the community? (As infill housing? Recreational space?)	
General	1. How do the above features/structures contribute to a unique sense of place?	
	2. Has anything been lost from the community fabric?	
	3. What should be preserved?	
	4. Identify "eyesores" in the community. What could be done to improve them?	
	5. Identify the areas in the community where people like to hang out, to walk, to engage in recreational activities. What makes them attractive? How could they be enhanced?	

Site Assessment Tool

a) What it is and what it is used for

- Used to assess market readiness and attractiveness of physical attractions, parklands, museums and other “gated” tourism facilities.
- Attempts to quantify site information from the visitor’s perspective and points to elements that are strong or need improvements.

b) Application: When to use it

- Use to assess level of market readiness of the site to identify where improvements can be made. Use to benchmark in year 1, then annually thereafter.
- Sections can also be incorporated into on-site surveys to assess visitor satisfaction with various site components, as desired.

c) How to use it

- Best done individually, then cross comparisons can be made.
- Best used when at least two evaluators (e.g. attraction manager, funding agency) assess the site, so comparisons can be made and discussed.



Site Assessment Tool

Subject Property: _____

Evaluation Performed by: _____

For analysis of all forms of tourism facilities. This tool is intended to provide indicators toward tourism market readiness. (Can be used in tandem with *The Ten Essentials of Successful Travel Products/Experiences*)

Part A: Site Evaluation			
Criteria:	Max. Possible Points	Actual Score	Comments
1. Importance/Significance	5	0	
a) Importance of Attraction or Resource: International (5); National (4); Regional AC (3); Provincial (2); Local Area (1)	5		
2. Uniqueness	10	0	
a) Uniqueness/distinctiveness of Attraction or Resource: Internationally (5); within Canada (National) (4); Regional (AC) (3); Provincial (2); within Local Area (1)	5		
b) Is a Demand-Generator (4) (draws people in and of itself); Is a Demand-Supporter (2) (draws people when combined with other local attractions/events); Is Undeveloped (1)	4		
c) Uniqueness is linked to history or theme of site (1)	1		
3. Ease of Access to Site Location	14	0	
a) Online Access: Web/Mobile Access about & to site with GPS coordinates (4)	4		
b) Transportation Route Access (3)	3		
c) Directional Signage to Site (2)	2		
d) Proximity to other Services (Clustering) (3)	3		
e) Parking Access: Large Buses, RVs, Handicap (2); Cars only (1)	2		
4. Architecture/Facilities	18	0	
a) Visual Appeal: physical facilities & on-site aesthetics (4)	4		
b) On-site seating (seats, benches, chairs, rest areas); Plentiful (2); Adequate (1).	2		
c) All weather Facilities (2)	2		
d) Reception/Interpretation Area (2)	2		
e) On-site Signage (e.g. directional) (2)	2		
f) Access for those with Disabilities (2)	2		
g) Ability to handle large groups: (40+) (3); 20-39 (2); <20 (1)	3		
h) Visually appealing/professional materials associated with site (print, & electronic; e.g. signage) (1)	1		

5. Season/Hours of Operation		8	0	
a)	Season of Operation: Open Year Round (3); mid-May to mid Oct (2); Sporadic opening times -potential for multi-season (1).	3		
b)	Consistent Opening Hours: Open daily/evening at hours convenient to visitors (3); Open daily during business hours (2); Not always open (1)	3		
c)	Reservation System: On-line (2); Telephone (1)	2		
6. On-Site Amenities & Services		15	0	
a)	Front-line Staff/Volunteers Trained in Customer Service (5)	5		
b)	Restroom facilities: Handicapped Access (3); Yes but no Handicapped Access (2)	2		
c)	Provision of signage, literature, programs in three languages or more (2); Two Languages (1)	2		
d)	Shopping: Locally made items available (2); Other (1)	2		
e)	Eating/drinking facilities: Local specialty food (2); Other (1)	2		
f)	Participant Comfort, Chairs, Benches, Lighting, Sound (2)	2		
MAXIMUM SITE SCORE (70)*		70	0	
<p>**The higher the score, the more Market Ready the Site. A score of less than 50% of the maximum potential is considered well below acceptable market readiness capacity.</p>				

Part B: Program/Experience Evaluation			
Criteria:	Max. Possible Points	Actual Score	Comments
1. On-site Experience	19	0	
a)	Well themed: Tied to local area (3)	3	
b)	Customized program can be geared to specific group or target market (3)	3	
c)	Unique experience – One of a kind (not available elsewhere) (2)	2	
d)	Involves Tours/Activities/Demos/Re-enactments/Storytelling/Interactive Exhibits (3)	3	
e)	Features ways to interact with distinctive cultural, historical and/or natural wonders of the area (2)	2	
f)	Provides hands-on opportunities: Often (2); Usually (1)	2	
g)	Authenticity/Realism (2)	2	
h)	Engages participants (intellectually, emotionally, personally, physically, and/or spiritually) (2)	2	

2. Pricing		4	0	
a)	Options (variety, packages etc.); There are pricing options from which to choose? Several (2); Few (1)	2		
b)	Good value for dollar - perceived fair prices (in relation to similar attractions) (2)	2		
3. Product Distribution		4	0	
a)	Product is easily adapted for Independent and/or Group Travelers (2)	2		
b)	Is packaged with local supplier products (hotels, restaurants, campgrounds, other attractions) (2)	2		
4. Overall Enjoyment		3	0	
a)	Satisfaction, delight, Wow factor (potential for referral or repeat business) (3)	3		
MAXIMUM PROGRAM SCORE (30)**		30	0	
**The higher the score, the more Market Ready the On-site Program. A score of less than 50% of the maximum potential is considered well below acceptable market readiness capacity.				
TOTAL SCORE (100)		100	0	

Adapted from Reid, L. (1997) and Tourism Synergy Ltd. (2006).

VX (Visitor Experience) Evaluation Tool

a) What it is and what it is used for

- Assesses the quality of the visitor experience provided by an individual tourism operator.
- Uncovers how a visitor perceives a travel experience before, during, and after participation.
- Helps assess the overall experiential capacity and determines follow-up actions.
- Sets benchmarks for ongoing evaluation.

b) Application: When to use it

- Use on a consistent basis (annually recommended) to ensure the tourism experience measures up to the expectations of today's sophisticated traveler.

c) How to use it

- For use by a tourism Consultant with experience in assessing the visitor readiness of experiences. Results are discussed with the operator and Consultant recommends relevant enhancements and improvement ideas.
- For use by the tourism operator, independently or in collaboration with the Tourism Consultant. Results are compared with the Consultant's assessment and further action discussed.

VX (Visitor Experience) Evaluation Tool

The VX Tool uncovers how a visitor perceives a travel experience before, during and after interacting with it. Travel experiences are subjective, context-dependent, and dynamic over time so **this tool represents a benchmark at a given point in time.**

A Visitor Ready Experience is: built for an identified market and engages visitors, is offered with consistency and meets visitor expectations. The experience is effectively marketed and all licenses, permits, and insurance required to operate are in place.

Name of Operator and Experience: _____ **Date:** _____

BEFORE

For OPERATORS the experience is/has:	Description	Excels as Visitor Ready	Visitor Ready	Somewhat Visitor Ready/ Enhancements Recommended	Not Visitor Ready/ Requires Development	Comments/Improvement Ideas
1. Visitor ready: Pre-trip information is available and enticing.	Easily found via various online and offline channels (i.e. website, provincial travel information, etc.). Experience is effectively costed, priced and prices/details are available in advance. Point of contact/ booking is identified. Supporting marketing collateral for both online and offline marketing. Links with provincial and/or regional offerings.					
2. Social media presence	Uses various platforms with content tailored for each (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.). Imagery used and interaction with visitors and others is ongoing. Information is regularly updated.					
3. Connection to local elements	Utilizes local partners, products, suppliers, and community storytellers to create local partnerships.					

DURING

For OPERATORS the experience is/has:	Description	Excels as Visitor Ready	Visitor Ready	Somewhat Visitor Ready/ Enhancements Recommended	Not Visitor Ready/ Requires Development	Comments/Improvement Ideas
4. Training	Evidence of training/coaching of experience providers, staff, partners, suppliers.					
5. Well-themed/well-staged throughout	The experience is well-themed and the storyline is followed and reinforced at every available opportunity. Uses appropriate venue; can include cues, comfort levels, lighting, sound, background noise, use of props, tools.					
6. Authentic and genuine	Offers a unique perspective on the authentic stories and special interests of an area. The experience is personal and relevant to a visitor.					
7. Aesthetically suitable	Aesthetics, surroundings and materials are visually appealing and add value to the experience.					
8. Customized*	The experience is personalized where possible for individual visitors, taking into account different visitor types/interests.* (see EQ types below)					

9. Value for money	The experience is good value for the dollar spent.					
10. Interactive and memorable with active engagement	Experience engages/challenges visitors to participate, triggering as many of the 5 senses as possible and leaves lasting memories.					
11. Incorporates relevant takeaways	Incorporates a tangible takeaway, memorabilia or photo opportunity consistent with the theme.					
12. An opportunity to learn	Visitor learns something and/or has a sense of discovery as a result of the experience.					
13. WOW factor	There is a WOW factor associated with this experience that makes it worthwhile and special.					
14. Delivers on the promise	The experience is consistent with or exceeds the promise made beforehand.					
15. Recommendation-worthy	Enthuses a visitor to recommend this experience to others.					
16. Feedback mechanism	Techniques to capture visitor feedback are in place and encouraged, i.e. TripAdvisor, exit survey. The feedback is utilized to quickly adjust and enhance the experience.					

AFTER

For OPERATORS the experience is/has:	Description	Excels as Visitor Ready	Visitor Ready	Somewhat Visitor Ready/ Enhancements Recommended	Not Visitor Ready/ Requires Development	Comments/Improvement Ideas
17. Post-experience engagement	Operator encourages visitors to engage online post-experience (i.e. share photos, experience details, recommendations). Promotion advocates for the experience.					
18. Tracking for success	Tracking measures to gauge the response to and success of the experience are integrated into the program, regularly evaluated and the information used for improvement.					

* EQ Visitor Types (as defined by Destination Canada)

I. Cultural Explorers: interested in nature observation activities; exhibits, architecture, historic sites/buildings, museums; and sightseeing activities.

II. Authentic Experiencers: interested in exhibits, architecture, historic sites/buildings, and museums.

III. Free Spirits: interested in shopping, dining, and other food-related activities; entertainment, performing arts, amusement parks; and accommodation-related activities.

Please note: More information on EQ visitor types can be found at www.destinationcanada.com/resources-industry/explorer-quotient

Digital Footprint Tool

a) What it is and what it is used for

- Assesses the digital assets of a region.
- Reveals the online accessibility of a region from a visitor perspective and points to elements that are strong or those that need improvement.
- Provides concrete recommendations on improving the digital representation of a region.
- Offers operator-specific tactics for improvement based on industry best practices.
- Sets benchmarks for ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

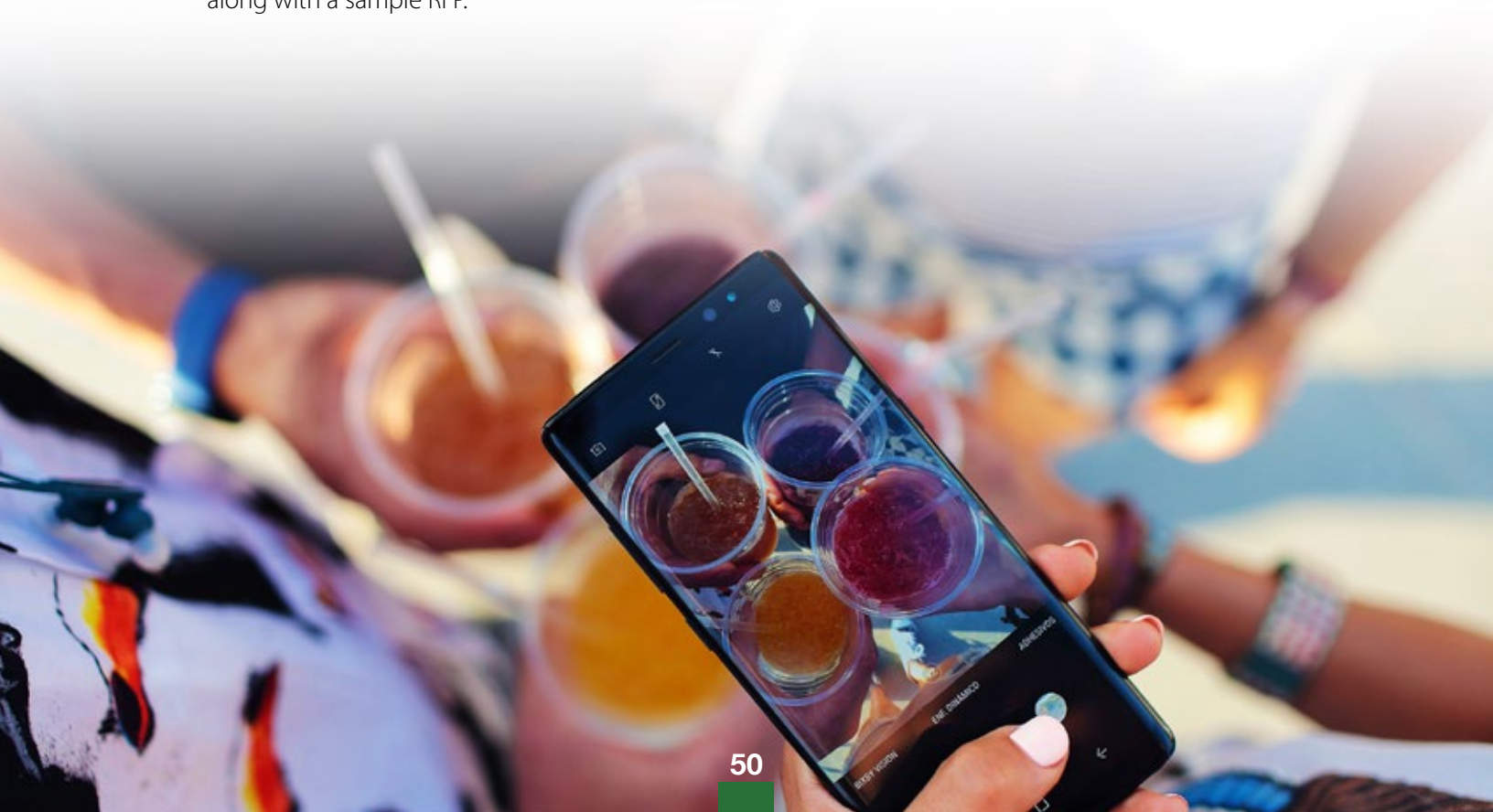
b) Application: When to use it

- Use to assess overall digital footprint and opportunities to make improvements.
- Executed during Stage 1 and used to establish benchmarks, which can be monitored moving forward. Results can also inform capacity building sessions.
- Revisit recommendations annually to ensure tourism assets are well represented online and accessible in visitor planning.

c) How to use it

- For use by a third party Consultant with expertise in digital marketing, ideally focused in the tourism industry.
- Results are discussed with the region and participating operators and the Consultant prepares recommendations for improvements using the provided report templates.
- Overarching recommendations are incorporated into the final report.

The digital footprint tool is comprised of three components; a template to collect relevant data from DMO and operator websites, social media platforms, Google listings and review sites, a destination report template and an operator report template. These have been provided in a separate file titled Digital Footprint Tool', along with a sample RFP.



Digital Footprint Tool

Digital marketing is quickly becoming the primary focus of many tourism marketing campaigns. Despite several digital platforms being less than a decade old, these technologies have become a vital component in promoting a destination to potential travelers. Provincial marketing organizations, destination marketing organizations, regional tourism associations and individual operators have all adopted varying technologies, tools and platforms to include in the marketing mix for their regions. The widespread adoption of these digital marketing approaches has led ACOA to incorporate a dedicated digital assessment as part of the STEP process to help communities and regions better understand the impact of their digital presence.

Digital Evolution

Today visitors can explore a wide range of digital assets to learn about a region, ranging from provincial tourism sites to individual operator social media accounts. It is important to recognize the role of each of these channels when working to promote a destination, and to encourage cohesion among the digital assets of a region when applicable. Tourism stakeholders today have a varying range of comfort when it comes to leveraging digital marketing opportunities, and the goal of this digital footprint tool is to help identify opportunities for improvement while recognizing community successes.

Employing The Tool

Unlike other tools in the STEP Toolbox, the Digital Footprint Tool has been designed to be outsourced to a third party. The Digital Footprint Tool is comprised of three main components provided in a digital file:

- 1) A **template spreadsheet** used to collect relevant data from DMO and operator websites, social media platforms, Google listings and review sites. This spreadsheet has been designed to capture raw data, and leave room for subjective interpretation by the consultant through the 'comments' columns.
- 2) A **destination report template**, to be populated by drawing conclusions from the data, collected in the spreadsheet to offer guidance and suggestions on improving the overall digital presence of the destination.
- 3) An **individual operator report template**, to be populated using data collected from the spreadsheet to identify areas for improvement for each unique operator within the destination.

While these templates have been prepared to offer some structure to this process, it is important to note that the instructions provided are merely a guide. Individual consultants are encouraged to incorporate their own expertise into the conclusions drawn and recommendations provided, offering destinations and operators rich insights into improving their digital footprint. Templates should be updated with destination specific insights, current tourism best practices and region specific imagery. Ultimately, the spreadsheet and reports will provide the destination with a snapshot in time of their digital presence and concrete recommendations for improvement. These recommendations will feed in to the broader STEP Strategic Plan and provide a sense of direction when it comes to digital marketing for tourism stakeholders moving forward.

Communities of Interest Discovery Questionnaire

a) What it is and what it is used for

- Validates and determines the market readiness of a particular Communities of Interest (COI).

b) Application: When to use it

- Typically used at Phase 1: Discovery and Identification stage of COI process.
- Can be used at any time when brainstorming/determining COIs for future development.

c) How to use it

- To be used by a few key stakeholders in a community/region.

Communities of Interest (COI) - Discovery Questionnaire

About the COI

1. Please describe the identity or interest of the COI you are considering.

2. What are the best times of year to experience the COI products/experiences (check all the periods that apply)?

- January-March April-June July-August September-October November-December

3. Does the opportunity exist to expand the season through new products or education/brand awareness created by the COI? Circle Yes or No

If, yes, please identify how

4. Research shows there are six primary motivators that drive visitation to Atlantic Canada. Is the COI a current or potential visitation driver and what categories does it fall into? (check all that apply)

- Sightseeing and Touring
 Coastal Experiences
 Culture, Entertainment and Heritage (including culinary)
 Signature Events
 Experiential Accommodation
 Outdoor Experiences

5. What products, services, experiences, festivals/events currently exist to support the COI and visitors?

6. Who owns the product, services or experiences?

7. Are there any known gaps in products, services or experiences limiting the development of the COI? (ultimately, what is holding the COI back)

8. What is the primary geographic area for the COI? For example, 26 hiking trails in Cape Breton. This may be an area in a province, a whole province, several provinces or the region.

About the Local Advocates

9. Do you already have a group of passionate local advocates?

Advocate	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	YouTube	Total

10. Are you already working with these local advocates?

11. Is there an opportunity to grow the community of local advocates?

12. Do you feel this this community is currently active online? Circle Yes or No.

13. Are existing activities/events that take place where local advocates gather/connect? (e.g. annual conferences, festivals, meetings, etc.)

Marketing

14. Is there an obvious strong and passionate champion organization to lead the COI and mobilize local advocates? (e.g. an organization that is currently responsible for product development and/or marketing)

15. Do high quality marketing assets currently exist? Please describe and how many. (e.g. photo libraries or videos)

16. What promotional materials currently exist? (Circle all that apply)

- a. Website
- b. Packages
- c. Social Media
- d. Brochures
- e. Maps, Guides
- f. Other, please specify: _____
- g. None

17. What social platforms are currently being used that support the COI approach? Please include the number of followers and engagement rates.

	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	YouTube	Total
Number of followers					
Level of Engagement					

18. Does it have dedicated resources (internal or external) responsible for social media? Please describe.

19. What is its current marketing budget? _____

a. What percentage of the current budget is allocated to:

i. traditional media _____

ii. online media/social media _____

20. Which organizations, provincially or regionally, are you currently or could you potentially work with to advocate for the COI approach?



STEP SOLUTIONS

GROS MORNE INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM (GMIST)

Opening its doors in Rocky Harbour, Newfoundland in May 2004, GMIST has developed and delivered leading-edge, relevant curricula in experiential tourism, environmental stewardship, and courses of interest to the adventure tourism sector. The core strategy for GMIST is to offer unique specialized courses and ongoing support to groups of tourism operators. Expert instructors provide highly specialized training and are also contracted to help course alumni implement course principles in their specific situations.

Programs such as Edge of the Wedge (Experiential Tourism) have redefined models of tourism training in Canada, and other GMIST developed programs have set new benchmarks for the industry. GMIST has trained over 1,200 individuals across Atlantic Canada representing every tourism sector.

The Institute offers leading-edge professional development workshops scheduled for fall and winter/spring delivery. Workshop prices vary between one-day free offerings to three-day workshops priced at \$999 plus HST. A 50 percent subsidy is offered to eligible Atlantic Canadian tourism businesses to attend some GMIST programs.

Under GMIST leadership, tourism operators of every type and size have been assisted in the building of profitable and sustainable businesses by providing richer, more satisfying, authentic experiences for customers, while actively protecting the environment. In similar fashion, GMIST has implemented business procedures and policies to demonstrate its commitment to the environment, the local culture, and the local economy.

For more information see: www.gmist.ca

Contact: Jonathan Foster, Executive Director, P.O. Box 130, Rocky Harbour, NL A0K 4N0



TOURISM BEST PRACTICES PROGRAM

One of Atlantic Canada's premier industries is tourism and there is a definite need to support learning and product development to ensure the continued growth of this industry. The Gros Morne Cooperating Association in partnership with ACOA – Tourism Atlantic, has successfully established the Tourism Best Practices program which supports these issues in all sectors of the tourism industry of Atlantic Canada.

Best Practices Missions are learning opportunities organized for tourism operators in Atlantic Canada. The program is designed to expose private sector operators and representatives of sustainable tourism communities to successful tourism operators/entrepreneurs and outstanding products outside of Atlantic Canada. It is intended this exposure will stimulate the generation of new product ideas, improved practices in customer service, innovative operational techniques, sound planning models and partnership opportunities for the Atlantic tourism sector. Best Practices missions provide Atlantic Canada tourism operators with first-hand industry knowledge and information on development and marketing models which exemplify attributes such as quality, high productivity, extended seasonality and motivation to travel.

Since the beginning of the program in 2000, Tourism Atlantic has hosted 110 Best Practices Missions with varying themes such as Experiential Tourism, Product Development, Festivals and Events, and Culinary Tourism. In total, there have been over 1,000 private sector participants attend Best Practices Missions. The Best Practices project has had a strong impact on improving tourism product in Atlantic Canada. The majority of participants have experienced an impact on their businesses since participating in the mission, e.g. quality improvements, increased visitation or increased revenues.

Mission themes are determined based on tourism strategic priorities in the region and input is provided by various levels of government, as well as industry in the Atlantic Canada provinces. Priority is given to those missions that focus on issues/opportunities most critical for industry operators, destinations where "experiential" is the key focus of a product, destinations where "sustainable tourism practices" are demonstrated, and destinations that have been successful. Although the missions themselves serve as a form of demonstrative research, the program is intended to reinforce the importance of following the Research/Product/Marketing Continuum model in all tourism endeavors.

Depending on location, mission costs vary; however, the average participant cost per mission is \$2,300. Private sector operators will be reimbursed at 50% of total costs (up to a maximum \$1,500). Federal, provincial, crown agency employees, as well as federally and provincially elected officials must cover their own expenses.

For more information see: www.gmist.ca/tourism-best-practices

Contact: Jonathan Foster, Executive Director, P.O. Box 130, Rocky Harbour, NL A0K 4N0
Phone: 1-709-458-3610 E-Mail: info@gmist.ca

ACCELERATED MARKET READINESS (AMR) PROGRAM

The AMR program is a business improvement program that offers individual tourism operators the ability to increase their standards of excellence, be more responsive to emerging tourism trends and ultimately, increase revenues. The program is offered in an inexpensive and time efficient manner; a typical AMR project is completed over the course of a 24-hour period. During a project, the operator will meet with an independent qualified tourism Consultant, who will identify key areas of focus for their business and provide suggested improvements.

AMR is intended for use by individual tourism operators and has been successfully used by a variety of tourism operators, from small B&B type operations to large scale tourism resorts and community colleges. The program is designed to work with clusters from a defined geographical area with approximately five individual operators at a time.

AMR is included for a potential group of operators as part of the STEP project.

Contact: STEP ACOA Working Committee member

TRAVEL TRADE MARKET READINESS (TTMR) PROGRAM

The TTMR Program equips tourism operators with tactics, processes and best-practices on how to develop and expand your business through travel trade. A toolkit is available from the provincial travel trade marketing team entitled, *Building Your Business with Overseas and U.S. Visitors: A Toolkit on How to Work with Travel Trade*.

Operators interested in serving this market should access an introductory one-hour webinar produced by Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1FPL9iBQeM&feature=youtu.be>

For more information, contact your provincial travel trade development team to access travel trade market readiness workshops.

CANEXPORT

CanExport provides direct financial assistance to small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) registered in Canada to help them develop new export opportunities and markets, especially high-growth emerging markets.

CanExport provides financial support for a wide range of export marketing activities. CanExport reimburses up to 50 percent of eligible expenses but requires applicants to match funds on a one-to-one basis.

CanExport is delivered by the Trade Commissioner Service (TCS) of Global Affairs Canada, in partnership with the National Research Council of Canada's Industrial Research Assistance Program (NRC-IRAP).

For more information, contact the regional ACOA office in your area. A list of these offices is found at: <http://www.acoa-apeca.gc.ca/eng/Pages/contactus.aspx>

CONSULTING ADVISORY SERVICES (CAS) PROGRAM

The CAS program is funded by ACOA and managed by the Central Business Development Corporation (CBDC) throughout Atlantic Canada. The Program is designed to provide SME businesses and non-profit organizations with the resources and information needed to operate effectively and efficiently.

Eligible CAS program activities include:

- i. **Diagnostic Assessment:** The assessment involves conducting a thorough review of all aspects of an existing operation in order to provide an objective assessment of its current performance, key issues and future prospects.
- ii. **Business Management Development Practices:** Undertakes a comprehensive review of the management skills of an existing business in order to provide an objective assessment of its current status and identify opportunities to enhance operations/management performances.
- iii. **Access to Capital:** Sources other options for capital beyond government sources of financing.
- iv. **Market Readiness/Export Potential:** Undertakes an objective assessment of an existing company to determine its export readiness and identify areas that require enhancement to successfully enter the export market.
- v. **Specific Studies/Business Plan Mentoring:** A Consultant assists the client with the development and initial implementation of a study or business plan.
- vi. **Aftercare/Mentoring and Follow-up:** Provides mentoring or coaching assistance and advice to a client who has proceeded with the implementation of advice/strategies developed in any of the above described CAS products.

For more information, contact the local CBDC in your area. A list of CBDC offices can be found at:

<https://www.cbdc.ca/en/contact>

ACOA PROGRAMMING

Business Development Program (BDP)

The BDP can help start up, expand or modernize businesses. Focusing on SME enterprises, the BDP provides access to capital in the form of interest-free repayable assistance. Most business sectors are eligible except retail/wholesale, real estate, government services, and services of a personal or social nature.

The BDP also provides financial assistance, in the form of non-repayable assistance, to not-for-profit organizations that provide support to Atlantic businesses.

Regional Economic Growth through Innovation Program (REGI)

Canada's regional development agencies (RDAs) are one of the ways that the government delivers on its Innovation and Skills Plan in the regions. RDAs across Canada deliver two common streams of programming to fuel economic growth through innovation and create more well-paying jobs for Canadians. These streams, along with tailored programming in each region, foster the right environment to start and grow businesses and create the conditions for the development of strong, dynamic and inclusive regional innovation ecosystems across the country.

Business Scale-up and Productivity

Funding offered under this stream helps businesses to accelerate their growth and assists with the adoption of innovative technologies that support scale-up, productivity and global competitiveness as well as the development of and entry into new markets.

Regional Innovation Ecosystems

Funding offered under this stream helps create, grow and develop strong and inclusive regional networks that support business growth and innovation. It also fosters the entrepreneurial environment necessary for more innovative regional economies and increases the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME), women entrepreneurs and under-represented groups.

Innovative Communities Fund (ICF)

ICF invests in strategic projects that build the economies of Atlantic Canada's communities. Working in partnership with Atlantic communities and stakeholders, ICF builds on the strengths of communities and provides the tools needed to identify opportunities available for their sustainable economic growth.

ICF focuses on investments that lead to long-term employment and economic capacity building in rural communities. Urban initiatives that stimulate the competitiveness and vitality of rural communities may be considered on a selective basis.

Eligible recipients include non-commercial/not-for-profit organizations such as local development associations, municipalities and their agencies, business or technology institutes, industry/sector associations, economic development associations, local co-operatives, universities and educational institutions.

Contact for all ACOA programming: ACOA STEP Working Committee member

