



CENTRAL COUNTIES TOURISM

STRATEGIC PLAN  
2018-2020

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# Central Counties Tourism Strategic Plan 2018-2020

***“Creating Value & Driving Growth”***

# Executive Summary

In 2015, the Board of Directors of Central Counties Tourism (CCT) engaged in a planning process that resulted in a three-year Destination Management Plan, intended to guide the organization through the period of 2015 to March 2018. In early 2017, the Board struck an Ad Hoc Committee (AHC) to recommend a strategic direction for the organization for the period 2018 – 2020. The organization subsequently issued a Request for Qualifications seeking a qualified consultant to develop a new strategic plan in cooperation with the AHC, and the project was awarded to FLOOR13 (F13) in August 2017.

## Mandate

CCT contracted FLOOR13 to work in cooperation with the AHC to oversee the review and strategic direction planning for 2018 – 2020, and to present the strategic plan at the November 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Board of Directors.

## Research Findings

F13 conducted extensive research with stakeholders of all three regions making up Central Counties, as well as in-person and online surveys of staff and Board members. In addition, a full-day strategic planning session was held with the Board on September 15th. A number of themes emerged, which helped to populate the key phases of the strategic planning process, such as Mission, Strategic Direction and Primary Objectives. Key themes were:

- A consistent degree of confusion exists around the role of CCT, and how it is intended to support tourism organizations and stakeholders.
- Need for stronger engagement and partnerships with regional tourism organizations.
- Need for an effective means of measuring results and success.
- CCT should play a leadership role in advancing advocacy efforts with municipal governments, the public, and media.
- CCT should play a leadership role in market development and market readiness training.
- CCT should facilitate the development and promotion of tourism stakeholders sharing their stories with target markets.

## **Mission**

***Our Mission is to foster the growth of tourism visitations to Central Counties, leading with strategic partnerships that strengthen market readiness and consumer awareness.***

Based on research input, the Mission speaks to the “why and how” of CCT as a business organization.....helping to grow business volumes.....by taking a leadership role in developing partnerships.....that strengthen the destination offering and build a stronger level of market awareness.

## **Core Purpose**

***We are passionate about telling the story of tourism in Central Counties.....providing our industry partners with leadership and a unified direction by which to grow their business and achieve their goals.***

Based on research input, the Core Purpose speaks to what drives the organization.....and ultimately the Staff and Board’s higher purpose.

## **Strategic Direction 2020**

***Aligned with Ontario Ministry of Tourism priorities, and powered by strategic partnerships that focus on communicating, innovating and marketing.....Central Counties will achieve growth of 3% annually in product and experience development, and growth in total visitations of 5%, by 2020.***

This direction describes CCT's desired state in 2020, having successfully executed its three-year Strategic Plan. Hard goals that support its Mission, achieved through a partnership approach to education and advocacy, building the destination, and telling the stories.....and aligned with and respectful of Ministry priorities.

Supporting the Strategic Direction is the engine intended to power the effort of **“Creating Value and Driving Growth”** .....the Primary Objectives. The PO’s focus on three achievements:

- a destination that is better informed about the value of the tourism industry and the role CCT plays in maximizing that value;
- a destination that is market-ready;
- a destination that is recognized by, and compelling to, its target markets.

### **Primary Objectives**

1. ***Communicate the value of tourism, the role of CCT, and how CCT can facilitate stakeholders capitalizing from tourism.***
2. ***Work with tourism organizations and stakeholders to enhance and deliver experiences to target markets.....for stronger experience alignment and greater visitor spend.***
3. ***Facilitate and contribute to tourism stakeholders sharing their stories with target audiences.***

The PO’s drive the development of actionable strategies, tactics and KPI’s intended to produce the desired outcome of a market-ready destination and growing business volumes.



# Situational Analysis

The tourism industry has become a mainstay of economic prosperity for many regions and municipalities throughout Canada. Central Counties Tourism (CCT) is no exception to this and has focused on achieving a leadership role within the Ontario tourism landscape. CCT's role is one of advocate, facilitator, and marketer of tourism for the region. Made up of three distinct regions, the CCT has over the past several years worked in cooperation with its regional partners to establish progressive marketing initiatives to grow overall visitation and tourism spend. The three main tourism organizations.....Headwaters, York Scene and Durham Tourism.....each offer an array of unique tourism experiences within their own region. Nevertheless, CCT has established an experience-based B2C marketing strategy highlighting common themes found throughout all three regions, which can be found on the [yorkdurhamheadwaters.ca](http://yorkdurhamheadwaters.ca) web site. Building upon the successes of past years, the CCT has now undertaken a new strategic plan for the period 2018-2020, based on understanding today's market realities and competitive environment.

The GTA remains the region's primary feeder market, as it is for several other neighbouring regions. The ease of access from the GTA works in favor of Central Counties for day visitations, but brings a larger challenge for overnight stays. In order to address this, CCT will work with its partners at developing new and innovative offers, a solid multi-segmented approach, new and innovative communication strategies, partnership opportunities, and solid data collection to better target its clientele, leading to extended length of stay.

# Research Findings

# Stakeholder and Industry Feedback

In the process of developing the 2018-2020 Strategic Plan, a stakeholder and industry outreach was conducted. Town hall meetings were held in each of the three regions: Headwaters, York and Durham. Well over 80 stakeholders from industry, municipalities and interest groups attended the three sessions. As well, both the CCT board of directors and staff participated in the sessions.

All groups were asked a series of questions and encouraged to brainstorm and share their opinions on the CCT's role and what its focus should be over the next three years. Lively discussions and debates were had in each region culminating in a full board of directors retreat held to review outputs from the stakeholder sessions. Input from the board retreat narrowed the research feedback down to a series of key outcomes to be focused on for the following three years.

The following is a summary of this feedback, which has been used as a basis for the development of this plan.

# Stakeholder/Industry Feedback Summary

Stakeholders were asked a series of questions, such as their impression of CCT's present role, what it should concentrate on going forward and whether the marketing and branding was resonating with the client base and potential travellers. The feedback received pointed out that there still seems to be some confusion as to CCT's role in the regions due to the fact that there are already destination marketing organizations that exist in each of the regions. The flow of responsibility and oversight needs further clarification. The fact that the region is so diverse in its product offering makes CCT's role in finding common ground a challenge. Stakeholders were, however, well aware that CCT is responsible for promoting the regions and initiating marketing and sales initiatives, in which stakeholders and tourism organizations can participate. They also see the CCT as an effective liaison between stakeholders and other tourism bodies such as OTMPC and the Ontario Ministry of Tourism.

As for looking ahead, stakeholders felt that CCT has a greater role to play in market readiness training and market development, municipal and stakeholder advocacy, and funding local initiatives. As well, CCT should be at the forefront of product gap assessment and product development of sectoral interests (Aboriginal, LGBT, ethnic communities, parks/trails). Data collection, which is presently ineffective, should also be a major initiative of CCT. CCT should also initiate market development of the travel trade and sports segments for the regions.

The feedback also dealt with CCT and York-Durham-Headwaters branding. Many felt that CCT should only be used as a B2B resource brand, aimed at DMO's and stakeholders; whereas the YDH brand should remain as the region's main B2C facing brand, promoting experience-based products throughout the region to potential clients.

# Staff Research Feedback

# Staff Research Feedback

The CCT staff was engaged through an online survey and their feedback suggested that the operator-centric strategy initiated in the current DMP was taking root. Stakeholders that had taken advantage of CCT's services had benefited from the relationship. They pointed out that the next strategic plan should maintain established initiatives so as not to change direction, as may have happened in the past. It was stated, however, that there should be a quid pro quo with stakeholders receiving CCT funding to supply client consumption data post-initiative. It was also felt that CCT should expand its communication strategy to stakeholders in order to better inform them of CCT's role and initiatives.

As for the branding issue, staff felt the YDH.ca site should be the main vehicle for all client facing interaction, relegating the CCT brand to B2B purposes only. They felt this is the only way to cross-sell and highlight each region's opportunities to potential travellers.

Looking forward the staff felt strongly that there is great potential in further development of the trade travel, MC&IT, family fun, soft adventure and sports segments, as well as tapping into new markets (aboriginal, LGBT, ethnic communities) and working closely with sectoral associations and groups.

# Board Research Feedback

# Board Research Feedback

The board of directors of CCT was asked a series of questions relating to the functionality and role of CCT, via an online survey or individual meetings, and ultimately participated in a board retreat to brainstorm on overall direction for the 2018-2020 Strategic Plan. The board felt that CCT's role still needs some clarification with the region's tourism organizations and with its stakeholders. It felt that CCT should move forward with a greater emphasis on engagement and partnering with tourism organizations, advocacy and measuring, as well as market readiness training for tourism businesses. The board sees the development of efficient data collection as a vital part of determining a true picture of CCT's impact on tourism, and whether initiatives undertaken were indeed bearing results. This would also play a key role in advocacy efforts, and setting future goals in partnership with respective tourism organizations. It was clear that the board felt the experience driven strategy implemented in the previous year with the YDH.ca site was promising and should be maintained, and in fact expanded to include other experiences (Aboriginal, LGBT, ethnic communities, arts and culture, and soft adventure), involving a greater number of stakeholders.

It was felt that CCT should undertake further engagement with stakeholder communication, sharing research, projects and successes on a more regular basis. Digital and social media marketing, it was felt, needed to be significantly upgraded in order to become the platform of all marketing initiatives.



## Refresh on Key Themes from Board Retreat:

- Advance key business relationships with tourism organizations that produce collaboration and positive results
- Lead in a tourism asset-mapping, gap analysis and investment plan for the region
- Facilitate tourism partners in creating compelling new experiences aligned with best customer segments
- Facilitate tourism partners in marketing and telling their stories to best customer segments.
- Identify a program for data gathering across the region that is relevant, strategic and timely.
- Improve and increase stakeholder engagement through a program of relevant, collaborative and partner-based meetings/working groups, programs and initiatives.
- Explore and facilitate new niche experiences ie: LGBT; Aboriginal; ethnic communities, etc.
- Lead and support the growth of the Travel Trade in the region
- Help the region understand the business of tourism and the opportunities arising from it.
- Support the development of pan-regional experiences

# Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport Priorities and Alignment

# Aligning with Provincial Priorities and Strategies

Key to Central Counties Tourism strategic planning is the alignment of strategies and priorities to those of the Provincial governing body.

In the following section, we outline the priorities and pillars of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport and indicate how & where alignment exists with CCT's direction.

# OMTCS – CCT Alignment: Five Pillars

## Product Development

- CCT's market and trade readiness and exploring innovation with its potential partners; tourism asset-mapping, gap analysis and opportunity identification.

## Investment Attraction and Investor Relations

- CCT's public relations and media strategy together with aforementioned gap analysis to promote investment opportunities in the region.

## Workforce Development and Training

- CCT's training and workshop series in collaboration with regional tourism organizations to identify priority areas and industry-equipping opportunities.

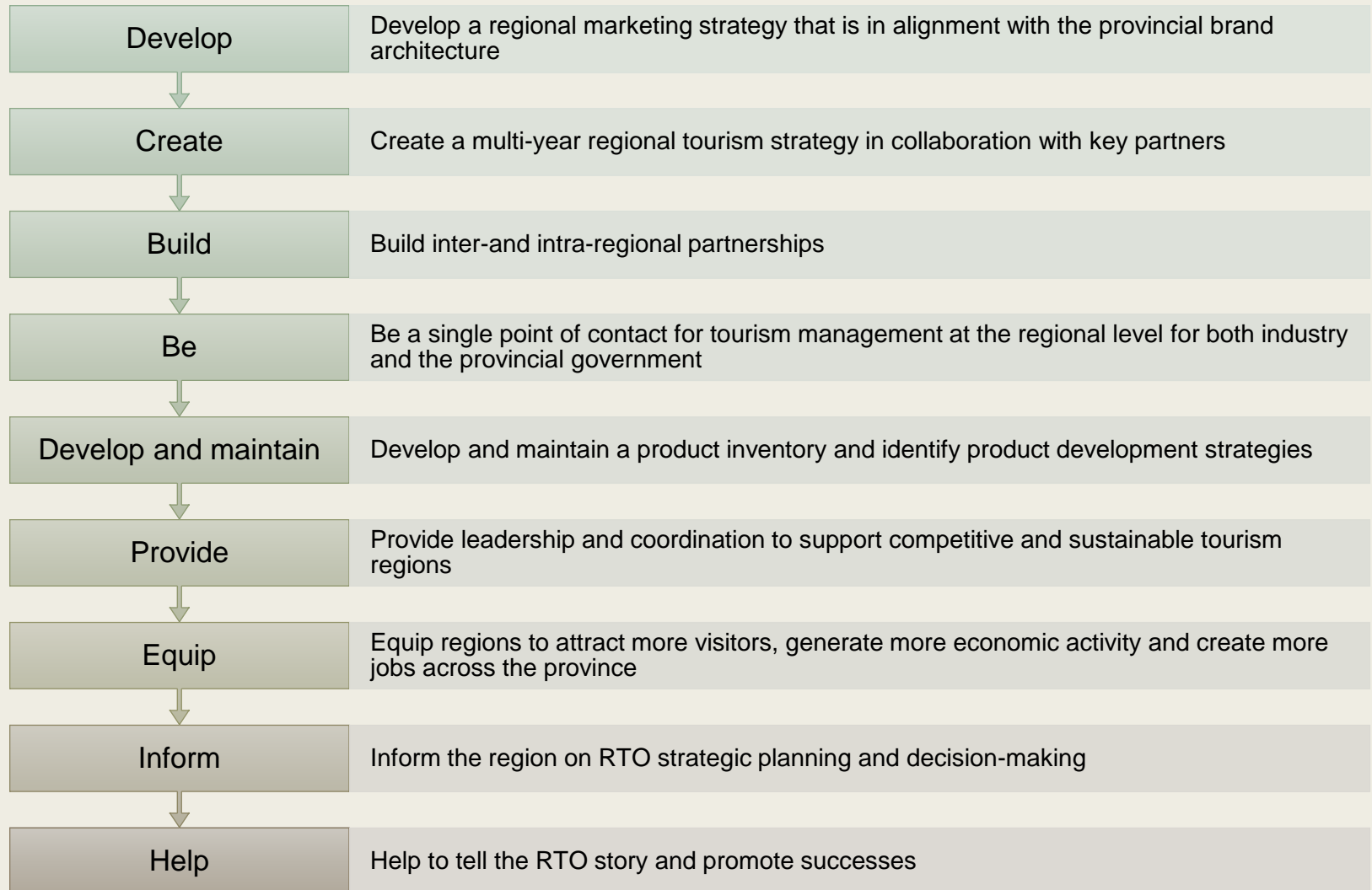
## Marketing

- CCT development of new regional marketing promotions, coop marketing, digital and social media marketing initiatives.

## Partnerships

- CCT leading with facilitation of partnerships, collaborating on growth strategies with all tourism organizations in the region.

# OMTCS – CCT Alignment: RTO Roles & Responsibilities

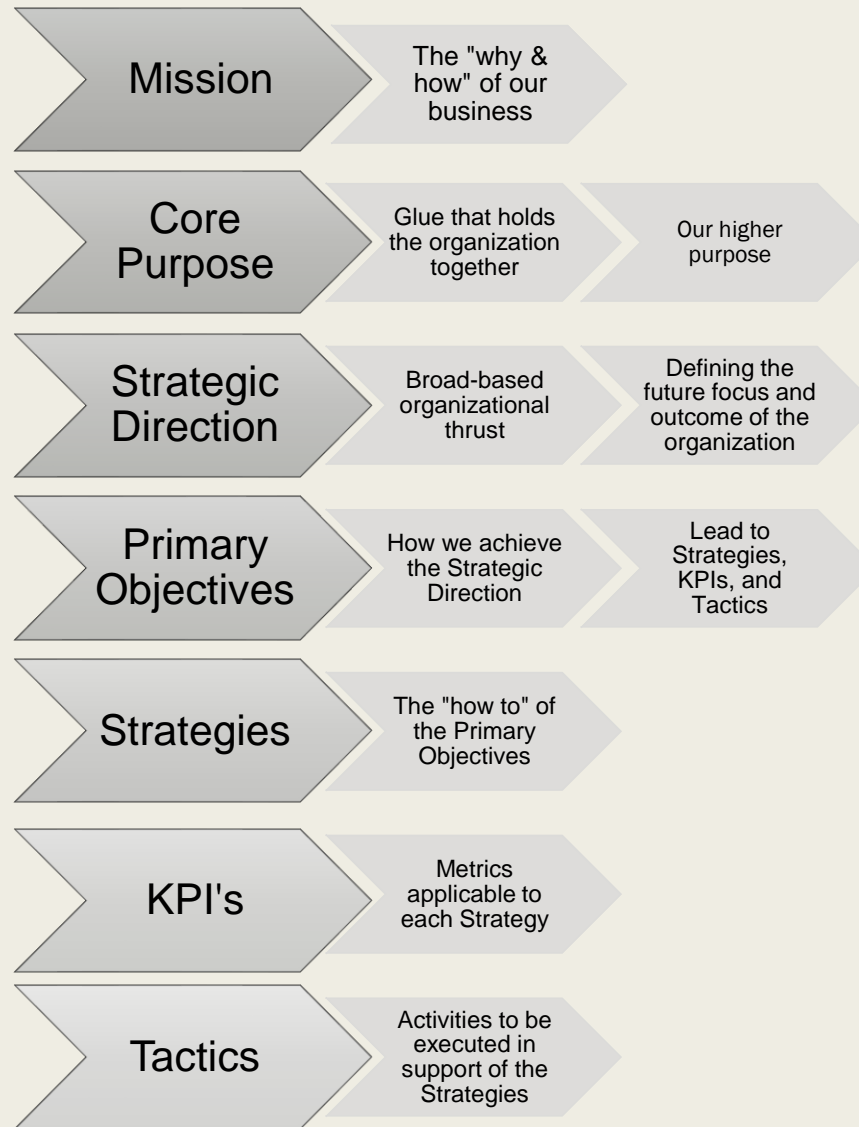


# Central Counties Tourism 2.0

## The next three years.....

*“Creating Value & Driving Growth”*

# FLOOR13 Strategic Planning Outcomes



While stakeholder, staff and board research pointed to a number of potential directions for the new strategic plan, the board retreat identified priorities and logistics that favour an ultimate focus on three desired outcomes:

- A destination that is better informed about the value of the tourism industry and the role that CCT plays in maximizing that value
- A destination that is market-ready
- A destination that is recognized by, and compelling to, its target markets

The 2018 – 2020 strategic plan has been developed in order to crystalize this focus and identify opportunities to accomplish these outcomes.



# CCT Mission

Key themes from board retreat:

- leadership
  - building market awareness
  - strategic partnerships
  - experience development
  - for tourism organizations and tourism businesses
- 

## ***Mission:***

***Our Mission is to foster the growth of tourism visitations to Central Counties, leading with strategic partnerships that strengthen market readiness and consumer awareness.***

# CCT Core Purpose

Key themes from board retreat:

- voice for stakeholders/businesses
  - a unified voice to grow tourism
  - elevate the tourism experience
  - industry leadership
  - tell compelling stories of the region's tourism offerings
  - help business operators to realize their goals and dreams
- 

## ***Core Purpose:***

***We are passionate about telling the story of tourism in Central Counties, and providing our industry partners with leadership and a unified direction by which to grow their business and achieve their goals.***

# What Does Success In 2020 Look Like?

## Regional Alignment:

- All tourism organizations are engaged and collaborating in growing tourism for the region.
- Greater engagement and partnership across the region re: collaborating in training, industry knowledge, market and trade readiness, data gathering and advocacy.
- CCT stakeholder feedback notes greater visibility of tourism in public, and stronger presence of CCT in tourism sector.

## Visitor Experience & Metrics:

- Visitor activity & spend increases due to innovative product & experience offerings and enhanced market awareness.
- Stakeholders report improved ROI across all regions.
- Travel trade responds with new and increased bookings; quality improvements in regional visitor experiences.
- Increase in business events sector by # of events, delegates, length of stay and economic impact.
- Visitor tracking data is reported regularly and demonstrates improved visitor experiences, including quality and value of visit, as well as relevant market data.
- Client experience path reflects ease in finding information, being inspired to visit, and booking.

## Innovation:

- CCT leads tourism in the province with notable and innovative experiences introduced in each region annually e.g.: Aboriginal Tourism, LGBT, new/improved infrastructure

# Strategic Direction 2020

Key themes from board retreat:

- growth in product/experience development by \_\_\_\_%
- growth in visitations by \_\_\_\_%
- web/social media interactions and analytics
- timely & measurable data collection
- collaborative partnerships with tourism organizations and key operators
- growth in partner engagement

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## ***Strategic Direction 2020:***

***Aligned with Ontario Ministry of Tourism priorities, and powered by strategic partnerships that focus on communicating, innovating and marketing.....CCT will achieve growth of 3% annually in product and experience development, and growth in total visitations by 5%, by 2020.***

# Primary Objectives: “Creating Value and Driving Growth”

Three Primary Objectives in support of the Strategic Direction:



# PO1. Communicate the value and measurable impact of tourism; the role of the CCT; and how CCT can facilitate stakeholders and tourism organizations in capitalizing from tourism. (B2B)

## Strategies

Advocate for the region, in tandem with partners, on CCT's role and key public policy issues that impact the tourism industry and the visitor experience.

Invest in local awareness activities and public relation strategies in Central Counties, educating municipal governments, media and the public through an effective campaign of key messages and data.

Facilitate the development of a regional data-gathering and analysis model that reflects the critical metrics required in order to effectively measure success, visitor data, economic impact and trends.

Collect and share research reports back to stakeholders with up-to-date changes in how Ontario is being positioned, and other marketing innovations and best practices.

## Tactics

- Meet with municipal managers and elected representatives to help inform and educate on CCT's role, responsibilities and tourism benefits.
- Work with OMTCS and TIAO to insure the regions' stakeholder concerns are addressed.
- Quarterly town halls throughout Central Counties to discuss tourism benefits to the community.
- Identify and enlist major partners that can advocate and influence, along with CCT, for the merits of tourism development and investment
- Share success stories of regional partners and stakeholders as examples of positive tourism benefits.
- Grow CCT stakeholders CRM in order to expand information distribution on E-learning, seminars, conferences and month-end performance metrics.
- Create a standard high level data-sharing report that can be shared through social media feeds. (occupancy rates, length of stay, visitor geographic origin, attractions visitation stats, partner highlights, research findings).
- Continue the region representatives program to meet and update tourism stakeholders.

## PO2. Work with tourism organizations and stakeholders to enhance and deliver experiences to target markets – for stronger experience alignment and greater visitor spend. (B2B)

### Strategies

Lead a region-wide tourism mapping/market readiness exercise, identifying gaps in products, experiences, amenities and infrastructure.....demonstrating opportunities for improvement, innovation and business development.

Collaborate with regional tourism partners to support training and workshops related to aligning experiences with market segments, and leveraging social media and pricing/package strategies.

Support Travel Trade development with regional tourism organizations while leading trade-readiness standards and programs.

### Tactics

- Develop communications strategy around definition of “market readiness” and why it’s important to future growth.
- Work with each region and town to assess market readiness of realistic tourism assets and gap list.
- Draft a “Development & Investment Plan” in partnership with tourism organizations and stakeholders, including potential sources of investment capital.
- Work with the regional tourism organizations and stakeholders to develop experiences and packages that address the gap list and target market interests, with a particular focus on pan-regional opportunities where appropriate...describing product/experience offerings, target markets, pricing and communications.
- Conduct market readiness analysis with regional tourism organizations, to determine where the most important industry-equipping opportunities are.
- Work with regional tourism organizations and neighbouring RTO’s to develop training programs for tourism operators to address identified industry-equipping opportunities.
- Build with regional partners net pricing itineraries which are travel trade ready.
- Identify inventory of travel trade product and experience package offerings.

# PO3. Facilitate and contribute to tourism stakeholders sharing their stories with target audiences. (B2C)

## Strategies

Support collaborative marketing programs for regional tourism organizations investing specifically in the travel trade, leisure, sports and business events segments.

Facilitate workshops for CCT stakeholders teaching storytelling, using resonating and memorable experience descriptors, aligning stories with market segment profiles.

Continue to develop a dynamic website product that captures all elements of a successful client experience path to purchase.

## Tactics

- Continue existing experiences programs while looking to add further tri-region offerings. (agri tours, cultural tours, first nations, soft outdoor tours, LGBT )
- Collect and analyze social media traffic data to better target the right audiences with compelling promotions.
- Increase marketing efforts into the GTA based on collected data analytics.
- Encourage regional stakeholders to adhere, update, share and promote the YDH social media feeds.
- YDH.com to remain the B2C conduit.
- Continue experiences based search model on YDH.com
- Ensure the client's experience path to purchase inspires to visit, and is user-friendly to research and book.
- Continue to add visual content to YDH.com (video, photos). CCT created and/or user-generated.



# Key Performance Indicators

# KPI's

The CCT, through the execution of the primary objectives, strategies and tactics listed in this plan, will look to measure its success based on the following metrics:

- Increase in visitations of 5% by 2020.
- Growth of 3% in product and experience development by 2020.
- Participation by all three regional tourism organizations in a minimum of two seasonal CCT marketing programs
- Initiation of a data collection strategy across all regions and regular reporting to stakeholders by 2019.
- Development of regional tourism market-readiness program, including two training sessions per year by 2019
- Increase in the number of business events by 10% per year across the region.
- Quarterly stakeholder town halls throughout the region.
- Enlist 5 municipalities per year to initiate a tourism marketing plan.

# Milestones

# Milestones: 2018

- Create a target list of municipal officials in the region that have the most short term potential for tourism development, to meet and advocate on tourism.
- Work in cooperation with provincial entities to address stakeholder concerns
- Initiate a quarterly calendar of town hall meetings throughout the region to inform and educate on tourism's impact and market readiness.
- Build working groups or committees across RTO to lead on market readiness assessment: data needs, training, advocacy and awareness, and tourism asset-mapping.
- Develop a 'tourism awareness' regional media relations program and news tracking service for the region – in partnership with tourism organizations (Story ideas, spokespeople, key messages, calendar of events, innovations, non-traditional partnerships, etc.).
- Work with province and neighboring RTO's to initiate trade-readiness standards and training program.
- Work with regions to identify a comprehensive program to track key indicators re: spend, visitation, business events, etc.
- Investigate a visitor tracking program for the region – demographics, travel values, visitor experiences vs expectations
- Continue to develop new experience products and pan regional offers, in cooperation with local tourism organizations
- Ensure regional stakeholders adhere to, share and promote the YDH social media feeds
- Create net pricing itineraries for the travel trade segment and facilitate pilot travel trade fam tour during summer and fall

# Milestones: 2019 - 2020

- Develop workshop series to encourage innovation in tourism
- Begin to report on key metrics to region, providing insight on marketing and experience development responses and strategies
- Develop a stronger social media analysis model to better target the right audiences with compelling offers
- Explore best practices in supporting business events growth
- Continue to populate YDH.com with compelling promotions and ensure the client path to purchase is user-friendly and efficient
- Investigate non-traditional partnerships to stimulate tourism awareness and visitation across the regions
- Enlist more municipalities to develop their own tourism strategic plans
- Increase GTA awareness with more targeted promotions based on previous year's data.
- Draft a development and investment plan with regional partners to identify and attract interested investors



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Central Counties Tourism  
Strategic Plan

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