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Introduction

The board and staff of Central Counties Tourism believe that the visitor economy is delivered by businesses, championed by communities and supported by DMOs/RTOs. The 2023-2024 Business Plan reflects this belief and further cements CCT's leadership role in the industry – both regionally and at the provincial level.

In October 2022, the Central Counties Tourism Board of Directors met for a facilitated session to determine the assumptions and priorities that were to guide the 2023-2024 programs. This plan lays out the actions and tactics required to deliver against the priorities.

CCT knows why it exists; to grow the visitor economy. The board and staff recognize that in order to achieve that, two things have to happen:

1) Tourism businesses must have the capacity to grow and be more successful
2) Municipalities must deliver a welcoming, visitor-friendly environment

There are many ways and layers to achieve the above. Each of the many objectives, goals, and tactics is designed to support these two keys to tourism success.

It is important to note that this plan is a stand-alone based on expected provincial funding and earned revenues. One of the priorities for fiscal 2023-2024 is to begin to determine how CCT can further support other organizations and government ministries deliver against their priorities, when those priorities have an impact on stakeholder ability to grow the visitor economy. While this is a long-term strategy, if CCT is successful in securing project funding, a revised budget and project plan will be developed for board approval.

2023-2024 Assumptions

While there is general comfort that the worse of the pandemic is behind us, there are concerns that pent-up demand for international travel could stunt domestic travel recovery and growth.

- Visitor comfort levels will continue to increase, however:
  a. Ontario travel within Ontario will stay flat to 2022
  b. Canadian travel to Ontario will remain flat to 2022
  c. International travel to Ontario will increase over 2022
- Regional accommodators are planning for a strong 2023, while sport tournament and conference travel will see an increase but there is concern for 2024 & 2025
- Provincial funding for Central Counties Tourism will remain flat for 2023-2024
- Additional funding to support the tourism sector will not be available
- Supply chain and staffing will continue to hinder recovery and growth
- There is potential for a recession and, if mild, there won't be too large an impact

2023-2024 Priorities

Beginning in September 2022, the Executive Director and Industry Relations Managers set meetings with all municipal and regional partners to determine what their 2023 priorities were and what they would like Central Counties Tourism to assist with and or fill the gap for. Eleven of these meetings had taken place prior to the board planning session and the below priorities reflect both what was heard by the municipal partners and the direction given by the board. An overarching priority from CCT's municipal partners was the need for funding support to achieve their goals. To this end, new for 2023-2024, CCT will begin to look for new funding sources like the Tourism Relief Fund that can be leveraged to directly support tourism stakeholders. This is a long-term strategic shift for the organization but one that, once successful, will have a lasting impact for stakeholders.

Below are the business plan priorities by pillar and the role CCT plays to support them.

Policy/Advocacy

Priorities: Municipal focus/investment in tourism through:
　　　　　　 1) Community Tourism Plans (new & updates)
　　　　　　 2) Wayfinding plans/updates including text / digital / mobile
　　　　　　 3) Tourism 'lens' integration across departments
　　　　　　 4) Presenting why tourism matters to new municipal councils
　　　　　　 5) Consistent use / understanding of language – role, gaps, pillars, etc.
　　　　 Create networks of support organizations (CoC, BoT, Small Business Enterprise, WFDB, etc.) within communities to increase support for the visitor economy
　　　　 Add the 'tourism-lens' in other Ministries / funds (Ag&Rural / Enviro / MMA etc..)
　　　　 Focused messaging to residents about the value of tourism in their community

Role:

Municipal Focus/Investment: CCT plays both a leadership and supporting role when it comes to our municipal partners. Our leadership role is ensuring that municipalities are aware of and believe the impact the visitor economy has on their community. We do this through meetings and presentations to council. We then support their efforts to invest in and grow the visitor economy by facilitating Community Tourism and Wayfinding Plans, speaking with senior staff about the importance of putting a "tourism lens" on decisions of other municipal departments, and leveraging investments with support from the partnership program where applicable.

Organization Networks: Lead the development of community business support organizations networks and facilitate discussions by municipality to create synergies of support for tourism-related businesses and initiatives.

Other Ministries: Research other ministries and agencies (Agriculture, Environment, Trillium, etc.) whose stakeholders have a role in tourism and lead discussions with them about the importance of the visitor economy and how CCT could support their efforts

Changing Resident Sentiment: This is another long-term priority that will be led by CCT and supported by regional/municipal partners and stakeholders to determine and implement effective methods to educate residents on the importance of the visitor economy to keep their community vibrant.

Central Counties Tourism aligns tourism resources to expand its stakeholder's ability to grow the visitor economy

Research

Priorities: Geo-Fencing for individual stakeholders, BIAs, Municipalities, etc.
Municipal data insights for product/market/investment development
Data collection partnerships so that we can collectively tell compelling stories (ROI)
Champion evidence-based decision making by ensuring stakeholders know how to interpret and utilize the information
Cost recovery

Role: Educate stakeholders on the research services CCT offers and their benefits
Lead aggregate data collection, analysis and reporting for the region
Support stakeholders' understanding of how to interpret and utilize the data
Support the development of new tools and datasets to further the understanding of the visitor economy and how to grow it.

Industry Equipping

Priorities: Keep building Learning LAB including:
                  Train the Trainer module
                  Interactive experience development toolkit
                  Add experts and local applications to TAP
                  Marketing "how to's" (from the Marketing Priorities)
        Develop a survey toolkit including QR code integration (for events)
        Connect artists to the visitor economy (from Experience Development Priorities)
        Connect municipalities with education / students
        Assist associations develop and implement strategies to grow the tourism workforce

Role: Lead the development and delivery of relevant toolkits/course/workshop content
        Support stakeholder knowledge through B2B website and social channels
        Work with DMOs/Stakeholders to build and deliver compelling content for residents
        Facilitate workshops, learning and networking opportunities for artists to understand the tourism landscape and how they can fit
        Communicate, through B2B channels, student placement opportunities to stakeholders

Experience Development

Priorities: Leverage CCT funds/resources to support stakeholder-led initiatives
Focus on trails – themes, connectivity between trails and to economic centres
Use technology and innovation in the development of content and storytelling
Connect artists to other tourism stakeholders
   Create an artist database
   Networking / "speed dating" events
   Celebrating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
   Putting a "tourism lens" on culture program outcomes (Culture Days)
Inspire stakeholder-led experience development
   Networking opportunities
   Sharing success stories
   Industry trends and highlights
Expand 'Shoulder Season' experiences
Explore film industry experience opportunities

Role:

Focus on Trails: Facilitate discussions between other RTO's, municipalities, trail groups, conservation authorities, businesses, etc., to grow trail connectivity. Coordinate outcomes of discussions to create new trails experiences and support the development and implementation of those experiences.

Technology: Lead the development and use of augmented reality pilot project that will deliver compelling experiential content. Cost recovery model.

Connecting Artists: Facilitate discussions and networking opportunities between artists and the broader tourism sector. Support the compilation of artist databases.

Stakeholder-led Experiences: Lead opportunities to learn about the benefits of collaboration. Facilitate planning/development discussions between stakeholders. Connect stakeholder groups to other potential participants. Support the implementation and marketing of launched experiences.

Shoulder Season: Facilitate the development of shoulder season experiences and supporting content. Support the implementation and marketing of market-ready experiences.

Film Industry: Research/Explore opportunities to engage stakeholders in the development of film-centric experiences

Marketing

Priorities: Content Development
                      New markets
                      New tag-line / focus
                 B2B Engagement
                      Produce content about experience development
                      Sharing best practices
                      Content-rich social engagement
                      Compelling and resource-rich website
                      Develop templates/toolkit for partnership program recipients to further leverage CCT
                      PR support / distribution
                 Connecting YDH Audience to municipal / stakeholder content
                 Co-op ad strategy (Note: will be developed as part of fiscal 2022-2023)

Role: <u>Content Development</u>: Lead the creation and execution of pan-regional and themed
                 campaigns to drive visitation. Engage new market(s) based on research insights and
                 industry trends. Refresh brand positioning of Ontario's Road Trip Destination because it is
                 being copied too much.
                 <u>B2B Engagement</u>: Lead the development and implementation of a B2B marketing and
                 communications strategy to engage stakeholders and inspire them to be more successful.
                 <u>Connecting YDH Audience</u>: Utilize the expertise of the Industry Relations team, work with
                 municipal stakeholders and businesses to determine which are tourism ready and connect
                 those that aren't to CCT resources to get them there. Amplify the positioning of municipal
                 and regional weblinks from the YDH website and digital channels.
                 <u>Co-op Ads</u>: Create equal opportunity for all interested parties to participate.

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Executive Summary

The plan has been developed to deliver against the priorities while furthering CCT's mission to provide resources and support to stakeholders so they have the capacity to achieve success. Objectives for fiscal 2023-2024 are:

Governance and Administration

- Clear and transparent delivery of the 2023-2024 Business Plan
- Transfer Payment Agreement compliance, clean audit and budget oversight
- Engaged Board of Directors to maximize organizational excellence and direction

Industry Relations & Advocacy

- Build municipal (town and resident) understanding of, and increased support for, the visitor economy as it relates to the vibrancy of the community
- Support the development and implementation of Community Tourism Plans to increase tourism readiness
- Explore long-term funding opportunities from other ministries and agencies

Investment Attraction

- Grow municipal investment in tourism through the facilitation of, and implementation support for, Community Tourism Plans and Wayfinding Plans
- Leverage stakeholder investment through the partnership program
- Provide visitor insights to communities to demonstrate the value of the visitor economy

Research

- Provide stakeholders a holistic view of the tourism landscape in the region and its importance on the vibrancy of communities
- Provide in-depth and aggregated visitor analysis to stakeholder, municipalities, DMO's and RTO's so that they can understand their visitor landscape and make informed decisions about experiences to develop, audiences to target, and markets to penetrate (revenue generator)
- CCT to be an integral part of provincial/national research working groups and panels so that stakeholders needs/wants are communicated and implemented which will assist them in their success
- Make research results easy for all stakeholders to understand so they can interpret and use the data to make informed decisions

Partnership Program

- Foster tourism investment
- Further CCT impact on tourism

Industry Equipping

- Grow stakeholder ability to strengthen their skills by providing learning content on key topics that increase tourism-readiness resulting in strong and competitive tourism businesses
- Identify opportunities and support programs that will assist stakeholders build their capacity.
- Leverage municipal and stakeholder relationships to connect them with student placement opportunities to grow the workforce
- Assist municipalities to create a welcoming environment for visitors by providing customer and tourism ambassador skills training to the tourism workforce and volunteer/resident base

Experience Development

- Facilitate industry-led experience development
- Develop and launch new trails/itineraries in partnership with regional stakeholders
- Support Marketing & Communications campaigns through development of itineraries
- Explore use of new and emerging technologies for experience development

Marketing & Communications

- Develop and implement a B2B Marketing Strategy
- Provide opportunities for stakeholders to tell their stories through YDH pan-regional campaigns
- Position the region as Ontario's Road Trip Destination for local & domestic visitors in order to increase economic impact.
- Become a leader in Consumer Education in order to provide visitors with all the information they require during the destination selection process.
- Raise consumer awareness of tourism businesses and products found in York Durham Headwaters while retaining strong sub-regional identification.
- Strengthen local tourism awareness while supporting new economic impact models
- Align with Destination Ontario and other in-region tourism partners in order to raise awareness of YDH as a premier and safe destination – including local markets
- Measure success through goal setting and metric models

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Group Travel Support

- Be the best practice example of pan-regional partnerships through the Golf in Ontario Program
- Support group travel growth through bid-support and offsetting the cost for stakeholders to attend Travel Trade events (through partnership program)

Revenue

- Communicate the value of the programs CCT offers and solicit participation
- Increase CCT's ability to support stakeholders
- Further CCT's impact on tourism

Defining Success for Central Counties

Success for Central Counties Tourism is two-fold. The main measure of success is seeing an increase in stakeholder capacity, which is built through active engagement with CCT and a formal recognition from municipalities regarding the importance of tourism to the community, which leads to further support for the sector and, through coordination and cooperation, a regional approach for tourism development. The second measure of success is CCT's ability to connect potential visitors to tourism-ready stakeholders through compelling content.

Each of the pillar objectives are broken into tactics, with measurable KPIs, and goals staff plan on achieving. In addition, new research capabilities allow CCT to provide a clearer picture of the visitor economy and, where possible, the organizations' impact on it.

CCT measures its success against these two main components for growing the visitor economy. Measures include the number of stakeholders furthering their capacity by participating in CCT-led initiatives, the number of new products/experiences developed and launched, the amount of stakeholder investment being made, the number of partnerships, municipal investment in Community Tourism Planning, municipal investment in tourism products/events, municipal investment in tourism infrastructure, tourism budgets, tourism advisory committees and an acknowledgement of tourism impact on the economics and vibrancy at the community level, the number of stakeholder leads generated through CCT content, media value of stories told about stakeholders, the number of clicks to stakeholder websites through CCT channels, etc.