



Tourism St. Catharines Matched Funding Program Guidelines

Updated: March 2026

OVERVIEW

The Tourism St. Catharines Matched Funding Program (TSTC Matched Funding Program) aims to strengthen St. Catharines' tourism appeal by attracting visitors and increasing overnight stays. This program offers financial support to eligible tourism stakeholders for initiatives focused on one of the three key priorities:

Key Priorities:

- Marketing (e.g., media buying, digital campaign, promotions)
- Investment Attraction (e.g., events-cultural, sporting, etc., FAMs, media hosting)
- Product Development (e.g., Culinary & Wine, Cycling, Cultural, etc.)

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

The Tourism St. Catharines Matched Funding Program is open to tourism stakeholders in good standing who contribute to the city's visitor economy. Eligible applicants must demonstrate how their initiative supports tourism growth by attracting visitors to St. Catharines, increasing overnight stays in St. Catharines, or enhancing the destination's appeal. Applicants may be required to provide supporting documentation to verify their status and project alignment with program objectives.

ELIGIBLE INITIATIVES

To be considered for matched funding, projects must:

- Take place in **St. Catharines**
- Align with loveSTC tourism marketing strategy and / or any objectives identified by the Chief Marketing Officer
- Demonstrate **measurable tourism impact**, through initiatives that are **strategically aligned** with destination marketing, investment attraction, or product development including attracting visitors from outside the Niagara Region and generating overnight stays.

INELIGIBLE EXPENSES

- Grants or flow-through funding to other organizations.
- Charitable fundraising or donations to political parties/lobby groups.
- Capital expenses or infrastructure.
- Prize money.
- Alcohol-related expenses.
- Expenses unrelated to tourism development.

MATCHED FUNDING CRITERIA

- **Tourism St. Catharines will match dollar for dollar** any funds that an applicant contributes to an approved project.
- **Minimum funding request:** \$5,000 (matched by \$5,000 from TSTC for a minimum project value of \$10,000).
 - Notwithstanding the above, the Chief Marketing Officer has authority to recommend that the Evaluating Panel consider funding requests under \$5,000.
- **Maximum funding request:** \$20,000 (matched by \$20,000 from TSTC for a minimum project value of \$40,000)
- Funding cannot be used as matching funds for any other **Provincial or Federal government programs**, including Celebrate Ontario, Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation, or other RTOs.
- Funding cannot be used to offset existing operational and marketing costs.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Step 1 – Application Submission

- All applicants must submit a completed application form to Tourism St. Catharines, using the designated format and submission method.
- The deadline for submitting applications shall be determined by the Chief Marketing Officer or designate.
 - Late applications shall not be accepted.
 - Late applicants are eligible to apply for future intake sessions.
- Applications must include:
 - A clear description of the project/event, including goals, deliverables, and anticipated tourism impact.
 - A budget outlining **all sources of funding** and eligible expenses.
 - Marketing and promotional strategies.
 - Performance measures and success metrics.
- The Chief Marketing Officer in consultation with the General Manager, or designate, shall have discretion to disqualify any applications they deem to be incomplete.
 - Disqualified applications shall not be provided to the Evaluation Panel for review.
 - Disqualified applications are eligible to apply for future intake sessions

Step 2 – Review & Approval

- The Chief Marketing Officer, or their designate, will oversee the coordination of the review and approval process.
- An Evaluation Panel comprised of a minimum of three of the following will review and evaluate applications for each intake year:
 - Chief Marketing Officer, or designate
 - Two Directors (to be appointed annually. Directors may serve consecutive terms on the panel)
 - One representative from the Niagara hospitality or tourism sector (to be appointed annually by the Chief Marketing Officer or designate. Representative may serve consecutive terms on the panel)
- Meetings of the Evaluation Panel shall be closed to the public but the Chief Marketing Officer or designate shall have discretion to invite individuals they deem appropriate to attend. The members of the Evaluation Panel will be identified in the recommendation report that goes to the Board.

- If a member of the Evaluation Panel declares a conflict for an application they shall not provide a score or recommendation for the application and shall not take part in any discussion involving the applicant
 - Should the number of conflicts on an application limit the number of eligible members on the Evaluation Panel to less than two, the Chief Marketing Officer or designate shall have discretion to select an employee of the City of St. Catharines to review the application(s).
 - Should all members of the Evaluation Panel have a conflict for an application, the Chief Marketing Officer or designate shall select two employees of the City of St. Catharines to review the application(s).
 - All conflicts shall be noted in the recommendation report brought to the Board.
- Applications shall be evaluated based on the Funding Evaluation Criteria noted in Schedule A.
- The Evaluation Panel shall be responsible for making a recommendation to the Board on how funding should be allocated.
- The approval of funding shall be a decision of the Board.

Step 3 – Funding Disbursement

- Prior to the disbursement of funds, approved projects will be required to sign a Funding Agreement which outlines responsibilities, deliverables, and funding conditions.
- The Chief Marketing Officer, in consultation with the General Manager, shall have the authority to establish an annual intake and fund disbursement schedule, with the objective of disbursing funds as early as possible to the successful applicants.
- The Evaluation Panel shall:
 - Recommend to the Board that all funds be disbursed; or
 - Recommend that some funds be held back for distribution during a second intake period later in the same calendar year.
- Payments are made **only to applicants** with **10% held back** until the final report is received and approved by the Chief Marketing Officer.
- At the end of each intake year, any remaining funds shall be, pending confirmation by the Chief Financial Officer, carried over to the next intake year.

Step 4 - Pre-Project

- If an applicant fails to fulfill the requirements outlined in the funding agreement, Tourism St. Catharines reserves the right to withhold or recover disbursed funds, and the applicant may be deemed ineligible for future funding opportunities
- Recovered funds will be added back to the budget for the Matched Funding Program.

Step 5 – Post-Project Reporting

- After completion of the event or project, organizations must submit a final report, in a format determined by the Chief Marketing Officer or designate, including:
 - Number of visitors, including overnight stays and economic impact analysis- ticket sales, food & beverage sales
 - Proof of **Tourism St. Catharines recognition** (logo placement, media mentions, etc.).
 - Financial reconciliation.
 - Performance measurement outcomes.
 - Copies of marketing materials and documentation.
- Reports must be submitted by the date outlined in the agreement.
- Failure to submit a final report may, at the Board's discretion, **disqualify** the applicant from future funding.

Administration

- Tourism St. Catharines **reserves the right to review and amend** these Guidelines as needed.
- Tourism St. Catharines may **audit or verify** applications and reports to ensure compliance.
- Failure to adhere to funding conditions **may result in ineligibility** for future funding.

Schedule A

FUNDING EVALUATION CRITERIA

Applications will be evaluated based on the following:

Tourist Attraction & Economic Impact

- How will this initiative attract visitors from outside the **Niagara Region**?
- What are the projected **visitor spending and overnight stays**?
- How will results be measured? See chart below for examples.

Key Priority	Metric Examples (including but not limited to)
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media reach and engagement (likes, shares, comments, followers) • Website traffic and conversions (bookings, sign-ups) • Number of media mentions or influencer collaborations • Email marketing open and click-through rates
Investment Attraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projected increase in visitor numbers (%) • Number of tickets/experiences sold • Average length of stay per visitor • Repeat visitation rate (%)
Product Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assets produced (photography, video) • Number of tourism packages created or enhanced • Estimated revenue generated (\$) • Increase in local business sales (%) • Number of participating businesses/partners

Marketing & Outreach

- What is the **regional, national, or international reach** of the initiative?
- How does the marketing strategy ensure a broad audience engagement?

Brand Alignment & Community Enhancement

- How does the project align with **loveSTC tourism brand**?
- Does it promote local culture, businesses, or attractions?

Partnerships & Collaborations

- What **tourism stakeholders** will be engaged in this initiative?
- How will partnerships strengthen the destination's appeal?

Media Exposure & Social Media Impact

- What media coverage and social media engagement will be generated?

Scalability & Sustainability

- Does this project have the potential to **grow and be repeated** in the future?
- What **sustainable tourism** practices will be implemented?

Accessibility & Inclusion

- How does this initiative ensure inclusivity for **diverse and underrepresented groups**?
- Are there efforts to engage **BIPOC, Indigenous communities, persons with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQI+** audiences?