

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Interim Chief Administrative Officer

Tourism Relief Fund Application Update

RECOMMENDATION

1. That County Council receive Report No. CAO 2022-11 entitled “Tourism Relief Fund Application Update”, for information.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Southwestern Ontario Tourism Corporation (SWOTC) received nearly \$11 million from the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) to support tourism stakeholders across the region, as part of a Government of Canada contribution of over \$78 million to support 11 Regional Tourism Offices and Indigenous Tourism Ontario through the Tourism Relief Fund.
- April 12, 2022, SWOTC opened applications for the Tourism Relief Fund (TRF) - offering municipalities up to \$100,000 to support the tourism sector with product development, marketing supports, customer service and Trans Canada Trail cyclist amenities.
- Oxford County’s application was successful resulting in an \$88,000 contribution, which is on target for completion by December 31, 2022. Oxford County also assisted local businesses and organizations their SWOTC-TRF applications. Assistance included information sharing, concept development, writing, and letters of support. Nine local businesses and organizations had successful applications, bringing the total SWOTC-TRF contributions in Oxford County to more than \$886,000. This will have a legacy impact on tourism in the region.

Implementation Points

The majority of Oxford County’s SWOTC-TRF projects are completed or are in progress. The program will wrap up by December 31, 2022.

Financial Impact

Applying for SWOTC-TRF funding had no financial impact on the current year's operating budget. The application included two capital expenses, which will require future replacements or betterments as outlined in the following table.

Tourism Relief Fund Project Proposals	Original Estimates	Project Budget	Ongoing Asset Management	Replacement Costs
Support businesses in creating/enhancing tourism products	\$55,000	\$62,500		
Customer Service Improvements	\$5,000	\$7300		
Enhanced visitor experience (Trans Canada Trail)	\$20,000	\$18,200	Benches (20 year life expectancy, 15 years for bench finish) Bicycle repair stations (10 year life expectancy with anti-theft elements)	\$18,200
County funded	0	0		
Total	\$88,000	\$88,000		\$18,200

Communications







Businesses were informed of the SWOTC-TRF grant opportunities through the following channels:

- Oxford County website, www.OxfordCounty.ca/TourismPartners
- Tourism Oxford industry newsletter (300+ subscribers)
- Oxford County Newsroom
- Oxford County social media
- Industry partners' communication channels

Communication focused on making the tourism industry aware of the opportunity to apply for funding themselves and encourage engagement in training and partnership opportunities made possible by Oxford County's successful application.

Tourism and Finance staff are completing required reporting for this program.

Strategic Plan (2020-2022)

					
WORKS WELL TOGETHER	WELL CONNECTED	SHAPES THE FUTURE	INFORMS & ENGAGES	PERFORMS & DELIVERS	POSITIVE IMPACT
1.i. 1.ii.	2.i.	3.iii.	4.i. 4.ii.	5.ii.	

DISCUSSION

Background

The Southern Ontario Tourism Corporation (SWOTC) received \$10,969,354 through the Government of Canada’s Tourism Relief Fund (TRF), delivered by the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario). The fund helps local tourism organizations and businesses safely welcome back visitors, recover from the impacts of the pandemic, create jobs and prepare for future growth as outlined in Attachment 1.

Southwestern Ontario Tourism Corporation (SWOTC) accepted applications for the Tourism Relief Fund (TRF), made possible by Government of Canada funding through FedDev Ontario. Municipalities and not-for-profit organizations could receive up to \$100,000, no matching funds required. Businesses could receive 50% matching funds.

Oxford County submitted an application for SWOTC-TRF funding, resulting in an \$88,000 grant for projects that were to be completed by December 31, 2022. Oxford County’s successful application was to create/enhance tourism product and experiences through development, training and collaborations focusing on culinary; diversity equity and inclusion; sustainable travel; cycling; and, seasonal dispersion.

In addition to Oxford County’s successful SWOTC-TRF application, 9 other businesses/organizations received funding in Oxford. Successful applicants were:

- Norwich and District Historical Society
- Makkink’s Flower Farm
- Town of Ingersoll
- The Golspie Dairy
- Ingersoll Creative Arts Centre
- Bre’s Fresh Market
- Aggie Armstrong Fine Arts
- Thames River Melons
- Ingersoll Downtown BIA

Including Oxford County and the successful applicants listed above, more than \$886,000 in SWOTC-TRF has been allocated to tourism in Oxford County. With this funding, businesses

and organizations are increasing accessibility, expanding their capacity, creating new tourism attractions, and enhancing tourism product as shown in Attachment 2. Oxford County is expecting a further announcement of organizations that received funding for TRF applications submitted directly to FedDev Ontario. When FedDev Ontario makes this announcement, it will be shared with Oxford County Council.

Comments

Oxford County's application further advanced activities within the 2022 business plan and supported tourism development priorities.

Grant Impacts

The following is a list of projects completed, or in process of being completed, that the grant has funded for the County, and their respective impacts.

- Printed the Oxford County Cheese Trail and Big Cheese Days brochures. This was the first year Big Cheese Days was held since COVID. On a scale of 1-5, business surveys reported satisfaction at a level 4 (56%) or 5 (42%). Big Cheese Days will be held again next year.
- Organized workshops on: diversity equity and inclusion, experiential tourism, working with tourism partners, joining the Oxford County Cheese Trail, marketing, local food sourcing for restaurants, sustainable tourism and shoulder season travel. There have been over 240 workshop registrations to date. Attendee surveys show 93% learned something new to help in their work and 84% will act on information they learned to adopt a practice, create something new or change operations.
- Supporting three businesses to create new experiential tourism products with coaching, testing, and communication assets. Participating businesses include Aggie Armstrong Fine Arts, Rising Roots Farm, and Transitions Equine Assisted Learning. These products will be ready for market in 2023.
- Supporting 16 businesses with training in offering collaborative events utilizing digital advertising. To date, businesses reported in a survey that 83% were very satisfied with the program and experienced 12% to 150% increase in sales during their events. Two more events are currently in market with one more application expected.
- Creation of new gravel road cycling routes in areas previously without gravel routes. These routes increase opportunities for overnight stays in Tillsonburg, South-West Oxford, Ingersoll, and Zorra.
- Installation of 2 benches and 3 cycling repair centres on the Trans Canada Trail to enhance the visitor experience.

Timeline

The following table illustrates that the grant activities are on schedule for completion as outlined in the following timeline. Individual businesses are working on their grant projects and are in touch with SWOTC.

TRF Funding Timeline	2022		
Tasks	Q2	Q3	Q4
Application and receipt of TRF			
Update materials to support marketing efforts			
Support bringing new tourism projects to market.			
Training and customer service improvements			
Trans Canada Trail improvements			

Conclusions

This investment by SWOTC and FedDev Ontario will transform recovery and tourism growth throughout the region. Consumers can expect to see new and enhanced tourism, product offerings, accessibility, beautification and sustainability improvements. Oxford County will be better positioned to appeal to more diverse and inclusive target markets, providing economic benefit to the region.

SIGNATURES

Report Author:

Original signed by _____

Meredith Maywood
 Tourism Specialist

Approved for submission:

Original signed by _____

Benjamin R. Addley
 Interim Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Southwest Ontario Tourism Corporation announces support for tourism recovery in Ontario's Southwest, October 13, 2022

Attachment 2 - Backgrounder, October 13, 2022