



**NIAGARA
BENCH
LANDS**
LINCOLN ONTARIO

**DESTINATION
DEVELOPMENT FUND**

2024 Application Guide



BACKGROUND

The Town of Lincoln has one of the most diversified economies in the Niagara Region. Tourism-related jobs and the economic value of the tourism industry in our community cannot be understated. In 2019, tourism-related jobs in our community accounted for close to 1,700 jobs and were poised to continue a promising trajectory in 2020, until the COVID-19 pandemic slowed growth. In total, Lincoln has seen an 11% increase in tourism jobs since 2015, while Niagara has seen a 17.9% increase overall. Regionally, tourism contributes \$2.4 billion to the local economy.

Lincoln is a Greenbelt community with agriculture and value-added agriculture being one of the largest segments of our economy. As such, growing our tourism industry and attracting additional tourism-related employers and investment is paramount to Lincoln's plan for economic growth. Our mandate is to offer visitors unique tourism experiences built around an award-winning craft beverage sector in a spectacular natural setting, targeted at high-yield, small-group, and independent travelers; sensitive to preserving the unique character of the place.

As the natural tourism gateway for visitors entering Niagara, Lincoln has great potential to increase its overall destination awareness, thereby attracting a greater portion of the Ontario tourist market, including culinary tourists, eco-tourists, agri-tourists, and sports and recreation enthusiasts alike.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The purpose of the Niagara Benchlands Destination Development Fund Grant Policy is to assist the Town of Lincoln in growing awareness of the Niagara Benchlands destination through sustainable economic growth, job creation, as well ongoing capacity innovation in Lincoln's tourism sector.

By supporting Lincoln's tourism-based businesses and organizations with financial aid, encouraging greater collaboration amongst private-sector businesses, and utilizing

Town-owned marketing and promotional channels; the policy ensures that municipal funds are disbursed in meaningful, equitable, and measurable ways.

Program Inquiries

If you have any questions and/or comments about the Niagara Benchlands Destination Development Fund, please contact:

Britnie Bazylewski – Tourism Development Officer
E | bbazylewski@lincoln.ca
P | 289-668-5009

Cameron Rotz – Economic Development Officer
E | crotz@lincoln.ca
P | 289-668-0610

Program Objectives

It is recognized that to sustainably grow Lincoln's tourism economy, there is a need to identify new opportunities to support Lincoln's tourism-based businesses and organizations. The Niagara Benchlands Destination Development Fund will be used to help support new and expanded projects in both the short and long term, encouraging local businesses and tourism operators to collaborate and foster innovative, capacity-building tourism products and events that have a measurable impact on Lincoln's tourism economy. Tourism-based events and activations help draw visitors to our community creating opportunities for economic growth, job creation, and investment attraction.

Priority Objectives:

In line with the priorities identified in Lincoln's Five-Year Tourism Strategy and Action Plan (2020-2025), this fund aims to foster growth, innovation, and collaboration among Lincoln's tourism stakeholders, aligning with our destination's values.

Priority Objectives Cont.:

A fundamental priority outlined within the Tourism Strategy and Action Plan is the facilitation of additional private sector investment in festivals/events and tourism activations, aiming to enhance destination awareness and foster increased visitation and visitor spending. As we continue to see growth opportunities throughout the Ontario tourism sector, the importance of extending visitation into the Fall/Winter shoulder season is recognized as an important means to sustainably increase Lincoln's tourism capacity and welcome visitors more continuously as a year-round destination.

Special attention will be given to projects that contribute to product development during the shoulder tourism season (September to December). This includes, but is not limited to:

- seasonal destination awareness campaigns,
- seasonally inspired experiences,
- and festivals and events designed to attract visitors during this period.

The Niagara Benchlands Destination Development Fund aims to promote and foster the following values when considering support for tourism events and activations:

- **Quality** - We stand behind the quality of our products, services, and experiences, and these create a community where we want to grow, prosper, and belong.
- **Diversity** - We celebrate the diversity of our destination, its people, and our future.
- **Engagement** - We have an engaged tourism community that participates and supports our success.
- **Authenticity** - We embrace our rural roots and showcase an authentic Lincoln for all.

Priority consideration will be given to projects that demonstrate:

- Opportunities to bolster shoulder season visitation endeavors (September to December)
- The greatest cross-sector collaboration amongst other tourism-based businesses, organizations, and key suppliers in the Town of Lincoln's tourism ecosystem.
- Management by a business/organization of strategic importance to the tourism

sector in the Town of Lincoln.

- A measurable contribution to Lincoln’s tourism economy.
- A solid rationale for the project’s capacity to draw external visitors and create opportunities for increased visitor spending or overnight stays.
- Job creation in Lincoln, particularly in the areas of tourism, culture, and value-added agriculture.
- A need for financial assistance.
- Potential for wider media exposure for the Niagara Benchlands destination, including locally, nationally, and internationally.
- A strong accessibility and inclusivity plan, that supports underrepresented groups such as:
 - Women
 - Indigenous Peoples
 - Members of Official Language Minority Communities
 - Age-Friendly Communities
 - Persons with Disabilities
 - Racialized Communities
 - 2SLGBTQI+

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible Businesses

Tourism-based businesses and organizations located within the municipal boundaries of the Town of Lincoln are eligible for the Niagara Benchlands Destination Development Fund. This includes for-profit businesses, not-for-profit businesses, public sector agencies, and private sector agencies whose business operations support Lincoln’s diverse tourism economic value chain.

Examples of eligible businesses and organizations include:

- Accommodations Providers
- Culinary Businesses
- Farms & Farm Markets
- Outdoor Adventure/Eco-Tourism Operators
- Retail and Shopping Businesses
- Tours and Attractions Operators
- Arts, Culture, and Heritage
- Wineries
- Breweries
- Distilleries

Eligible Project Categories

- The project must support new tourism events or festivals, or the expansion of existing programming.
- The project must foster the development of new tourism products, such as a Winterlicious culinary activation, or a culinary/beverage taste trail, for example.
- The project must support feasibility studies and business plans that investigate the potential for increased visitation and visitor spending. For example, Bed and Breakfast establishments come together to form an association, to advance their collective interests in Lincoln.

Eligible Expenses

- Research or consulting services related to feasibility or business planning
- Hosting fees for events
- Marketing and promotion costs
- Rental, lease, or purchase of equipment related to the project
- Project-specific licenses and permits

Eligible Expenses Cont.

- Fees for artists and speakers

- Signage and wayfinding costs related to the project
- Training and development costs related to the project

Ineligible Expenses

- Alcohol for re-sale
- Hospitality costs such as travel expenses, staff/volunteer meals, promotional giveaways
- Pre-existing deficit funding (grant or loan)
- Operating costs associated with staffing
- Legal, audit, or interest expenses
- Prize money
- Expenses related to charitable components (i.e., lottery licenses and raffle expenses)
- Retroactive funding is not eligible (i.e., for past projects or expenses outside the current funding year)

AVAILABLE FUNDING DETAILS

The Niagara Benchlands Destination Development Fund has a total annual allocation of \$25,000. Eligible businesses have an opportunity to be awarded up to \$25,000, or a portion thereof, as determined by the Evaluation Committee's recommendations and Town Council's approval. It is understood that funds are limited and not every project can be funded.

Tourism-based businesses and organizations located in the Town of Lincoln must be able to provide a minimum financial contribution of the value of 50% of the proposed project's total operating budget.

For example, if the total operating budget for the project is \$3,000, the applicant must prove a minimum financial contribution of \$1,500 to be eligible to receive funds. Funding awarded to local businesses could be up to 100% of the application ask, or a portion thereof.

Funding will be available for projects that have or are taking place between **January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024.**

EVALUATION PROCESS & CRITERIA

Applications will be reviewed and evaluated by an Evaluation Committee using an evaluation matrix to ensure a fair and equitable adjudication process.

The Evaluation Committee will be comprised of the following key Town of Lincoln personnel:

- Two (2) representatives from Town Council, Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning and Economic Development Committee of Council
- One (1) representative from the local Destination Marketing Organization
- Two (2) Town Staff from Economic Development (Director of Economic Development and Communications, and Tourism Development Officer)
- One (1) Town Staff from Community Services
- One (1) Town Staff from Legislative Services

EVALUATION PROCESS & CRITERIA Cont.

The Evaluation Committee will perform a detailed review and provide Council with recommendations for approval. Council will approve the release of funding up to the amount included in the annual operating budget. Funding award decisions of Council are final and will not be subject to appeal.

Each application will be graded based on the criteria within the ***Niagara Benchlands Destination Development Fund Assessment Matrix.***

HOW TO APPLY

Applications for the 2024 Niagara Benchlands Destination Development Fund will be accepted from **Thursday, April 4, 2024, to Monday, May 6, 2024, at 5:00 p.m. EST.**

To access the online application and all supporting documents please visit [Lincoln.ca](https://lincoln.ca) or log into the Niagara Benchlands CoLab Portal.

Submission of Required Documents:

Once complete, please submit all required and supporting documentation to tourism@niagarabenchlands.ca, including:

- Appendix A - Project Operating Budget
- Appendix B - Attestation
- A copy of your organization's Articles of Incorporation

Release of grant funds approved by the Lincoln Town Council will only be made available to successful applicants upon final approval.

Recipient Obligations Funding Conditions:

- Recipients will publicly acknowledge funding support from the Town of Lincoln and include a current Niagara Benchlands and Town of Lincoln logo on all forms of communication related to the project. Where the Niagara Benchlands and Town logo are present, documents must be reviewed by the Town's communications team to ensure the integrity of the Town's brand.
- A minimum of 10% of the project will be held back until project completion and the final report has been submitted.
- Reports must be accompanied by invoices, receipts, and proof of payment for all eligible expenses paid for with the funding.
- Funding is not to be regarded as a commitment by the Town to continue assistance in the future.

- Funding will only be used for the purpose approved by Council. The recipient must request approval for any proposed project delivery changes before implementation. If the changes result in cancellation or significant delay, the recipient will, after consultation with staff, be required to return the grant funds received that year.
- Funding that is not spent within the allowed project implementation period in which it was awarded, must be returned to the Town of Lincoln. See *Available Funding Details* on pages 7 and 8 of this document for the specific date range.
- Eligible recipients should not have any outstanding monies due to the Town. Should there be any outstanding monies due to the Town, your award will be applied to the outstanding arrears first and the balance left over, if any, will then be paid to the recipient.

Reporting Requirements:

- Successful applicants who receive funding must report on how the funding was spent and the benefits and overall impact. A reporting template will be supplied by the Town to all successful applicants.
- Any organization receiving funds from the Town must submit a final report for return:
 - The final report form **must** be accompanied by copies of receipts and proof of payment within 60 days of the activity or the end of the event/project/program.
 - Only community organizations that have fulfilled all requirements and have completed and submitted the final report shall be eligible for future funding.