



**REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE**

# **What We Heard Report**

**Atlantic Region  
May 13, 2025**

# Introduction

The roundtable discussions brought forth issues essential to advancing the Atlantic region's tourism industry. Participants engaged in meaningful discussions, identifying strategies for growing the sector through investments, initiatives, and collaboration. Major challenges identified included labour shortages and high employee turnover, as well as the need for increased funding and infrastructure improvements, additional air and marine transportation capacity, and adaptation to the changing climate.

The discussions also highlighted the importance of more inclusive hiring practices and fostering Indigenous-led tourism development to promote economic growth and cultural preservation. Proposed solutions included continuous training and development to retain staff, leveraging new technologies like AI for marketing and workforce attraction, and engaging visitors in community-wide cleanup initiatives. The discussions underscored the importance of forging partnerships and collaborating across all levels of government to strengthen the tourism ecosystem.

The Atlantic Regional Roundtable included participants from a wide range of tourism organizations — associations, regional bodies, destination marketing organizations — allowing for productive discussions on a variety of important topics to the region's local industry.



# Discussion Highlights: What We Heard

## Local Workforce Development

### Overview

The roundtable discussions emphasized a need for the industry to attract and retain a skilled and diverse workforce. Participants noted that the region's tourism sector faces significant challenges from labour shortages, staff retention, and perception issues. Exploring innovative human resources practices to provide a more consistent talent pool is essential, along with offering year-round opportunities with more stability, making tourism careers more attractive.

### Challenges

- **Chronic Labour Shortages and Turnover**  
The region's tourism industry faces significant and ongoing labour challenges, with high employee turnover due to the seasonal nature and instability of roles.
- **Career Perceptions**  
The tourism industry faces a challenge in attracting talent due to perceptions that opportunities are only entry-level jobs. A shift in perspective must be enacted that presents tourism as a viable career path with many professional development opportunities.

### Opportunities

- **Career Awareness**  
Promoting tourism as a viable career path, highlighting non-temporary opportunities, competitive wages, and career benefits thereby attracting new employees while retaining experienced staff.
- **Professional Development for Employees**  
Providing career development opportunities for employees can emphasize the professional nature of the tourism industry, and foster interest from continuous training and development programs.
- **Knowledge Transfer**  
Leveraging institutional knowledge among the industry, investigating mentorship and knowledge transfer programs to address retirements and turnover, while nurturing a new and energized tourism workforce.

# Promoting Inclusivity and Community Growth

## Overview

The discussions highlighted the importance of more inclusive hiring practices and fostering Indigenous-led tourism development to promote economic growth and cultural preservation. Proposed solutions included continuous training and development to retain staff, leveraging new technologies like AI for marketing and workforce attraction, and engaging visitors in community-wide cleanup initiatives.

## Challenges

- **Limited Investment**  
A lack of ongoing funding programs and accessible capital to support businesses and Indigenous entrepreneurs in undertaking their own initiatives stifle community growth and accessible infrastructure upgrades.
- **Challenging Funding Sources**  
Smaller destinations and entrepreneurs face significant challenges in navigating complex funding sources, leading to issues in growth and adaptation for accessible initiatives.

## Opportunities

- **Training and Education**  
Provide training and education for employers on inclusive hiring practices for people with disabilities and neurodivergent individuals, focusing on overcoming misconceptions about accommodation burdens and highlighting the benefits of a diverse workforce.
- **Community Integration**  
Collaborate with community organizations to better understand the barriers individuals face in entering the tourism sector, identifying opportunities to address challenges.
- **Local Expertise**  
Leveraging expertise across the Atlantic region to promote community-first initiatives that will grow the local economy, drive new visitors, and strengthen the region's tourism leadership.

# Sustainable and Regenerative Tourism

## Overview

The roundtable discussions brought forth the importance of a sustainable transition to more environmentally conscious tourism practices and experiences. Participants noted a pressing need to balance economic growth with environmental stewardship and community well-being, highlighting unique regenerative tourism opportunities.

## Challenges

- **Challenging Sustainability Adaptation**  
Costly and inaccessible practices are difficult to adapt at scale, and smaller business will need increased funding and support to work towards new environmental goals.
- **Resource and Funding Gaps**  
Lacking sustainable funding models to support businesses in undertaking their own initiatives is stifling the region's sustainable transition.
- **Priority Alignment**  
Issues from balancing sustainability goals with economic growth have harmed progression, with participants expressing concern about neglecting sustainability to prioritize short-term goals.

## Opportunities

- **Community-Driven Initiatives**  
Explore community-wide tourism member cleanup initiatives to engage locals and visitors in environmental stewardship.
- **Increased Interest in Eco-Tourism**  
Involving visitors in sustainability practices, such as voluntourism opportunities, to foster a deeper connection between visitors and the destination, driving both economic and environmental benefits.
- **Indigenous Collaboration**  
Leveraging indigenous sustainability practices into the broader tourism industry to support indigenous communities while supporting environmental efforts across the region.

# Infrastructure and Transportation

## Overview

The roundtable stressed the need for strategic investments and modernization of critical infrastructure to support the tourism industry's continued growth. Participants noted a slowdown of the region's investment environment, which has led to reductions in project starts and infrastructure development. The discussions also surrounded the importance of engaging public and private actors to drive investment and ensure that the region's tourism industry can thrive and remain competitive.

## Challenges

- **Diverse Transportation Needs**  
The region has a variety of unique transportation needs, particularly due to the wide natural environments of Atlantic provinces, and the challenges connecting both cities and the provinces themselves.
- **Aging Infrastructure and Insufficient Capacity**  
There is a significant challenge posed by existing tourism-supporting infrastructure assets, including aging roads, the high cost of bridge maintenance, and issues with accommodation inventory. The region needs increased capacity to support increasing tourism demand.

## Opportunities

- **Leveraging Existing Assets**  
Investigate ways to make existing assets more commercially viable – expanding offerings, operating hours, and the seasonality of attractions, while maximizing use and revenue.
- **Adaptation Projects**  
Prioritize refurbishing existing infrastructure over new construction, focusing on road improvements and upgrading current facilities, given challenges with cash flow and timely investment approvals.

## Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

The Atlantic Canada roundtable compiled action items from all attendees to support the region's diverse tourism industry, drive economic growth, and support community success. Participants highlighted the need to overcome the various challenges faced by destinations and operators across the region, integrating key opportunities into the actions to be taken by government and other stakeholders in the industry.

### Workforce and Labour

The region must take action to address chronic labour shortages and high employee turnover, especially in seasonal tourism. This requires innovative recruitment strategies, providing continuous training and development, and exploring policy changes to attract and retain a diverse workforce, including seniors and new Canadians.

- **Innovative Employment Programs**  
Design and implement employment programs that allow businesses with different peak seasons to share employees, generating more stable and year-round employment opportunities.
- **Workforce Attraction and Development**  
Develop and promote tourism as a viable career path with competitive wages and benefits, emphasizing professional development and continuous training opportunities to attract and retain talent.
- **Educational Collaboration**  
Partner with community colleges and universities to develop tourism training programs during the off-season, addressing skills gaps and providing continuous learning for staff.



## Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

### Infrastructure and Investment

Participants highlighted the need to improve transportation and infrastructure to support tourism growth and meet visitor demand. This involves increasing ferry capacity, refurbishing older structures, and securing private and public investments for new projects and year-round operations.

- **Transportation Infrastructure Strategy**  
Design new solutions to increase connectivity across the region, including advocating for increased ferry capacity and supporting regional air, highway, and rail services.
- **Public-Private Partnership Funding Model**  
Explore and implement public-private partnerships and fund-matching programs to encourage sustained investment in tourism infrastructure and attraction projects.
- **Technology Integration**  
Leverage new technologies, data, and artificial intelligence in destination marketing and workforce attraction to appeal to visitors and talent.

### Inclusive Business Practices

The region must focus on creating more inclusive hiring environments to tap into underrepresented labour pools. Employers need to be taught inclusive practices for people with disabilities and neurodivergent individuals. Systemic barriers that prevent marginalized groups from entering the workforce must also be addressed.

- **Implement a B2B Mentorship Program**  
Design mentorship programs so that businesses can support one another in their accessibility and inclusion practices, aligning operational requirements with accessibility.
- **Employer Training Opportunities**  
Provide training and education for employers on inclusive hiring practices for members of underrepresented groups, including people with disabilities and neurodivergent individuals.

# Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

## Sustainability and Community Engagement

Participants concluded that the region must implement sustainable and regenerative tourism practices to protect natural and cultural assets while supporting economic growth. This includes promoting community-wide cleanups, adapting to climate change, and integrating Indigenous knowledge into tourism experiences to ensure long-term viability.

- **Design an Indigenous Tourism Framework**  
Create a framework to guide the development and integration of Indigenous tourism attractions, engaging communities to support their economic and cultural growth.
- **Support for Community-Driven Initiatives**  
Design programs to drive community-led sustainability and eco-tourism initiatives, such as community-wide cleanups, supporting their integration into regenerative tourism activities and marketing campaigns.






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