



REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE

# What We Heard Report

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# Introduction

The Eastern Regional Roundtable served as a key platform for stakeholders to provide feedback on the state of the tourism industry across the region. Participants included tourism operators, national and provincial bodies, destination marketing organizations, and other key stakeholders. Discussions addressed Workforce Development and Retention, Accessibility, Inclusion, and Indigenous Engagement, Infrastructure and Connectivity, and Strategic Collaboration and Information Sharing.

The need for a unified and strategic approach to tourism growth was identified. The region must ensure that tourism initiatives and programs continue to be renewed and upgraded to continually attract visitors. The discussions underscored the importance of leveraging diverse assets, fostering strong partnerships, and ensuring that all efforts across the industry contribute to a more inclusive, resilient, and robust tourism ecosystem.



# Discussion Highlights: What We Heard

## Workforce Development and Retention

### Overview

The Eastern region's tourism sector needs to build a more resilient and appealing workforce by promoting the industry as a long-term career rather than a temporary job. There is a need for comprehensive training, mentorship, and co-op programs to provide professional development and retain employees. Discussions also focused on attracting diverse talent through flexible work arrangements and non-traditional work hours.

### Challenges

- **Industry Perception**  
The tourism industry is often seen as offering short-term, temporary jobs rather than long-term career paths, thus preventing operators from attracting and retaining employees.
- **Seasonality**  
The seasonal nature of tourism presents employers with significant challenges, as many prospective employees seek year-round employment elsewhere. Consequently, the industry is rife with high turnover and yearly training crunches.
- **Long-Term Strategies**  
Lack of a coordinated and long-term strategy for tourism workforce development across the region.

### Opportunities

- **Partnerships for Recruitment**  
Engagement with employment service providers and educational institutions to tap into larger talent pools, establishing new recruitment pipelines.
- **Formal Training Programs**  
Design and implement tailored co-op, internship, and other training programs to enhance mentorship and professional development opportunities for people pursuing careers in tourism, promoting practical skills for prospective employees.
- **Youth Engagement**  
Highlight roles in the region's tourism industry as viable long-term career pathways for young people.

## Accessibility, Inclusion, and Indigenous Engagement

### Overview

The Eastern region's tourism industry must be more inclusive and accessible for a diverse range of visitors and employees. Participants emphasized the need to break down barriers and correct misconceptions about the sector. Workforce inclusion and the need for more engagement with Indigenous tourism organizations and businesses was of particular note.

### Challenges

- **Lack of Awareness**  
A lack of understanding and awareness of the needs of many marginalized and under-represented groups inhibits the growth of visitors and the ability of the industry to retain talent.
- **Practical Barriers**  
Addressing the barriers to accessibility, inclusion, and Indigenous engagement is essential to industry growth. Ensuring that transportation, housing, and broader connectivity does not disproportionately affect any communities.

### Opportunities

- **Indigenous Engagement**  
Engagement and collaboration with Indigenous tourism to foster a more inclusive and robust workforce, while also integrating Indigenous tourism into broader regional offerings to support workers and entrepreneurs from local Indigenous communities.
- **Workforce Inclusion Initiatives**  
Fostering a more welcoming and accessible environment for all prospective employees to drive workforce growth and opportunities for businesses.



## Infrastructure and Connectivity

### Overview

Discussions highlighted that the region requires significant investment in transportation and tourism infrastructure to enhance both the visitor experience and economic development. Participants identified key barriers such as a lack of regional air connectivity, outdated road infrastructure, and a lack of integration among different transportation modes.

### Challenges

- **Aging and Outdated Infrastructure**  
The region's tourism growth is hindered by aging and outdated transportation infrastructure, including a lack of regional air connectivity, outdated roads, and integration challenges. As a result, destination connectivity and ease of travel are impeded.
- **Travel Barriers and Rural Challenges**  
Rural areas are disconnected from urban centres, leading to significant challenges in tourism growth. A lack of practical solutions for transportation and housing in these areas hurts tourism growth and workforce potential.

### Opportunities

- **Partnership Models**  
Investigating public-private partnership models to drive new infrastructure investments, enhance the region's traveller experience, and ensure both public and private capital are utilized to efficiently advance the region's critical infrastructure.
- **Innovative Projects**  
Establishing innovative tourism-supporting projects, such as commercial docks for cruise lines, to expand regional offerings and support visitor growth.

## Strategic Collaboration

### Overview

Participants noted that, to strengthen the region's tourism ecosystem, effective collaboration and communication across national, provincial, and regional levels must be implemented. This would help consolidate training, marketing, and information-sharing initiatives, reducing duplication of effort and ensuring a unified message to visitors.

### Challenges

- **Siloed Operations**  
Organizations operating in silos prevents coordination, leading to fragmentation and a duplication of efforts.
- **Coalition-Building**  
Organizing and getting buy-in for cross-sector collaborations is a major hurdle towards supporting the growth of the region's tourism industry – diverse interests across sectors make a unified vision of tourism growth in the region difficult to achieve.

### Opportunities

- **Stakeholder Engagement**  
Involve diverse stakeholders in tourism planning and development to foster goodwill and ensure a wide-reaching and comprehensive approach to industry growth.
- **Multi-Level Effort Coordination**  
Encourage comprehensive collaboration among all levels of partners, including operator, municipal, provincial, and federal bodies, allowing destinations and attractions to leverage relationships for industry growth and advocacy.
- **Regional Passports**  
Implement regional tourism passports or an itinerary program to facilitate exploration of the entire region.

## Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

Roundtable discussions highlighted a clear path forward for the Eastern region's tourism industry – encouraging government and other industry stakeholders to take bold actions in supporting the industry's continued growth, resilience, and attraction for visitors. Key priorities include investing in a skilled and stable workforce, enhancing infrastructure, and fostering collaboration across both the region and the country. Participants underscored the importance of these actions in driving continued success of the region's tourism industry.

### Labour Needs

The region must promote the industry as a long-term career pathway instead of a temporary role to generate a more robust and attractive tourism workforce. Workers and businesses alike must be provided with support and opportunities for skills development for essential tourism roles.

- **Promoting Tourism as a Career**  
Boost programs and incentives to promote tourism as a career path for young people. Collaborate with educational institutions to showcase opportunities for progression in the tourism industry.
- **Employment Service and Development Programs**  
Partner with employment service providers to generate interest from a broader talent pool. Introduce formal mentorship programs to ensure adequate knowledge transfer from existing staff to new employees.



## Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

### Collaboration and Communication

To strengthen the region's tourism resilience, there is a need for better collaboration and communication across national, provincial, and regional levels. This would allow for the consolidation of training, marketing, and information-sharing initiatives, reducing duplication and ensuring a unified message to visitors.

- **Coordinate Training and Marketing Efforts**  
Consider developing programs on such topics as training, marketing, data analysis, and destination upgrades to better coordinate and consolidate key efforts across the industry.
- **Develop a Regional Passport**  
Develop a regional tourism passport or itinerary program to encourage visitor engagement with more attractions across the region.

### Enhanced Infrastructure

Participants stressed that the region's diverse infrastructure must be bolstered and further developed to enhance visitor experience and economic development. A lack of regional air connectivity, outdated road infrastructure, and a lack of integration between different modes of transport impedes the industry's continued growth.

- **Implement new Partnership Models**  
Investigate public-private partnership models to drive infrastructure investments and tourism development to ensure a sustainable and connected future for the region.
- **Transportation Infrastructure Upgrades**  
Implement new transportation infrastructure projects to improve the region's connectivity. Drive new multi-modal projects across railways, improved roads, and broader air transportation opportunities to support travel opportunities.
- **Meet the Needs of Remote Communities**  
Support the region's diverse remote communities by providing adequate transportation and housing to expand opportunities for workforce development and destination growth.



## Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

### Inclusivity and Accessibility

With government support, encourage inclusivity and accessibility throughout the industry for a diverse range of visitors and potential employees. Develop frameworks and methodologies to support the ability of marginalized groups to thrive both in their visits to the region and in employment.

- **Support Accessibility Initiatives**  
Engage in new initiatives to support both the accessibility of destinations, as well as inclusion programs in workforce development programs. Seek new and tailored funding for accessibility retrofits at destinations, while also supporting marginalized groups who seek roles in the industry.





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