

# Rural Ontario Development Program (ROD) Guidelines - Community Development

Learn how to get funding for projects that improve rural community economies.

## Overview

The Rural Ontario Development (ROD) Program provides Cost-Share funding to support activities that create strong rural communities in Ontario and opens doors to rural Economic Development, by funding Projects that:

- address barriers to Economic Development
- increase capacity and effectiveness for Economic Development
- build rural community capacity to attract, retain and expand businesses
- better position rural communities to attract or retain investment
- support jobs to be attracted and retained in rural communities
- support economic growth and resiliency through regional partnerships
- address Workforce development challenges
- transform community assets to drive Economic Development

The ROD Program is application-based and Projects are selected using a competitive process. All applications are assessed based on the guidelines. Please review these guidelines before completing your application form.

These guidelines and related application forms are subject to change without notice.

Please refer to the glossary section (<https://www.ontario.ca/document/rural-ontario-development-program-rod-guidelines-community-development/glossary-and-legal>) for any capitalized terms. These terms are defined in detail to ensure clarity and consistency throughout our materials.

## Eligibility and program overview

### Who is eligible

To be eligible to apply to the Rural Ontario Development Program – Community Development, an Applicant must be:

- a Municipality
- a Not-For-Profit organization
- an Ontario Indigenous community or Indigenous Not-For-Profit organization
- a Local Services Board

The Province is committed to supporting the success of Indigenous communities and Indigenous non-profit organizations in Rural Ontario. Indigenous Applicants are encouraged to contact program staff for assistance at: [RODprogram@ontario.ca](mailto:RODprogram@ontario.ca) (mailto:RODprogram@ontario.ca) or 1-877-424-1300.

## Role of Applicant

Multiple applications from the same Applicant within the same intake are allowed but are discouraged.

An Applicant may not combine or stack funding from multiple Ontario government departments or programs for the same Project. Applications for ROD Program Community Development streams must be for Projects that are not concurrently supported by other Ontario government sources.

The Applicant will submit the application and, if successful, sign the Contribution Agreement with the Province of Ontario.

When working with a Partner, the Applicant is the contact for the Project and assumes full responsibility for the Project, including legal liability, receiving payments and submitting invoices.

Successful Applicants must comply with the Contribution Agreement and all other Requirements of Law.

## Role of Partner

Applicants may choose to work with Partners on the Project.

Partners are organizations or community groups that contribute financial or In-kind resources to the Project.

To be considered a Partner, organizations or community groups **must** have a role in the Project and provide either financial or In-kind support to the Project.

In-kind support could include a commitment of resources such as staff time, expertise, equipment, or other non-monetary support.

## Who is not eligible

The following are not eligible to apply to ROD Program – Community Development:

- an individual
- a business
- a research institution or organization whose core business or primary activity is research and development (for example, universities, colleges)
- a not-for-profit organization that is not incorporated or a registered charity

## Definition of Rural Ontario

Projects must take place in and benefit Rural Ontario.

Rural Ontario for the purposes of the ROD Program is defined as:

- all Statistics Canada census subdivisions (including lower-tier and single-tier Municipalities) that either have a population of less than 100,000 people in the most recent Statistics Canada Census of Canadian Population, or;

- have a population density of 100 people per square kilometre or less, as identified in the most recent Statistics Canada Census of Canadian Population or;
- a rural postal code within areas considered urban. "0" as the second character of a postal code identifies a rural postal code.

Refer to the ROD Program "Rural and Urban Areas" map  
 (https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/efec072314ae451ca6fb59c356d02882) .

### Community Development streams overview

This is an overview of the funding streams and sub-streams available for:

- Municipalities
- Not-For-Profits
- Indigenous communities and Indigenous non-profit organizations
- Local Services Boards

### Stream 1: Economic diversification, competitiveness and capacity building

Sub-stream	Maximum provincial Cost Share	Maximum provincial funding
Strategies and plans	50%	Up to \$50,000
Economic diversification and competitiveness	50%	Up to \$150,000
Capacity building events	35%	Up to \$10,000

### Stream 2: Workforce development, attraction and retention

Sub-stream	Maximum provincial Cost Share	Maximum provincial funding
Workforce development, attraction and retention	50%	Up to \$150,000

### Stream 3: Community infrastructure enhancements

Sub-stream	Maximum provincial Cost Share	Maximum provincial funding
Small Projects	35%	Up to \$25,000
Large Projects	35%	Up to \$250,000

## Program streams and Project types

The Applicant is required to identify the program stream and Project type in the application. The program stream and Project type selected will impact the provincial Cost Share, the maximum provincial funding, and the eligible expenses for the Project.

### Economic diversification, competitiveness and capacity building stream

#### Strategies and plans

This sub-stream funds strategies and plans and has a provincial Cost Share of up to 50% and maximum provincial funding of \$50,000.

Projects in this sub-stream will develop strategies or plans that will **build community capacity** and enhance the ability of communities to be prepared for and engage in Economic Development activities.

#### Example Projects

- Economic Development strategy
- housing plans for attracting and retaining workers
- feasibility or business plans
- community improvement plans

#### Economic diversification and competitiveness

This Project sub-stream has a provincial Cost Share of up to 50% and maximum provincial funding of \$150,000.

Projects in this sub-stream must implement an existing plan or strategy.

#### Business retention and expansion

Projects that proactively **engage the local or regional business community** to identify and implement actions that address barriers to growth

Example Projects: Projects that are part of MRA's Business Retention and Expansion Program (BR+E) (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/business-retention-and-expansion-program>) or similar to such Projects with activities including:

- collecting business and market data

- writing and implementing action plans
- executing actions to support local businesses in the community

### **Downtown revitalization**

Projects that focus on identifying and implementing actions that **improve and promote traditional downtowns**.

Example Projects: Projects that are part of [MRA's Downtown Revitalization Program \(DR\)](https://www.ontario.ca/page/downtown-revitalization-program) (https://www.ontario.ca/page/downtown-revitalization-program) or similar to such Projects with activities including:

- growing customer traffic
- attracting business to locate in downtowns through marketing activities

### **Entrepreneurship or business succession**

Projects that support **business start-up or succession** in the community.

Example Projects:

- coaching/mentorship
- business succession support (for example, connecting buyers and retiring business owners)
- familiarization tours

### **Regional marketing and outreach**

Projects that **implement marketing or promotional activities** outlined in an existing marketing or communications plan that will have an **impact across multiple communities** in a region.

Example Projects: Promotional campaigns across at least 2 communities (for example, investment attraction)

### **Technology adoption or innovation initiatives**

Projects that support businesses and/or communities to **improve their digital capabilities** and participate in the information economy.

Example Projects:

- digital and cyber security training for businesses
- new technology to improve coordination of business approvals

### **Capacity building events**

This sub-stream has a provincial Cost Share of up to 35% and maximum provincial funding of \$10,000.

This sub-stream funds events to **strengthen rural individuals, organizations and communities' knowledge and skill sets**, to undertake and manage their Economic Development efforts. Events must have an Economic Development skill development and/or training component.

Events that target tourists or general community events are not eligible Projects.

Project examples:

- asset based community development training
- summits/conferences related to community Economic Development
- community Leader skill development
- regional Economic Development capacity building events

## **Workforce development, attraction and retention**

This Project stream has a provincial Cost Share of up to 50% and maximum provincial funding of \$150,000.

This stream funds Projects that support communities to implement strategies and/or to undertake initiatives for attracting and retaining workers.

### **Attraction, retention, and training of workers**

Implementation of strategies to attract, retain and train workers, immigrants or youth.

Example Projects:

- collaborative labour attraction marketing campaigns
- workforce-oriented policy/regulatory improvements
- career days/events
- network development (service providers / businesses/ schools/ post-secondary)
- workforce or sector-based training
- youth training
- intern/apprentice matching system
- welcoming community Projects

## **Community infrastructure enhancements**

This stream funds Projects that update or transform Community Assets that have been identified as important to the community's economy. There are small or large Projects in the community infrastructure enhancements stream, and small or large Projects are eligible for all 3 Project types.

The large Projects sub-stream has a provincial Cost Share of up to 35% and maximum provincial funding of \$250,000.

The small Projects sub-stream has a provincial Cost Share of up to 35% and maximum provincial funding of \$25,000. Small Projects have a streamlined application and assessment process.

### **Rehabilitation of cultural, heritage or tourism attractions**

Minor Capital Costs Projects that **rehabilitate an existing cultural, heritage, or tourism attraction**, as identified through previously completed strategies and Projects that establish its significance for Economic Development.

Example Projects:

- rehabilitation of a historic building or structure
- rehabilitation of an established tourism asset
- rehabilitation of a recreational trail

### **Redevelopment of vacant and/or underutilized buildings**

Minor Capital Costs Projects to **redevelop vacant and/or underutilized buildings** to achieve an Economic Development outcome.

Example Projects:

- expansion of an incubator or innovation hub
- development of a co-working space
- youth centre
- agri-food hubs

### **Streetscaping and landscaping**

Minor Capital Costs Projects identified through previously completed strategies that improve the design quality of public areas.

Example Projects:

- wayfinding signage
- beautification (for example, decorative lighting, banners, murals, street furniture, public art, trees)
- wi-Fi equipment for public use

### **Ineligible Projects**

The following Projects are ineligible:

- submissions with incomplete applications
- Projects that do not meet the outcomes of the ROD Program (as outlined in the "Program outcomes and performance measures" section below) or align with the program streams
- Projects that do not benefit Rural Ontario
- Projects receiving any amount of other provincial funding
- Projects seeking funding for academic research
- debt restructuring, fundraising, or financing (for example, re-granting ROD Funds)
- Projects that will influence or lobby any level of government
- Projects seeking funding for major capital Projects (for example, new building construction, roads, bridges, paved or concrete surfaces, water/wastewater treatment facilities, utility distribution, broadband)

- regional marketing and outreach Projects that do not have an impact across at least 2 lower-tier or least 2 communities within a single-tier Municipality, or that focus exclusively on tourism events
- Projects that host events with the intent to primarily attract tourists or general community attendance
- those primarily benefitting an individual business
- Projects that the primary purpose is to ready a property or asset for immediate or imminent sale
- Projects that the primary purpose is to support compliance efforts with current Requirements of Law

## How to apply

### Intake and deadlines

Refer to the ROD Program page (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/rural-ontario-development-program>) for intake windows and application deadlines

### Step 1

Download, save and complete the application form (<https://www.ontario.ca/files/2025-06/mra-rod-community-development-application-form-en-2025-06-23.pdf>).

### Step 2

Email [RODprogram@ontario.ca](mailto:RODprogram@ontario.ca) (<mailto:RODprogram@ontario.ca>) with:

- A completed application
- Applicants are encouraged to include **supplemental documentation** with the application. Examples include:
  - letters from the Partner confirming their role in the Project by describing their commitment of financial support and/or in-kind commitments such as resources, knowledge or staff
  - quotes or estimates for cost items over \$10,000 to support the Project budget
  - feasibility studies, strategic plans, reports, or relevant evidence that supports the need for the Project and anticipated impacts
- If the attachments are greater than 10 MB, send multiple emails and ensure the subject line remains consistent.

### Step 3

The Province will only assess completed applications received by the program intake deadline.

The Province is committed to supporting the success of Indigenous communities and Indigenous non-profit organizations in Rural Ontario. Indigenous Applicants are encouraged to contact program staff within the intake period, to discuss opportunities for ROD Program flexibility such as application intake timelines, Project assessments and reporting timelines. Please reach out during the intake period to: [RODprogram@ontario.ca](mailto:RODprogram@ontario.ca) (<mailto:RODprogram@ontario.ca>) or call 1-877-424-1300.

### Step 4

The Province will send a confirmation email with an application number within 5 business days of the receipt of application.

If you do not receive confirmation, please contact [RODprogram@ontario.ca](mailto:RODprogram@ontario.ca) (mailto:RODprogram@ontario.ca) or call 1-877-424-1300.

## Program outcomes and performance measures

Applicants are required to describe in the application how their Project will tangibly support the ROD Program's outcomes and how the Project impacts will be measured. For further detail on how Projects are evaluated based on the program outcomes, please refer to the assessment criteria scoring section below.

The ROD Program outcomes and example performance measures include:

### **Businesses attracted, retained and expanded**

The number of businesses that have opened, remained, and/or grown within a community that could reasonably be attributed to the activities of the Project.

#### **Example performance measures:**

- number of businesses attracted, retained and expanded
- the change in the number of businesses

### **Economic barriers addressed in rural including those of Indigenous communities**

The reduction of obstacles that hinder Rural Ontario communities, organizations, or Indigenous communities from benefiting from growth and development; and can be reasonably attributed to the activities of the Project.

#### **Example performance measures:**

- number of economic barriers or opportunities addressed
- description of economic barrier and how it was addressed

### **Increased capacity and effectiveness for rural Economic Development**

The process of strengthening people, organizations and communities' knowledge and skill sets to undertake and manage their Economic Development efforts.

#### **Example performance measures:**

- number of people and businesses engaged
- level of satisfaction
- intent to adopt the information learned

### **Investment attracted or retained**

The attraction of new investments from public and private sources or the retention of investments in a community that might not have occurred without the activities of the Project.

**Example performance measures:**

- dollars of investment attracted and retained
- building permit value
- new property tax assessment
- preventing loss in tax assessment from vacancies/closures

**Jobs attracted or retained**

The number of new paid positions created during or after the Project that will result in longer term jobs that can be directly attributed to Project activities, which otherwise may not have been created; and/or the number of existing jobs that will be maintained within a community during or after the Project that can be directly attributed to Project activities and may otherwise have not been retained.

**Example performance measure:**

- number of jobs attracted and retained

**Regional partnerships that strengthen local economies and resiliency**

Partnerships between 2 or more communities, that agree to work together to drive growth and adapt to economic circumstances. Regional, collaborative partnerships help pool limited resources, both human and financial to increase the Project's effectiveness.

**Example performance measures:**

- number of Partners involved in the Project
- contribution of the Partners towards the Project

**Transformed or modernized Community Assets that drive economic growth and resiliency**

The enhancement of physical Community Assets that have been identified as economically important to the community. The improvement would lead to the rehabilitation and renewal of the assets that preserves and enhances the unique character of the community.

**Example performance measures:**

- dollars invested in physical Community Asset enhancement
- increased utilization of the Community Asset

**Workforce development challenges addressed**

Workforce challenges are acted on, fostering an adequate, equitable and/or stable Workforce in a community that could be reasonably attributed to the Project activities.

**Example performance measures:**

- number of Workforce development challenges or opportunities addressed
- Workforce and employer engagement
- number of people trained

## Project funding and costs

### Approved funding payment

Generally, payments under the ROD Program are reimbursement-based and will be made following verification of proof of payment, with the exception of a 10% holdback. The 10% holdback will only be provided once the final report (<https://www.ontario.ca/document/rural-ontario-development-program-rod-guidelines-community-development/selection-process#final-report>) is received and accepted by the Province.

However, the Province may provide an initial payment of 20% of the approved funding for successful Projects following the execution of the Contribution Agreement, provided the following conditions are met:

- The Applicant has indicated the need for immediate use of some program Funds in the fiscal year of 2025-2026 (before March 31, 2026) in its Project budget.
- The Applicant has provided an undertaking that the initial 20% payment will be used solely for eligible costs permitted under these guidelines and the Contribution Agreement.
- The Applicant will provide proof of payment following the use of the initial 20% payment, which shall be verified by the Province before any additional Funds are disbursed.
- Where such verification cannot be completed to the satisfaction of the Province, the Project may not be completed, and the Applicant will be required to repay the initial 20% payment, as well as the costs Incurred by the Province to recover the Funds and interest.

Please note that this initial 20% payment is granted as a one-time approval by the Province and does not establish any precedent, intention, or expectation of continued or future funding in a similar manner.

All payments are subject to the Applicant's compliance with the requirements of the ROD Program and terms of the Contribution Agreement, as determined by the Province in its sole discretion.

### Stacking

Stacking with other provincial sources of financing for the Project is not permitted. Projects receiving other provincial funding are not eligible to apply for or receive funding under the ROD Program. Provincial funding includes but is not limited to Funds administered by:

- Provincial Ministries or agencies
- Ontario Trillium Foundation
- Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation

- regional tourism organizations

Funding from federal government programs (for example, Community Futures Development Corporations) can be used toward a Project's total costs, if it is permitted under applicable federal programs.

## **Funding sources for Projects**

Combined federal and ROD Program funding cannot exceed 90% of the Project's eligible costs.

The Applicant must disclose all potential sources of funding for the Project in the application whether they are secured or not. Secured funding means a written commitment from the Partner. Failure to disclose all funding or possible funding sources may result in mitigation measures, up to and including the termination of the application or Contribution Agreement.

In-kind Contributions are not eligible for funding or reimbursement but can be noted on the application to demonstrate a commitment from Applicants and Partners.

## **Extenuating circumstances**

Applicants may request an increased provincial Cost Share and/or an amount of provincial funding for a Project that exceeds the maximum provincial funding amount noted above, based on significant barriers to or opportunities for Economic Development.

Extenuating circumstances are significant and unique and are not common across program Applicants. Applicants will be required to explain in detail, the significant barriers or opportunities and provide rationale for their additional funding request.

Approval of an increased provincial Cost Share or funding amount for a Project due to extenuating circumstances is in the Province's sole discretion. Any such decision by the Province will be subject to additional provincial approvals that may impact Project timelines.

## **Eligible and Ineligible Cost items for all Projects**

Eligible Costs must be:

- reasonable as determined by the Province
- necessary to complete the Project as determined by the Province
- identified within the Contribution Agreement
- Incurred **within** the period identified in the Contribution Agreement; between the Effective Date and Project completion date outlined in the Contribution Agreement
- Incurred in Ontario
- Incurred by following a process that is transparent, fair and promotes the best value for money (i.e., prices must be competitive and not more than the fair market value)
- paid to an Arm's Length third-party

Ineligible Costs are:

- unreasonable as determined by the Province
- unnecessary to complete the Project as determined by the Province
- Incurred outside the period identified in the Contribution Agreement
- Incurred outside of Ontario
- Incurred by following a process that is not transparent or fair or does not promote the best value for money (i.e., prices are not competitive or are more than the fair market value)
- paid to a non-Arm's-Length third-party or
- In-kind Contributions

**Table A: eligible and ineligible expenses for all project streams and sub-streams**

Eligible expenses	Ineligible expenses
<p><b>New Hires</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new hires who work 100% on Project-related activities - wages and mandatory employer related costs</li> <li>• Other costs for new hires who work 100% on Project-related activities, including the cost of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Laptops, computers, software</li> <li>◦ Travel in Ontario in compliance with the province’s travel, meal and hospitality directive</li> <li>◦ Portable internet services, cell phones, cellular network services</li> <li>◦ Professional development costs</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Professional fees specifically related to the activities of the Project</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal</li> <li>• Architectural</li> <li>• Engineering</li> <li>• Environmental</li> <li>• Surveys</li> </ul>	<p><b>Employee expenses not related to new hires</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct wage subsidies for existing staff on Project related activities or administrative fees charged by the Applicant.</li> <li>• Honoraria or per diems taxable under the Income Tax Act,</li> <li>• Membership costs</li> <li>• Travel and meals for consultants and existing staff</li> </ul> <p><b>Administrative costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financing and financing charges, debt restructuring, loan interest payments and bank fees</li> <li>• Preparing an application, claim submission or reporting requirements for any program, including the ROD Program</li> </ul> <p><b>Technology costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recurring software licenses/fees</li> </ul> <p><b>Events, Hospitality and promotion costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catering, food and refreshments (see Eligible Costs under the Event Stream only for exemption)</li> </ul>

<b>Eligible expenses</b>	<b>Ineligible expenses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project management</li> <li>• Audio visual</li> <li>• Marketing and promotions</li> <li>• Consulting</li> <li>• Accounting fees</li> </ul> <p><b>Technology costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project-related computer, communications and audio or video equipment</li> <li>• Project-related software</li> </ul> <p><b>Events, marketing and promotion costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design, branding and production of materials, excluding giveaway items</li> <li>• Media, promotions or advertising</li> <li>• Distribution costs, including data, printing, or postage</li> <li>• Venue rental fees</li> <li>• One-time tradeshow entrance or exhibit fees</li> </ul> <p><b>Honorariums</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Honorariums for Indigenous Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alcohol</li> <li>• Gifts, awards, prizes or incentives</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• Sponsorship of conferences and events</li> <li>• Private sector events</li> <li>• Events that have already occurred</li> <li>• Giveaway items (for example, branded pens, buttons, notepads etc.)</li> </ul> <p><b>Vehicles and Transportation Equipment Costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vehicles</li> <li>• Transportation equipment</li> <li>• Material handling equipment (powered and unpowered)</li> <li>• Agricultural, construction, or mining equipment</li> </ul> <p><b>Honorariums</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Honorariums for speakers or attendees who are not Indigenous Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers</li> </ul> <p><b>Major Capital Costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Costs as identified in the Glossary</li> </ul> <p><b>Normal business practice costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-going operational costs of an organization</li> <li>• Insurance and taxes including HST</li> <li>• Meeting costs not directly related to the Project</li> <li>• Travel not directly related to the Project</li> <li>• Office space and utilities</li> <li>• Regular or deferred maintenance</li> <li>• Office supplies, stationary, business cards and business-specific promotional items</li> <li>• Office phones, internet and networks</li> </ul>

Eligible expenses	Ineligible expenses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uniforms</li> </ul> <p><b>Other Costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities that influence or lobby any level of government</li> <li>• Permits and approvals</li> <li>• Contingencies</li> <li>• Deposits (prepayments) for expenses that have yet to be fully Incurred</li> <li>• Refunds or rebates, including any you are eligible to receive</li> </ul>

**Table B: Eligible and ineligible expenses for strategies and plans sub-stream**

Eligible expenses	Ineligible expenses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional fees or new hires to develop strategies and plans</li> <li>• All expenses included in the eligible expenses in Table A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major or Minor Capital Costs (refer to glossary)</li> <li>• All expenses included in the ineligible expenses in Table A</li> </ul>

**Table C: Eligible and ineligible expenses for economic diversification and competitiveness sub-stream**

Eligible expenses	Ineligible expenses

Eligible expenses	Ineligible expenses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training development and speaker fees</li> <li>• Workshop and training-related materials and supplies costs</li> <li>• Event related transportation costs</li> <li>• All other eligible expenses included in Table A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major or Minor Capital Costs (refer to glossary)</li> <li>• All expenses included in the ineligible expenses in Table A</li> </ul>

**Table D: Eligible and ineligible expenses for capacity building events sub-stream**

Eligible expenses	Ineligible expenses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training development and speaker fees including transportation, meal and hotel costs for approved Project related activities (in compliance with the province's Travel, Meal and Hospitality Directive (<a href="https://www.ontario.ca/page/travel-meal-and-hospitality-expenses-directive">https://www.ontario.ca/page/travel-meal-and-hospitality-expenses-directive</a>))</li> <li>• Workshop and training-related materials and supplies costs</li> <li>• Event related transportation costs</li> <li>• Catering (in compliance with the province's Travel, Meal and Hospitality Directive (<a href="https://www.ontario.ca/page/travel-meal-and-hospitality-expenses-directive">https://www.ontario.ca/page/travel-meal-and-hospitality-expenses-directive</a>))</li> <li>• All other eligible expenses included in Table A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the primary purpose is an annual general meeting or regular business meeting or a fundraising event</li> <li>• Events that have already occurred</li> <li>• Private sector events</li> <li>• Major or Minor Capital Costs (refer to glossary)</li> <li>• All expenses included in the ineligible expenses in Table A</li> </ul>

**Table E: Eligible and ineligible expenses for workforce development, attraction and retention stream**

Eligible expenses	Ineligible expenses

Eligible expenses	Ineligible expenses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training development and speaker fees</li> <li>• Workshop and training-related materials and supplies costs</li> <li>• Event related transportation costs</li> <li>• All other eligible expenses included in Table A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major or Minor Capital Costs (refer to glossary)</li> <li>• All expenses included in the ineligible expenses in Table A</li> </ul>

**Table F: Eligible and ineligible expenses for community infrastructure enhancements stream**

Eligible expenses	Ineligible expenses
<p><b>Minor Capital Costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contractor’s fees</li> <li>• Cost of materials or supplies (for example, electrical, plumbing, ventilation, structural and finishings) and labour, for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Redevelopment of an existing vacant or underutilized building</li> <li>◦ Rehabilitation of buildings or structures with identified cultural, heritage, or tourism significance</li> <li>◦ Landscaping and streetscaping</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Streetscaping and landscaping such as wayfinding signage, decorative lighting, banners, murals, street furniture, interpretive elements, public art, trees, and accessibility equipment outside of a building</li> <li>• Rental or purchase of equipment and machinery</li> <li>• Furniture and major appliances</li> <li>• Localized Wi-Fi hardware and software for public use</li> <li>• Project-related computer, communications and audio or video equipment</li> <li>• Trail rehabilitation (non-paved surfaces), including existing trail bridges</li> </ul>	<p><b>Major Capital Costs including, but not limited to, costs of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchase or lease of land, buildings and facilities</li> <li>• Site preparation</li> <li>• Construction of buildings, teardowns or rebuilds</li> <li>• Construction or rehabilitation of paved or concrete surfaces, parking lots</li> <li>• Gateway signs</li> <li>• Major infrastructure (for example, water/wastewater systems, storm water management, transportation facilities, roads, road/highway bridges and streetlights)</li> <li>• Infrastructure and equipment costs for airports, seaports, railways, and commuter/tourist transportation systems</li> </ul>

Eligible expenses	Ineligible expenses
<p><b>Other costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contingency costs up to 10%</li> <li>Recognition Signage: Projects in this stream are required to install a permanent sign acknowledging the support of the ROD Program. Eligible expenses for the design, fabrication, and installation of the sign will be reimbursed up to a maximum of \$300, based on a total eligible cost of \$857.14</li> </ul> <p>All other eligible expenses included in Table A</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilities, power lines, chargers, generational systems, broadband infrastructure, and water or wastewater lines outside of a building</li> </ul> <p>All expenses included in the ineligible expenses in Table A</p>

Ownership of eligible capital assets must be maintained for a minimum of 2 years after the completion of the Project.

Applicants may contact the Province at [RODprogram@ontario.ca](mailto:RODprogram@ontario.ca) (mailto:RODprogram@ontario.ca) with questions regarding the eligibility of any potential costs not explicitly addressed in this section. Provincial determination of eligibility is final.

## Project description, work plan and budget

Single and multi-year Projects are eligible. Projects should incur expenses within the first year of the Project.

In the assessment criteria, preference is given to Projects that are completed by March 31, 2026 or March 31, 2027.

### Project description

The Project description should describe:

- the Project key activities
- what the Project will accomplish
- how it will benefit Rural Ontario
- align with the work plan and budget in the application form

### Project need

- The Project Need should be described in the application and how the Project will address an Economic Development need or opportunity.

### Work plan and budget

The Project work plan and budget should list each activity required to complete the Project, the anticipated start and end date of each activity and the eligible costs items associated with the activity. Applicants are encouraged to attach relevant supplementary documentation to support the application.

The Project budget must:

- list the specific eligible cost items associated with each activity in the Project work plan. Some activities may have more than one eligible cost (for example, an event may have the following costs: venue rental, printing, marketing or promotions)
- list eligible, in-kind and ineligible costs
- indicate when the costs will be Incurred each year
- indicate if funding is secured or not
- if including contingency costs (Community Infrastructure Enhancements Projects only), include a specific “contingency costs” budget line

Eligible costs must be broken down by fiscal year (between April 1 and March 31) and align with the timelines outlined in the Project work plan.

The Applicant is encouraged to provide as much detail as possible about cost items and may attach more detailed budget documents with the application.

In-kind and ineligible costs will not be matched by provincial cost-share funding but do indicate the Applicant and Partner(s) commitment to the Project.

### **Quotes and estimates**

Applicants may submit quotes and estimates for cost items over \$10,000.

Quotes or estimates should include a category breakdown (specify all items per cost item) for all Project costs.

Quotes can be provided either on supplier letterhead or as a screenshot from the supplier's website (screenshot must include website URL, itemized list and totals).

## **Selection process**

Once an application has been submitted and the intake period closes, each application will be assessed based on the following criteria:

### **Stage 1: Eligibility screening**

An application must meet the following basic eligibility criteria to move on to Stage 2:

- a complete ROD Program application and all supporting documentation was received by the date and time indicated for the intake
- meeting all the Applicant eligibility criteria
- meeting all the Project eligibility criteria
- the Project takes place in and benefits Rural Ontario

### **Stage 2: Project assessment**

Applications will be scored based on the following criteria and the criteria are listed in order of importance.

Indigenous community or Indigenous non-profit organization Projects will be given additional consideration, in the assessment areas of:

- partnerships and community support
- financial commitment.

For Projects requesting less than \$25,000 in provincial funding, the applications will not be evaluated on the assessment criteria of:

- performance measures
- sustainability.

## Assessment Criteria Scoring

Assessment Criteria	Strong ROD Projects identify the following, through the application and supporting documents
<p><b>ROD Program outcomes:</b> The Project addresses one or more of the ROD Program outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong alignment with 3 or more ROD Program outcomes that will be addressed by the Project</li> <li>• Provide detailed description of how actions undertaken through the Project will address those outcomes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Project Description:</b> A detailed Project description outlining objectives, activities, Rural Ontario benefits, alignment with the workplan and budget, and the organization’s capacity to successfully deliver the Project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides a description of the Project that includes:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ what the Project will accomplish and key activities</li> <li>◦ Rural Ontario benefits</li> <li>◦ alignment with workplan and budget</li> <li>◦ organizations capacity for Project success</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Partnerships and Community Support:</b> Communities or organizations beyond the Applicant that are offering financial and/or in-kind support for the Project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships are described and confirmed including how the Partners</li> </ul>

<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Strong ROD Projects identify the following, through the application and supporting documents</b>
<p>Please note organizations or community groups that provide a letter of support without committing financial or in-kind support are not considered Partners.</p>	<p>collaborate such as a:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ financial contribution</li> <li>○ expertise</li> <li>○ resources or staff</li> </ul> <p>Or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Applicant has identified as Ontario Indigenous community or organization</li> </ul>
<p><b>Project Need:</b> The Project addresses an economic need or opportunity that has been identified by the community (for example through a community consultation, BR+E, strategic plan, supporting evidence)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Identifies why Project is needed</li> <li>● Describes how an economic need or opportunity that will be addressed by the Project</li> <li>● Barriers substantiated</li> </ul>
<p><b>Performance Measures:</b> A clear, well-supported plan for measuring Project impacts, with realistic, trackable performance measures aligned with ROD Program outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provides a detailed and well-supported description of how the Project impacts will be measured</li> <li>● The measures are realistic and can be tracked throughout the Project</li> <li>● Measures align with the ROD Program outcomes</li> </ul> <p>Or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Project funding requested is less than \$25,000</li> </ul>
<p><b>Project Work Plan and Budget:</b> The Project provides a detailed Project plan and budget that that outlines eligible activities, their costs and realistic timelines.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provides a detailed work plan and budget that supports the successful completion of the Project, including all of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ detailed description of eligible activities and their estimated cost</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Strong ROD Projects identify the following, through the application and supporting documents</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ realistic timelines to complete each activity</li> <li>○ costs align with work plan</li> <li>○ costs are reasonable</li> <li>○ Projects are completed by March 31, 2026 or March 31, 2027</li> <li>○ costs are supported by quotes or proposals if over \$10,000</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sustainability:</b> The Project will contribute to longer-term Economic Development activities and outcomes after ROD Program funding ends, through activities like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• implementation funding identified for strategies and plans</li> <li>• support for Project outcomes after funding ends</li> <li>• activities to encourage sustainability (for example, knowledge transfer, sharing materials after an event)</li> <li>• sustainability plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates significant and specific efforts to encourage longer-term contributions to Economic Development after ROD Program funding ends</li> </ul> <p>Or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Project funding requested is less than \$25,000</li> </ul>
<p><b>Financial commitment:</b> Applicant has made a financial commitment to the Project that meets the Cost Share requirements of the stream.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Applicant has secured a financial commitment equal to or greater than the required provincial Cost Share</li> </ul> <p>Or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Applicant is an Indigenous Community or Indigenous non-profit Organization</li> </ul>

### Stage 3: Approvals

All eligible applications that complete stage 2 will be reviewed by the Rural Economic Development Advisory Panel. The Advisory Panel members are appointed by the Minister and have expertise in rural Economic Development

and business development. The Advisory Panel will make non-binding recommendations to the Minister of Rural Affairs on funding.

## **Reserved rights and non-entitlement**

The Minister of Rural Affairs retains the exclusive right to approve or reject any Project at their sole discretion and to reduce Cost Share and to reduce maximum funding amounts or both for those Projects that have been approved.

Applicants shall not be eligible for funding under the ROD Program or have any claim or demand or action against His Majesty the King in right of Ontario, his ministers, directors, officers, employees, servants, appointees or agents, solely by reason of having made an application.

## **After Project approval**

### **Notifying Applicants of decision**

The Applicant will be notified as funding decisions are reached, which is usually within 3 months from the posted intake closure date. However, timing may vary.

### **Next steps after approval**

If the Applicant is successful, the Applicant will receive a letter of approval. The Applicant is required to sign a Contribution Agreement prior to receiving any Funds and to abide by the terms and conditions of the Contribution Agreement within the timeframe identified in the Contribution Agreement.

The Applicant's information **must** be up to date with both Transfer Payment Ontario and Supply Ontario.

To register with, or update information previously submitted to, Transfer Payment Ontario, visit Transfer Payment Ontario (<https://www.app.grants.gov.on.ca/tpon/psLogin>) .

If you are the Applicant or are authorized to represent the Applicant, you can register and update the information referred to above.

Review the Project Funding and Costs of the ROD Program guidelines for information on Project funding payments.

Applications will be assigned a Project analyst that will monitor and support the Project.

## **Submitting claims**

Claims for approved Projects are submitted through an online portal. Instructions will be provided on how to receive access once the Project is approved. In order for the claim to be processed, all submitted costs must be:

- eligible
- Incurred
- paid in full

A proof of payment must set out in detail:

- a. who paid for the good, service or both and their relationship to the Recipient
- b. who received the payment
- c. the goods, services or both that were provided
- d. the date of the payment

For proofs of payment, all personal information (for example, Social Insurance Number, home addresses, banking information, employee number) must be redacted before submission.

Generally acceptable forms of a proof of payment include:

- a. an electronic image of a processed cheque
- b. a statement from a banking institution setting out to whom the processed cheque was written, or electronic payment made, and the amount, or
- c. a credit card or debit card receipt or statement clearly identifying the amount and to whom the payment was made
- d. wire transfer and online bank transfer showing transaction paid in full and cleared (transaction fees are not eligible costs)
- e. confirmation from vendor that bank draft funds have been received

**Note:** If using a credit card or debit card receipt, cheque or statement as a proof of payment, the number of the credit or debit card as well as all other information, including the unrelated costs to the Recipient's Project must be redacted. Bank statements and processed cheques also contain personal information which must be redacted.

## **Communications by the Applicant**

An Applicant will not communicate about their Project unless the following conditions have been met:

- a. The Applicant has submitted all Project-related external or public facing publications, whether intended for written, oral or visual communications and including social media publications, to the Project analyst (mailto:RODprogram@ontario.ca) assigned to the Project at least ten (10) business days prior to their intended publication date, and has received approval for these Project-related publications from the Project analyst;
- b. The Applicant has acknowledged the support of the Province in the form and manner set out under Contribution Agreement or as otherwise directed; and
- c. Any communications about the Project includes a statement that the views set out in those communications are the Recipient's and do not necessarily reflect the views of Ontario.

The Applicant's internal Project-related communications, such as reports from municipal staff to council, are not subject to the above requirements.

## **Project completion date**

The Project must be completed within the timeframe identified in the Contribution Agreement. If the Applicant does not complete the Project by the Project completion date, the Applicant may be required to repay any and all funds provided to the Applicant, including any interest earned on them, as well as the costs Incurred by the province to recover the funds and interest.

## Final report

To close the Project, the Applicant is required to submit a final report by the deadline stated in the Contribution Agreement. There is a 10% holdback of Project reimbursement until the final report is received and accepted by the Province, and all other requirements have been met.

# Glossary and legal

## Glossary

**Applicant:** means the organization who has applied for funding under the program.

**Arm's-Length:** means an entity that is not related, as determined under the *Income Tax Act* (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/I-3.3/>), to the Applicant.

**Community Asset:** refers to public physical places, structures or facilities. These can include cultural, heritage or tourism attractions, recreational trails, or in downtown areas, can include murals, decorative lighting, downtown street furniture or public art.

**Community Leader:** individuals who guide and direct others within an organization to achieve its Economic Development goals and vision (elected, volunteer or staff position).

**Contribution Agreement:** The legal contract between the Applicant(s) and the Province of Ontario.

**Cost Share:** The maximum funding percentage the Province will pay towards eligible costs for an approved Project.

**Economic Development:** The process of fostering an environment that results in the creation of wealth and well-being for communities.

**Effective Date:** The date the Minister of Rural Affairs approved an Applicant's Project to begin, which is set out in the Contribution Agreement, and that is no earlier than January 1, 2026.

**In-kind Contributions:** Non-financial goods and services provided to support the Project. For example, salaries, use of equipment, materials and supplies, or use of facilities.

**Incurred:** A cost is considered incurred when goods have been received or services have been rendered, regardless of when the actual payment is made.

**Local Services Board:** A Local Services Board established under the *Northern Services Boards Act, 1990* (<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90l28>).

**Major Capital Costs:** Costs for significant infrastructure, including transportation infrastructure; construction of buildings; construction or rehabilitation of paved, or concrete surfaces, parking lots, bridges; gateway signs; teardowns or rebuilds; purchase and installation of modular facilities for housing; and for site preparation or purchase or lease of land, buildings, facilities and structures.

**Minor Capital Costs:** Costs that include contractor's fees; costs of construction materials or supplies and labour; redevelopment of the interior or exterior of an existing vacant or underutilized building; rehabilitation of buildings

or structures with identified cultural, heritage, or tourism significance; landscaping and streetscaping; installation of localized Wi-Fi equipment for public use, streetscaping and landscaping and recreational trail rehabilitation (non-paved surfaces), including existing recreational trail bridges.

**Municipality:** A geographic area whose inhabitants are incorporated as described in the *Municipal Act, 2001*. S.O. 2001 c. 25 (<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/01m25>).

**Not-For-Profit:** A legal entity that is either a:

- registered charity as defined in the *Income Tax Act* (Canada) and is in good standing with the Canada Revenue Agency
- corporation incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation or similar entity under an act of Canada or a province or territory of Canada and is in good standing under its incorporating act

**MRA:** Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs  
\*\*\*\*\*

**Ontario Indigenous community or Indigenous non-profit organization:** means a First Nations community in Ontario; Métis community in Ontario; Political Territorial organizations in Ontario; Tribal Councils in Ontario; or Indigenous organizations in Ontario that apply on behalf of and with the support of the communities they represent, and that have a substantiated record of representing those communities.

**Partner:** an organization that contributes financial or in-kind resources towards Project completion. Partners do not sign the Contribution Agreement with the Province of Ontario. Employees of the Ontario Public Service cannot be Partners and will not provide letters of support for any application.

**Project:** A set of activities undertaken to achieve specific outcomes.

**Requirements of Law:** means all applicable requirements of law as may be set out in statutes, regulations, by-laws, codes, rules, ordinances, official plans, approvals, permits, licenses, authorizations, decrees, injunctions, orders and declarations, or any other similar instrument.

**Rural Ontario:** means all Statistics Canada census subdivisions (including lower-tier and single-tier Municipalities) that either have a population of less than 100,000 people, or have a population density of 100 people per square kilometre or less, as identified in the most recent Statistics Canada Census of Canadian Population or a rural postal code within areas considered urban ("0" as the second character of a postal code identifies a rural postal code). Refer to the ROD Program "Rural and Urban Areas  
\*\*\*\*\*  
(<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/efec072314ae451ca6fb59c356d02882>) " map.

**Workforce:** refers to people employed or actively seeking employment including workers, youth and immigrants.

## Legal

### Confidentiality

Take notice that application forms and supporting material, claims and reports submitted to the Province of Ontario are subject to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1990* (<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90f31>) (FIPPA). Any information intended to be considered in confidence should be clearly and prominently marked "confidential" by the Applicant. Nevertheless, information supplied to the ROD Program may be disclosed by the Province where it is obligated to do so under FIPPA or by an order of a court, \*\*\*\*\*

tribunal or pursuant to a legal proceeding. Information contained in an application to the ROD Program may also be disclosed by the Province to verify compliance with other provincial and federal funding initiatives administered by the Province, federal ministries, or a third-party delivery agent, to ensure that there is no duplication of funding. Inquiries about confidentiality should be directed to the ROD Program.

### **Order-In-Council (OIC) and conflict resolution between documents**

The Rural Ontario Development program is an application-based program (OIC 201/2011 ("the OIC")). In the event of conflict between these guidelines, the application forms, and the Contribution Agreement, the terms and conditions of the Contribution Agreement will prevail. In the event of conflict between the terms and conditions of the Contribution Agreement and the OIC, the OIC will prevail.

### **Eligibility requirements**

The Applicant must also comply with the following requirements:

- have the legal capacity and authority to enter into a Contribution Agreement and take on liability for the Project
- be undertaking an eligible activity set out in the Guidelines
- be in compliance with the following for its business operations at the time of applying and agree to remain in compliance throughout the Project if approved:
  - environmental-related Requirements of Law
  - labour-related Requirements of Law
  - tax-related Requirements of Law
  - material compliance with all other Requirements of Law
- agrees that Ontario may, should the Applicant be found to be eligible to participate in the ROD Program, publish information pertaining to the Applicant and Project, including:
  - Project-related information
  - the Name of the Applicant
  - the amount of funding Ontario provided
  - the outcome of the Project
- agrees to be bound by the terms, conditions and requirements of ROD Program, as set out in these Guidelines and the letter of approval
- if the Project is approved, cooperate in any audits related to any funding received under the ROD Program

### **Contact us**

If the Applicant has questions or needs help with the application, contact us at 1-877-424-1300 or [RODprogram@ontario.ca](mailto:RODprogram@ontario.ca) (mailto:RODprogram@ontario.ca) to connect with an advisor.