



Accessible Destination Program

APPLICATION GUIDE



Accessible Destination Program

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Background

On February 28, 2022, Guelph's City Council voted to implement the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT), [legislated by the Provincial Government](#), on local short-term stay accommodations. These accommodations include hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, and shared accommodation providers like Airbnb. Implementing the MAT was a priority outlined in the [2022-2026 Economic Development and Tourism Strategy](#).

The MAT is used to enhance Guelph as a destination for visitors by providing funding and education support to tourism industry stakeholders, infrastructure upgrades that address visitor needs, and in marketing to support increased sport, group, and conference tourism activity in the City of Guelph. The Guelph Chamber of Commerce is the not-for-profit Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) and operates under the name Destination Marketing Guelph (DMG).

Tourism industry funding is a direct outcome of the 2022-2026 Economic Development and Tourism Strategy highlighted in priority 1.2 Support industry-led tourism product development and priority 5.3 Enhance placemaking throughout the city. All funds are subject to the requirements and processes laid out in the [Municipal Accommodation Tax Administration Policy](#).

Through ongoing engagement with Guelph's tourism network, accessibility was identified as a key gap and opportunity area. As a result, accessibility has been selected as the strategic focus of the 2026 Gaps and Needs Fund. This decision reflects a shared commitment to creating a more inclusive visitor experience and supporting tourism businesses in addressing barriers in their offerings.

Program Overview

The Accessible Destination Program is a one-time initiative designed to help tourism businesses and event organizers in Guelph improve accessibility and enhance the visitor experience for people with disabilities. Funded through the Council-approved Gaps and Needs Fund and delivered in partnership with AccessNow, the program focuses on practical, non-structural improvements that make tourism spaces more inclusive.

Selected participants will receive:

- A detailed accessibility review conducted by trained Access Mappers
- A Verified Listing on AccessNow's platform (for physical locations)
- A fact sheet outlining accessibility features
- Tailored recommendations for small accessibility upgrades
- Up to \$1,000 in vendor-supported funding to implement improvements. Funds will be paid to the vendor directly for completed project work. The grantee will not receive any dollars directly.

AccessNow Partnership

Guelph Tourism has partnered with AccessNow to provide expert guidance during the program. AccessNow is a global accessibility platform that helps communities identify and improve access to public spaces through real-world assessments and lived experience. As part of the Accessible

Destination Program, AccessNow will conduct detailed accessibility reviews of selected tourism businesses and events in Guelph. Trained Access Mappers—individuals with lived experience of disability—will visit each location and assess over 30 accessibility features across three categories: Entrance, General, and Washroom.

Their feedback will be used to generate:

- A Verified Listing on AccessNow's platform (for physical locations)
- A fact sheet outlining accessibility features
- Customized recommendations for small non- structural improvements

AccessNow's approach is grounded in usability and inclusion. While recommendations will be provided, participating organizations are not required to implement any specific changes. The goal is to foster learning, increase awareness, and promote inclusive tourism experiences across Guelph.

Priority objectives

Applications will be prioritized based on the following goals:

- Improving visitor experiences for people with disabilities
- Commitment to advancing accessibility in tourism
- Promoting Guelph as an accessible destination
- Supporting a mix of tourism types (brick-and-mortar and event-based)
- The grantee's goals and motivation
- Readiness and commitment to reporting

Eligibility and applicants

Eligible applicants include:

- Tourism businesses located within the City of Guelph
- Both new and established organizations
- For-profit and non-profit entities
- Brick and mortar businesses
- Festivals and events without storefronts such as festivals taking place in a park

To be eligible, your organization must qualify as a tourism business that serves visitors from 40 kilometers or more away. This includes accommodation , restaurants, sports hosting organizations, festivals, attractions, specialty retail and arts and culture organizations. Participating organizations must be willing to have their location reviewed by AccessNow. Reviews will be conducted by trained Mappers with lived experience, who will provide feedback based on their visit and interaction with your space. While recommendations will be provided, organizations are not required to implement any suggested changes. While we appreciate the interest from all applicants, funding is limited. As a result, only five brick-and-mortar businesses and five events will be selected to participate in the Accessible Destination Program in 2026.

Eligible Projects

While final project recommendations will depend on the unique accessibility review of each

space, here are examples of improvements that may be considered through the program. Projects must be based on AccessNow's recommendations and may include:

- Inclusive seating (mobility device-friendly, companion seating, size-inclusive options)
- Accessible menus (braille, large print, screen reader-friendly)
- Staff training on inclusive customer service
- Sensory kits or quiet zones
- Exterior doorbells or entry alerts
- High-contrast or tactile signage
- Bathroom upgrades (grab bars, automatic faucets)

Structural renovations or permanent construction are not eligible under this program.

Ineligible costs

The following items are not eligible for funding through this program:

- Structural renovations or permanent construction such as ramps
- Façade improvements or building modifications
- Operating expenses (e.g. staff wages, salaries, utilities)
- Alcohol purchase, distribution, or licensing
- Awards, prizes, or raffles
- Donations or sponsorships
- Legal, audit, or interest expenses
- Political contributions
- Lottery licenses or gaming fees
- Branding or logo development
- Permit fees or municipal approvals
- Pre-existing deficit funding (grants or loans)

Funding Structure

The Accessible Destination Program is a one-time fund through the Destination Gaps and Needs Program. Grantees will receive up to \$1,000 for accessibility improvements. This is paid directly to the vendor completing the work and will not be paid to the grantee.

Application process

Applications for the Accessible Destination Program will be accepted between November 3, 2025, and November 28, 2025. Applications must be submitted online through the application portal. If requested, the City of Guelph will accept written applications or verbal applications. A staff review committee will review applications in full based on a pre-established rubric before making award decisions .

The application process is as follows:

1. Attend an information session in November 2025 hosted by AccessNow and Guelph Tourism.
2. Apply through the City's grant platform (alternate formats accepted upon request). All applications must be submitted by November 28, 2025.
3. Receive notification of application status by March 1, 2026.
4. Complete the project and submit a final report by December 31, 2026.

Funding decision

All applications will be reviewed by a staff selection committee composed of representatives from Guelph Tourism, Accessibility and Community, Equity and Inclusion. Applications will be evaluated using a pre-established rubric that considers accessibility goals, readiness to participate, and potential impact on the visitor experience. Successful applicants will be notified by March 1, 2026. All successful awards will be subject to the [Municipal Accommodation Tax Administration Policy](#).

Reporting requirements

All successful participants must submit a final report by December 31, 2026. Grantees will receive a detailed list of reporting requirements upon selection. Reports may include the organization's experience with the program, project goals and outcomes, accessibility improvements implemented, feedback collected from visitors or staff, new marketing efforts used to inform visitors about accessibility features, and any positive changes observed in visitor experiences. This information will help evaluate the impact of the program and inform future accessibility initiatives. Failure to submit a complete report may result in disqualification from future funding opportunities.

Definitions

For-profit business: A for-profit organization is one that operates with the goal of making money.

Non-profit organization: A non-profit organization, also known as a non-business entity, or nonprofit institution, is a legal entity organized and operated for a collective, public or social benefit, in contrary with an entity that operates as a business aiming to generate a profit for its owners.

Tourism business: A tourism business is any organization—whether for-profit, non-profit, or charity—that provides services, experiences, or products primarily aimed at serving visitors who travel from 40 kilometers or more away. This includes:

- Accommodations: hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts
- Food services: restaurants and cafes
- Events and hosting: sports organizations, festivals
- Attractions: museums, theme parks, natural sites
- Retail and culture: specialty shops, galleries, performing arts

Tourism event: An event that is focused on attracting 30% or more of its overall attendance to be visitors from 40 kilometers or further away.

Specialty visitor-focused retail: A business or organization that offers a product that is not readily available in all communities. Examples include but are not limited to: wedding dresses, thrift stores, souvenir shops, etc.

Tourism product: A tourism product is considered any product, service, event or offering that appeals to a visitor.

Visitor: A visitor is considered anyone who visits Guelph from more than 40 kilometers away who is not making a routine trip.

Supporting Documentation

Tourism Marketing and Material Development Fund Application Form Appendix A – Budget document

Appendix B – Attestation cover letter

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