Northern Tourism Partnership
Building a Tourism Cluster in Northern Newfoundland

A Report to the NL Rural Secretariat
and
Centre for Environmental Excellence – SWGC

2010
A Note About the Report

The horizontal format of this report pays homage to Newfoundland and Labrador’s Department of Tourism, Culture, and Recreation document, *Uncommon Potential: A Vision for Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism*. This report builds on the research and recommendations of that provincial document. It has provided a platform on which to specifically explore the issues facing the development of a competitive tourism industry at the northern end of the Great Northern Peninsula and consider the viability of a tourism cluster as a strategy.
ABSTRACT

The northern end of Newfoundland’s Great Northern Peninsula (GNP) is home to some of the most important natural and cultural heritage sites in Canada and therefore a compelling tourism destination. L’Anse aux Meadows, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is the region’s unique anchor attraction for knowledge-based tourism. In spite the site’s global importance, the region continues to face a number of challenges in its attempt to build a competitive tourism industry. Declining population, distance from major airports and Provincial cities, lack of public overland transportation and inconsistent road maintenance are a few of the challenges to tourism development. To address some of the issues in the region and create a collective strategy for enhancing tourism products and promotion, a group of regional businesses, heritage sites, and support agencies have created a regional tourism development group called the Northern Tourism Partnership (NTP).

This report describes the NTP region, the existing tourism industry, and the process by which NTP was created and is now organizing itself as a collaborative effort. It ends with recommendations for sustaining a successful tourism development group by summarizing the current thinking on tourism clusters and networks as an organizing tool for small and medium tourism enterprises.
I. INTRODUCTION

The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador has put considerable resources towards developing its burgeoning tourism industry. The Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation (TCR) oversees the marketing of the province and designated satellite organizations receive funds for marketing specific regions. TCR also works to support tourism infrastructure development and hospitality training, as well as other aspects of the industry. In addition to government efforts, there are small networks and organizations that target specific development and promotional needs for their regions. These often function as structures for collaboration between businesses and historic sites, social networking for participants and forums for addressing issues of concern that affect them in the tourism industry.

Tourism businesses and attractions at the northern section of the Great Northern Peninsula are looking to create a group structure they can use to build their tourism industry to be competitive with the rest of the province and country. Inspired by economic development theories of Michael Porter at Harvard Business School and Stuart Rosenfeld, founder of Regional Technology Strategies, Inc., the group is working to create a tourism cluster. This report summarizes a small bit of the literature on tourism clusters and the process by which the tourism businesses and attractions are forming a viable development organization.

As part of the process of creating a development group or tourism cluster at the northern end of the Great Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland and Labrador, it is useful to begin with a short description of the region and the development of tourism there.

The Region

The Great Northern Peninsula (GNP) is home to some of the most important natural and cultural heritage sites in Canada. From rare plants to the first European landings on the Western Hemisphere, the GNP is a compelling destination for tourism. Two sites have particularly drawn the attention of visitors and promoters – Gros Morne National Park at the southern end of the peninsula and L’Anse au Meadows at the northern end. Both attractions have UNESCO World Heritage Site designations. Although these sites are anchor attractions at “the bow and stern” of the peninsula, they are not the only experiences that could attract visitors to the area, given the right kind of development and marketing.
Most of the historic outports on the GNP are dotted along a two-lane highway (Route 430) that runs north-south along the western edge of the island of Newfoundland. At the northern tip is the town of St. Anthony, a major service centre. This “northern tip” and seven communities on the nearby northeast coast make up a sub-region of the GNP, which is the geographic focus of this report and the fledgling Northern Tourism Partnership – the place being called the Land of First Contact.¹

Historically, the economic foundation of the LOFC region was characterized by fishing and forestry. The ups and downs of these industries are painfully well-known to the residents who live mostly in small communities whose locations reflect easy access to natural resources rather than to large population centres and services. Looking at the challenged economic state of this region now, it is hard to believe that at in the early 16th century it was the focal point of industrial activity that brought great wealth through fishing, fur trading, and whaling to mercantile companies in England, France and, for a short time, Spain and Portugal.

For this report, it is not necessary to describe the sad decline of the cod fishery that has defined both the economy and culture of rural Newfoundland and is now a compelling focal point for cultural tourism. Although the fishing industry still brings in large revenues to provincial coffers, it is no longer based in the same way in the outports, leaving them in a precarious position on many levels.

Fortunately, in the last decade, tourism has evolved as a viable economic opportunity for small communities with saleable natural and cultural assets. Local entrepreneurs and heritage centres are determined to participate in the growing tourism industry that brings in hundreds of million dollars to the province each year. They believe they have special attractions that are unique and could be competitive in a provincial, national and even global tourism industry. It is their plan to develop a sustainable way to compete.

A major problem for tourism development in the LOFC region is the discrepancy between the numbers of tourists who visit Gros Morne Park (approximately 158,000 in 2008) versus the much smaller number who continue north to L’Anse au Meadows (approximately 27,000). This worrisome statistic is one of the red flags prompting the creation of a tourism development group to help change the equation in the LOFC region. Tourism operators and other connected to the tourism industry understand that is crucial in the near future to address the challenge of attracting visitors to destinations north of Gros Morne and providing them with high quality experiences.

¹To distinguish the NTP region from the rest of the GNP, its members sponsored an online historical atlas and tourism information site entitled Land of First Contact (www.landoffirstcontact.ca).
Tourism in the Region – a Look Back

In the late 19th and early 20th century gentlemen explorers traveled the northern coasts and interior landscape of Newfoundland and Labrador, which they saw as exceedingly exotic terrain occupied by colourful fishermen and trappers as well as mysterious aboriginal people. The 1930s witnessed a more organized attempt to use northern Newfoundland and Labrador as a cruising destination for intrepid travellers. As one cruise ship brochure put it, “Give yourself a unique summer holiday this year – a Clarke luxury cruise from Montreal to beautiful, mysterious Labrador. See the far-famed Grenfell Missions in the outposts of civilization on the fringe of the Arctic.” Dr. Grenfell and his international staff did play a significant role in publicizing the region in eastern US and England through fundraising lectures about the Grenfell Mission. After World War II, the tourism industry catered especially to hunting and sport fishing, taking advantage of the large animal population and excellent salmon rivers. In the 1980s, through the efforts of far-sighted tourism entrepreneurs from the province, and with governmentsupport, the tourism industry began to diversify and promote important historical sites and natural wonders to a growing market of adventure tourists. Now, in the early 21st century, culture and heritage has become important to both tourism and economic development especially in rural areas.
In 1988 the Viking Trail Tourism Association (VTTA) was founded to develop a collective marketing and tourism strategy for the region’s growing number of small tourism-related enterprises. The VTTA territory covers most of the western coast of Newfoundland and the Labrador Straits. In 2000, the VTTA was involved with organizing a successful international millennium celebration of Viking/Norse history in Newfoundland that brought researchers and visitors to the L’Anse aux Meadows Historic Site. Besides that celebration, the VTTA did many good things to improve and promote the tourism industry in its territory. However, one challenge to the association’s long-term sustainability was its big geographic area with diverse history and interests, types of attractions, and competing tourism agendas. In the last few years the VTTA has been less active even as the need increases for individual tourism businesses and attractions to work together.

The LOFC region is much smaller than that of the VTTA, which is what the members want and should be well-placed for the global upturn of interest in adventure tourism. However, a quick analysis of tourism infrastructure and products shows a patchwork situation with a few high-end accommodations and attractions, and too many sites - including interpretation centres, trails, museums, roadside picnic areas, and information rest-stops - unfinished, poorly maintained or even abandoned, with outdated travel information and under trained staff. The hospitality of the region’s people, the depth of its history, the authentic experiences make up somewhat for a small number of services and packages, but not enough to ignore problems such as those listed here.

The successful tourism businesses in the LOFC region are searching for a way to address barriers to positive industry development. They are looking to create a geographically smaller tourism development group made up initially of a few tourism businesses, historic sites and support agencies who recognize the importance of collaboration between private and public sectors to increase market share, improve attractions and promote the LOFC region. At the present time, the group, calling itself the Northern Tourism Partnership (NTP), is loosely structured. The membership and mission remain fluid as the group begins to solidify its structure and plan of action. The group’s overarching goal can be understood in a quote by John Hull in the Destination Development Forum final report (Parks Canada, 2009). He writes, “statistics suggest that there is a need for local operators and attractions to work in partnership to capture a greater share of domestic and provincial markets in order to grow visitation to the region (pg. 14, 2009).”

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2 The VTTA website has described it territory on one page as being all of western Newfoundland and the Labrador Straits being from Deer Lake to the Labrador Straits. In either case the territory is much larger than that of the Northern Tourism Partnership.
Splash page from the Northern Tourism Partnership online historical atlas – [http://landoffirstcontact.ca](http://landoffirstcontact.ca)
III. TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Tourism Clusters and Networks – an Overview of the Literature

In the last decade, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador has put considerable funding and effort into developing its tourism industry. It has invested in useful research on the global state of tourism, looking especially at marketplace, product development, marketing strategies, and innovation. It has also invested in large marketing campaigns, the last one being highly thought of for its artistic merit as well as promotional appeal. Mindful of the growing competition to attract high-end tourists, the provincial Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation (TCR) created a document entitled *Uncommon Potential: A Vision for Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism* (also called Vision 2010). It describes emerging market trends, including:

- traveler demand for higher levels of comfort, security, and personalization,
- competition dependent on ability to spend more on marketing,
- development of new products and experiences,
- ability to facilitate visitors trip planning online,
- high levels of service and authentic experiences.
- environmental consciousness.

The report also identifies some of the challenges facing tourism in NL, challenges that are especially true for the LOFC region. They include:

- travel barriers,
- access to interesting natural and cultural sites,
- slow growth of industry products,
- skilled workforce,
- high-level infrastructure.

This is a formidable list, especially for a rural area such as the LOFC region with a small permanent population. To address these challenges, a list tourism experts point to the need for better collaboration among tourism operators and attractions. Tourism development literature reviewed for this report has singled out small and medium tourism enterprises (SMEs), common in rural areas, for special attention on how they can address industry development challenges and compete in a global market dominated by large corporations, resorts and
service industries. The importance of collaborative organizing strategies for tourism SMEs is paramount, and is focused particularly on three essential ingredients:

- partnerships that align and focus the investment decisions of government and tourist industry,
- deeper citizen and community engagement,
- strong leadership and partnerships between business and the public sector.

The literature promotes collaborative strategies in the form of what is variously called clusters, networks, partnerships, collaborations, innovation systems, etc. As if the list of barriers on the previous page is not enough, other potential problems that appear in rurally-based tourism development include lack of coordination in programming and services, deficiencies in expertise and training, lack of human and economic resources, lack of research capabilities, little understanding among individual businesses of the global market place and how best to align their attractions to it. Clearly, for SMEs to get the word out about what their region has to offer and improve the attractions and services for visitors when they do come, they must make themselves more visible and their voice louder by banding together in an organized, though not necessarily formal, collaborative group.

To discuss the creation of collaborative groups, this paper will use the term clusters and networks found in development literature. While there seems to be no one definition of a tourism cluster, it is generally agreed that, in the tourism industry, clusters are more often than not formed in a specified and limited geographical area. In several cases, researchers found clusters that were countrywide or product-based, but this is not the norm. There are a number of case studies of successful tourism clusters around the world; those that were mentioned shared an ability to be innovative in their approach to problem solving and marketing. The literature agrees that tourism clusters and networks appear to be increasing in number as a competitive strategy in the global tourism industry.

In place of a single definition for tourism clusters, Novelli (2005) describes their purpose this way, “The purpose of tourism clusters is to highlight the availability of certain activities in one destination or region and to get SMEs that would normally work in isolation to cooperate and build a successful tourism product in the location.” This statement of purpose might be helpful to send to a funding agency but it is too general to advise on what a successful working cluster looks like from the inside. For this report a further search of the literature was necessary to gather ideas describing specific organizational strategies for creating and running tourism clusters and networks.
There is no shortage of examples from around the world of exemplary tourism clusters and networks, which are now considered an appropriate organizing strategy for tourism SMEs. Consensus on possible positive outcomes includes:

- stimulation to members for improving their businesses,
- infrastructure for professional development and training,
- knowledge transfer,
- sharing of best practices,
- links to marketplace,
- connections to government, academia and support NGOs,
- sense of belonging to region and shared industry,
- coordination and collaborative programming,
- regional packaging,
- promote personal relationships,
- improved services,
- lobbying ability,
- increased market share.

This an energizing set of outcomes that should send tourism SMEs in the LOFC region rushing to form a cluster or network; but the all so import “how to” remains both less clear in the literature and in the past experience of NTP members. In some sense, just how to organize and maintain a tourism development group is the biggest question facing the fledgling Northern Tourism Partnership and the literature is reluctant to provide recipe.
The Nuts and Bolts of Tourism Clusters and Networks

The literature is disappointingly stingy for those seeking a simple formula for a successful cluster or network. Missing is a concise guide to the nuts and bolts of organizational development. Answers to such questions about formal/informal structure, sustainable leadership, strategies and actions, public-private partnerships, and prioritization of projects unfortunately do not exist (or have yet to be found). It can only be said that in search of an organizational strategy for NTP, it is important to remember some of the barriers to creating a successful cluster. Again, these include lack of leadership, low levels of collaboration, and little trust between members (Braun 2005).

On a more positive note the Norden Innovation Centre has provided a detailed list of positive common characteristics shared by ten clusters (they call innovation systems) studied in Nordic countries (Hjalager, A. M, et al. 2008). They are:

- members from various sectors of the tourism industry, public entities, and organizations;
- personally diverse members with several layers of relationships to each other that bridge social, cultural, and institutional gaps;
- strong role in the group played by at least one visionary able to facilitate or help facilitate the actions of the group;
- open and inviting atmosphere in the group with participants willing to share knowledge and resources;
- a willingness to cooperate on various issues;
- decisive role for public sector facilitating innovation, resources, connections to academia;
- focus on increasing global outreach in marketing and knowledge acquisition;
- increasing cross-sector outreach to other business, education, the environment.
While the Nordic Innovations Centre does not state that all these characteristics must be present to have a successful cluster, most successful clusters have some or all of these characteristics, a fine but important point.

For the NTP, there are two initial issues that need consensus as it begins to develop an organizational structure for the organization whether or not it remains a loose network or builds itself into a formal association. They are: the make-up of the membership (with thought to the possibility of membership categories; and second, group leadership.

Cluster Membership

In the creation of a cluster membership list, researchers have found that the participants usually have both a formal and informal relationship to each other (Hjalager 2008). This seems to be the case with at least some of NTP’s current members who often sit on the same regional development committees and informally encourage tourists to visit each other’s businesses and attractions. In successful networks the core business related members are often joined by representatives from the both public and private support agencies who can facilitate and “provoke” activity (Norden, 2008).

In developing a membership list, there is the question of how the support sector representatives should be included in the group. For instance, should they be part of the core membership or instead, have an ancillary support status? A search of literature on public-private partnerships focuses mostly on large-scale infrastructure projects such as libraries (UBC is one example), hospitals, and museums; public-private partnerships are not much discussed in tourism literature using that
terminology. However, in most literature on tourism clusters it is clear that a successful group should include both public and private sector entities. The public sector, in the form of government agencies for instance, can provide access to vital funding, facilitation services, provincial or national level marketing.\(^3\) Often there is already an undeclared partnership in some regions; in the LOFC region public sector services are already provided in the form of transportation (ferries, roads), parks, and management of natural resources that are also attractions (such as wildlife). The higher education community, which could be either public or private sector, is another potentially important arm of a tourism cluster, especially helpful for its research expertise, access to technology and training opportunities, and in NTP’s case, access to a high level student workforce.

There are many links in the tourism industry chain besides the directly related businesses and attractions, and they should be considered for some type of participation in a tourism development cluster or network. Examples include representatives from the transportation industry (bus lines, taxi services, car rentals, and so on). Also, individual entrepreneurs, such as artists and musicians, whose presence can act as a magnet to attract visitors and summer residents.\(^4\)

It should be noted that members of a successful cluster must be able to identify themselves as, not only individual owners of businesses or directors of non-profit attractions, but as committed participants in a collective tourism entity. Members’ lack of time or motivation can be a fatal impediment to sustaining a successful cluster or

\(^3\) The PEI Museum, PEI Heritage Foundation, and Tourism PEI can be considered a type of public-private partnership although it is not clear from the outside reading how the partners work together.

\(^4\) An example at the southern end of the GNP are the communities of Woody Point and Norris Point that have attracted artists to their communities, which in turn, has attracted visitors and seasonal residents who want to be associated with a Place of Culture.
network. If, for no other reason, motivation should stem from the understanding that “one poor experience can negatively impact the entire chain of (tourism) experiences” in a region (Braun 2005).

At the time of writing this report, a core list of members had been established for NTP, made up of four members from the business sector, two from the university, one from a non-profit development organization, and four from the provincial government. In a past NTP meeting, the members spoke of their hope to enlarge the group without making it unwieldy. The research recommends an optimum membership, including support group agencies, should be between 15 and 20 people.

Leadership

Most descriptions of existing tourism clusters identify the need for a salaried coordinator or facilitator. Unfortunately, beyond stating the importance of such a position, there is no detailed description of a good coordinator’s role, especially what kind of power to act goes with the position. It has been suggested that the duties of a coordinator are of a steward to the group who gives encouragement, finds resources, shares workload, facilitates joint activities among members, and oversees outreach activities. It can be added here, although it may be obvious, that the leader should also be knowledgeable about the tourism industry, which can be a challenge in a rural area whose traditional job descriptions relate more often to natural resource management, healthcare, general education and retail activities.

There are other questions too about successful leadership such as, should the position be ever a volunteer one, a rolling task for cluster members or only work as a paid position? Would the network members pay a membership fee to support a coordinator? What other funding strategies are there? Does the group have to be formal to access government funds for that purpose?

After questioning the members about the difficult issue of leadership, a possible solution has been presented by one group member from government. It will be discussed in a later section and involves a combination of project-based coordinators interspersed with temporary facilitators from the ranks of the government and NGO support members.
Tickle Inn, Cape Onion
IV. THE NORTHERN TOURISM PARTNERSHIP

The Formation of the Northern Tourism Partnership

In 2006, sensing growing problems in the development of the tourism industry in the LOFC region, a few tourism-related entrepreneurs and community organizers, with facilitators from the Department of Industry, Trade and Rural Development (INTRD) and the Quebec-Labrador Foundation (QLF), created a small, informal group with the idea of identifying and addressing tourism industry issues in the region. It was a loose network that called itself the *Northern Travels Tourism Network* (NTTN). The ad hoc facilitators at that time felt that the group could be the basis of a cluster strategy for the region. The members themselves were less focused on theories of collaborative clusters than on getting solutions to on-going problems of visitation and marketing, and the need for collaboration on these and other matters. Even though the group began as an informal alliance, it understood that at some point it would need to solidify its core membership, name, organizational structure and plan of action.

In the first year, the group had two meetings to discuss shared issues and write a mission statement. To create a visible identity for government and other support agencies, the group agreed to develop a website introducing the region and its attractions for visitors. The website would also broaden the historical “back story” from the Viking exploration to a wider and more inclusive story that would allow smaller communities to participate with their historical assets. When the funding agency turned down the website proposal, the group had serious thoughts as to whether to continue its efforts to organize. Feedback from the government funder stated that the group needed to be formally organized, even registered, in order to receive a grant. This news was a setback as the members were already divided on the advisability of formalizing. No one wanted to get involved with covering administrative costs, which was a growing problem for the VTTA and other development groups around the province. The turndown of initial funding halted all forward momentum in the group. Although the group’s members still felt that some type of collaboration would be useful, no one was sure how to proceed. The one actual accomplishment to this point had been the creation of a mission statement.
The Mission Statement

The mission statement as written below was created during an earlier period of the group’s existence when it was known as the *Northern Travels Tourism Network*. It states that:

*The mission of the Northern tourism partnership is to collaborate to increase market place for its members through marketing, packaging, educational and research programs and to solve shared problems facing tourism development in the region that includes Plum Point north to L’Anse aux Meadows and east to Englee.*
Soldiering on

After another tourism season came and went, an idea was put forth that by involving an academic institution of higher learning in the group would help to focus objectives, give the group a higher profile, and allow the region to access academic knowledge and research expertise to support tourism growth. An alliance was suggested with the Centre for Environmental Excellence (CEE) at Sir Wilfred Grenfell College (SWGC) in Corner Brook.

In the fall of 2008 CEE sponsored a meeting at the college to introduce a few SWGC faculty to the special history, culture, research opportunities, and development challenges in the LOFC region. It was also made clear that partnership with NTP might help individual faculty members focus their research projects on its region. As stated in one meeting report, besides the major tourism mandate of the group, which is “to strengthen the capacity of the private sector, tourism sites, and community organizers through planning, training, collaboration, and education”, it could also “identify areas where new research should be undertaken and to outline a research agenda.”

The first meeting was followed a month later with a retreat at the Tuckamore Lodge in Main Brook attended by CEE participants from Meeting One, region representatives from government and not-for profit organizations, tourism businesses and attractions (see participant list in appendix). At the very least, the meeting organizers thought there would be an opportunity for members and potential members to get to know each other and do some informal brainstorming. Specifically, as written in the meeting’s follow-up report, the objectives of the meeting were to:

- introduce potential network members,
- identify issues facing the tourism industry in the region,
- visit one of the community-based heritage attractions,
- discuss how academic research could assist in building the capacity of the tourism industry to compete at a global level,
- develop a plan for short-term and long-term actions related to both research and development.

A series of short and long-term goals and outcomes were debated and put forth. They were:

Outcomes – short term

- Student researcher to inventory and assess fossil sites with the idea of developing one or more for public visitation;
- student assistant for the Granchain Exhibit in St. Lunaire to help create a new site for the exhibit at Dark Tickle and propose experiential opportunities related to the exhibit for visitors;
• student with GIS/GPS experience to collect data for community tourism asset maps;
• QLF project to pilot a New Zealand-based model for knowledge-based tourism [Creative Tourism New Zealand – www.creativetourism.co.nz/] and develop a set of research indicators to evaluate implementation of the model;
• SWOT analysis of tourism opportunities in the region;
• Archival assistance to French Shore Historical Society related to historical documents;
• Development of terms of reference for research on cluster development;
• Research on marketplace and knowledge-based tourism as it related to the tourism potential for the region.

It was agreed that some of the short-term actions should lead to longer term research and development projects related directly or indirectly to tourism. The long-term action might include the following outcomes:

Outcomes – Long Term

• CURA Research Proposal
  Needed: community support
  strong university/academic requirements
  private sector investment/support
• Grenfell Mission (Gap analysis leading to possible research projects)
• Application for Canada Research Chair in Sustainable Tourism
• Development of Tourism Events and Festivals
  Examples: Iceberg Festival, Religious Festivals, Sealing Industry, Irish Cultural festival
• Identification of science-based research opportunities related to the region (prior examples were eider ducks and fish) that could lead to solving problems with natural resources
  Needed: a clear line for requesting research assistance from local university participants
• Development of “IT” technology to promote and inform potential visitors to region.

In order to keep the positive momentum going that began at the Main Brook meeting, it was agreed that there must be some actions taken in the short term that would benefit both local members of the network and SWGC. To that end, it was decided that a relatively easy step would be to establish student internships with a direct or indirect tourism focus. Several internship ideas were put forward that included assisting the renewal of the Granchain Exhibit in St. Lunaire or doing an inventory of fossil sites in the region. Neither of these internships came to fruition as the NTP was still trying to work out the basics of its organizational structure and funding.
The meeting participants left Main Brook feeling as if they had finally found a formula to make NTP work as a useful addition to tourism development in their region. They were ready to take the next steps; but unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, the momentum halted again. Members’ time, funding, and communication issues, were all impediments to the forward movement of the group. At this point, members wondered if NTP would every truly get off the ground. Was it worth the effort as most of the members had been involved for years in one group or another that had failed to exist long enough to plant permanent roots as a viable instrument for long-term development on a number of fronts.

In spite of the group’s continuing delays in establishing some permanent form, it did have a written list of objectives, a name everyone could agree on, a few ideas for initial projects, a core membership, and a written Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), if that was needed.

**Northern Tourism Partnership Objectives**

The list of objectives as listed in the MOU include:

- Formulate an organizational structure that represents the broad interests and priorities of each partner, focused on the needs of the tourism partners in the NTP region;

- engage the tourism and research communities and government agencies to ensure that NTP tourism development and research needs are met through the partnership;

- actively recruit government partnership and influence public policy issues that have a direct link to the overall tourism development of the region;

- engage other development agencies in the area in order to collaborate on solving problems and creating promotion and development strategies to benefit the tourism industry in the region;

- host stakeholder forums to create collaborative strategic planning, coordinate development initiatives, identify and address regional challenges and strengthen communication between tourism related businesses, attractions and public and private support organizations.

In the MOU more objectives, listed under Partner Roles and Commitments, included:

- Establish effective communication linkages with tourism stakeholders in the region;

- identify specific tourism assets and opportunities that require research & development;
• provide access for researchers to establish collaboration opportunities in the region.

In addition to outcomes suggested earlier in this document, the group should consider adding the following objectives or actions:

• Share best practices in tourism and the latest research on tourism development;
• provide opportunities for professional development and training;
• link the region to the marketplace;
• be a lobby group to government in tourism policy issues and initiatives;
• create opportunities for knowledge transfer from academia and other sources;
• coordinate programming;
• promote relationships between tourism businesses, attractions and government agencies;
• find ways to increase the market share;
• create a shared sense of belonging to the region and a connected tourism industry.

There is a much overlap in these three lists. Given the size and uncertain workings of NTP, the members might consider consolidating the objectives into a smaller and more manageable list.

As the decision whether or not NTP can survive as a workable group to address issues facing the tourism industry in the LOFC region gets closer, it was time to interview each member for their perspectives on the next move of the group.

**NTP Members Weigh In**
Since the birth of the idea to form a tourism development group at the northern end of the GNP, there has been a core of “members” who have loyally stuck with the idea through the ups and downs of the process. The core members were more than willing to be interviewed by phone about how they see an ideal group in form, organization and outcomes. Unfortunately, a few members could not be reached and so their views may be added later as they are successfully contacted. Here is a summary of what the interviewees said when asked the following questions:5

- What has been your experience with other development groups, in the region or nationally?
- What do you want to get out of being a member of NTP?
- How many members should NTP have and who should be included in the group?
- What should the members’ responsibilities be?
- Who should lead the group?
- What are the objectives of NTP?
- What tasks are most important to address first?
- How should government agencies and other support groups be connected to NTP?

What has been your experience with other development groups?
Naturally the core members have had different experiences with development groups depending on how long they have been directly or indirectly connected to the tourism industry. Several members personally gained valuable knowledge of tourism as an industry and how different size groups function. All felt that their experience with small groups was far superior to large groups, especially for getting their ideas out and having the ability to work towards their objectives. Unfortunately, all the interviewees were ultimately frustrated with the tourism groups they had been associated with, feeling that none were able or willing to focus on the needs of their region in terms of promoting their individual tourism assets or the destination as a whole. One exception was the VTTA when it first started.

What would you like to get out of being a member of NTP?
When asked this question, the interviewees who run businesses or attractions wanted marketing assistance and a higher profile for the region in the provincial marketing pieces. Across the board, these members expressed discontent with what they see as provincial lack of attention to their region; they believe there is very little (actually no) effort being made to meaningfully include their region in marketing or tourism development. They hope that NTP can be a stronger voice in lobbying for inclusion in marketing and development funding at a level that would make their attractions competitive in the marketplace.

5 Some questions were added in interviews with government representatives and the CEE. As the interviews were conversational in nature, the questions listed above may have been stated in a slightly different manner.
The support members\(^6\) generally expressed an interest in seeing the small and medium size enterprises band together in a representative group to develop and coordinate projects and fit better in various funding streams. It would also be easier for them to deal with one group to assist in identifying and addressing specific needs. On a broader level, the support organizations could also use NTP and the region as a field lab for model projects and as the focus for research, purely academic and economically developmental.

NTP members remain cautiously optimistic that NTP can work as an effective development group in spite of their understanding that in the past they have generally not been successful working together inside or outside a group. Tourism enterprises in the LOFC region have not particularly collaborated on promoting or improving the attractions not directly overseen by organizations like Parks Canada or the Province.

**What should the members’ responsibilities be?**

There is some difference within the group about what the individual responsibilities of members should be, which depends on where the members are coming from, as entrepreneurs or supporters. The members who are entrepreneurs, business people and site coordinators feel overworked already without taking on many new responsibilities as members of NTP. Overall, they are willing to come to meetings, give their ideas, decide on projects, and, in several cases, represent the group occasionally (but not alone) as lobbyists to government for regional needs. The support members, possibly frustrated themselves from past involvement with regional groups, feel members need to make a clear commitment, which they can keep, to represent the group occasionally in person, give input between meetings, respond to emails, and make every effort to show up at meetings. Both perspectives are somewhat out of sync with the realities of what the literature describes as basic to the sustainability of a tourism cluster. Members need to be willing to put in volunteer time in a number of ways, including leadership positions, and need to be thinking not only about their individual enterprises but also about how to further the objectives of their group and region. It boils down to a high level of commitment on the part of all the members, but there is room to negotiate what that commitment should look like for individual members.

**How many members should NTP have and who should be included in the group?**

Beyond the feeling that NTP should be a small group, no specific ideas were pushed forward as to who should be members and how they should relate to the group. Some felt that the support members should be at the core of the group along side the business members, and other felt they should be on the margins, ready to assist when called upon. As mentioned earlier in this report, if the membership expands, two categories of members should be considered that play an important, if less obvious role, in the tourism industry: representatives who provide access to the region in the form of transportation, i.e. car rental agencies, travel agencies,

\(^6\) Support member is the term used in this report to denote a representative from a government agency, NGO and educational organization.
public transportation. Also individual representatives of the arts – crafters, painters, musicians, etc. who often translate the culture in ways that can provide special experiences and learning for visitors and residents alike.

**Who should lead the group?**
It goes without question that proper leadership is perhaps the most important ingredient for a successful and sustainable group and so this question is the most difficult one facing the creation of any tourism cluster or network. The NTP members seemed better able to describe what would not work than what would work, which is a hurdle to solidifying the organizational chart and being able to move forward with projects.

In looking at the history of the various group that have formed around tourism, community development, culture and heritage, etc., it is most often the loss of leadership that has caused the untimely end of what were good efforts at collaboration. Under the current funding programs, it seems almost impossible to get grants for more than a start-up project coordinator. After the initial grant is over, funding has needed to be raised privately by members through other project proposals or their own donations or levy-type taxes. These strategies have been difficult to sustain. None of the group members wanted to be even part-time leaders and all agreed that if someone from the group did come forward, the cluster or network would probably not be sustainable.

In the face of this dilemma, it has been suggested that the time between NTP projects (such as research or infrastructure improvement) where a paid coordinator was present, support members whose job description already involved economic development, could rotate to assist with group communications and proposal writing. That would leave the main body of the membership to decide on what project they wanted NTP to focus on, work with the support member-leader to prepare a funding proposal or periodic meetings, and give periodic input on group needs and interests. While this strategy is not the smoothest approach, it might be the only one available given the constraints of time and funding. If a coordinator position could be funded for the first year, then the other strategy would kick in after NTP had a chance to get off the ground.

**What are the objectives of NTP and what tasks are most important to address first?**
In the interviews with the individual members, several objectives rose to the top of the list as most important. With tourism visitation dropping due in part to a global recession, the business members felt an immediate need to focus on marketing their businesses and the region. Coupled with their collective disappointment about their region’s lack of exposure in provincial marketing, the group feels they want to find innovative ways to improve their visibility and market their destinations as a distinct region. Several members hoped that the interest in working with community-based groups, expressed by Parks Canada, will lead to some joint marketing opportunities. One member has been actively seeking research on how the region measures up in global market place and market readiness.
A number of members mentioned another focus having to do with the improvement of tourism infrastructure in the region. This includes signage, roads, and attractions that are either unfinished or not maintained. Given that, as the quote on pg____ says, one bad experience can bring down the whole region, this problem of quality and supervision is an important one.

Beyond these two areas of concern just mentioned, the members’ input on objectives followed the original list from the 2008 meeting.

**III. NEXT STEPS**

Now seems to be the time to “fish or cut bait” as far as NTP’s existence is concerned. More ups and downs in the planning process of getting the group off the ground will surely kill the idea. Those loyal members mentioned earlier in the report need to meet later this spring and determine if a tourism cluster or network as described in this report will, not only be in their best interest, but will be workable given their limited time and energy to participate.

Should the group decide to move forward, the question of leadership is probably topmost. With input from the support members, the group must decide how the leadership position will work and be funded.

Upon solving the challenge of leadership, the group should decide on a plan of action in terms of specific objectives, whether they are research, lobbying, creating joint packages and marketing, etc. Once decided, the support members need to actively assist in procuring funds for the project.

If these several steps can be accomplished in a next meeting (plus follow-up) by designated members, then NTP would be well on the road to visible existence, if not true sustainability, which hopefully would follow.

**IV. CONCLUSIONS – a general note**

Back to the beginning – what a fantastic island, what a special region! This Land of First Contact is unique in the world, for its history and combination of natural wonders. Perhaps it will stay its unspoiled place with or without the residents and visitors who live and walk through its landscape. However, a look at other special places around the world provide a warning that without some kind of human stewardship, they are in danger of being lost to unwanted development, pollution or neglect.
Experience also tells us that beyond a doubt the people those who live in these regions are the best stewards of the land and the history. The tourism industry, when well managed, provides a living for residents, a motive and funding to keep the special places preserved, protected and shared. Continued out-migration, especially among young people, is already a troublesome statistic for the future of caring stewards living in the region. Those residents now involved in the tourism industry say they are worried that they may not be able to hang on to what they have already created or improve their infrastructure to compete in what has become a worldwide, very competitive industry.

The literature on tourism development has stated almost unanimously that, in rural regions like LOFC, the small and medium sized enterprises must band together to make a place for themselves, surrounded as they are by large travel corporations already dominating much of where tourists go, what they do, and how they get there. Tourism clusters and networks are a proven strategy for SME’s to successfully be part of the tourism industry. Although undeniable hurdles exist to block small development groups, it is not impossible for tourism businesses, attractions, government agencies, NGOs and educational institutions to develop a successful, well-coordinated collaboration to compete in the global tourism industry.

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