RAPID RESPONSE TO BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE 2026 GUIDELINES

BACKGROUND

The Grand River Agricultural Society (GRAS) launched the Rapid Response to Business Development Initiative (RRBDI) to support their commitment to impact investing by creating long-term sustainability and fuelling innovation in the Agriculture and Environmental sectors. The GRAS RRBDI will provide up to $10,000 to support Ontario-based, agri-tech, agriculture and agri-food businesses, as they work with established business connections to advance market opportunities and secure sales for their innovative products, processes or technologies. The RRBDI is administered by the Agricultural Adaptation Council (AAC).

RRBDI OBJECTIVES

- To enable Ontario businesses, with preference to those located in Wellington, Waterloo and Perth counties, to respond quickly to emerging, global market opportunities where timely action is critical to securing sales.
- To assist businesses that have developed new and innovative products, processes and technologies in the agri-tech, agriculture and agri-food sector to move quickly to secure sales and market opportunities.
- To provide support for eligible project activities, including travel and associated costs, that are required to work with clients where there is a high potential to “close the deal” with real and established business connections.

APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

- Eligible applicants will be Ontario-based businesses in the agri-tech, agriculture, and agri-food sectors that are legal entities.
- All projects must address the RRBDI Objectives above.
- Prior contact and interaction between the business and another organization/company must have occurred. This prior interaction has required time, effort and investment on the part of the Ontario business and can be demonstrated.
- There is a high potential to close business agreements based on the prior interaction between the parties
- There is a demonstrated need to act quickly (i.e., the opportunity may be lost if travel is delayed) with travel occurring within twelve weeks of the application submission.
- The opportunity must be innovative (e.g. innovative products, process, technology, service or new markets) in Ontario’s agri-tech, agri-food and agri-products sector.
- No other more appropriate funding mechanism is reasonably available to support the proposed travel.
- Projects from previously successful RRBDI applicants will be considered in the following circumstances:
  - The project is separate from previously approved projects
  - The overall funding received through RRBDI will not exceed $10,000 per program year or $20,000 over the life of the program
  - All other eligibility requirements are met

APPLICANT CATEGORIES (*NEW FOR 2026*)

Funding will be allocated by applicant category. Eligible businesses will be classified according to the overview provided below, based on their primary business activity and primary source of revenue. For the 2026 funding year, 80% of available funding will be allocated to Agri-Tech and Agriculture businesses and 20% will be allocated to businesses in the agri-food category. Businesses operating across multiple categories will be assigned to a single category based on the activity that generates the majority of their revenue.

Agri-tech: Businesses that develop, commercialize, manufacture, deploy or support innovative technologies, equipment, products, services or processes that enhance the productivity, efficiency, sustainability, profitability of agricultural, food, clean technology, or bio-based production systems.

Agriculture: Businesses involved in primary production (crop or livestock) including: engaged in production in controlled environment agriculture (such as indoor agriculture, greenhouse, vertical farm); propagator (agricultural activities); owner of fruit tree nursery; maple syrup producers; beekeeper; and biomass producer. This category also includes licensed businesses engaged in the cultivation, propagation, harvesting, and initial handling of cannabis or industrial hemp products.

Agri-food: Businesses that operate in the agri-food supply chain including: a slaughterhouse/abattoir; agri-food-processor (such as food, beverage); bio-processing company (such as food, industrial); owner of packing houses (washing, packing, chopping, irreversible actions to product); pet food; and fertilizer (manure/compost products).

Regardless of category, all applicants must identify a specific market opportunity and demonstrate how the proposed opportunity supports the commercialization of an innovative product, process, technology, service, or market opportunity for their business.

APPLICATION EVALUATION CRITERIA

- The products, processes and technologies demonstrate a sufficient level of innovation.
- The products, processes and technologies must result in tangible benefits to the broader agriculture industry.
- If there are regulatory barriers, the applicant has addressed the challenges.
- The immediate or longer-term potential of this opportunity is significant.
- The costs and activities appear appropriate to address the company's sales requirement.
- GRAS funding will have an incremental impact on achieving the applicant's sales objectives.
- The applicant is making use of the existing network (trade commissioners, etc.).
- The applicant is sufficiently aware of the financing required to grow the company.

Due to the limited funding available and the rapid-response nature of the program, applications that demonstrate an immediate and time-sensitive opportunity to secure sales, partnerships, or market access may receive priority consideration.

RRBDI is intended to support time-sensitive business development opportunities. Applications involving travel that will occur within twelve weeks of submission (and no later than February 28, 2027) and that demonstrate a clear and immediate opportunity to secure business agreements, sales, partnerships, or market access will receive priority consideration.

TIMELINES AND FUNDING

The application intake will open June 22, 2026, and remain open until all funds are allocated or until March 1, 2027.

All applications will be screened for the eligibility of the applicant and application evaluation criteria. Applicants will be notified of the funding decision within three business days of submitting a complete application and responding to any additional questions regarding the application.

Successful applicants will enter into a funding agreement. All eligible expenses must be incurred between the contracted project start date and the contracted project end date, the outside boundaries of which are June 22, 2026 – February 28, 2027. Funding will be provided on a reimbursement basis, whereby the business incurs all expenses and submits the required claim form and documentation after they incur the expenses. Eligible expenses (see below) will be reimbursed at a 100% funding level.

ELIGIBLE EXPENSES INCLUDE:

Expenses associated with provincial, national or international travel, accommodations and meals to build business, including:

- Transportation (including Base Economy airfare (including seat selection and baggage check, not including preferred seat fees or upgrades), taxis, train travel, public transportation, car rental (including gas), personal vehicle mileage if used as primary mode of transportation (at a rate of $0.63 per km.), mileage to/from airport (at a rate of $0.63 per km.), airport shuttle service, travel insurance, parking, tolls, entry visas)
- Accommodations
- Hospitality meals are only eligible when directly related to business development activities, preapproved, and supported by a description, list of attendees and purpose
- Shipping costs directly related to the business development activities and identified meeting
- Meal per diems expensed as per the current National Joint Council Travel Directive.
- Consultant fees that are directly related to travel requirements for the business development activities (i.e. translator, region guide, etc.)
- Intellectual property expenses including: registration and licensing fees directly required to commercialize the product, process or technology for the identified market opportunity.

INELIGIBLE EXPENSES INCLUDE:

- Tradeshow attendance/booth space
- Trade Mission registration fees
- Expenses incurred by non-business-related individuals, or anyone not named in the application
- “Cost of Doing Business” items (photocopying, office supplies, gifts, wifi, cellphone coverage, manufacturing, etc.)
- Alcohol
- Marketing/promotional materials
- In-room movies/laundry service
- Personal items (toiletries, cell phone, etc.)
- Salaries
- Any costs paid by cash without proper proof of payment
- Any costs incurred prior to the project approval date, except for prepaid airfare and accommodation)

Activities related to supplier meetings, technology procurement, equipment purchases, market research, introductory meetings, or general business development that are not directly tied to securing a sale are not eligible for funding.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Applicants must submit their application through the AAC Application Portal: https://adaptcouncil.smartsimple.ca/ and ensure that all required information is complete and accurate at the time of submission. Incomplete applications may result in a delayed review or deemed ineligible.

CLAIMS PROCESS

Funding is provided on a reimbursement basis. Approved applicants are responsible for paying all project expenses upfront and submitting a claim for reimbursement after eligible expenses have been incurred and their travel completed. To receive reimbursement, recipients must submit a completed claim through the AAC Application Portal no later than six weeks following the project end date, as specified in their funding agreement.

Claim submissions must include:

- A completed project report and expense claim table;
- Copies of all invoices and receipts for eligible expenses;
- Proof of payment for all claimed expenses (e.g., credit card statements, bank records, cancelled cheques); and
- Any additional information requested by AAC to verify project activities and expenses.

AAC reserves the right to request additional documentation and adjust reimbursement amounts where expenses are determined to be ineligible, unsupported, or inconsistent with the approved application.

Applicants must communicate and receive amendments for any changes to the timelines outlined in their funding agreement. Projects that face delays longer than twelve weeks will be asked to withdraw their application and reapply, if the intake remains open. This reapplication will not count against their overall approved funding total.

If you have any questions, reach out to an AAC Programs team member at admin@adaptcouncil.org or 1-800-769-3272

AAC
AGRICULTURAL ADAPTATION COUNCIL