

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| To: | Chair Keaveney and Members of the Committee |
| Committee Date: | November 6, 2025 |
| Subject / Report No: | EDTC-PEDAC-13-25 |
| Title: | Economic Development, Tourism and Culture Strategic Progress Report – November 2025 |
| Prepared by: | Savanna Myers, Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Culture |
| Reviewed by: | Randy Scherzer, CAO |
| Lower Tier(s) Affected: | All |

Recommendation

1. That report EDTC-PEDAC-13-25 regarding Economic Development, Tourism and Culture Strategic Progress Report – November 2025 be received for information.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide the year-end status update of 2025 on strategic progress of the Economic Development, Tourism & Culture (EDTC) Master Plan. Included is an overview of priority milestones, relevant statistics and individual project outcomes. The items contained in this report are pulled directly from the EDTC Master Plan and were all discussed through the 2025 budget process, with approval through the same. A comprehensive 2025 review will be provided in the new year to account for all progress from January through December.

Background and Discussion

With year two of Masterplan implementation nearing its end, staff continue to drive progress aligned with the theme of study. Since the August update, this has included better understanding consumer behaviour, evaluating site-specific readiness, analyzing broader provincial and national trends, and trialing new program offerings.

The EDTC team continues to identify and action departmental LEAN recommendations followings its training in July. Staff meetings and quarterly reporting have been adjusted, and the first EDTC team building and development day was hosted in October inclusive of a southern Grey familiarization tour. Staff also completed the next round of training in early November focusing on lean models and process mapping. Job description reviews and restructuring are also underway to achieve highest and best value of human resources. Over the past four months, there has been notable improvement as the EDTC comes together to find better

alignment, efficiencies, and cross-departmental collaborations, making the best use of our staff time and resources.

Across the broader EDTC Master Plan, a lot of good work is underway. The following section highlights the most significant strategic action items to be advanced since last reporting period and an overview of key performance indicators related to transitioning marketing efforts.

Economic Development & Tourism

Priority 1: Leadership & Collaboration

Economic Development Leadership Forum (1.1)

The second annual Economic Development Leadership Forum and third event of the Leadership series was hosted at Cobble Beach on October 30 with more than 90 elected officials and senior staff present. The focus this time was on the partnerships, negotiations and storytelling that underpin and set the foundation, as we engage in Building Communities for the Future. Speakers Roger Mooking, Nicole Simon of Invest Ontario and Luigi Presta of ThinkCompass were welcomed, alongside Team Grey discussions and a celebration of key accomplishments across the County over the last year. Planning for the spring luncheon is already underway.

Team Grey Memorandum of Understanding (1.4)

The 'Team Grey' MOU was formally drafted following three rounds of engagement with economic development staff and CAOs from all member municipalities. In October, it was circulated for review and comment by the same and taken through a stakeholder engagement session at the Economic Development Leadership Forum. The final draft is expected to come before County Council ahead of year end, followed by a report and presentation to each member municipality in the new year.

The Team Grey MOU is meant to operationalize the discussions and opportunities communicated through the Economic Development Leadership Series, while helping to clearly define roles, responsibilities, resources and expectations between Grey and its municipalities. The inaugural version is focused on Priorities 1 and 2 of the EDTC Master Plan. As Team Grey hones its skills, the MOU will be evaluated and updated to reflect advancement.

Priority 3: Business Retention & Expansion

Sector Scans (3.2)

Economic Development staff continue to engage with local manufacturers to better understand sector trends, challenges, and opportunities as part of the ongoing Manufacturing Sector Scan. However, response rates remain low due to time constraints and the pressures of managing business operations amid ongoing uncertainties—particularly around tariffs. Due to limited direct engagement, staff have turned to industry summits, reports, webinars, and EMC (Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium) resources to gather and share insights.

Georgian College (3.4)

Economic Development staff continue to support Georgian College's capacity and awareness of skilled trades and apprenticeship programs. This includes particular attention around the Early Childhood Educator (ECE) program and facilitating discussions between Grey County Children's Services and Georgian College staff to raise awareness of the delivery pathways.

Advocacy efforts to support rural serving campuses, particularly Georgian College have also been ongoing. Most recently, this includes a delegation to the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security at AMO and stories of success shared through the Workforce Development & Preservation: Building Trades Capacity session at the Western Ontario Municipal Conference hosted by Western Ontario Warden's Caucus.

Grey County Economic Development will host Co-op Teachers from the Bluewater District School Board at Sydenham Campus on November 24th for a collaborative learning day focused on current economic development trends and their impact on regional career opportunities. This day aims to support educators in understanding the evolving employment landscape while also providing the Economic Development team with valuable insights into the challenges teachers face when guiding students and securing local placements. By bridging this knowledge gap, we can strengthen pathways for youth between education and employment, ultimately working toward the shared goal of retaining a vibrant and skilled workforce in Grey County.

Priority 4: Entrepreneurship & Innovation

Business Enterprise Centre (4.1)

From July to October 15, the Business Enterprise Centre hosted:

- 2 workshops for 18 participants,
- 1 Starter Company Plus marketing session for 14 participants
- 1 Summer Company mentorship session, 1 wrap event
- Supported BWDSB Guidance staff education event
- 6 Foodpreneur Advantage sessions/workshops

A total of 134 inquiries were received and 44 consultations conducted.

Sydenham Campus

From August 1 to October 15, the Campus hosted 80 rentals, alongside two significant events: Sydenham Fall Fair, and Hydro One – Powering Preparedness Workshop. In the month of September, more than 4000 people attended the Campus for education, training and workshops between long term tenants and short-term rentals.

Staff are also thrilled to share Grey Bruce Makers now has exceeded 100 members.

Priority 5: Destination Development

Regional Marketing (5.3)

A key component of the study theme in 2025 has been better understanding consumer behaviour and identifying the key performance indicators that matter to the department's strategic goals. In follow up to committee discussion in August, staff have prepared further information on the data, trends and analysis undertaken.

Grey County Tourism – KPI Reporting & Dashboard Summary

Strategic Focus

Grey County Tourism is focusing on a set of key performance indicators that reflect how marketing efforts are performing across four interconnected areas: Website Engagement, Brand Awareness, Visitor and Business Support, and Storytelling Impact.

These metrics help staff understand not just how many people are reached, but how they interact with our content, how often they return, and how our efforts support local businesses and inspire travel planning. Together, they offer a well-rounded view of our tactics and outcomes and guide ongoing improvements to attract and retain visitors while amplifying community and economic value.

1. Website Engagement – VisitGrey.ca

KPIs Tracked:

- **Engaged Sessions** – Measures meaningful user interaction.
- **Pages per Session** – Indicates depth of exploration.
- **Returning Visitors Rate** – Shows loyalty and repeat interest.

What This Tells Us:

Engaged Sessions & Pages per Session

These metrics show how users interact with the site beyond a single page. From Q1 to Q3, engaged session rate dropped from 0.30% to 0.15%, and pages per session remained relatively flat. This suggests that while traffic is steady, deeper engagement is limited.

Returning Visitors Rate

This metric increased from 11.96% in Q1 to 12.83% in Q3, indicating that more users are returning to the site - a positive sign of content relevance and user satisfaction.

Contextual Note

A boosted post with an incorrect URL likely skewed Q3 engagement metrics downward. A new dynamic website build is underway, which will address many of these issues through improved UX and content flow.

KPI Summary

While engagement metrics show room for improvement, the increase in returning visitors and the upcoming website redesign position us well for stronger performance in 2026. These insights help us focus on enhancing the quality of user experience and guiding visitors toward deeper interaction with our content.

2. Brand Awareness

KPIs Tracked:

- **Reach Rate:** Measures visibility across platforms.
- **Follower Growth Rate:** Tracks audience expansion.
- **Top Performing Content:** Highlights standout posts.

What This Tells Us:

Reach Rate

Reach Rate tells us how frequently our content is being viewed relative to our audience size. It reflects visibility and repeated exposure. Q1: 5.6%, Q2: 13.1%, Q3: 48.1%. Despite a boosted post anomaly, this upward trend suggests improved visibility and better alignment with seasonal interest or campaign timing.

Follower Growth Rate

This measures how our audience is growing over time. In total, our social channels had net new followers of 775, primarily on Instagram. This steady increase supports long-term audience building and brand loyalty.

KPI Summary

Our social media efforts are showing strong signs of increased visibility and audience engagement. The rising Reach Rate demonstrates that our content is being seen more frequently, and our steady follower growth reflects ongoing interest in Grey County Tourism.

- These insights will help us refine our storytelling and campaign timing to continue building visibility and audience loyalty.

3. Visitor & Business Support

KPIs Tracked:

- **Clicks to Local Operators:** Measures interest in featured businesses.
- **Trip Idea Page Views:** Tracks planning behavior.
- **Event Page Engagement:** Reflects seasonal interest.

What This Tells Us:

Clicks to Local Operators

Increased from 6,948 in Q1 to 17,700 in Q3 — a 155% rise. This shows strong interest in local businesses and effective campaign targeting.

Trip Idea Page Views

Grew from 4,573 in Q1 to 16,510 in Q3, that's a 261% increase. This indicates that visitors are actively using our site to plan experiences.

Event Page Engagement

Rose from 2,456 in Q1 to 5,218 in Q3, a 112% increase, reflecting seasonal interest and successful promotion of local events.

KPI Summary

Our Visitor & Business Support metrics show strong and accelerating engagement with local operators and visitor-facing content. From Q1 to Q3, clicks to local businesses increased 155%, and views of "Trip Ideas" pages surged by 261%, indicating that our thematic post, Gather in Grey campaign, and curated content are resonating with audiences. Event page engagement also grew by 112%, reflecting increased interest in local experiences.

These metrics demonstrate that our digital strategy is effectively driving traffic to key tourism assets and supporting local economic development. As we move into 2026, we'll begin monthly

manual tracking of newsletter signups to further enrich this reporting and capture more direct visitor engagement.

4. Storytelling Impact

KPIs Tracked:

- **Video Views:** Measures reach and interest.
- **Video Completion Rate:** Reflects storytelling effectiveness.
- **Average Time on Page:** Indicates content engagement.
- **Content Interaction:** Signals emotional resonance.

What This Tells Us:

Video Views & Completion Rate

Video views dropped from 24,782 in Q1 to 2,886 in Q3, and completion rate declined from 81.5% to 12.4%. This may reflect seasonal shifts or platform changes.

Average Time on Page

Increased slightly from 43s to 46s, showing consistent interest in video-related content.

Content Interaction

Surged from 1,402 in Q1 to 6,300 in Q3 — a 349% increase. This suggests that our stories are resonating more deeply and being shared more frequently.

KPI Summary

Our storytelling KPIs reflect a multi-platform strategy that engages audiences through video, web content, and social media. While views and completion rates have fluctuated, we've seen consistent growth in content interaction and time spent on site, indicating that our stories are resonating and encouraging deeper engagement.

These metrics give us a holistic view of how our content performs across channels and help us refine our approach to storytelling, distribution, and audience targeting.

Additional Highlights

For the first time, staff have observed an increase in Instagram followers aged 25-34, a key demographic, now representing 19.3% of our audience. Meanwhile, the largest segment remains those aged 35-44, comprising 34%.

Fall OTT Campaign Performance

The second and final block of our **Over-the-Top (OTT)** video campaign concluded with strong mid-point results.

As of September 18:

- **283,411 impressions** across YouTube and Samsung DSP
- **143,370 YouTube views**
- **118 total clicks**

Top-performing creative: *Flavour Meets Soul*

- 23,346 YouTube impressions
- 17,612 YouTube views
- 15 YouTube clicks
- 8.66K Samsung DSP impressions
- 9 Samsung DSP clicks

Videos featuring local food and beverage consistently attracted higher engagement, reinforcing the value of culinary storytelling in our campaigns.

Coming Soon, Refreshed Visitgrey.ca

Staff are excited to announce the launch of a dynamic new VisitGrey.ca website in early 2026, designed with improved navigation and a better user experience. It will continue to be a trusted resource for trip ideas, itineraries, and local events — helping visitors plan meaningful outings across Grey County.

Alongside the website, we’re introducing a streamlined customer management portal through *Whereabouts*. This new tool will make it easier for tourism-focused operators to manage and update their business profiles on VisitGrey.ca. The onboarding process will begin in early November and roll out in phases. Businesses can watch for their invitation to claim their listing and ensure the business is accurately represented on the new site.

For those not currently listed on VisitGrey.ca, there will be opportunities to add businesses and be part of the fun as we roll out the new platform.

Grey Roots

Priority 1: Leadership & Collaboration

Expert Stewards (1.4)

On September 19, Grey Roots Museum & Archives has launched its cornerstone exhibit in the Grey County Gallery - thoughtfully redesigned to honour the diverse stories of Grey County. The museum was approved for a total of \$355,486 in funding from Canadian Heritage through the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund (CCSF) in support of the project.

The following charts outline the expected increase in access to collections and stories:

| Grey County Gallery (2004-2024) | New Grey County Gallery Design |
|--|--|
| 94 artifacts | 304 artifacts |
| 24 archival materials | 29 archival materials |
| 79 graphics | 213 graphics (includes archival images, maps and infographics) |
| 5 interactives (computer terminals) | 28 interactives (hands-on activity carts, iPad stations, collaborative interactives) |

Priority 2: Inclusive Storytelling

Authentic and Diverse Voices (2.2)

On September 30, Grey Roots hosted the County's first day of learning and reflection for National Truth and Reconciliation Day. Many staff and members of the public joined the inaugural event, which was very well received. Staff and visitors were invited to explore the many exhibits throughout Grey Roots, including updates to the Grey County Gallery launched in 2025, which now present more First Nations perspectives on the history of the region, including a section focused on the Saugeen Ojibway Nation experience with the residential school system. Access to digital resources at www.greyroots.com/truth are also available.

Priority 3: Interactive Experiences

New Interactive Experiences (3.1) and Young Family and Youth (3.3)

This summer, Grey Roots focused on meaningful visitor engagement in Moreston Heritage Village through interactive and personalized experiences.

Highlights included:

- Themed Tours: Led by summer staff, offering fresh perspectives based on personal interests.
- Hands-On Activities: Guests tried heritage crafts, games, and skills—often leaving with handmade keepsakes.
- Sensory Additions: New gardens, live animals (sheep and ducks), and music enhanced the Village atmosphere. Iain Campbell performed four times, alongside the Summerfolk 50th Anniversary exhibit.
- Wheels Wednesday (4x): Historic vehicles interpreted by volunteers.
- Bob McDowall Memorial Railway (4x): 150 volunteer hours supported train rides and model demos.
- Sheep Shearing Demo: A seasonal favourite that drew strong interest.

Volunteer Impact: In July and August, 1,179.25 hours were contributed across 360 shifts—averaging 40 shifts per week.

Visitation Impact: In July and August, 9200+ visitors through Moreston. 73 Guided Tours reached 514 visitors. These student-led tours based on personal interests created deeper, more meaningful visitor experiences. Hands-On Demonstrations: 16 different heritage skills demonstrated 142 times, engaging 5,414 visitors, with 2,789 actively participating (52% engagement rate).

Railway Days

In 2025, Grey Roots Museum & Archives proudly launched the Bob McDowall Memorial Railway, a ride-on railway that adds a sense of adventure and delight to the visitor experience. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held on August 9, recognizing the significant contributions of Mrs. Jeanne McDowall and Ms. Patricia Zelonka, whose donations of funds and equipment made the project possible.

We also extend sincere appreciation to the Bluewater Railroaders volunteer group, whose dedication, craftsmanship, and countless hours of work were instrumental in bringing the railway to life.

Dinosaur Discoveries – Travelling Exhibit

Organized by the American Museum of Natural History, *Dinosaur Discoveries: Ancient Fossils, New Ideas* offered visitors an engaging look at how modern science reshapes our understanding of dinosaurs.

Running from May 17 to September 20, the exhibition drew 13,103 visitors, including 1,035 educational tour guests during June school trips. Hundreds of dinosaur-themed plush toys were sold, adding to the exhibition's popularity. Annual admission targets were reached by the end of September.

While the success of the travelling exhibit highlights the importance of the initial draw, staff continue to be overwhelmed by the visitor feedback, that it's the permanent exhibits, interactive children's stations and Moreston Heritage Village that leads to increased membership sales and multiple return visits.

Priority 5: Innovative Practices

Prioritize Programming (5.1), Annual Operations Review (5.3)

As part of annual operations review, staff trialed an event to celebrate the end of the travelling exhibit this fall, which very well received. This decision replaced an annual fall event, however, required less resources and resulted in greater visitation and revenue.

With the return of field trips this fall, staff are applying this same thinking to education programs and trialing new offerings, which may provide greater flexibility, better resource balance and welcome more external partnerships and voices.

Financial and Resource Implications

All initiatives are included in staff workplans and the approved 2025 budget.

Relevant Consultation

- Internal: EDTC Staff
 - AODA Compliance
 - Contribution to Climate Change Action Plan Targets
- External

Appendices and Attachments

[EDTC Master Plan and Annual Report](#)