

Building **vision, voice & leadership**



**RURAL ONTARIO
INSTITUTE**

**2025 - 2026
Annual Report**



Land Acknowledgement

The Rural Ontario Institute would like to acknowledge that our office in Guelph, Ontario is located on land that has been inhabited by Indigenous peoples from the beginning. As settlers, we're grateful for the opportunity to meet and work here and we thank all the generations of people who have taken care of this land - for thousands of years.

Long before today, there have been First Peoples who have been the stewards of this place. In particular, we acknowledge the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee peoples (the Six Nations including the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca and Tuscarora) and the Attawandaron peoples (Neutral Nation) and the territories represented in the Upper Canada and Haldimand Treaties.

We recognize and deeply appreciate their historic connection to this place. We also recognize the contributions Métis, Inuit, and other Indigenous peoples have made, both in shaping and strengthening this community in particular, and our province and country as a whole. As settlers, this recognition of the contributions and historic importance of Indigenous peoples must also be clearly and overtly connected to our collective commitment to make the promise and the challenge of Truth and Reconciliation real in our communities, and in particular to bring justice for murdered and missing Indigenous women and children across our country.

Partners and Collaborators

Beyond our important agricultural sector sponsors and partners, ROI also collaborates with a wide variety of organizations, municipalities, and universities to accomplish our diverse, wide ranging rural mission. Some of these reflect ongoing formal partnerships and others project specific connections. We value all these relationships. The logos below are among those we collaborated with in 2025/2026.



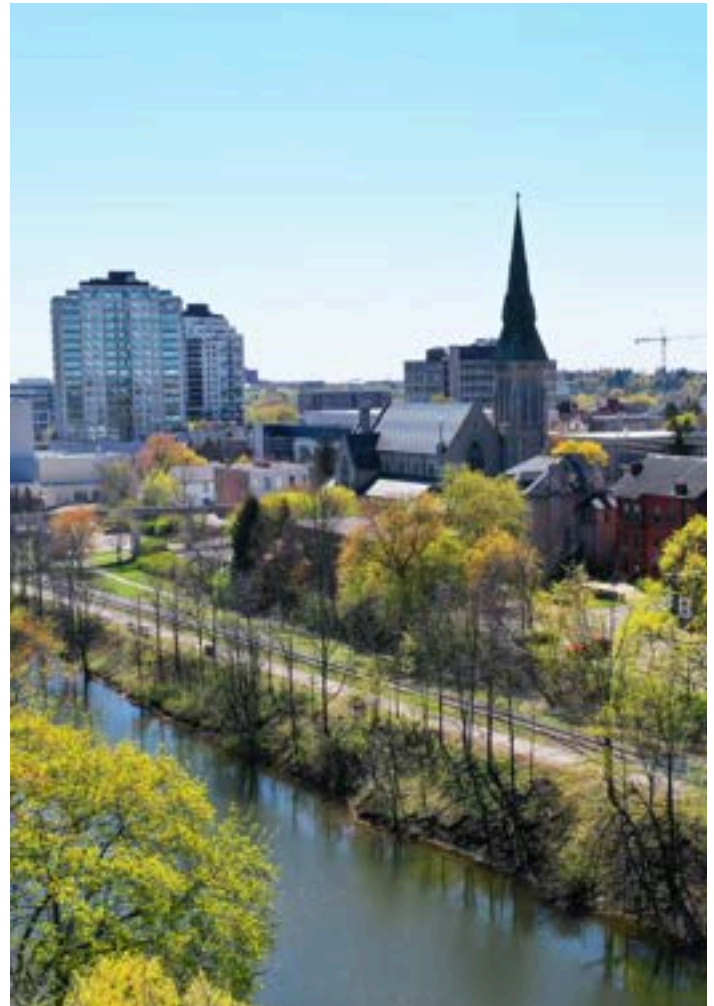
Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program Sponsors	
PATRON	
GUARDIANS	
PACESETTERS	
CHAMPIONS	
ALLIES	
LEADERS	



About Us

The Rural Ontario Institute is a charitable organization (CRA862752052) delivering programs that develop strong leaders and critical voices around opportunities and key issues facing rural and northern Ontario. To support our vision of thriving, vibrant communities we develop, inform and connect rural and ag-sector leaders through programs, events, data analysis and knowledge sharing tools.

Established in 2010, ROI was created through the amalgamation of The Centre for Rural Leadership (TCRL) and The Ontario Rural Council (TORC). For 16 years, ROI has been dedicated to empowering leaders, informing decision-makers, and strengthening communities across rural Ontario.



Mission

Building vision, voice and leadership

Vision

Thriving vibrant communities

Key Values

- Diverse perspectives and collaboration.
- Respectful, open and honest communication.
- Innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Economic, social and environmental sustainability in rural and northern Ontario.
- Continuous improvement and excellence.

Key Result Areas

- Developing leaders through core programming like the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program and the Rural Change Makers Program.
- Informing leaders and rural communities through our knowledge and data resources, like the Rural Community Wellbeing Dashboard and the Rural Housing Information System.
- Connecting rural communities, leaders and partners through specialized projects, webinars and events.

Board of Directors 2025/26



Dan Borowec
Chair
Grafton, ON



Emily Morrison
Vice Chair
Lucknow, ON



Chris Wray
Treasurer
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Michelle Hunter
Secretary
Elmville, ON



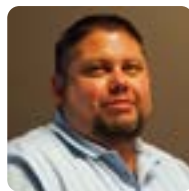
Matthew Bunch
Fergus, ON



Patrick Shaw
Beaverton, ON



John Cranfield
Guelph, ON



Graham Hoogterp
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Kerry Schubert-Mackey
New Liskeard, ON



Hardik Patel
Belleville, ON



Cathy Jo Noble
Winchester, ON



Liz O'Gorman-Smit
Russell, ON

Staff

Kimberly Earls
Executive Director

Peggy Brekveld
Leadership Programs Director

Melanie Bidiuk
Communications & Program Manager
- Rural Change Makers

Kezia Cowtan
Data Programs Manager

Cathy Cocker
Finance and Administration Manager

Breckyn Caers
Fund Development Officer

Emeline Nicolich
French Data Coordinator

Yogesh Mandal
GIS and Software Technician

Brianna Pitt
Communications Coordinator

Kelsey Randhawa
Leadership Programs Coordinator

Alexander Thorne
Agricultural & Rural Youth Leadership
Training Coordinator

Saba Khan
Rural Data Analyst

Sarah Dick
Rural Events Coordinator

Maddie Min
Administrative Assistant

In 2025-2026, ROI bid a fond farewell to staff members Ellen Sinclair, Gabrielle Ferguson, Helen Bogl, Zviko Gwekwerere, Francisca Soloman, Lucas Berek, Dr. Jasmine Muszik, Athulya James, Rheann Quenneville. We thank them for their dedication and contributions to ROI and wish them every success in the future.

2025-26 ROI YEAR OF IMPACT

DATA REACH

RHIS: **16K VIEWS**

RHIS members: **389 USERS**

RCWB: **16K VIEWS**

6K RCWB Dashboard Views

967 Factsheet Downloads

RCWB RESOURCES PUBLISHED

25 French Tableau dashboards

19 French Factsheets

7 French Resource Reports

2 NEW Factsheets
(Communting & Internet)

DIGITAL REACH

ROI website: **73K VIEWS**

ROIConnect: **22K VIEWS**

494 ROIConnect
community members

ONTARIO LEADERS

AALP alumni: **540+**

AALP Class 21: **18 PARTICIPANTS**

RCM alumni: **80+**

OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

Subscribers & followers: **12K** Impressions: **310K** Events attended: **44**



Thank You, Ellen Sinclair

In 2025, ROI bid a fond farewell to Ellen Sinclair, past Executive Director. Under Ellen's leadership, ROI reached new heights by expanding leadership opportunities and further developing data products focused on supporting well-being in rural communities. ROI is deeply grateful for her many contributions to the organization and her steadfast commitment to strengthening capacity building and community development across rural Ontario, and we wish her all the best. Thank you Ellen!

A Message from the Chair and Executive Director

ROI Board Chair and Executive Director are pleased to share this year's annual report, a reflection not only of the work accomplished over the past year, but also of a moment of meaningful transition for the Rural Ontario Institute and the rural communities we serve.

Change is in the air. Across rural Ontario, communities are navigating shifting economic realities, evolving needs, and new opportunities for growth and collaboration. At the same time, our organization is experiencing its own period of transition. We have said farewell to valued staff and leaders whose dedication and commitment helped build a strong foundation for ROI's work. Their contributions have shaped who we are today, and we move forward with gratitude for their lasting impact.

This year has also marked a refresh of our strategic focus. While our core commitment to vision, voice, and leadership remains unchanged, we are taking steps to ensure that our work continues to respond to the realities facing rural communities today. We are building on what has been established while positioning ROI to lead with clarity, purpose, and impact in the years ahead.

Vision. Voice. Leadership.

These remain our guiding stars toward a thriving rural Ontario, one where communities are resilient, young people are engaged, leaders are developed, and capacity is strengthened so that communities can adapt and grow in the face of change. This vision is both aspirational and practical, grounded in the lived experiences of rural people and the opportunities that lie ahead.

Our goal is to ensure that rural perspectives are not only heard, but actively shape conversations about our communities, capacity, quality of life, and equity across rural Ontario. We remain committed to providing credible, timely tools, programs, and insights that support informed decision-making at all levels.

Now is the time for action and strong leadership across rural Ontario. Through our programs, partnerships, and networks, we continue to invest in building the capacity of current and emerging leaders, people who are ready to respond to challenges and drive meaningful change in their communities.

As we look ahead, we do so with a renewed sense of purpose. We will continue to foster collaboration, support decision-making with high-quality data, and invest in the leadership needed to navigate the future of rural Ontario.

Thank you for your continued trust, partnership, and commitment to rural communities and ROI. Together, we are not only responding to change, we are helping to shape what comes next.



Dan Borowec, Chair



Kimberly Earls, Executive Director

Ministry of Agriculture,
Food and Agribusiness

Office of the Minister

77 Grenville Street, 11th Floor
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1B3
Tel: 416-326-3074

Ministère de l'Agriculture,
de l'Alimentation et de l'Agroentreprise

Bureau du ministre

77, rue Grenville, 11^e étage
Toronto (Ontario) M7A 1B3
Tél. : 416 326-3074



A Message from the Honourable Trevor Jones

On behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness, I am grateful to participate in the Rural Ontario Institute's 2026 Annual Report.

The Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) plays a vital role in strengthening leadership, amplifying rural voices and supporting informed decision-making across Ontario's rural, northern and agri-food communities. Since 2010, ROI has demonstrated how investing in people, data and collaboration leads to strong local economies, resilient communities and a competitive agri-food sector.

Now more than ever, it is important that we protect the sustained independence of our province's food system. Growing for Ontario and the world is only made possible through the collective wisdom of our province's farmers, food processors and industry leaders. Programs delivered by ROI, like the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program, help ensure leaders have the tools, confidence, and networks needed to shape the future of agriculture across the province.

I would like to thank all the staff, board members, partners, alumni and volunteers whose dedication makes this work possible. Your efforts support both current and future generations of agricultural leaders.

I extend my best wishes for continued success in the year ahead.

Sincerely,

Trevor Jones
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness



Good things grow in Ontario
À bonne terre, bons produits

Ministry Headquarters: 1 Stone Road West, Guelph, Ontario N1G 4Y2
Bureau principal du ministère: 1, rue Stone ouest, Guelph (Ontario) N1G 4Y2

Ministry of Rural Affairs

Ministère des Affaires rurales

Office of the Minister

Bureau du ministre

777 Bay, 28th Floor
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2J3
Tel: 647-329-1485

777, rue Bay, 28^e étage
Toronto (Ontario) M7A 2J3
Tél. : 647-329-1485



A Message from the Honourable Lisa Thompson

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to welcome you back to the 16th Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) Annual General Meeting. As the Ontario Minister of Rural Affairs, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the incredible leadership and work being championed by ROI across the province.

ROI continues to play a vital role in strengthening the long-term capacity and economic viability of rural communities and small towns, helping rural Ontario not only adapt to change but thrive.

The impact of initiatives like the Rural Changemakers Program and the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP) do not go unnoticed. These programs are cultivating new generations of informed and forward-thinking leaders who can better support their local communities and build careers close to home.

We know that Rural Ontario matters! Through a collective commitment to meaningful programs and initiatives, we will continue to build community capacity and ensure our small towns and rural communities remain the best places to live, work and raise a family.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lisa M. Thompson".

Lisa M. Thompson
Ontario Minister of Rural Affairs

A Message from the Dean of the Ontario Agricultural College, University of Guelph

The Ontario Agricultural College (OAC) is proud to continue its strong and enduring partnership with the Rural Ontario Institute. Together with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Government of Ontario, OAC remains committed to advancing leadership, learning, and innovation in support of resilient rural and agri-food systems. The Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP) remains a flagship expression of this collaboration. AALP has a long and respected legacy of developing thoughtful, values-driven leaders across Ontario's agri-food and rural sectors - many of whom are graduates of OAC. We are especially proud of the lasting impact these leaders have in strengthening communities, organizations, and public dialogue. ROI's work continues to be vital in fostering rural resilience through evidence-informed insight, leadership development, and convening. OAC is honoured to support this mission and work alongside ROI and its partners in shaping a more sustainable, inclusive, and prosperous future for rural Ontario.

Sincerely,

John Cranfield, Ph.D.
Dean, Ontario Agricultural College
University of Guelph

UNIVERSITY OF
GUELPH

Ontario
Agricultural College
School of Environmental Design
and Rural Development

A Message from the President of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture

Agriculture's future depends on strong leadership, and that leadership must be cultivated intentionally. Across Ontario, farmers are stepping forward to take on new challenges in advocacy, business, and community leadership, but they need opportunities, encouragement, and support to succeed. At the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, we believe investing in leadership development is one of the most important investments we can make in the future of our agri-food sector and rural communities.

Leadership often begins with a simple decision to say yes. That might be yes to participating in a meeting, joining a committee or a board, or sharing a perspective. It might be saying yes to a program like Rural Change Makers or AALP. Those opportunities create connections, build confidence, and help emerging leaders recognize the important role they can play in shaping the future of agriculture. Programs and partnerships that create welcoming spaces for people to learn, network, and grow are essential to ensuring the next generation is prepared to lead with confidence and purpose.

OFA is proud to support leadership development through partnerships with organizations such as the Junior Farmers' Association of Ontario, 4-H Ontario, and the Rural Ontario Institute through the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program. These initiatives provide the next generation with invaluable experiences that strengthen advocacy skills, foster collaboration, and connect participants with mentors and leaders across the province.

The Rural Ontario Institute has played an important role in building leadership capacity across rural Ontario, and OFA values its continued partnership in supporting current and emerging leaders. Together, we are helping ensure Ontario's agri-food sector remains innovative, resilient, and represented by passionate individuals who are ready to lead our industry and our rural communities into the future.

Sincerely,

Drew Spoelstra

President, Ontario Federation of Agriculture
AALP Class 13



Developing Leaders

With a commitment to developing strong leaders, ROI's leadership programs strive to impart the vision and dedication to lead change and ensure the sustainability of Ontario's agricultural economies and rural communities.

Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP)

Developing rural and agricultural leaders has been a highlight of ROI's work for a long time. AALP alumni continue to serve in boardrooms, councils, and at all levels of government, while also giving back to their communities as dedicated volunteers. ROI is strengthening rural Ontario and agriculture one graduate at a time. We are deeply grateful to the supporters and partners whose commitment helps make this impact possible.

The 2025–2026 year has been one of growth, momentum, and transition for the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP). AALP Class 21 is now halfway through its leadership journey, having completed seminars in Niagara, Sarnia, and Toronto, as well as a North American study tour to Alberta and British Columbia.

Class 21 Highlights:

- Participants explored leadership, governance, adaptability, innovation, personality styles, strengths, communication, lobbying, and mindfulness of energy drains and charges.
- Seminars connected participants to their agricultural roots through discussions on diverse operations, from greenhouses and feedlots to irrigation systems and food processing.



- The program examined leadership within a broader Ontario and Canadian context, including Indigenous conversations, a look at food coops in intercity areas, Ontario farm politics, environmental issues, and climate change.
- Class members further developed practical skills in public speaking, chairing, communication, sharing gratitude, fundraising, and reflection.

The breadth of learning to date reflects the depth of the AALP experience, with several important milestones still ahead. Upcoming seminars in Thunder Bay, London, and Ottawa, along with the International Study Tour (location still a secret) and graduation in Guelph, with topics such as poverty, negotiation skills, conflict management, and more. Class 21 continues to demonstrate their courage in digging deeper, curiosity, and a strong willingness to try things outside their comfort zones.

This year also marked an important leadership transition, as the Leadership Programs

Director role moved from Gabrielle Ferguson to Peggy Brekvelde. Gabrielle leaves a significant legacy built on passion, dedication, and deep commitment to Ontario's agri-food sector and leadership development. We are grateful for her efforts in ensuring a smooth transition and wish her the best in her next adventure. Peggy brings new energy and connections to the program and is excited to build upon the strong foundation of almost 42 years of AALP in Ontario.



AALP Alumni Tour

At the end of March 2026, 26 AALP alumni representing 12 classes travelled together to Cambodia and Vietnam. The group explored the agriculture, culture, and rich history these countries have to offer. Tour highlights included floating villages, fish farms, cashew processing, lotus silk, and visits to UNESCO world heritage sites. The tour provided alumni with an opportunity to strengthen connections within the AALP network and demonstrated that learning never stops for AALP leaders - it goes global. 100% of participants said they would recommend the alumni tour experience to fellow alumni.

BUILD Leadership

BUILD Leadership is a fully customized training program designed for organizations seeking to strengthen leadership capacity and energize current and emerging leaders. In 2025, ROI partnered with the Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies to deliver the Building Community Leaders program, which included workshops in Kingston, Peterborough, Guelph, and Richmond Hill and engaged 148 participants. ROI also partnered with Beef Farmers of Ontario to plan and deliver the BUILD Leadership Program, which took place in April 2026.

If you're interested in customized leadership and governance programming, reach out to Peggy Brekvelde at pbrekvelde@ruralontarioinstitute.ca to discuss how we can BUILD up your team.



Rural Change Makers

ROI celebrated another exciting year of rural youth leadership training and positive rural development outcomes through the Rural Change Makers Program. It's inspiring to see so many rural partners from diverse sectors and communities, coming alongside change makers to create important community connections, share expertise and invest in the future of rural Ontario. The results are powerful – and evident in the contributions of change makers in their communities, careers and futures.

Twenty-two graduates were celebrated during a special ceremony October 18, 2025 held in the beautiful partner region of Renfrew County. Many partners and program stewards joined us to recognize the accomplishments of these dedicated young leaders, sharing words of encouragement and inspiration, and leaving a lasting impression on change makers. 2025 graduates are making a difference in over 25 rural communities and sectors including rural healthcare and the trades, policy initiatives, mental health and wellbeing organizations, addressing rural housing solutions and contributing to labour and workforce developments. Some have entered the agriculture sector for the first time, and many are expanding or developing new businesses. They are also increasingly taking on leadership roles in municipal



sectors and First Nations, holding public service positions and serving on boards and councils. Their care for the next generation is undeniable through child welfare initiatives, advocacy, youth engagement, arts and culture initiatives and building inclusive rural communities through projects that create welcoming spaces and networks.

There are many positive outcomes of the Rural Change Maker program - as distinct as Ontario's rural people and places. New results from a multi-year program evaluation are significant with an increase in rural retention of youth from 45% at the onset of the program in 2019 to 90% by 2025. This is especially meaningful for rural Ontario to retain talent and create future stability in communities.



Recruitment is now underway for the 2026 program with applications closing July 1, 2026.

We invite you to share the opportunity with emerging leaders in your work or networks, and encourage them to apply.



Scan the QR code to apply

Skill Development



98% reported leaving the program with the knowledge and practical skills needed to lead effective community change.



Increased Community Connectedness

94% report an increased sense of belonging and feel more connected to their community.

97%

said the program has provided the tools and skills to increase their employability and/or advance their careers.

Employability



Advancing Future Goals

97% said they will use the skills learned to continuously grow and build the future they prefer.



Increased Rural Retention

90% said they are likely to stay in their local community to live and work.

Making a Difference



94%

believe they can make a difference and have made a meaningful contribution to their community by taking part in the program.

Thank You Rural Change Maker Partners

We are grateful to our partners and stewards for their important role in shaping these outcomes and realities. Graduates are agile, skilled, more connected and are making vital contributions in their lives, communities and futures.





Informing Decision Makers

To support our vision of thriving, vibrant communities, we inform rural leaders and stakeholders through data analysis and knowledge-sharing tools, ranging from factsheets to interactive platforms such as the Rural Community Wellbeing Dashboard and the Rural Housing Information System. These data tools aid in making rural data available in Ontario for municipalities, service providers, and non-profits organizations working to improve their community planning, services, and development.

6,000
DASHBOARD
VIEWS

967
FACTSHEET
VIEWS

2 NEW
FACTSHEETS
Commuting
& Internet

13,897
IMPRESSIONS

DASHBOARD DATA UPDATED:

- Jobs
- Internet
- Long-term care wait time

Rural Community Wellbeing

The Rural Community Wellbeing Dashboard is a free data tool that centralizes multiple datasets for all of Ontario including socioeconomic information, housing, health, and environment data to offer rural and urban comparators.

In 2025, ROI's two data platforms, the Rural Housing Information System and the Rural Community Wellbeing (RCWB) Dashboard, were aligned under new leadership of ROI's Data Programs Manager, Kezia Cowtan, following the departure of ROI's Senior Data Analyst, Danielle Letang. Letang, along with the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF), played an instrumental role in the development of the RCWB Dashboard. ROI continued to strengthen both data platforms as leading

components of our new three-year transfer payment agreement with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness. This provincial support was further complimented by a renewed two-year agreement with the OTF Partnerships program to provide continued RCWB expansion support. With this support, the Data Team tripled in size expanding to a dozen technical staff, software engineer subcontractors, software student interns and co-op placements under Cowtan's new management.

The OTF's primary focus was to see the RCWB dashboard available in dual languages and to engage francophone communities in data. ROI collaborated with software engineering firm Purpose Analytics' Data Scientist, Maia Pelletier, a newly hired bilingual translator, Emeline Nicolich, and with ROI's Communications

NOW AVAILABLE IN FRENCH



BIEN-ÊTRE DES
COLLECTIVITÉS
RURALES

To learn more about our data resources in French, please visit www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca/bienetre

Coordinator, Brianna Pitt, to translate 25 RCWB Tableau software dashboards, 19 Factsheets, and 7 resource reports into French. A French pre-launch event was held in February 2026 and was attended by 40 Francophone participants. The French launch event for the Tableau de bord du bien-être des collectivités rurales took place in May 2026. ROI will continue to translate new data and publications for the Bien-être site with the support of a newly formed Francophone data steering committee.

Custom Community Wellbeing Reports

ROI published 3 custom data reports for the County of Renfrew, Kawartha Lakes, and Wellington County. Each report includes maps, infographics, indicator data, and visualizations from the RCWB dashboard. These reports support research, planning, policy development, and progress measurement by providing clear, locally relevant data.

The reports are available on the RCWB website at www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca/wellbeing-request-report.



ROI collaborated and was recognized in 3 use cases in 2025. ROI collaborated with the County of Huron's Adaptation Committee to utilize the data in the RCWB dashboard to engage their committee around their baseline environment data and the development of their Community Risk and Vulnerability Assessment. This use case report is available on the RCWB website to illustrate how this local government planning committee utilized the RCWB data. ROI collaborated with Cape Breton University to share a clone of our Ontario RCWB Tableau dashboard to import Cape Breton's data to visualize their local data through an interactive Wellbeing dashboard.

The Journal of City Climate Policy and Economy also featured an article on the RCWB Environment, Ecological and Biocapacity data dashboard. This article is available on the RCWB resources page.



To learn more about our use cases, please visit www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca/wellbeing-resources.

The Data Team hosted the largest number of annual ROI public data engagements events with a whopping 15 in total with more than 7,057 attendees. Namely, the cohosted webinar with the Canadian Standards Association Group's (CSA-Group), R113-22 "Indicators for Rural Community Wellbeing, services, and sustainability in rural areas" and the 4 Counties of Grey/Bruce/Huron/Perth Workforce Planning Board RCWB webinars. Presenting in both, the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OSSMA) Conference's Housing Data Panel and the Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs' Ontario Data webinar.

Rural Housing Information System

The Rural Housing Information System (RHIS) centralizes housing data for the rural municipalities and all northern Ontario in one platform to support affordable housing developments.

In 2025, the RHIS rental and permit data was updated monthly for all 365 municipalities featured on the system. The eastern and western zoning, servicing, and geospatial planning data was updated for their 220 municipalities with ROI's lead ArcGIS Technician, Yogesh Mandal and ArcGIS Assistant, Athulya James. As a result, we saw significant growth and expansion of multiple dwelling permittable zoning categories. The municipal Service Manager survey data was updated for both regions, reflecting the updated homelessness count and the affordable housing inventory data owned and operated by the municipalities and/or their supported housing corporations. We will be working on Northern Ontario updates in the first quarter of the new 2026 fiscal year.

To learn more about the RHIS, please visit www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca/rhis.



RHIS RURAL HOUSING
INFORMATION SYSTEM

2025-2026 RECAP

 **365** Housing data across
MUNICIPALITIES

 **389** SYSTEM USERS

 **16,000** VIEWS

Building capacity for data availability in Ontario

ROI looks forward to further growth in 2026 through a multi-year partnership with the University of Guelph, School of Environmental Design and Rural Development Department Head, Professor Ryan Gibson and the Mitacs program to facilitate a team of Master's and PhD students to assist in ROI's rural data and leadership development impact work. Mitacs works in partnerships with Canadian academia, private industry and government to operate research and training programs in fields related to industrial and social innovation.



ROI would like to thank the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness, Ontario Trillium Foundation, EcoCanada, BioTalent, Canada Summer Jobs, Northeastern University, Algonquin College, Fanshawe College, University of Guelph, the Canadian Standards Association Group, the 4 Counties Workforce Planning Board of Grey/Bruce/Huron/Perth, County of Huron, Cape Breton University, the Journal of City Climate Policy and Economy, and our software engineer partners; Itergy and Purpose Analytics, for making ROI's 2025 year such a huge success. We would not be able to do this work without your support and partnerships. And we would like to express thanks to the Data team staff, interns, and co-op students who made the data work possible over 2025; Danielle Letang, Kezia Cowtan, Zviko Gwekwerere, Evette Wu, Yogesh Mandal, Aly Ybanez, Niba Zia, Lucas Berek, Athulya James, Dr. Jasmine Muszik, Emeline Nicolich, and Rheann Quenneville.

Connecting Communities

ROI strengthens connections in rural Ontario by fostering collaboration and engagement through our events and programs.



Knowledge Sharing Events

In the past year ROI has hosted, co-hosted or collaborated in over 44 virtual or in-person events. Through event facilitation and partnership with rural community stakeholders ROI addressed topics of interest including:

- Rural youth leadership
- Rural housing data
- Rural community wellbeing
- Understanding governance, risk management, your personal leadership style and leading through change

ROI Connect

ROI Connect is ROI's online gathering place for rural folks to connect, collaborate, inspire and create change. Over the past year public engagement on the platform has grown with 22K views, 494 members and 40 community projects to date.

To learn more, please visit www.roiconnect.ca.

Financial Performance

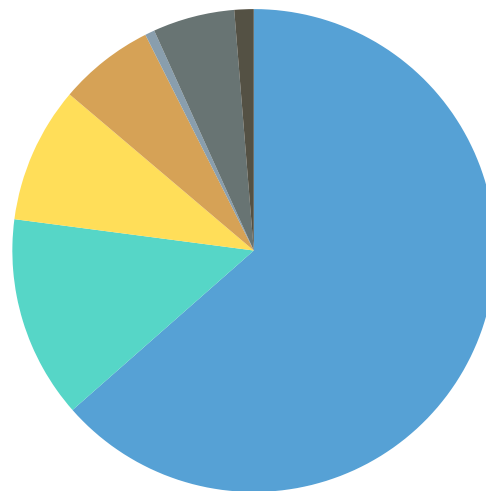
The Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) is a charitable organization (CRA862752052.)

Summary

	Audited 2026
Revenue	\$1,660,742.00
Expenses	\$1,520,939.00
Revenue Over Expenses	\$139,803.00

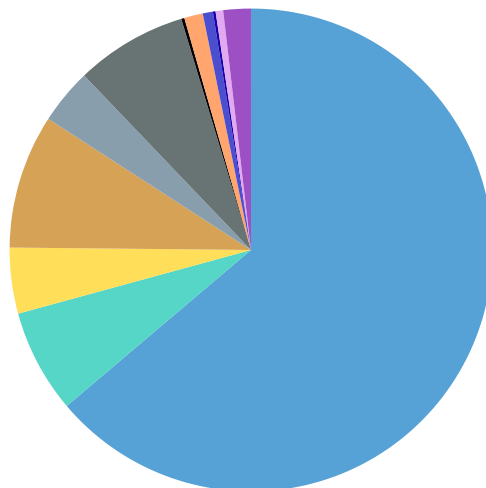
Revenue

- Funding Income (63.5%)
- Training & Business Development (13.6%)
- Sponsorships (9.1%)
- Tuition (6.4%)
- Donations (0.6%)
- Other (5.5%)
- Interest (1.3%)



Expenses

- Salaries & Benefits (63.8%)
- Contract & Professional Services (6.9%)
- Travel (4.4%)
- Accommodations & Meals (9%)
- Operations (3.7%)
- Information & Technology (7.5%)
- In-Kind Donations (0.1%)
- Professional development (0.2%)
- Financial Services (1.2%)
- Communications & Marketing (0.7%)
- Amortization (0.2%)
- Board of Directors (0.5%)
- Bad debts (1.8%)



Endowments

The Rural Ontario Institute greatly appreciates the endowments and gifts that continue to grow and provide interest income to assist in supporting AALP and other rural leadership programming.

Ken McKinnon Memorial Fund

The Ken McKinnon Memorial Fund is a tribute to Ken McKinnon's leadership and service to Canadian agriculture and a commitment to excellence in future leaders. During his 21-year tenure at the Ontario Milk Marketing Board (now Dairy Farmers of Ontario), Ken played an integral role in leading changes that revolutionized milk production, pricing and marketing provincially and nationally. Through donations from individuals, businesses and organizations, this fund fosters the leadership qualities needed in rural Ontario in the years ahead.

William A. Stewart Endowment

The William A. Stewart Endowment was initiated in 1991 by the Agricultural Leadership Trust as a tribute to the late Ontario Minister of Agriculture and Food, the Honourable William A. Stewart. The fund recognizes and honours his legacy of public service, community involvement and leadership. The William A. Stewart Lecture & Reception – a prestigious public lecture event – is held every other year in London, ON as part of the final AALP seminar.

George Dmetriuc Memorial Fund

The George Dmetriuc Memorial Fund was established by the Ontario Wheat Producers' Marketing Board (now Grain Farmers of Ontario) as part of the William A. Stewart Endowment in 1993. The fund exemplifies the spirit of George Dmetriuc as a leader in Ontario agriculture. Other commodity organizations, friends and associates contributed to this fund in recognition of George's contributions during his time as Ontario Wheat Producers' Marketing Board chair from 1984 to 1992.

W. Garfield Weston Foundation Endowment

The W. Garfield Weston Foundation originated in 1959 and is named in honour of Willard Garfield Weston, a Canadian who established successful business enterprises across Canada and around the world. The Foundation's mission states that grants support projects in Canada for the benefit of Canadians. The W. Garfield Weston Foundation Endowment was established upon receipt of contributions from the Foundation in 1994, 1995 and 1996.

Dean Tiessen Memorial Fund

The Dean Tiessen Memorial Fund honours the vision and memory of agriculture entrepreneur and AALP Class 10 graduate Dean Tiessen who died tragically in Brazil in 2013. Dean was president of New Energy Farms, was a catalyst in helping to establish Ontario's biomass sector and was a leader in the greenhouse vegetable industry. The fund will directly support AALP Classes 16 through 20 in their southwestern Ontario seminar themed "Dynamics of Change". Class 10 continues to accept donations toward this fund.

Together, We Can Do More for Rural Ontario

Your support helps strengthen leadership, build vibrant communities, and create opportunities across rural and northern Ontario.

Ways to Support

- Donations
- Sponsorship
- Memorial Giving
- Third-Party Events
- Estate Gifts



Why Give

- **Tax Receipts**
ROI is a registered Canadian charity and provides tax receipts for eligible donations.
- **Meaningful Community Impact**
Your support provides opportunities and action on affordable housing solutions, youth empowerment, data innovation, healthy communities and leadership excellence in rural and northern Ontario.
- **Visibility and Recognition**
Supporters may be recognized through ROI communications, events, and outreach opportunities. This demonstrates their commitment to strong and vibrant rural communities.
- **Support Future Leaders**
Donations help ROI create opportunities for current and emerging leaders who are shaping the future of rural Ontario.

JOIN US

**in building stronger
leaders and rural
communities
across Ontario.**



Contact Us

Breckyn Caers

Fund Development Officer

bcaers@ruralontarioinstitute.ca

Phone: 519-826-4204

www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca




**RURAL ONTARIO
INSTITUTE**


7382 Wellington Road 30, R.R. 5
Guelph, ON N1H 6J2

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Contact us at

 519-826-4204

 info@ruralontarioinstitute.ca

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