

May 21, 2020

Dear AALP Class 18 Sponsor,

Like you, the Rural Ontario Institute has been very busy this spring season. I want to provide you with an update to my letter of April 29th about AALP Class 18 so that you are aware of our plans as participants move into year two of their leadership program.

As we consider changes due to COVID 19 our priority will always be the safety and health of AALP Class 18 participants, ROI staff and our curriculum/site/tour providers. Given this priority, our intention is to deliver the curriculum skills and knowledge objectives, and, the expectations for participant interaction, sector networking and experiential travel that AALP has an excellent reputation for. This is already looking different than the past and we are planning to flexibly adjust both timelines and travel protocols as we move forward. As part of our plans we will have a critical decisions timeline that will allow Class 18 participants to participate in program activities around their work and home lives.

I have met and continue to communicate with our founding partners at OMAFRA, University of Guelph and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture to share safety and health perspectives/protocols and ideas for agile and innovative programming. While we are all adapting as we go, I appreciate the insights they are providing and their continuing support of ROI and AALP.

The 21 participants of AALP Class 18 met Wednesday to reaffirm their commitment to rising to the challenge that COVID-19 has presented to our original program plans. The group has created a communications team and an “optimizing AALP” team. Together we will use our network of experts to continue to plan for a safe physical gathering in July if that is possible. Clearly gathering size rules and locational constraints will drive the scope of options we can pursue. At the same time we will continue to engage experts in leadership skills building and ag-sector/rural community knowledge from around the world through virtual options.

As a sponsor you may have questions about how your contribution will be used as ROI adapts the program. To help provide you information I have created a series of Q&A's on the ROI website [at this link](#) and will continue to update this document when change or more news is available. I am pleased to provide further information or deliver an update presentation to any people in your organization/business.

More broadly at ROI we are taking this time to re-evaluate how we deliver leadership and capacity building to rural stakeholders. This means being responsive to what we have heard is needed and innovative. We will realign to meet future requirements and transform to take advantage of opportunities to make our programs increasingly accessible.

I once again invite you as a sponsor to share your thoughts and ideas. I welcome a “go-pro” tour of a research facility, special farm/equipment example of technology in action, or a “fire-side” chat with your president/chairperson. Please take the time to get to know AALP Class 18, I can promise you it is worth the while!

Sincerely,



*Gabrielle Ferguson CCA AALP
Leadership Programs Director
Rural Ontario Institute*

April 29, 2020

Dear AALP Class 18 Sponsor:

I hope that this correspondence finds you well and that your business/organization is managing the COVID-19 restrictions as smoothly as the circumstances permit.

Along with everyone else, Class 18 of the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program is discovering how to navigate our new situation. Participants agree that COVID-19 has made the benefits of leadership training apparent. I am happy to report that they have risen to the challenges presented to them by proactively organizing to seek out great examples of agri-food and rural leadership. In true AALP style, they have also initiated virtual socials where they can share and support each other in work, farm, family and future. The network building goals of AALP are proving as relevant as ever in these times.

You may be wondering how a leadership program with a large experiential learning component will achieve its objectives during a time of restricted travel and personal contact. Our Board Executive has given staff guidance to ensure we fulfill our commitments to sponsors and participants and re-align our programming to make it as relevant to a rural socio-economic rebound from COVID-19 as possible. Our philosophy will be to remain as agile as possible so that we can respond to opportunities when they align with program objectives and with the schedule AALP Class 18 participants have committed to. An example of this was converting our seminar 3, originally planned for Sarnia, to a webinar format. Over two days we used personality pre-assessment results of participants' and their partners to explore how communication styles can be harnessed to enhance personal relationships and team effectiveness. It was both instructive and enjoyable to watch partners and friends react as their different personalities were revealed on the DiSC circle. Then, Class 18 met on their own to drill into how they will communicate to benefit most from their leadership journey together.

I have been sharing ideas with 35 other Ag leadership programs from USA, Australia and Scotland to develop virtual offerings and to combine our knowledge about navigating travel during this unique time.

If your organization or company has suggestions I welcome your input. Many of you will have interesting operations in Ontario and around the world that could provide a virtual “behind the scenes” look at responding to agri-food and rural community needs with vision and action. Perhaps you have a communications team that can facilitate this and if so I would like to hear from you.

The Rural Ontario Institute remains committed to providing AALP Class 18 with the knowledge and experience to develop the AALP leadership competencies. As you know, we have postponed our North American study tour and are preparing for a study tour that will respond to the best advice provided by official provincial and federal COVID-19 advisories. In order for us to have travel options that provide agility we need confidence in the resources we can draw on to move quickly if need be. Similarly resourcing the organization of on-line learning experiences while travel is not available takes time and money ROI is asking for your continued sponsorship to provide us this flexibility.

Our expectation is that costs will be incurred whether we travel in person and/or as we create the best possible learning virtually. Regardless we will be seeking to provide participants exposure to technical, social, economic, trade and other experts from around the world. We appreciate your financial and in-kind support to accomplish this goal. Certainly, AALP Class 18 will have experiences un-like any before and therefore advance as leaders with unique capacities that the sector can rely on for the future.

Thank you for your understanding as we navigate through the uncertainty. I welcome your comments, questions and collaboration.

Sincerely,



*Gabrielle Ferguson CCA AALP
Leadership Programs Director
Rural Ontario Institute
7382 Wellington County Rd 30, Guelph, ON N1H 6J2
519-383-5581
gferguson@ruralontarioinstitute.ca*