

Updated Apr 2025

Class 21 Interview/ Orientation Information - Notes & FAQ

1) Introduction to AALP

- An experiential leadership development opportunity for individuals in the agricultural, agri-food and rural community who want to broaden their horizons, deepen their understanding of Ontario's diverse agri-food industry and expand their networks.
- Over two fall/winter periods participants take part in seminars and study tours (North American/International) culminating in a spring graduation.
- Classes are made of **up to** 30 participants including but not limited to: farmers and rural business people, government, individuals from agriculture, food and rural community organizations. Participants from across the full value chain in many disciplines are encouraged.
- Ages from mid-20's to late-50's (usual range)
- Education ranges from highschool diploma to PhD. Contributing experience of all types is valued.
- The focus is on building top leaders with the skills and knowledge to make a positive difference in the agriculture, food, agribusiness sectors and rural communities.
- Participants examine social, political, environmental and economic issues as they relate to agriculture, food, agribusiness sectors, rural communities and society.
- Learning is done in a variety of formats (in-person and virtual) including lectures, workshops, site visits, discussion forums, networking receptions, formal briefing sessions, issues projects, study tours and practical application.
- The program consists of seven seminars (3 to 5 days each) held in different Ontario locations including on-site farm/industry/cultural visits, one 5 to 8-day North American Study tour, a 10-to-14-day international study tour, seven 2.5 hour webinars and one group issues analysis project.
- Participants increase the effectiveness of their leadership through:
 - Exposure and experience through application of the best practices in leadership.
 - Gaining broader knowledge of the agri-food industry and social structure in a global context.
 - Networking with peers, industry, government leaders provincially, nationally and internationally.
 - Improving self-confidence and enhancing positive attitudes for the future.

Time & Financial Commitment

- Approximately 31 seminar/webinar days over 18-months dedicated to formal group study (both in-person & virtually) plus approximately 22 travel study tour days.
- In addition, 8-10 days in travel to/from seminars is anticipated.
- Further time in independent study analyzing a specific issue through an Issue Analysis Group Project.
- Preparation for seminars (background reading/ daily chair or other duty preparations).
- Follow-up after seminars and tours (articles, web-site reports, media releases, thank you letters).
- Additional time spent promoting AALP events and fund-raising, including a minimum of one event as participant and one as alumni in the year after graduation.
- \$3000 to \$5000 in additional personal expenses over tuition (gratuities, travel visa/vaccinations/passport/insurance, hospitality, some meals, tourism and other miscellaneous items).

Study tours (Approximate timing)

- 5 to 8-day North American Study Tour (anticipated late February 2025)
- 10 day to 14 day International Study Tour (anticipated late February 2026)
- COVID dependent dates and locations are available in the Class 21 Curriculum Outline.

Issue Analysis Project / Group Project

- Participants select from issues and work in small groups of 3 to 5 individuals.
- A team-based leadership project intended to increase critical thinking, team/task/time management.

- Working with representatives of selected agri-food and rural organizations, on issues of importance, class teams will analyze the issues and present concepts, ideas and options for change. Groups have worked with the Ontario Agriculture President's Council, Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority, 4-H Ontario, Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc., Ontario Agricultural College, Ag Women's Network, Beef Farmers of Ontario, Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO), Fresh Vegetable Growers of Ontario (FVGO), Indian Agricultural Program of Ontario (IAPO), Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians (OAVT), Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association (OFFMA), Ontario Livestock and Poultry Council (OLPC), Farm & Food Care Ontario, Rural Ontario Institute

Tuition Cost - \$12,500.00 (plus administrative fees)

- Tuition is tax-deductible and is payable in up to 2 installments, July and April by E-transfer, Cheque, Visa or MasterCard.
- Class members will also pay a registration and administration fee to the University of Guelph of approximately \$130.00/yr for tuition processing.
- If paying by credit card, class members will also pay a credit card administration fee of approximately \$190.00/yr.
- Tuition covers many expenses except transportation to and from seminars, study tour start & return points, country entrance visa fee, vaccinations, some meals, gratuities, hospitality and other incidentals.
- The cost participants pay is about 1/3 of the total cost of the program. Gratitude goes to program and industry partners and sponsors that make this support possible by contributing financially to the Program as well as private corporations, rural and agricultural organizations and interested individuals through regular donations and fund-raising campaigns.
- Class members are expected to participate in, and contribute where possible to various fund-raising campaigns, activities and initiatives, including a minimum of one event as participant and one as alumni in the year after graduation.

Fundraising

- This is critical for keeping tuition costs at an affordable level.
- Participants and graduates have a responsibility to raise funds throughout the program.
- Specific responsibilities include:
 - Dream Gala or other keystone event organized by the Class participants
 - Formal event held every second year, hosted by the graduation Class
 - Involves soliciting donations of items to be sold – everything from trips to t-shirts, and selling tickets to the event
 - In 2022, almost 350 people attended and over \$105,000 was raised for the AALP program
 - Leadership Lecture and Recruitment Gala
 - Held every second March/April in conjunction with the final seminar (March 2027)
 - Class participants help sell tickets and invite those interested in participating in/funding future AALP Classes.
 - 100 to 300 tickets are sold
 - Class fundraising
 - Historically every class has its own fundraising campaign – raising between \$2500 and \$11,000 for the next class
 - Ideas have included fines, raffles, auctions and the sale of CD's or books. Class 9 initiated a baseball tournament that was held in August for over 5 years. Class 13 initiated a 'Fun-draising Curling Bonspiel. Class 18 held raffles.

Core strengths of the AALP Program

- Graduate support – 99% of graduates have indicated their experiences provided good value for their time and money.
- Excellent track record in leadership training which fosters sector networks and alliances, agricultural competitiveness, collaboration and internationalism.

- Increased leadership activities (44% provincial level, 12-16% on a national and international level)
- 97% of graduates felt AALP helped to make them better leaders and their leadership has been applied to farm/commodity/rural/local organizations; municipal gov't; director or executive roles within farm organizations; increase competitive of own businesses.
- A long history with strong industry support - AALP started in 1984, through a unique partnership between the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, University of Guelph and The Foundation for Rural Living. The Rural Ontario Institute, a non-profit, charitable corporation has delivered AALP since 2010.

2) Applicant Interviews (Feb/May 2025)

Virtual interviews will be held for applicants across the province. The selection committee will ask the same questions of all applicants to assess their:

- Leadership potential after the program
- Open-mindedness and vision
- Linkages to the rural, agriculture and agri-food community
- Demonstrated leadership ability
- Breadth of perspective on rural issues
- Support from personal and business networks
- Level of respect in their community and business

References may be called following the interview process.

3) Provincial Selection (Apr/May 2025)

The AALP recruitment task team selects the Class participants based on their applications, the results from the regional interviews, geographic location and demographics.

Although it is not a primary determinant, diversity among class members is desired since the interaction between participants is crucial to the success of the program. Representation will be sought on the basis of age, gender, location, occupation, agricultural commodity or sector and rural community representation.

4) Notification of Selection Results & Participant Acceptance (Apr/May 2025)

All candidates will be notified shortly after the provincial selection by telephone and written correspondence.

5) Class 21 (2025-2027) begins when it is safe to do so: anticipated – September 3 – 6, 2025

Upon acceptance, participants commit to:

- Attend and fully participate in ALL seminars, study travel sessions, and other virtual activities as required.
- Set aside time outside of formal sessions to prepare for and follow-up from seminars and study tours (background reading, daily notes, thank you letters, sponsorship introductions etc.)
- Complete an Issue Analysis Project or other group project as identified. The time commitment can vary from 25 hours to 80 hours.
- Pay tuition fees, administration fees, transportation costs to and from Ontario seminars, study tour start and return points, country entrance visa fee, vaccinations, gratuities, hospitality and some meals.
- Become competent with the use of Internet, Email, PowerPoint, Google Drive and various Social Media applications.
- Be proactive ambassadors of the program, help promote and support fundraising activities.
- Provide leadership in the agricultural, agri-food and rural community upon completion of the program.

6) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

Q. *Who participates in AALP?*

A. Anyone involved in Ontario's agriculture and food industries or rural communities. Over 250 graduates are primary producers. Classes are made up of producers representing all facets of agriculture in Ontario as well as representatives from the agriculture and rural sectors including government,

agricultural finance, crop protection, insurance, media, marketing and consulting and various agricultural, food and rural community businesses, organizations and associations.

Q. *What is involved in the selection process?*

A. Selection of AALP participants is based on a written application, virtual interviews that include a short presentation and a final provincial selection process by the AALP recruitment task team. Typically, 200 nominations and between thirty and fifty applications are received for the up to 30 positions within the class.

Q. *What does the selection committee look for when choosing participants?*

A. Personal/Individual Criteria:

- Leadership potential after the program
- Open-mindedness and vision
- Linkages to the rural, agriculture and agri-food community
- Demonstrated leadership ability
- Breadth of perspective on ag-sector and rural issues
- Support of personal and business networks
- Well-respected in their community and business

Class Composition Criteria:

- Diversity - Although not a primary determinant, diversity among the up to 30 participants is desired, as participant mix and interaction is crucial to the success of the program. Representation will be sought based on age, gender, location, occupation, agrifood value chain contribution and agricultural/food commodity or sector and rural community representation. Participants are chosen so that peer-to-peer mentorship, interrelationships and a broad network are developed. Class participants are chosen for their different backgrounds, offering unique viewpoints and enabling thought-provoking, balanced discussion of critical issues.

Q. *Didn't the program used to be just for farmers?*

A. Farm operators and primary producers made up the majority of AALP's first class 38 plus years ago. However, feedback from that class indicated that participants were being limited by a singular farming perspective. It was widely felt that much more could be gained for farmers, and agri-business, by introducing other industry and government perspectives into the mix. As a result, AALP moved to integrate farming leaders with industry and rural leaders to learn from each other.

While our goal is to have primary producers make up between 30% - 35% of the participants, it is important to have a broad cross section from agri-business, food processing, agriculture financing, marketers, journalists, rural developers, civil servants, agriculture and rural organizations and municipal officials. The program's intent is NOT about teaching agriculture production. It is designed to provide leaders in Ontario's agriculture, food and rural sectors the opportunity to gain skills, knowledge and an understanding of the forces shaping the ag-sector and rural Ontario.

Q. *Can applicants who are turned down, reapply?*

A. Yes. All applicants are notified of their result personally. Unsuccessful applicants are given suggestions for improvement. Candidates who take these suggestions seriously are encouraged to reapply and are very often successful the second time.

Q. *In previous years there seems to have been a lower number of farmers in the program?*

A. In fact in the last two or three classes the number of primary producers has been stable at 50 percent. At the same time ROI's Board of Directors remains committed to ensuring appropriate participation by Ontario's primary producers. Barriers to farmer participation have been identified and solutions have been put in place.

These include:

- Awareness

The farmer leaders that AALP would like to target for the program are very busy being innovators within their operations and working to grow and evolve their individual business operations. They are too busy to seek out these types of opportunities.

SOLUTION:

Seminars and study tours have been consolidated to the non-growing season and short virtual webinars support the program. A focus has been added to the recruitment process to target emerging farm leaders and innovators. Commodity organizations are providing invitations, scholarships and other support for their members.

- Application Process

The timing of the application and interview selection process began in early spring and was not a good fit with the crop schedule for many farm operators.

SOLUTION:

The application process was re-examined, streamlined and moved up to take place between September and April of the intake year to meet this timing conflict. Interviews still take place in winter/early spring and every effort is made to accommodate all applicants including a move to virtual interviews.

- Cost and Time restrictions for being off Farm

There may be more of a burden for farm operators to travel to seminars and study tours and there is significant financial cost to keep the operation running when they are away and off the farm.

SOLUTION:

Primary producers who show a need for financial support and/or Northern Ontario participants, with unusually high travel costs, are eligible to apply for a R. J. McLaughlin Award or the Emerging Leaders Award through the Rural Ontario Institute. Further information on this award is available through the Rural Ontario Institute.

While farmer participants are critical in the program, diversity among the up to 30 AALP participants is also desired, as participant mix and interaction across the entire agriculture and rural sectors is crucial to the success of AALP participants. Federal job training grants have been successfully obtained by previous participants. More information is available from the Rural Ontario Institute.

Q. *How do participants manage to allocate adequate time to AALP and still maintain their business, family and other commitments?*

A. AALP participants must make the program a priority. It is not a commitment to be taken lightly as it requires time away from normal activities. You must have the support of your personal network/family and business associates before acceptance into the program. Applicants might have to readjust the time they currently donate to volunteer activities in favour of their personal development. Throughout the course often the practice of learning to manage commitments when away at seminars is a great learning experience for aspiring senior leaders.

Q *The tuition is a lot of money for training. Is it really worth it?*

A AALP is an investment.... in you, in your business, in your organization(s) and in your community. You don't pay it all upfront. The tuition can be payable over 2 tax years and the full amount is a deduction on your income tax through a tuition receipt received from the University of Guelph. Some participants have sought out and received individual support from their employer and/ or local/ provincial farm and community organization(s). Federal job training grants may be available to farmers, employees and others. Due to the generosity of sponsors across the industry, you pay only about 1/3 of the total cost of the program. Other executive development programs offered across Ontario can be more costly.

Q. Do we have to own a new computer to be in the program?

A Participants will need access to a computer with basic functions and for access to high-speed Internet and email. The program is moving to using more distance education to deliver some of the curriculum. Future leaders will need to be comfortable with, and take advantage of, the benefits of online new and expanding technology.

Q. How might participants offset some of their tuition costs?

A. It is up to the individual participant to seek contributions from their employers, or from local organizations. With any contribution, participants should know that the employer or organization will expect some return on their investment. For example, if employers agree to pay part of the fee, it is often with a commitment from the participant to remain employed with them for a certain number of years. Tuition fees are also tax deductible and receipts are issued by the University of Guelph's Office of Open Learning each February during the program. There are some educational/job training funding programs available through the government.

Participants who show a need for financial support and/or Northern Ontario participants, with unusually high travel costs, are eligible to apply for a R. J. McLaughlin Award. Also, other participants in financial difficulty may be eligible for a grant of up to 20% available through the ROI's emerging leaders' fund.

Q. Who is responsible for the coordination and administration of AALP?

A. The Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) is in place to offer agricultural and rural leadership programming and is responsible for the coordination and administration of AALP. ROI is a charitable not-for profit organization.

Q. How is the program curriculum determined?

A. A curriculum task team (University of Guelph's Ontario Agricultural College, AALP alumni, industry, agriculture and rural organizations and other knowledge experts) assist with seminar planning, program development and evaluation, based on the Global Leadership Competency Framework (Ann L. Gordon, 2021). Primary focus is the latest applied research in leadership and specific focus is given to application of this knowledge and skills in agriculture, food and rural communities.

The curriculum deals with issues facing the entire agriculture industry. Topics include 360-degree leadership assessment, self-awareness, team synergy, change leadership, communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, problem solving, issues debates, working with the media, diversity, equity and inclusion, government and political systems, national and international trade, environment/economic/social trends in agriculture, rural and society.

Q. How does this program compare to other executive development programs or MBA programs?

A. AALP is excellent value for the money and focuses specifically on the agriculture, agri-food and rural sectors. It is unique by providing a cross-sector experiential executive leadership program that emphasizes practice rather than book work. Other executive development programs and MBA's have tuition costs of between \$10,000 and \$115,000 and range in length from 5 days to 15 months.

In comparison to most MBA programs, AALP will give you a more experiential curriculum leading to an extensive network base, travel opportunities and provide you the opportunity for one-on-one

discussions with industry and government leaders. With AALP you do not do a thesis or receive academic credentials, instead you receive an Award of Achievement, a Certificate from the Office of Open Learning at the University of Guelph. This is eligible for tax credit and AALP alumni are recognized as leaders in the industry.

Some AALP grads describe the program as “going back to school without having to sit in the classroom. It’s more real-life learning than academic instruction.”

Q. *How have graduates given back to the community because of their participation in the AALP?*

- A. Graduates have applied their leadership skills to:
- Federal, Provincial and Municipal government
 - Industry leadership – over 133 organizations/businesses have AALP alumni leading teams/projects
 - Local organizations (i.e. churches, schools)
 - President, General Manager, Director or other executive roles within farm/commodity/rural organizations
 - Their own farming operations and agri-businesses
 - Global development and trade
 - Youth and emerging leaders mentorship
 - Economic, Environmental and Social Innovation