

Questions and answers about AALP Class 18 programming in response to COVID-19

The Rural Ontario Institute is monitoring provincial and federal advisories about how to best deliver our programs and keep our staff, participants, associates and partners safe and healthy. We appreciate the concern and encouragement that members of our ROI community have shared with us and we continue to support collaborative initiatives and partnerships to enhance our rural communities.

1. How will safety and health be prioritized for AALP Class 18?

As part of our ongoing efforts to keep AALP Class 18 participants, ROI staff and curriculum/site/tour providers safe we will implement the most recent safety protocols following the best advice provided by official provincial and federal COVID-19 advisories. Clearly physical distancing and hand washing are key to reducing spread of this disease and now there is newer advice about use of non-medical masks and testing availability.

Class 18 has created an “optimizing AALP” team to assist with tracking changing advisories and logistical planning. This team will report to the Leadership Programs Director and as a benefit includes a participant with an MSc in public health and infectious diseases. At this point all planning for any face to face program delivery is tentative as we wait for further provincial direction and we work with participants to respect specific work and/or personal requirements. Participants are engaged with virtual webinars to meet critical learning objectives. Experiential program elements will be postponed if necessary. Updates to our progress and plans will be ongoing.

2. What are the learning objectives of the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP)?

AALP has six high level learning objectives:

1. Demonstrate the critical leadership skills that will inspire and motivate followers to achieve extraordinary results.
2. Build a complete understanding of their own preferences in terms of personality and ways of working and understand the value difference when working with others.
3. Understand the need to respect all aspects of diversity when working with other individuals and groups.
4. Demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively in oral and written forms, with individuals and groups.
5. Demonstrate strong management skills including managing for performance, coaching, and team development.
6. Articulate the current issues in the areas of Agri-Food systems, related policy aspects, and rural communities.

To support these objectives AALP has 40 detailed learning objectives under the following topics:

- Learning community

- Leadership
- Self-awareness
- Diversity
- Communicating with others
- Managing conflict
- Organization and management
- Agri-food system
- Ag and Food policy

3. What are the experiential targets for AALP?

AALP's strength comes in a large part because of its experiential style. Unlike many leadership degrees or programs offered in a classroom or short retreat format, AALP develops an extensive network that links participants to key influencers in the ag-sector and in government. Participants are challenged by circumstances that allow them to practice skills in uncomfortable situations while they are supported by a trusted team.

Practice – Apply skills they have learned during sessions, site visits, tours and Class team activities and projects.

Networking - With other class participants, ag sector key influencers, politicians, rural community, business and organization leaders at the provincial, national and international level.

Travel - Enhance their global orientation; develop understanding of agricultural production, trade, food safety, environmental issues. Become aware about other aspects of agribusiness important to Ontario's economic development. Gain perspective of other jurisdiction's economy (currency issues, key industries, areas of growth, workforce), national issues, population, culture, society and history through participating in tours/briefings/excursions. Learn how leaders in other legal and political contexts navigate their challenges and by contrast gain perspective on the dynamics of Canadian systems.

4. If AALP Class 18 cannot travel for seminars how will they meet the curriculum objectives?

The full AALP experience requires learning of leadership skills and knowledge plus the application of leadership skills in team work, seminars, site tours/visits and study tours. ROI intends to assist each participant willing to meet these requirements to graduate.

ROI is communicating closely with AALP Class 18 participants, travel providers, founding partners (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs, Ontario Federation of Agriculture and University of Guelph) and using provincial and federal advice to monitor and adjust our travel plans.

AALP Class 18 will most likely have changes to both in-province and out of province travel. In the near term leadership skills and knowledge can be gained using virtual technology. Some limited networking can occur by creating 2-way introductions and conversations with key influencers in the ag-sector, government and rural communities.

We are creating a timeline for critical decision making on travel. At those junctures we will choose between postpone/prolong or cancel options. Each Class 18 participant will be given the opportunity to continue their journey by extending their time past the original final program date (March 2021). This may include receiving a credit for travel with another class or staying together with a Class 18 group. Possible options for a pro-rated refund for those who decide not to finish the program are not off the table but are not necessary at this point in time given the commitment of Class 18 to work at getting the most out of alternative programming and the planning horizon we have for experiential elements.

5. How will the money collected from sponsors and donors towards AALP Class 18 be used?

Funds collected from sponsors will be used to support additional planning and capacity to deliver AALP in ways that incorporate both safety and innovative approaches. This may include such things as:

- Creating virtual webinars that connect participants to key influencers, innovative technologies and interesting people/places/things around the world.
- Providing safety equipment and tools to participants and others.
- Modifying to meet new lodging, travel, meeting room and site visit protocols which are more expensive
- Breaking up into smaller groups for selected components of the program;
- Providing travel credits to Class 18 participants to be used at a date beyond their originally schedule graduation date of March 2021.

6. What if our organization is reconsidering our AALP sponsorship commitments?

ROI continues to plan and deliver AALP programming to Class 18 participants with the intention to fulfill both skills and knowledge curriculum criteria, and experiential practice, networking and travel. In cases where sponsors are reviewing commitments we invite you to communicate with the leadership programs director (Gabrielle Ferguson) and/or the executive director (Norm Ragetlie) so we can provide more information, discuss concerns and plan accordingly

7. How can I/my organization/business help to support Class 18, AALP and ROI?

ROI and AALP Class 18 participants are grateful to our funders, sponsors and donors that generously make this unique leadership journey possible for those who wish to make a positive difference through their work and volunteering. Together you can help us realize the vision of creating future focused leaders in the ag-sector and rural community by considering some of the following options:

- Create a “go-pro” tour of a research facility, special farm/equipment example of technology in action. Or recycle some of your best videos to share.
- Provide a “fire-side” chat with your president/chairperson or another person of influence.
- Take the time to get to know AALP Class 18, I can promise you it is worth the while, by inviting them to give 2 minute introductions at a board luncheon – virtually or in-person if suitable.
- Donate or boost sponsorship to support safety and adapting to COVID-19 protocols.
- Share your best practices, contacts and resources for adapting to COVID-19 protocols.