



Attracting Film Production to Small Town Ontario



ONTARIO
CREATES

sgbma



COMMUNITY FUTURES
SOUTH GEORGIAN BAY



Nottawasaga Futures

Contents

1. Introduction	3
Credits and Profiles	4
Forward	5
The Economic Impact for Film Producers and Locations	6
Methodology	7
2. Background	9
Film Production Process	9
Analysis of Challenges and Opportunities	10
3. Economic Impact and Film Policy	12
Nottawasaga Futures Film Liaison Office	12
Film Permit Fees	14
Local Economic Impact Statistics	15
4. Limitations and Synergy	20
Municipal Operational Limitations	20
Tourism Industry Synergy	21
Workforce Development and Training	22
5. Strategic Recommendations	24
Short-Term Strategies	24
Long-Term Strategies	25
6. Conclusions	28
7. Appendix A - References	30

Published February 2024

DISCLAIMER: Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Ontario Creates, the Government of Ontario, South Georgian Bay Media Association (SGBMA), Community Futures South Georgian Bay, and/or Nottawasaga Futures Film Liaison Office. The Government of Ontario and their agencies are in no way bound by the recommendations contained in this document.

1. Introduction

In 2022, Ontario's film and television sector experienced a remarkable surge, contributing a staggering \$3.15 billion to the economy.¹ This impressive figure highlights the sector's dynamic expansion, fueled by domestic and international productions. The primary hub for film and television production in Ontario is Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), with the addition of Hamilton.

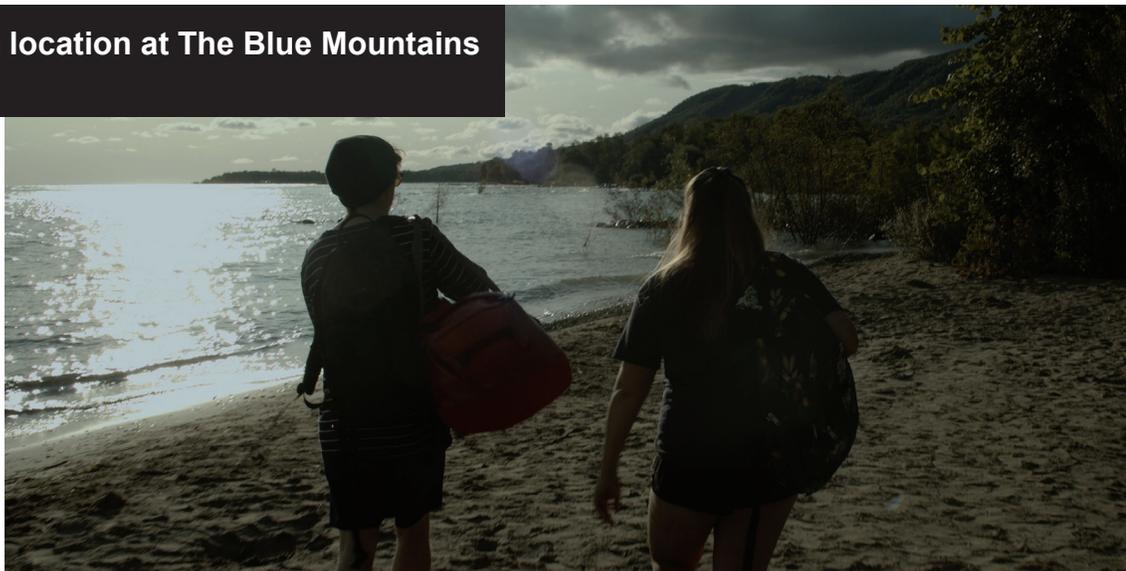
Ontario's quaint small towns, with their distinct charm and picturesque landscapes, stand in stark contrast to the bustling urban environment of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). These towns, often overlooked, offer unique settings that captivate filmmakers and audiences alike. Their historic architecture, natural scenic beauty, and unique tourist destination offerings provide a refreshing backdrop for storytelling. This untapped potential in these locales presents an intriguing avenue for attracting film production to these small towns in Southern Ontario.

The core objective of this study is to explore the untapped potential of Ontario's small towns (with populations of approximately 30,000 or less), especially those in rural areas eligible for regional bonus tax credits and located near the GTA.

The research undertaken is designed to identify both opportunities and challenges in bolstering the film industry's presence in these areas, defined as being within a 250km radius of the GTA. By integrating comprehensive data analysis with feedback from key stakeholders, the study aims to uncover how these towns can synergize with the local tourism sector. This approach is expected to aid in developing film infrastructure, evaluating economic impacts, and enhancing workforce training and capacity. Ultimately, this research endeavours to provide pivotal insights that could reshape the landscape of film production in Ontario, extending its reach beyond the GTA and enriching the film industry and the economies of these local communities.

Filming LABOUR DAY on location at The Blue Mountains

Photo: SGBMA



¹ Ontario Creates, 2023

Co-authored by:

Tom Strnad

Lead Strategist, South Georgian Bay Media Association Inc.

Tracey Strnad

Head of Production and Research, South Georgian Bay Media Association Inc.

Lead Consultant:

Boris Mojsovski, ASC, CSC, ASBH

Director, Cinematographer

A Thousand Lights Dark Inc.

Project Partners:

Ontario Creates

Community Futures South Georgian Bay

Nottawasaga Futures Film Liaison Office

Town of The Blue Mountains

About the SGBMA:

The South Georgian Bay Media Association (SGBMA) is a dynamic collective of media and film artists that fosters creativity and camaraderie within the media and film arts sector. Established in 2015, we are committed to enhancing media arts awareness and expertise through various services. These include consultation, training, education, media arts productions, and collaboration with local community hubs. We are dedicated to providing a platform for media and film artists to connect, share ideas, and grow through artist talks, training sessions, workshops, and professional development initiatives.

About Boris Mojsovski, ASC, CSC, ASBH:

Boris Mojsovski strives to create unique, appropriate and evocative beauty through his work. He is a filmmaker of multiple talents, equally interested in cinematography, writing and directing. Boris was born in Sarajevo, survived the war, as a refugee studied film and came to Toronto where he continued his studies and worked as a fashion photographer. Upon completing his Masters in Production and Film Theory, Boris became the third-generation in his family to pursue a career in film. Parallel to his writing and directing, Boris continued to work as a cinematographer on multiple films and series. Boris lensed 12 Monkeys alongside his mentor and dear friend David Greene ASC CSC. Boris won the ASC Award for the 12 Monkeys episode "Thief". After Monkeys, Boris continued to work as a cinematographer on such shows as Taken (NBC), Between (Netflix), Knightfall (A+E, History) and Titans (Warner Brothers, DC) for which he also directed the episodes "Atonement", "Lazarus" and "Souls". On Dan Brown's The Lost Symbol, Boris was the cinematographer and director - "Noögenesis" is the origin episode Boris directed. On Titans S4, Boris directed two episodes, Super Super Mart and Jinx, currently on HBO Max. Recently, Boris shot the series Rabbit Hole for Paramount, Witch Mountain, a pilot for Disney Plus. He is currently in pre production for The Madness, a new Netflix series.

Forward

Our small town of The Blue Mountains is a tourism destination, synonymous with Collingwood. The ski hills create a population swell that quadruples the permanent residents of 20,000 to over 100,000 on weekends and holidays. The Niagara Escarpment and Bruce Trail are explored year-round, with visitors from all over the world seeking out adventure on this UNESCO World Biosphere site. Agritourism, foodie scenes and local craft beer and cider scenes accompany festivals, live theatre and world-class musical performances throughout this South Georgian Bay region in Southern Ontario - just 2 hours north of Toronto.

Film productions arrive organically, from the major action film *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996) that had bullets ring through Santa's sleigh on cold winter nights in downtown Collingwood, or to the ski scenes captured for *Molly's Game* (2017) at the Beaver Valley ski club. Local film companies produce television series for Canadian broadcasters, and feature films for worldwide distribution.

But at its heart, the small towns within South Georgian Bay are tourism-based economies as are over 50 other small towns throughout Southern Ontario. We see many challenges for the tourism industry, with the ongoing recovery due to COVID-19 but also due to the seasonal and climate-related nuances that affect contract staff and tourism workers.

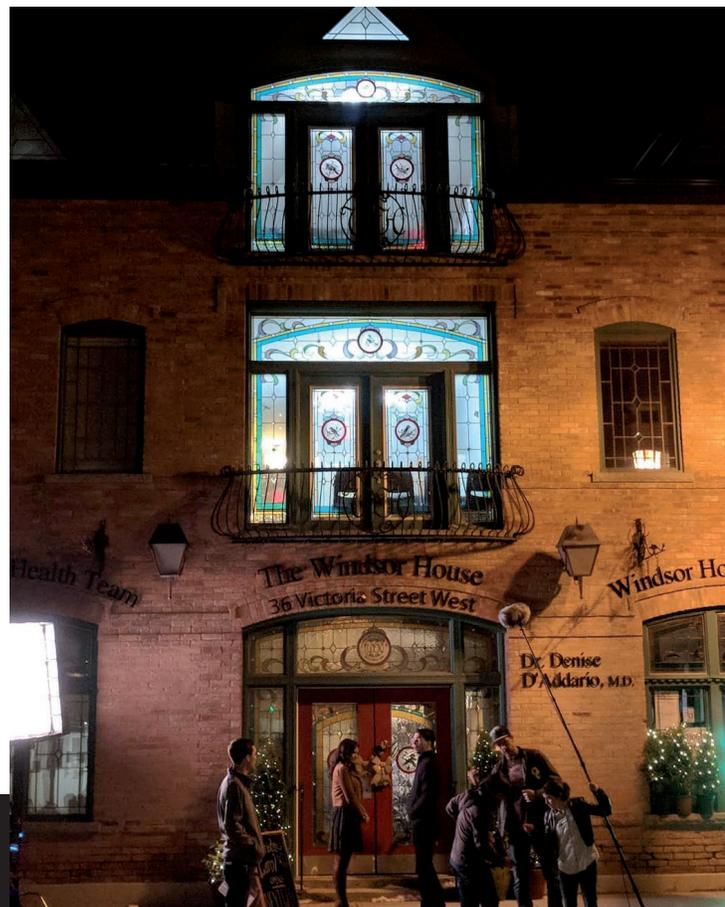
We wanted to start exploring synergies between the film and tourism industries since the same attraction qualities that draw tourists to small towns near the GTA, within a few hour's drive, are very similar to what attracts on-location filming to a town.

But while some towns have managed to see growth in film and television production, others, such as Collingwood see only sporadic major films visit once a decade. What does it take to attract film production outside the GTA? This is the million-dollar question that we are seeking to answer in this study.

Tom Strnad

Lead Strategist

South Georgian Bay Media Association Inc.



On location in Alliston for HOMETOWN HOLIDAY

Photo: Nottawasaga Futures Film Liaison Office

The Economic Impact for Film Producers and Locations

Making the move happen for a film to a small town, as each production unit move is literally a significant cost for film productions, requires a dedicated multi-step approach by any interested town in Ontario.

In order for small towns in Ontario to attract film productions outside the GTA, a better understanding of the economic impacts behind location choice is crucial to make ‘that move happen’



On location in New Tecumseth for MARSH KING'S DAUGHTER
Photo: Nottawasaga Futures Film Liaison Office

Methodology

The methodology of this research project intertwined quantitative and qualitative approaches to offer a holistic view of trends, policies, and best practices in location-based film production. We employed a mix of statistical methods to analyze the data obtained from in-person surveys and interviews. For quantitative data, such as production volume and economic impacts, we used descriptive statistics to summarize the data and inferential statistics to understand relationships and trends. The data sources included economic impact data for communities within the target region, where available, film production and film industry data from industry-based reports, and regional film industry production statistics from film offices, liaisons and economic development offices. Assumptions included independence and equal variance, particularly as it pertains to economic impact and industry growth, within sources used for the data analysis.

The original data collected for this study was gathered from identified critical stakeholders within the targeted region and experts, including regional economic development officers, film office and film liaison managers, film location managers, film producers, film production managers, private and public location owners/property managers, film industry service providers, and film companies.

For qualitative data gathered from interviews and roundtable discussions, thematic analysis was the primary tool. This involved coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns. By doing so, we were able to extract significant insights from the personal experiences and opinions of the participants. This method allowed for a nuanced understanding of the stakeholders' perspectives, complementing the quantitative data.

Stakeholder engagement was a cornerstone of our research and this was achieved through ongoing outreach to small towns, business networks and film industry community representatives. Our organization, being based in The Town of Blue Mountains, sought out and received full support from the town council and staff to participate and provide data for this study. We meticulously incorporated feedback from diverse stakeholders, including film professionals, consultants, private location owners, film liaison office staff, economic development officers, and town department managers. This was achieved through 38 in-depth interviews out of 52 requests. The interviews were conducted between September and December 2023, each lasting 15-30 minutes. And a critical 9-person roundtable discussion took place in November 2023. The roundtable, which included small-town management staff, business improvement area organizations, film office staff, and private stakeholders and location owners, all from within Grey and Simcoe County, fostered a collaborative environment for discussing pertinent issues.

The municipalities specifically engaged in this study included the following:

- **Collingwood** (pop. 24,811 in 2021)
- **The Blue Mountains** (pop. 9,390 in 2021)
- **Wasaga Beach** (pop. 24,862 in 2021)
- **Adjala-Tosorontio** (pop. 10,989 in 2021)
- **Bradford West Gwillimbury** (pop. 42,880 in 2021)
- **Essa** (pop. 22,970 in 2021)
- **Innisfil** (pop. 43,326 in 2021)
- **New Tecumseth** (pop. 41,439 in 2019)
- **Meaford** (pop. 1,485 in 2021)
- **Oro-Medonte** (pop. 23,017 in 2021)
- **County of Grey**

These towns and county were engaged using interviews and surveys directly through staff and/or through film representatives that included the Nottawasaga Futures Film Liaison Office and the Grey County Economic Development Department.

Balancing diverse perspectives was key to our approach. We ensured that each stakeholder group was represented equally and their viewpoints were considered with equal weight. This inclusive strategy enriched our understanding of the different facets of film production in small towns, contributing to a more comprehensive and balanced analysis.

The expertise of our lead film consultant Boris Mojsovski ASC, CSC, ASBH, an award-winning director and cinematographer based in Toronto, further enhanced the project. His insights into domestic and foreign film and TV production trends in Southwestern Ontario, offered a valuable perspective, complementing our data from various Southern Ontario cities and towns on film policies, permitting processes, insurance requirements, and representations of filming locations at municipal and regional government levels.



MARSH KING'S DAUGHTER crew enjoying pizza on location
Photo: Nottawasaga Futures Film Liaison Office, Robin Brown

2. Background

Ontario's filmmaking history is characterized by its early adoption of cinema and regulatory frameworks, setting the stage for a thriving industry. Southwestern Ontario is emerging as a film production hub, capitalizing on its unique landscapes and local resources. This contrasts with the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), the traditional heart of Canadian filmmaking, known for its established infrastructure and diverse filming locations. While the GTA offers a more developed film industry ecosystem, small towns in Southern Ontario present untapped potential and distinctive opportunities, driven by its rural charm and growing interest from filmmakers.

Film Production Process

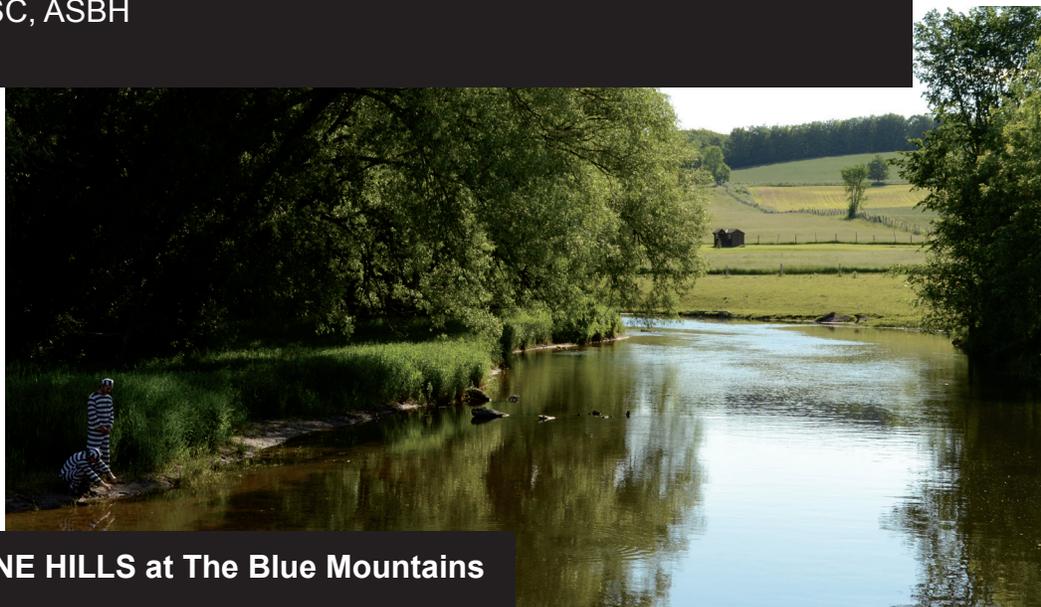
Film production operates in two primary environments: studios and on-location sets.

Studios are specially designed to facilitate lighting, cast, crew, and set construction for both interior and exterior shots. They range from modified warehouses to purpose-built facilities like Toronto's Pinewood Studios.

On-location filming involves transporting the entire production unit, including cast and crew, to various sites. This process, known as a unit move, incurs significant costs, particularly in transportation. The choice of filming location, whether in a studio or on-site, is influenced by budgetary constraints and logistical considerations.

Location moves must be necessary and work within the budget constraints. There must be a flow from one location to the next and proximity, and unique location needs are the greatest influence. Think of it like a train, and each stop has to be on the way for a round trip that returns the unit back to the studio or city such as Toronto. If the next stop is too far away or not on the way - production will seek out another spot.

Boris Mojsovski, ASC, CSC, ASBH



Filming THE FORTUNE HILLS at The Blue Mountains

Photo: SGBMA

Analysis of Opportunities and Challenges

The impact of location filming on local businesses and economies can be substantial, as evidenced by real-life case studies.

For instance, “The Umbrella Academy” Season Two, filmed in Ontario in 2019, had a profound economic impact. It resulted in over C\$77.3 million in local spending, of which 59% was allocated to wages and salaries.

This production engaged 980 Ontario-based suppliers and had a significant impact on cities like Toronto, Mississauga, Ajax, and Hamilton, along with neighbouring municipalities. This expenditure contributed C\$111 million to Ontario’s GDP and stimulated 1,120 full-time equivalent jobs in the province, illustrating the extensive ripple effect of large-scale film productions.¹

Another notable example is the filming of “Schitt’s Creek” in the small town of Goodwood, Ontario. This production not only provided a boost to local businesses but also put the town on the map, attracting tourists and fans of the show. These case studies exemplify how film productions, even in small towns, can lead to substantial economic benefits and wider recognition.²

When a film production arrives in a locality, it often brings key crew members but also typically hires local technicians, thereby boosting employment. The demand extends to various local services, from car rentals and dry cleaning to financial services and supplies from gas stations to hardware stores. This influx of business and employment opportunities demonstrates the far-reaching economic direct local impact of film productions.

However, small rural towns in Ontario face specific challenges in attracting film production. These include additional travel costs, a lack of awareness about film industry resources, outdated or missing information for film locations, and limited resources for developing film policies.

To overcome these challenges, strategies could include:

- **Developing Comprehensive Film Resource Guides:** Creating detailed guides about local resources, amenities, and contacts can help alleviate the lack of awareness and provide updated location information
- **Investing in Infrastructure:** Improving local infrastructure and transportation can reduce travel costs and make these locations more accessible and attractive for film production
- **Forming Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborating with private entities can help small towns in resource mobilization and policy development, ensuring a more film-friendly environment
- **Marketing and Promotion:** Actively promoting these towns as unique filming locations can attract more productions, leveraging their natural beauty and historical significance.

¹ https://www.mpa-canada.org/research_docs/oxford-economics-report-the-umbrella-academy-season-two

² <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/schitt-s-creek-provides-economic-boost-for-goodwood-ont-population-663-1.4484929>

Despite these challenges, small towns in Ontario offer significant opportunities, including direct economic impacts on local businesses, synergy with tourism-based economies, and unique filming locations.

Sustainable practices and historical preservation in these towns also present untapped potential for the film industry, suggesting a promising avenue for future development and collaboration.



Filming on location at the shores of Georgian Bay for THE HYPERBOREAN

Photo: John Fearnell

3. Economic Impact and Film Policy

Regions with dedicated film offices, comprehensive film policies, and robust support systems, including educational programs, skilled labour, equipment rentals, and economic incentives, have witnessed a notable increase in film production and direct economic impact. The presence of a regional film office catalyzes the growth in film and television production, enhancing year-over-year development and attraction. This can be seen in Northern Ontario which experiences ongoing growth in film and television production with a centralized office under the Creative Industries of Ontario North (CION). However, additional attraction to the Ontario North region occurs because of supplementary incentives, that include production financing contributions for productions alongside labour wage subsidies for local crew hiring.

Despite this need for a multi-faceted approach of policy, marketing, and incentives, regions like Collingwood and The Blue Mountains, without formal film policies or a film office, have organically attracted productions by leveraging their unique tourist attractions. By developing competitive film policies and enhancing location library listings, these regions can further boost this organic growth, making them more attractive to productions from the GTA.

Nottawasaga Futures Film Liaison Office

This regional film liaison office was established in 2001 by Nottawasaga Futures as a means to address the creation of a centralized film liaison that represents the Township of Adjala-Tosorontio, Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury, Township of Essa, Town of Innisfil, and the Town of New Tecumseth. The office has seen overall film production growth and recently provided location support and permits for the major motion picture *The Marsh King's Daughter* (2023), starring Daisy Ridley. The ability to work with a regional office provides ongoing access to popular locations such as the South Simcoe Railway, which regularly hosts television shows such as *Murdoch Mysteries* or the historical downtowns and parks that have been utilized for series such as *Titans* (2019), *Jack Reacher* (2021) and *The Boys* (2021). This model for film permitting and location accessibility provides exponential growth for all the small to medium towns and municipalities involved, all of which are outside the GTA.

Without the Nottawasaga Futures Film Liaison Office, the towns represented would not have the staffing resources to facilitate film location requests. All the towns that our office represents also do not have their own town-based film permit process or film permit policy. We continue to assist and offer a streamlined solution for film productions wishing to film in any of the towns that we represent.

Martin Kuzma, CEO of Nottawasaga Futures

When I work with a location manager, we break down the script and determine what locations are needed. The more locations that can work in one central area or town, the greater the possibility of the production filming everything in that one spot. A film office can make it very easy to find more than one location, and sometimes a film officer or liaison helps us find everything we need. There is great value in having that local expertise available.

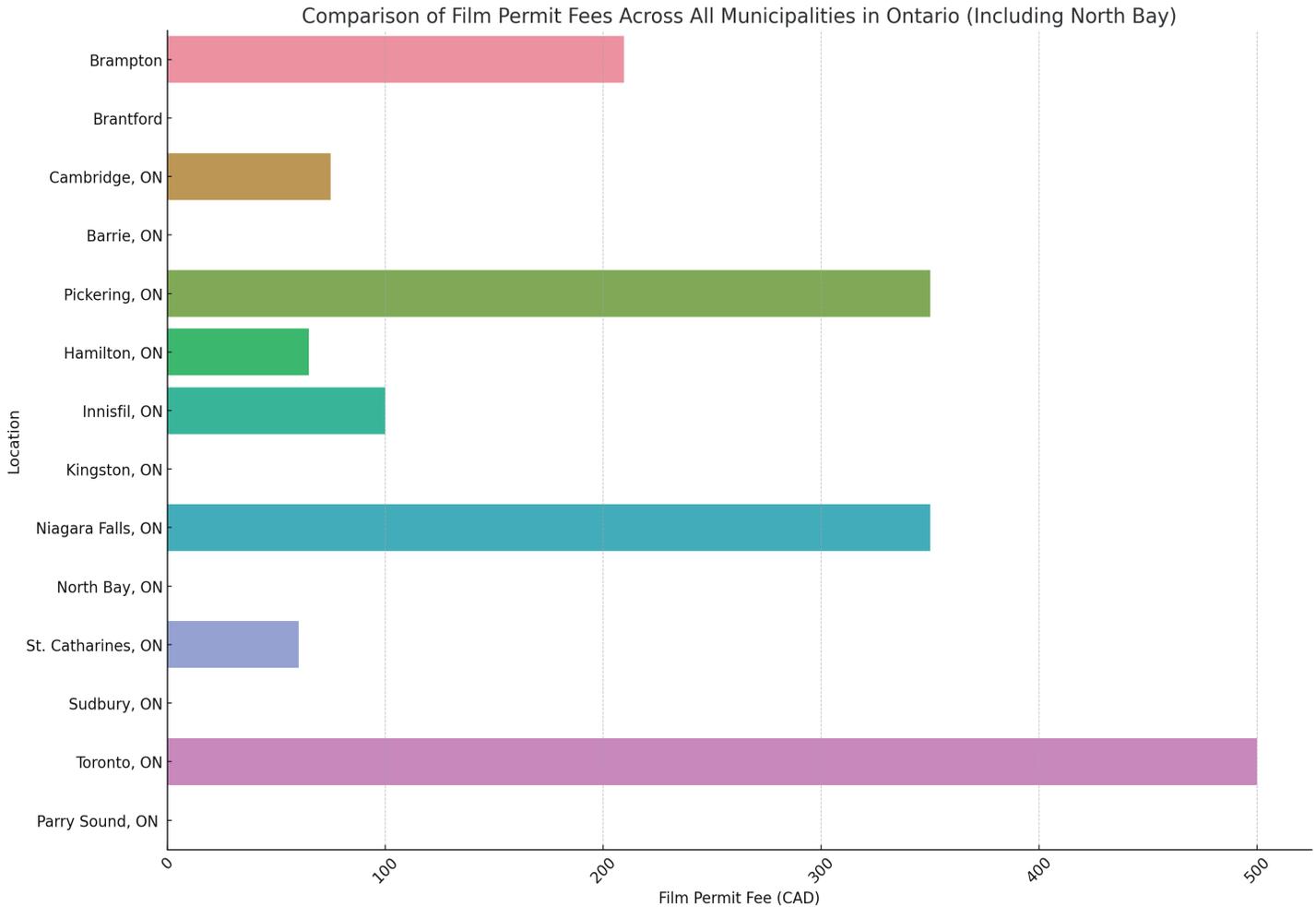
Boris Mojsovski, ASC, CSC, ASBH



Blue Mountain Resort and Village, a popular filming location in the town of The Blue Mountains, Photo: Shutterstock

Film Permit Fees

The following chart outlines the variety of film permit fees, with more rural areas outside the GTA offering film permits at lower or no cost than larger cities including Toronto.



Waiving costs for permit fees or reducing costs are advertised as an incentive by some rural and distant small towns outside the GTA.

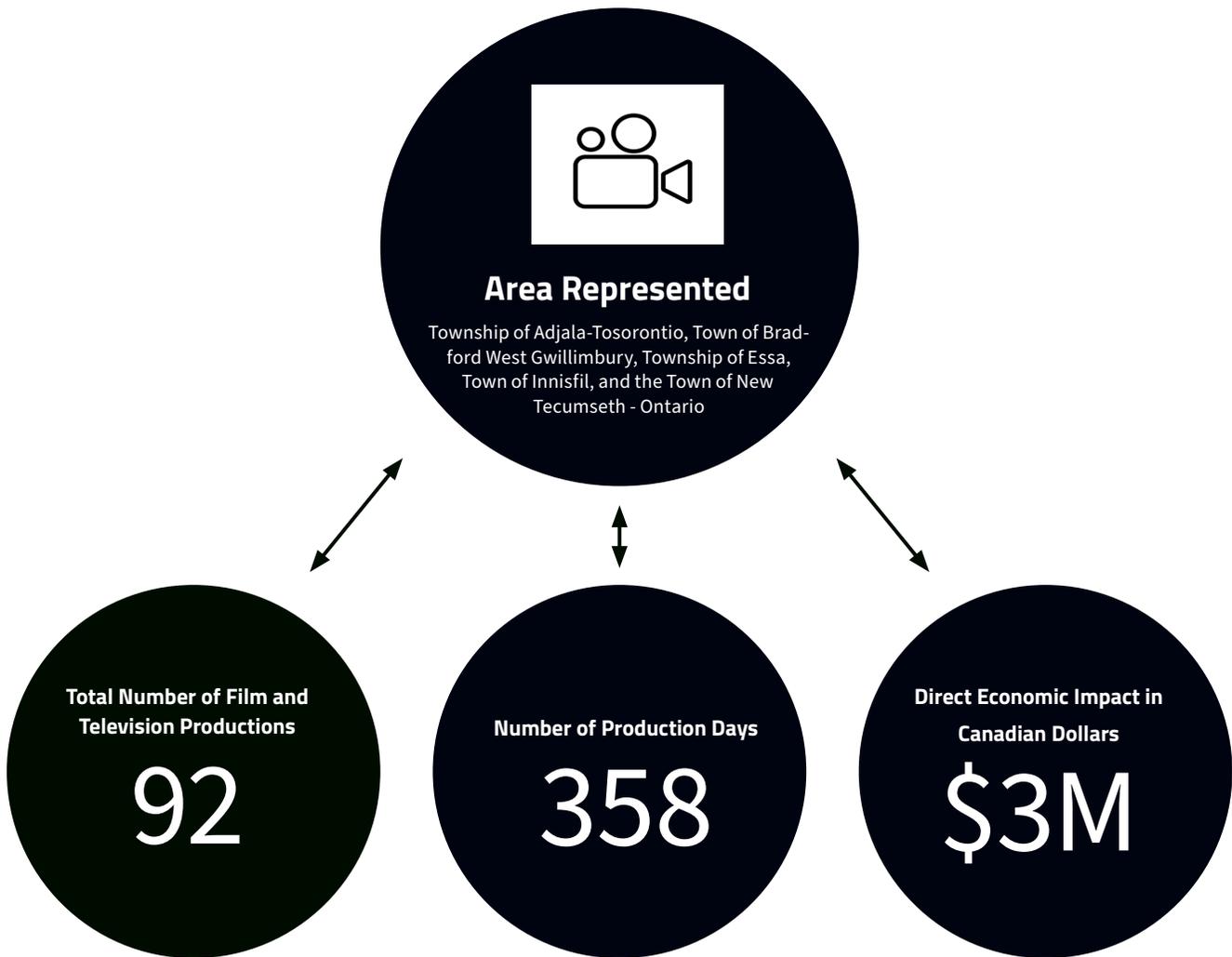
The CION Producers Guide states under the category ‘Advantages’ that ‘Shooting your next project in North Bay means: No Film Permit Fees’ as the first advantage for filming there.¹

¹ <https://cionorth.ca/film-tv/producers-guide/cities/north-bay>

Local Economic Impact Statistics

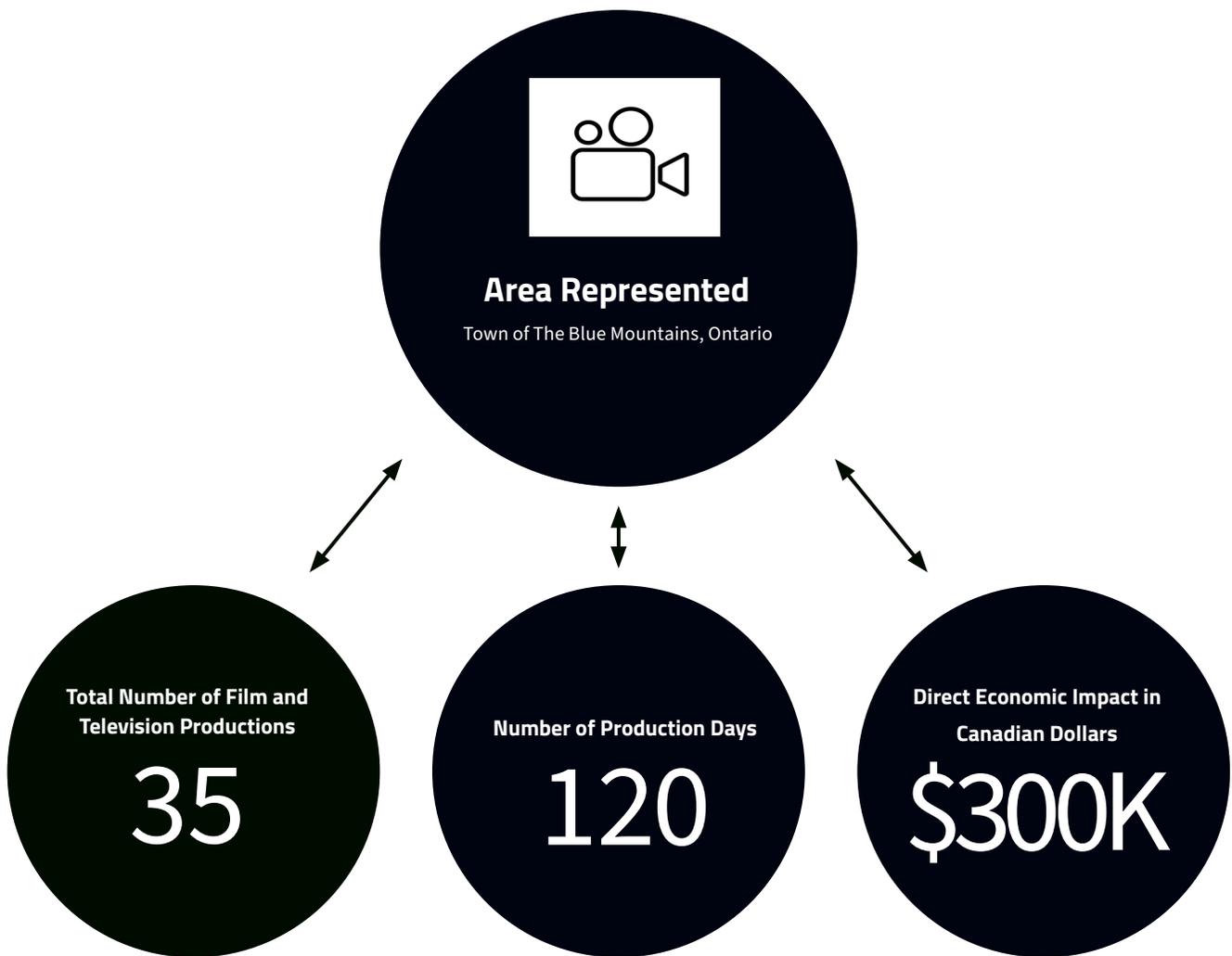
The following charts provide an overview of direct local economic impact from on-location film production.

Nottawasaga Futures Film Liaison Office (10 Year Statistics from 2012-2022)



Local Economic Impact Statistics

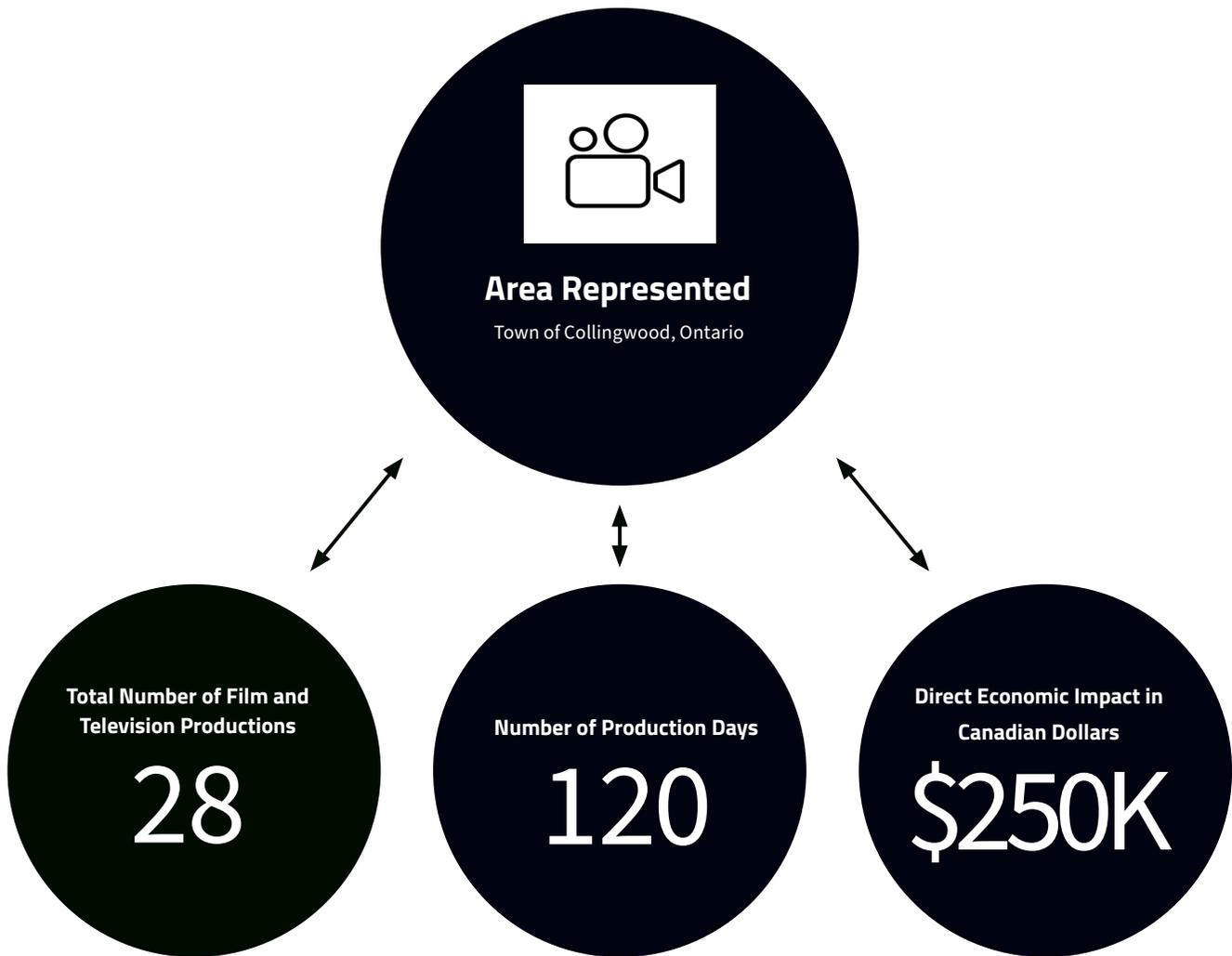
Town of the Blue Mountains (10 Year Statistics from 2012-2022)



Note: Limitations on the lack of existing data and statistics from the Town of The Blue Mountains and Town of Collingwood, which do not have a dedicated film office or film liaison, relied on estimations of annual production volumes. Qualitative data from interviews, specifically with locally based film producers and film producers that have filmed in these towns, provided insight for these estimates of overall volume and average production shoot days. Projections of a 10 year span were based on year-to-year growth seen in the neighbouring area represented by the Nottawasaga Futures Film Liaison Office.

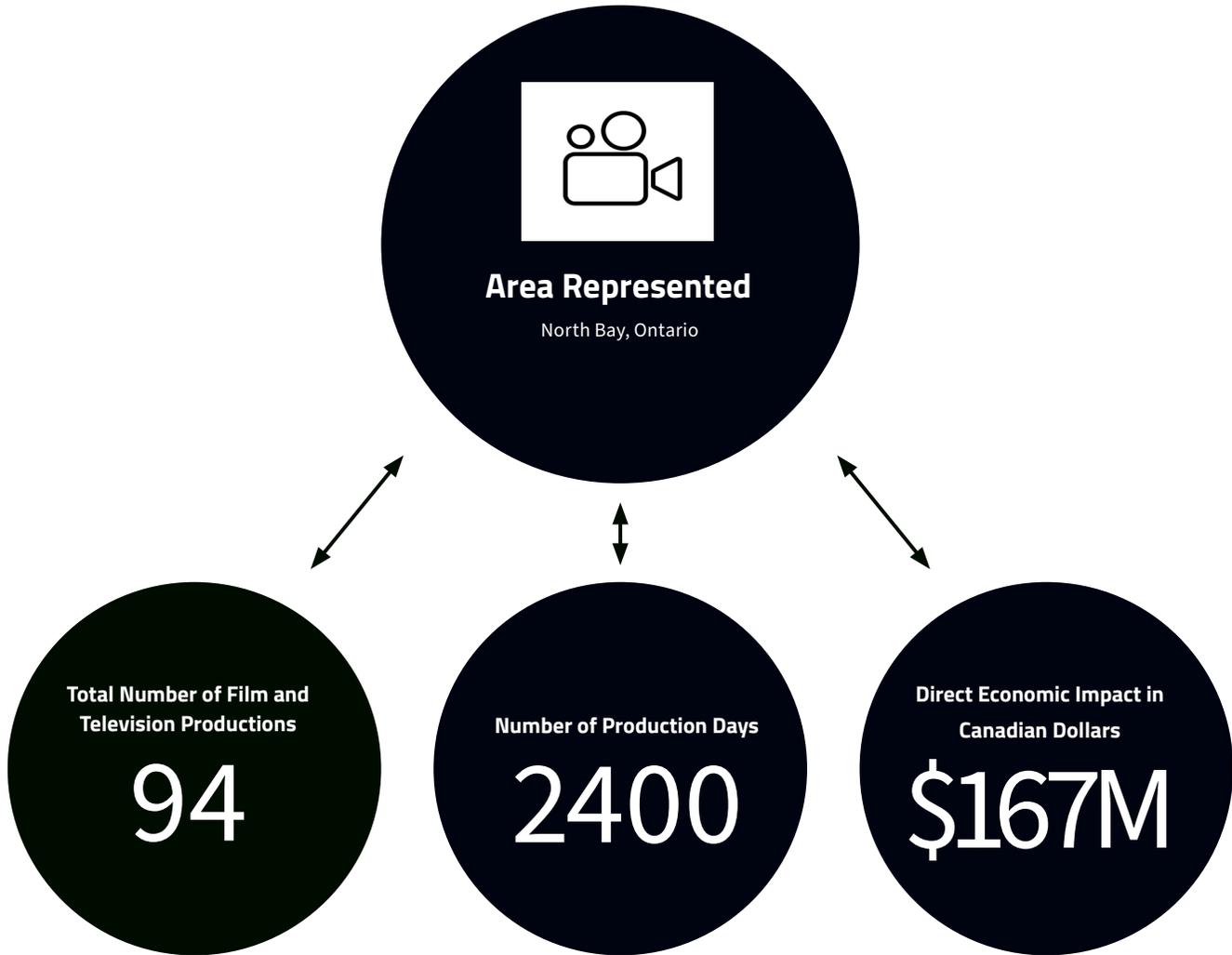
Local Economic Impact Statistics

Town of the Collingwood (10 Year Statistics from 2012-2022)



Local Economic Impact Statistics

City of North Bay (10 Year Statistics from 2012-2022)



With a regional film office under CION (Cultural Industries Ontario North), there is ongoing growth in production volume and direct local economic impact in the City of North Bay.

North Bay has grown from hosting 3 productions in the early 2000s to a total of 15 productions in 2019, with 377 filming days and \$46 million in local economic impact.¹ Comparatively, Greater Sudbury, also represented by CION, experienced over \$200 million in local economic spending from 2012-2021 and hosted 141 productions.²

¹ Film and Television Industry Workforce Analysis North Bay

² Economic Impact of the Film and Television Sector, Sudbury

Based on the regions studied, we found that a regional film office or liaison increases the amount of film production and direct economic impact by 3 to 10 times the organic rate of production in a small town.



Filming the Mary Ward shipwreck for the film MARY WARD, at Northwinds Beach in The Blue Mountains Photo: SGBMA

On-location filming significantly benefits the local economies of rural towns outside the GTA, with direct economic impacts and locally-based spending.

North Bay had 94 productions in the past decade offering on average approximately \$16 Million annually in local economic spend.¹

Statistics from the Nottawasaga Futures Film Liaison Office in 2022 estimated \$100,000 in direct economic impact from approximately 8-10 medium-sized film or television productions annually.²

While Toronto and Hamilton continue to be major film production centers in Ontario, boosted by favourable tax credits and a skilled workforce, surrounding Southwestern Ontario small towns are emerging as attractive alternatives. These areas, offering unique filming locations and additional incentives like regional bonus tax credits and no permit fees, complement the established infrastructure of larger cities. In 2023, a notable film production in Stratford contributed approximately C\$5 million to the local economy, underlining the potential economic benefits of on-location filming in these smaller towns.³

¹ <https://filming.northbay.ca/>

² Nottawasaga Film Liaison Office

³ <https://visitstratford.ca/film-tv/>

4. Limitations and Synergy

Municipal Operational Limitations

Our interviews and surveys identified a majority of municipalities having a desire to increase film production and establish film policies and/or film offices. However, the majority also indicated that the towns lacked the town staff and resources to implement these recommendations. There was a consensus that a more regional approach to a film office could be considered for implementing a film office and film policy procedure.

With small towns being part of a county or district level of government in Ontario, there are further complications arising from upper-tier levels of municipalities. One major issue brought forward is the multi-faceted nature of towns within a county or district that have distinct economic strategic objectives and plans. A county could be overseeing different interests from manufacturing to agriculture to arts and culture throughout all member towns.

A different model of film location and film office representation is needed to properly address these limitations for any growth in the film and television sector within the small towns near the GTA. There is a need to seek out synergies and collaborations that can access existing frameworks in both policy, structure and marketing.

9 out of 10 Small Towns Surveyed Did Not Have a Town Based Film Policy or Film Permitting Procedure in Place



**On location in New Tecumseth for
CHRISTMAS WITH A PRINCE**
Photo: Nottawasaga Futures Film Liaison Office

Tourism Industry Synergy

In terms of tourism and film production synergy, Ontario’s tourism sector, a major economic driver with over 200,000 businesses and 400,000 jobs, demonstrates effective integration with the film and television industry. A notable success story is the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, which has seamlessly blended its tourism appeal with film production. This synergy led to an estimated 30% increase in tourist visits following the filming of popular movies, showcasing the town’s picturesque vineyards and historic sites.¹

Small towns like Wasaga Beach and Collingwood, having transitioned to tourism-based economies, further enhance their attractiveness for film productions. However, challenges such as budget constraints and diverse economic strategies across county lines, complicate the establishment of unified film policies.

All small towns surveyed had policies in place to address tourism-based requirements that included park permits, special event permits, live musical events, and street closures. Parks and recreation departments have the expertise and knowledge base to address film requests and policies and are currently the primary contact point for small towns without a film office or film policy in place. Several towns also have electrical grids installed in downtowns to allow for street festivals and special events, offering sustainable electrical use for film and television that removes the need for gas-powered generators.

10 out of 10 Small Towns Surveyed had Tourism-Based Policies and Procedures in Place for Special Events, Park Rentals and Live Music

Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) provide valuable resources for marketing and capacity building, indicating potential for collaboration with film strategies to promote regional development. For example, leveraging RTO expertise in Grey County resulted in a 15% increase in film-related tourism in 2023.² RTOs also provide marketing support, and capacity building through training and mentorship and help promote a unified cross-county support system for the region represented. These same resources could be re-tooled and re-purposed for use by towns to attract and build on marketing the region as a film location destination.

**Embracing tourism in the postcard for
The Blue Mountains’ shot film, LABOUR DAY**
Photo: SGBMA



¹ ROMA Annual Report 2022, TIAO State of the Ontario Tourism Industry Report 2022
² RTO7 2023 Special Report

Workforce Development and Training

Workforce development in the film industry of Southwestern Ontario faces unique challenges due to the scarcity of purpose-built studios outside the GTA and Hamilton. This situation is somewhat alleviated in areas like Barrie and North Bay, which offer some facilities, but smaller towns often depend on repurposed spaces like warehouses for temporary studios. To address this, establishing strategic partnerships between educational institutions and the film industry is crucial.

One potential partnership model involves educational institutions collaborating with local film studios and production companies to provide hands-on training and internship opportunities. For instance, a partnership between Georgian College and local film studios in Collingwood could enable students to gain practical experience on real film sets, thereby bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and industry practices.¹

10 out of 10 Towns Surveyed Expressed Capacity Building as an Important Action Item in Town Strategic Plans

The small towns surveyed expressed a strong need and direction to staff from the town council to bring forward capacity-building projects to enhance workforce skills training, post-secondary training geared towards youth retention, and possible facilities creation such as performing arts centres with studio spaces.



A Virtual Production workshop tour of Sheridan College SIRT Centre at Pinewood Studios Toronto

Photo by SGBMA

¹ SGBMA VIVA Stage Study 2024

Additionally, the development of specialized training programs and workshops tailored to local needs is essential. Proposed examples include:

- 1. Mobile Training Units:** Implementing mobile training units equipped with film production technology that can travel to smaller towns, providing workshops and hands-on training in various aspects of film production.
- 2. Local Talent Development Programs:** Establishing programs focusing on specific skills such as cinematography, sound engineering, and set design, catered to the unique environments and resources of small towns.
- 3. Collaborative Workshops with Industry Professionals:** Organizing workshops led by industry professionals, possibly in collaboration with film festivals or local film events, to provide insights into current industry trends and practical skills.
- 4. Online Training Modules:** Creating accessible online training modules in partnership with local colleges and universities, allowing for a wider reach and flexibility in learning.
- 5. Apprenticeship Programs:** Forming apprenticeship programs with local film productions, providing on-the-job training and potential employment opportunities post-training.

Such initiatives would not only enhance local talent development but also create a more sustainable ecosystem for film production in Southwestern Ontario. By integrating educational resources with industry needs, these partnership models and training programs can effectively address the current limitations in workforce development, fostering a skilled and versatile talent pool in the region.

North Bay really got it right. We can access locally based skilled crew and talent. Some crew even moved to North Bay from Toronto due to the volume and to gain more opportunities. Now with studios being built, a small northern Ontario town is becoming a great place to film as a one-stop shop. Whites (film equipment rentals) even has a location there. If you're a small town in Ontario - that is a model to strive for.

Boris Mojsovski, ASC, CSC, ASBH



5. Strategic Recommendations

The strategic recommendations for attracting film productions outside the GTA focus on collaboration across towns, counties, and regions, establishing film offices and a tiered permitting system. Incentives such as reduced rates and cash incentives to hire local talent are suggested. Building capacity through education, professional development, and studio facilities is crucial. Marketing unique town characteristics and collaborating with nearby epicentres will expand filming locations. Key strategies include offering multiple locations, providing incentives beyond tax credits, and incorporating sustainability plans to attract film productions to rural areas.

Short-Term Strategies

Establishing Film Policy, Local Film Offices and Tiered Permitting System:

Action Steps:

- Establish a film policy for the town or regional office.
- Identify key towns with potential for film production and establish dedicated film offices.
- Develop a tiered permitting system to streamline the approval process for filming.
- Collaborate with local governments, neighbouring film regions and offices, to simplify regulations and permit procedures.

Marketing Unique Town Characteristics:

Action Steps:

- Add town-owned facilities and outdoor properties to the Ontario Creates Location Library.
- Create marketing materials showcasing the unique features of each town.
- Focus on themes and genres by offering multiple locations that can fit a story such as a romantic comedy film, a horror film, or an action-adventure film.
- Collaborate with regional tourism boards (RTOs) and neighbouring film offices and regions, to integrate these assets and features into broader marketing efforts.

Long-Term Strategies

Offering Incentives to Hire Local Talent:

Action Steps:

- Implement reduced rates or cash incentives for productions hiring local talent.
- Promote these incentives through marketing campaigns targeting film producers.

Building Educational and Professional Development Capacity:

Action Steps:

- Partner with local educational institutions to develop specialized film and media courses.
- Facilitate workshops and training programs focused on film production skills.

Developing Studio Facilities in Strategic Locations:

Action Steps:

- Consider the addition of film studio spaces to new projects such as arenas, performing arts centers or museums and galleries that can offer multi-use spaces for the arts and film and television productions
- Conduct feasibility studies to identify ideal locations for new studio facilities.
- Seek public-private partnerships for funding and development of these facilities.



Collaborating with Nearby Film Epicenters:

Action Steps:

- Establish partnerships with established film hubs like Toronto for knowledge and resource sharing.
- Create joint ventures for large-scale film projects that can utilize resources from both areas.

Expanding Filming Locations and Providing Diverse Incentives:

Action Steps:

- Develop a comprehensive location library database and website for the town or region to offer a variety of filming options.
- Introduce incentives beyond tax credits, such as logistical support and local resource discounts.

Incorporating Sustainability Plans in Film Productions:

Action Steps:

- Incorporate best practices as outlined by the Ontario Green Screen Strategic Plan¹ into film policy and filming incentives.
- Implement greenhouse gas emission reduction related to fuel and energy consumption such as grid tie-in opportunities and electrical vehicle infrastructure.
- Develop waste reduction methods such as food rescue services to local food banks and composting services.
- Seek circularity partners within Ontario and initiate processes that include material exchange and reuse programs.
- Capture data on sustainability practices for ongoing audits and statistics.

Set build in a warehouse space in
The Blue Mountains for the series
HOW DO YOU FEEL?

Photo: Riverbank Pictures



¹ Ontario Green Screen Strategic Plan 2023-2027

Each of these strategies, both short-term and long-term, is aimed at enhancing the attractiveness of rural areas outside the GTA for film productions. By breaking down the recommendations into actionable steps and distinguishing their time frames, the proposed strategies offer a clear, structured approach to achieving the goal of attracting and sustaining film production in these regions.



**Final shot of the warehouse studio filmed series
HOW DO YOU FEEL?**

Photo: Riverbank Pictures

6. Conclusions

Attracting Film Productions Outside the GTA is an organic occurrence at this time.

Unique location needs and working in tourist towns with the capacity to host a film is an easy sell for any film or television production. Where else can you find ski hills, a working steam train, or a natural biosphere such as the Niagara Escarpment?

However, a sustainable model for continued growth in attracting film productions outside the GTA requires strategic planning, identifying synergy opportunities across industries, and collaborative partnerships.



**DARKER THAN NIGHT on location
at the Collingwood Public Library
Photo: Riverbank Pictures**

Small towns in Ontario can attract film productions outside the GTA through one or more of the following:

- Showcasing the town's unique locations for storytelling
- Creating film policy and film offices/liaisons that reflect existing tourism or recreational-based policies and procedures
- Leveraging synergy opportunities from tourism-based economies and tourism-based organizations (Regional Tourism Office model, business organizations and associations)
- Offering incentives to productions (sustainability, workforce, and economic incentives)
- Building capacity for film infrastructure that can work alongside existing town projects or other industries (educational institutions and town arts and culture departments)



MARSH KING'S DAUGHTER on location in New Tecumseth

Photo: Nottawasaga Futures Film Liaison Office

Appendix A: References	
Town/Region	Reference Link
Port Colbourne	https://www.niagarathisweek.com/news/port-colborne-shoots-for-more-film-projects-in-city-with-new-policy/article_67c7d857-d716-5edb-8a8d-b882d9a663fd.html
Niagara on the Lake	https://www.niagarathisweek.com/news/council/council-says-cut-to-possible-film-production-in-notl/article_eb89aefc-6733-5126-aaf9-c557223f0d44.html
North Bay	https://cionorth.ca/film-tv/producers-guide/cities/north-bay
Oakville	https://www.insidehalton.com/news/council-making-it-easier-to-film-in-oakville/article_ca8b2866-9024-5bc0-baa4-87efe2f253e2.html
Peterborough	https://globalnews.ca/video/6999790/lack-of-film-productions-impacting-local-communities
Port Hope	https://www.northumberlandnews.com/news/council/port-hope-to-conduct-filming-readiness-study-to-attract-larger-film-projects-to-the-community/article_376cc81a-5f53-5f86-a57a-2f3f23c7ed72.html
Port Perry/Scugog	https://www.durhamregion.com/news/march-film-shoot-brought-200k-to-community-scugog/article_2c6f6004-76c9-51a9-8850-975cb40300ff.html
Sault Ste Marie	https://firstlocalnews.com/municipal-rolls-out-policy-to-help-film-industry-in-the-sault



McDONALDS commercial filming in Alliston
 Photos: Nottawasaga Futures Film Liaison Office

Appendix A: References	
Town/Region	Reference Link
St. Catharines	https://www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/entertainment/st-catharines-sets-out-to-woo-film-industry/article_0ea3db4f-edb1-5984-adf2-a4de6d47c40e.html
Toronto	https://www.toronto.ca/news/torontos-screen-production-industry-sets-record-with-more-than-2-5-billion-in-direct-spending-in-2021/
Timmins	https://www.timminstoday.com/jobs-of-the-future/film-crew-training-preparing-locals-to-work-on-film-sets-7750619
Timmins	https://northernontario.ctvnews.ca/film-shot-in-timmins-to-be-screened-at-sundance-film-festival-1.6190502
Cobourg	https://www.cobourgblog.com/news-2022/netflix-back-in-cobourg
Cobourg	https://www.northumberlandnews.com/news/film-crews-return-to-cobourg-oct-23-here-s-what-you-need-to-know/article_fc382b50-9103-5beb-a2e9-d2e7f9b9a827.html
Uxbridge	https://www.durhamregion.com/news/council/recent-movie-shoot-prompts-new-film-guidelines-in-uxbridge/article_fb1ae374-8bbb-5b3d-a9f4-857c451eeb27.html
Uxbridge	https://www.durhamregion.com/news/filming-returns-to-downtown-uxbridge/article_0b51ec98-40e6-53cf-96fb-13f122043c02.html



Filming SNOW PEOPLE on top of the ski hill at Craigeith Ski Club, in the town of The Blue Mountains, Photo: SGBMA

Attracting Film Production to Small Town Ontario



sgbma

South Georgian Bay Media Association Inc
Phone: +1 416 875 2652
E-mail: tom@sgbma.ca

www.sgbma.ca