

# Exceptional Experience

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR



**Program Handbook for  
Experience Providers**



# Exceptional Experience



The Exceptional Experience Program enables you, as a tourism experience provider in Newfoundland and Labrador, to demonstrate that you are committed to exceeding guest expectations with your tourism experience by meeting specific criteria focused on excellent customer service and the highest standards of business practice. As an Exceptional Experience Provider, you will be subject to regular audits to ensure compliance, and you can leverage a variety of benefits for your business. Further, visitors can be confident in the quality and level of service they will receive from your experience.

Exceptional Experiences include all types of guest experiences, from activities and attractions to restaurants and accommodations. The Criteria for Exceptional Experiences is divided into five categories, and this handbook has been created to clearly outline the intent of the criteria, how it can be met, and examples of what meeting the criteria might look like. The information contained in this handbook will help you understand if your experience currently meets the criteria, how you can demonstrate you meet it, and what you may need to do if you do not currently meet it. A tool kit is also included with this handbook, which provides tools and templates for you to use to help you meet the criteria as necessary.

# Contents

Criteria for Exceptional Experiences	4
• Experience	4
• Delivery	8
• Health, Safety & Comfort	11
• Operations	15
• Feedback	20
Code of Ethics for Exceptional Experience Providers	22
Tool Kit of Tools and Templates for Exceptional Experience Providers	23



# Criteria for Exceptional Experiences

## 1. Experience

The Experience itself must be:

### a. Delivered by a TAP-approved experience provider.

The Tourism Assurance Plan (TAP) is an industry led program which includes common minimum tourism standards for experience providers within the province. To qualify as an Exceptional Experience provider, you must already be TAP-approved.

If you are currently TAP-approved, you just need to indicate this on your application. For more information about the TAP program, visit

<https://HospitalityNL.ca/resources/about-tap/>.

*To meet this criteria:* Ensure you are TAP-approved.

### b. In market and offered to guests for at least one year.

It takes time to make sure an experience can be considered an Exceptional Experience, and it is common for a tourism experience to need a year to get established and be consistently operating well. For that reason, a tourism experience must be in market and offered to guests for at least one year before it can be considered as an Exceptional Experience.

*To meet this criteria:* Have you been in market with this experience and offering it to guests for at least one year.

### c. Authentic to Newfoundland and Labrador, or include elements that are authentic, demonstrating that the experience is tied to the sense of people, place and culture.

Visitors expect that an Exceptional Experience will be tied to the sense of people, place and culture in some way, and this criteria allows you to showcase what about your experience is authentic to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Many will say an experience is authentic to the place if it can't be done anywhere else, such as hiking in Gros Morne National Park or getting screeched-in. While those are excellent examples, there are many other ways that an experience can be authentic or include an element that is authentic to Newfoundland and Labrador. Here are some examples:

- Serving locally-made partridgeberry jam with breakfast in your inn
- Have local dishes and ingredients on your menu at the restaurant
- Showcasing famous Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who have stayed at your accommodation
- Including a sample of a local food or delicacy in your experience
- Having local music playing in the background of your experience

*To meet this criteria:* Include an element in your experience that provides that sense of people, place and culture to your guests.

### d. Thoughtfully crafted, with a flow and/or theme that provides an excellent and optimal guest experience.

It's important to consider your guests, from the very beginning of the experience to the end. This is talked about often when considering an activity or attraction, but it is equally important for restaurants, accommodations, and other experience providers. If you can answer yes to these questions, you likely have an experience that is thoughtfully crafted to provide an excellent and optimal guest experience:

- Is it clear and easy for your guests to see where to go for the experience once they arrive? Perhaps you have signage pointing them to follow the path to your main entrance, a "guest check-in" sign above the doorway, or an "Please wait here to be seated" sign in your restaurant, for example? Guests are always more comfortable when it's clear they are in the right place.
- Do you have someone ready to welcome your guests and provide information as to the next steps? For example, your accommodation may have its front desk staff clearly provide directions for getting to the room, or better yet, maybe you have someone walk them there (if time allows).



- If your experience includes multiple components, does the experience flow well from one experience to the next? Do the components fit well together? As an example, this may include having your museum tour end at the gift shop, with an area for the interpreter to say a warm farewell and stay for questions, allowing the guests to choose to chat with your interpreter, explore the gift shop, or go back to certain exhibits on their own.
- Is there a clear ending to the experience? Is it thoughtfully crafted to be warm, thanking the guest, perhaps inviting them to return?

*To meet this criteria:* Outline the guest experience to demonstrate it is thoughtfully crafted, with a flow and/or theme that provides an excellent and optimal guest experience. Template in Appendix.

### e. Responsive to guest trends in some way, such as including an experiential element.

There are many trends in tourism experiences, and Exceptional Experiences will respond to these trends. This means that some element of your experience is responsive to guest trends in some way. One of the most popular trends includes experiential elements where guests are hands-on and engaged. Others include things like selfie-stops, multi-generational travel, culinary experiences, and so on. Examples include:

- A boat tour that includes a marine biologist for the parents to learn from, seating for the grandparents, and a touch tank for the kids.
- An inn that includes a locally made chocolate on the pillow or has warm cookies available in the lobby on arrival.
- A marked selfie-stop with a post for folks to set their phone to get the best selfie at an attraction.
- A “locals recommend” indicator on your restaurant menu to show guests which dishes are favourites of the locals (and maybe why!).



*To meet this criteria:* Indicate one way your experience responds to a trend.

**f. Include one “wow” factor, an element of the experience that would prompt a reaction of “Wow, that was amazing” or “Wow, I was not expecting that.”**

Exceptional Experiences are those that go above and beyond in some way and provide guests with those “wow” moments – the ones they carry with them long after they have returned home and that they tell their friends about. You can build these “wow” moments into your experience, as most often, they are simply little moments that surprise and delight. Some examples of “wow” moments include:

- Scooping a bergy-bit from alongside the iceberg and dropping it in the guest’s iceberg vodka drink on a boat tour.
- Knowing your grandmother’s scones which are a much loved part of your Inn’s breakfast, and providing the recipe to guests upon check-out.
- Empower your team to give one small treat per day to a guest who might need it, whether they are celebrating an occasion or having a difficult time. Ideas would be a small box of local chocolates at your front desk, or a complimentary dessert at your restaurant.
- Having a local fisherman chat with your guests on the wharf while they wait to board your sightseeing boat.

*To meet this criteria:* Indicate your “wow” factor.

## 2. Delivery

The delivery of the Experience must be:

- a. **Led by people who have been trained and receive ongoing training on customer service and hospitality, as well as on the experience delivery and how to conduct the experience. This may include, but not be limited to, history, culture, nature, and general knowledge as applicable, as well as skill development in hospitality, service, storytelling, handling difficult situations, and so on.**

It is very important that the people who are responsible for delivering the guest experience are trained on how to do that. Depending on the type of experience, this training will look very different. Training for a hostess at a restaurant will be very different than training for a kayak tour guide. However, training for your team on the role they play in the experience is critical to achieving an exceptional guest experience. This training can be developed by you or by others, conducted in-house or through an established program, or a combination of any of these. What is important is that your team is trained on how to deliver the experience to meet the expectations of your guests.

This training should include:

- General hospitality and service (professional appearance, warm and friendly, etc.)
- Clear expectations for delivery of the experience
- How to meet those expectations and their role in the delivery of the experience
- Talking points for what information must be shared with guests
- How to handle common difficult situations and complaints

*To meet this criteria:* Outline the training that is provided to your team. Template in Appendix.



**b. Welcoming, ensuring all visitors are received courteously and every effort is made to be inclusive of race, gender, age, religion, and sexual orientation.**

Currently, many businesses are developing policies and practices around Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, which is both welcomed and encouraged, and if you have one, you can certainly share it as part of your application. However, the focus of this criteria is that you are warmly welcoming all guests, treating everyone courteously and without discrimination, and setting the tone for a culture of respect within your organization. Examples of ways your organization may communicate that you do this by including training on respecting all guests, welcoming guidelines in your guest service process or standard operating procedure, etc.

*To meet this criteria:* Indicate the way(s) your organization ensures this welcoming culture to all guests.

**c. Accurate, ensuring the experience matches any titles and descriptions that have been published and/or provided to the guest. This includes ensuring all information on websites, tourism listings, and other locations is updated as needed, and that the information is consistent across all.**

Exceptional Experience providers have a process in place to ensure that, as things change, their information is updated accurately in all the places where it needs to be updated. They also ensure that their team has access to the information the guest has, so they can ensure they are delivering to the guest expectation. For example, if you have a group tour arriving, knowing what description has been given to that group ensures your team can deliver everything they are expecting.

A best practice for ensuring this criteria is met is to have a checklist of everywhere your information is listed, so you can check it for accuracy prior to the beginning of the season and then update everywhere according to the checklist should something change. Also, asking clients for a copy of what is being promoted to guests, where applicable, is helpful.

*To meet this criteria:* Have a process in place for ensuring your information is accurate and kept up to date. Template in Appendix.

**d. Consistent, not only following published dates, hours, durations, etc., but also following the established and expected inclusions, timelines, routes, etc.**

Consistent delivery contributes not just to guest satisfaction, but also to your reputation and attracting more guests. It's very important that your guest experience be offered consistently, and Exceptional Experience providers recognize this. They have a process for ensuring that their experience is offered consistently, which includes ensuring accuracy, as discussed in the previous criteria, and consistent delivery. They train their teams to ensure this consistent delivery, with processes or standard operating procedures to be followed to ensure this consistency.

*To meet this criteria:* Have a process in place for ensuring the quality of your experience and its delivery is consistent. Template in Appendix.

**e. Flexible enough to allow responsiveness to the needs of the guests throughout the experience.**

While consistency is important, within that must be the ability to be flexible to respond to the needs of the guests. Empowering your interpreter to be able to alter the route to accommodate mobility-challenged guests or empowering your servers to offer an alternate lunch option to accommodate a dietary need are two examples of this flexibility. Exceptional Experience providers understand that occasionally, flexibility is necessary for an optimal guest experience, and they and their teams are empowered, equipped and prepared to deliver on that. They also understand any parameters to that flexibility.

For example, an interpreter may be able to be flexible with how much time is spent at each of the three exhibits based on the guests' interests, but the program must end within two hours.

*To meet this criteria:* Include in your process of experience delivery how your team is empowered to be flexible to best meet the needs of their guests, and if there are any parameters to that flexibility. Template in Appendix.



### 3. Health, Safety & Comfort

The health, safety and comfort of the guest must be at the core of the experience, including:

#### a. Safety briefings conducted at the beginning of the experience.

A safety briefing is becoming increasingly important for all experience providers. Depending on your experience, some may be very brief, while others may be more comprehensive. However, it is important that a safety briefing be provided at the beginning of each experience. Often, for restaurant or accommodation experiences, this is very brief, indicating to guests to let you know if there's anything they need, or anything you can do to make their experience more comfortable – and of course, if there is anything specific, such as a step down into the dining room, the host should say “watch your step.”

For attractions and experiences, particularly those where risks are higher, guests should be given a safety briefing at the beginning of the experience. This should include any risks, what they should be mindful of, and what to do if they are hurt or uncomfortable in any way.

For example, a museum may indicate that there are stairs throughout the building, so watch your step and hold on to the handrails, or a hiking path after the rain may need a reminder that the path may be slippery, so please watch your step.

No matter the scope of your experience or the safety risks involved, it is important to walk through your guest experience, identify what should be included in a safety briefing and where it should be said, and provide guidelines to your team as appropriate.

*To meet this criteria:* Have a safety briefing in place for your team to deliver. Template in Appendix.

#### b. Risk management plans in place for the experience provider, including clear plans on what to do in an emergency.

Exceptional Experience providers have a risk management plan in place for their organization, including clear plans on how to respond in the event of an emergency. An emergency is any situation involving illness, injury, potential injury or death, or any situation which causes cancellation of the experience. Emergency plans and procedures include all the steps for how to handle emergencies, and outline who is responsible for the various components. Risk management plans vary greatly among different types of organizations, and this information should in no way be considered legal advice, but having a risk management plan in place for your organization is very important.

In addition to a risk management plan, it is very helpful to consider your experience and work to minimize risk. Depending on your experience, this might include safety briefings to communicate potential hazards, first aid kits, safety equipment as necessary for the experience (i.e., life jackets), training for your teams on ways to minimize risk in the experience, and so on.

*To meet this criteria:* Have a risk management plan in place for your organization. Template in Appendix, and Department of Industry, Energy, and Technology has a variety of resources on emergency preparedness.

**c. Training for the team on the risk management and emergency plans to ensure everyone is fully aware of their own roles and capable of executing all components of the plan.**

Exceptional Experience providers not only have a comprehensive risk management plan, but they also communicate all relevant components of the plan to all team members. They provide relevant training on the content of the risk management plan, to the extent that everyone is fully aware of their own roles and capable of executing all components of the plan. This could be a pre-season review of what to do in the event of an emergency, for example.

*To meet this criteria:* Have training for your team on the risk management and emergency plans, and their role in those plans. Template in Appendix.

**d. Incident report forms are in place, and the team is trained on how to use them.**

Exceptional Experience providers have an Incident Report Form for use in the event that an incident occurs during the experience. All experience delivery team members have quick access to Incident Report Forms at all times during the experience, either with them or in a quickly and easily accessible location. Consider the experience you provide and determine how best to manage incident report forms. Should each team member be carrying a form? Do they already carry a tablet the form could be on? Is there a location that is quickly and easily accessible where they could be kept for team members to access?

Team members of Exceptional Experience providers are also trained on how to use the form and how to complete Incident Reports, particularly focusing on the importance of documenting facts (not expressing personal opinions), completing the form with the guest, getting the guest signature, and getting a signature from a witness to the guest signature. Frequently, the providers build this training into their pre-season training on the experience delivery. Additionally, the team members always have the experience provider's relevant emergency contact numbers with them, and they are trained to report incidents as soon as they happen, following the steps in the provider's risk management plan.

*To meet this criteria:* Have an incident report form in place, and include training on the form as part of your risk management training. Template in Appendix.

#### **e. Detailed and proactive processes and schedules are in place for maintenance, cleaning, and other health and safety practices as applicable.**

The health, safety and comfort of your guests and your team is in large part due to the processes and schedules you have in place for maintenance, cleaning, and other health and safety practices applicable to your organization or experience. Exceptional Experience providers have detailed and proactive processes and schedules in place for any maintenance, cleaning and other health and safety practices that are applicable to their experience. For many experience providers, their health and safety standards are overseen by governing bodies, but this does not eliminate the need for Exceptional Experience providers to have a process for regular maintenance, cleaning and other practices.

More information may be found from the following organizations:

- Workplace NL  
**WorkplaceNL | Health | Safety | Compensation**
- Service NL  
**Digital Government and Service NL – Government of Newfoundland and Labrador**

*To meet this criteria:* Have a process for regular maintenance, cleaning and other health and safety practices as applicable to your organization.

**f. Guest maximums are set and adhered to in order to ensure comfort, safety and optimal experience.**

It is important to consider the maximum number of guests that you can accommodate while ensuring their comfort and safety and providing an optimal experience. In some instances, there are governing bodies that dictate these maximums, such as the fire marshal. In other instances, it is important to consider the guest experience and what maximum number of participants is optimal for the experience. For example, a guided interpretive walk should not have more people than can be safely guided and hear the commentary.

*To meet this criteria:* Have guidelines in place for guest maximums to reflect comfort, safety and optimal experience. Template in Appendix.

**g. Appropriate facilities and services in place to support the experiences and ensure guest comfort and safety, such as sufficient washrooms, parking, seating areas, and so on.**

Appropriate facilities and services to support the experience are important to guest comfort and safety. This means having sufficient washrooms for your guests, parking that is available and safe for your guests as appropriate, seating areas for guests as appropriate, and so on. The facilities and services provided depend greatly on the experience and can look very different from one Exceptional Experience provider to the next, but generally, include sufficient washrooms, parking, and any other comfort and safety measures important to the experience.

*To meet this criteria:* Have appropriate facilities and services in place to support the experience and ensure guest comfort and safety.



## 4. Operations

The Experience Provider must have the following operational processes, procedures, and tools in place:

### a. Guest Service Procedures, including expected response times to inquiries (within 48 hours) and booking confirmations (within 24 hours)

Exceptional Experience providers have a procedure in place for offering exceptional guest service. Their processes and standard operating procedures include expected response times to inquiries, following the industry standard of no more than 48 hours, and providing booking confirmations within 24 hours. Their procedures may include additional guest service expectations specific to the experience being offered. Examples might include check-in processes for the front desk at accommodations, a checklist for an interpreter to ensure they have all materials prepared for a guided experience at an attraction, or other processes or tools to ensure exceptional guest service.

*To meet this criteria:* Have Guest Service processes or standard operating procedures in place. Template in Appendix.

### b. Ability to accept credit card payments, although other electronic payments may be considered (i.e. Square, e-transfer)

Increasingly, guests are expecting that credit card payments will be available, and Exceptional Experience providers meet these expectations by accepting credit card payments from their guests. If credit card payments are not an option, guests at the very least expect the option to pay electronically, whether through e-transfer, point of sale app (i.e. Square), or another option.

*To meet this criteria:* Have the ability to accept credit cards, or an alternative electronic payment if credit cards are not feasible for your organization.

**c. Booking and Cancellation Policies, including clear payment policies and clear cancellation policies that are communicated to the guest, with a 24-hour cancellation policy recommended.**

Booking and cancellation policies must be readily available and communicated to the guest. This information can be on your website with your booking information, sent with inquiries prior to booking, or included as something that must be read prior to booking, for a few examples.

What is important is that guests are made aware of the booking and cancellation policies, including clear payment and cancellation policies. The cancellation policies must be reasonable and in line with industry standards, with a 24-hour cancellation policy recommended.

*To meet this criteria:* Have a booking and cancellation policy in place. Template in Appendix.

**d. Rate Policies, including honouring rates to guests, not raising rates inappropriately (i.e. before a contract expires or mid-way through the season), clearly identifying high-season and low-season rates if applicable, etc.**

Exceptional Experience providers have a rate policy in place that outlines how they honour rates to guests, when rate increases take place, when high-season and low-season rates apply, and any other information that should be part of their rate policy based on their situation. This criteria assures that Exceptional Experience providers operate transparently and fairly with their guests.

*To meet this criteria:* Have a rate policy in place. Template in Appendix.

**e. Digital assets, such as photos and/or video, that are high quality and can be used for marketing and promotions.**

Exceptional Experience providers understand that digital assets are critical to successful marketing in today's environment. They have photos and/or video that are high quality that they use for marketing, and that can be shared with partners for marketing their experience.

To meet this criteria: Have digital assets for marketing and promotions that can be shared with partners.

**f. Website to promote the experience and accept inquiries and online bookings, which includes “Book Now” with e-commerce capabilities behind it. This website must be regularly updated, kept current and functioning well, and align with marketing efforts on other platforms (i.e. social media), as applicable.**

All Exceptional Experience providers have a website on which they promote their experience, and accept inquiries and online bookings, which includes a “Book Now” option with e-commerce capabilities behind it, as this has become a guest expectation. They also have a process in place to ensure that their website is updated regularly and kept current, and that it functions well. This means no broken links or issues with navigating the website for a guest. They also ensure that their messages, promotions, and other website content aligns with other marketing efforts, such as social media. For example, a promotion on social media that says “click here for more info” opens a page on your website that includes more info on that promotion, not just your home page. In short, there is a seamless experience on the website and between their other marketing efforts and their website.

To meet this criteria: Have a website that promotes the experience and accepts inquiries and online bookings through a “Book Now” with e-commerce capabilities behind it, as well as a process for the regular maintenance and updating of the website as necessary to stay current and aligned with other marketing efforts (can be included in your process for ensuring accuracy of materials).

**g. Business Listing on at least one third-party review site (Tripadvisor, Google, etc.).**

Third-party review sites, such as Tripadvisor or Google, have become a key way that guests research and select their travel experiences, and Exceptional Experience providers recognize their importance. They have a business listing on at least one third-party review site, which is monitored regularly, with reviews responded to.

To meet this criteria: Have a business listing on at least one third-party review site.

**h. Minimum of one active business social media account to promote the experience (i.e. Facebook, Instagram).**

Much like third-party review sites, social media has achieved a remarkable level of importance, and Exceptional Experience providers have a minimum of one active business social media account to promote the experience, whether it is on Facebook, Instagram, or another platform where their guests and potential guests can be found.

To meet this criteria: Have a minimum of one active business social media account to promote the experience.

**i. Demonstrated marketing efforts to non-residents aligned with one of Newfoundland and Labrador's key non-resident markets.**

Marketing is a key activity for Exceptional Experience providers, and they can demonstrate marketing efforts to non-residents that are aligned with one of Newfoundland and Labrador's key non-resident markets. Examples of demonstrated marketing efforts may include having developed packages for Travel Trade or partnerships, attendance at shows, digital marketing buys, direct sales efforts to Travel Trade, or other marketing activities.

To meet this criteria: Provide at least one (or more) marketing efforts undertaken by your organization in at least one of Newfoundland and Labrador's key non-resident markets.

## **j. Staff Appearance Policy, including uniform or dress code guidelines to ensure identifiable.**

Exceptional Experience providers have a Staff Appearance Policy in place for their team. Some provide uniforms to their team, while others provide dress code guidelines. These dress code guidelines can be comprehensive (i.e. dark pants or Bermuda shorts, solid colour in company colours, closed-toe shoes) or very simple (i.e. no jeans, no ball caps promoting alcohol). Many require that a name tag of some sort be worn, which is an excellent practice to readily show your guests who can help. Staff appearance policies vary greatly depending on the experience being offered, but Exceptional Experience providers have them in place to ensure that the first impression for their guests is an accurate reflection of their Exceptional Experience.

To meet this criteria: Have a staff appearance policy in place. Template in Appendix.

## **k. Sustainability Procedures, demonstrating the practical efforts that are made to sustainable practices.**

Sustainability is becoming increasingly important to guests, as they want to ensure that their visit does not have a negative impact on the community or the environment. Exceptional Experience providers are also concerned with sustainability, and they strive to make practical efforts toward sustainability. Examples include:

- Have a water filling station for guests who may have their own water bottles
- Provide compostable take-out containers or cutlery
- Feature local products in your gift shop
- Include a donation to a local sustainability initiative in every package

To meet this criteria: Provide at least one practical effort that is being made in your organization that contributes to sustainable practices.

## 5. Feedback

Collecting and responding to feedback is recognized as critical to providing an exceptional experience, and the provider must:

- a. Perform regular evaluation of their own program, evaluating all aspects of the experience (i.e. welcome, service, quality, timeliness).**

It is always interesting to consider how long it has been since you have been on your own experience, looked at it from your guests' perspective, and really evaluated it. Exceptional Experience providers perform regular evaluations of their own program, evaluating all aspects of the experience. This might include the welcome, the flow of the experience, the various components, the service provided at each step, the quality of the experience, the timeliness, and so on. They have a process that includes who conducts the evaluations, how often they are conducted, and an evaluation form to ensure consistency.

To meet this criteria: Have a process and evaluation form for evaluating your experience.

- b. Respond to feedback received from guests (positive or negative), including online reviews from third-party review sites.**

Engaging with guests is very important to their satisfaction, as well as to their decision to perhaps return or share their experience with friends. Exceptional Experience providers recognize this, and they respond to the feedback received from guests, whether positive or negative, including online reviews and third-party review sites.

To meet this criteria: Have a process for responding to feedback from guests that includes direct feedback, including online reviews.



### **c. Resolve issues and respond to complaints appropriately and in a timely manner.**

No matter how exceptional your experience and your service, things go wrong. What sets you apart is how you handle it when things go wrong. Exceptional Experience providers resolve issues and respond to complaints appropriately and in a timely manner, striving for the satisfaction of their guests. Their process for handling guest feedback includes how to respond to complaints appropriately, what timeline for responding and resolving complaints is expected, and who is responsible for what parts of the process. A best practice is to train your teams on managing the most common difficult situations and handling complaints.

To meet this criteria: Have a process for resolving issues and responding to complaints.

### **d. Have a documented process for handling guest feedback, particularly issues and complaints.**

Exceptional Experience providers have a documented process in place for handling guest feedback. This often includes having a person identified or a process in place to ensure they respond to positive feedback they receive, as well as a detailed process for handling issues and complaints. This process typically includes timelines for resolving issues and complaints (usually 24 hours), the steps for responding and resolution, who is involved, and so on.

To meet this criteria: Have a process for handling guest feedback, including resolving issues and responding to complaints.

### **e. Consistently receive very good or excellent ratings on a third-party review site (Tripadvisor, Google, etc.).**

Exceptional Experience providers consistently deliver their experience in a way that meets or exceeds guest expectations, and this is reflected in the ratings they receive from their guests on third-party review sites. To qualify as an Exceptional Experience, it must receive very good or excellent ratings consistently on a third-party review site.

To meet this criteria: Consistently receive very good or excellent ratings on your third-party review site.

# Code of Ethics

As an Exceptional Experience provider, you are expected to sign and submit the following Code of Ethics as part of the application process.

## Code of Ethics for Exceptional Experience Providers

As an Exceptional Experience provider, we agree to adhere to the following standards of professional conduct and hold the code of ethics in high regard as a consideration when dealing with our guests, our clients, all levels of government, all tourism partners, and each other.

- 1. Our business activities will be guided by truth, accuracy, honesty, fairness and integrity.
- 2. We will obey all applicable laws and regulations of all relevant Federal, Provincial and Municipal authorities.
- 3. We will conduct our business dealings in a civil, courteous, respectful and professional manner.
- 4. We will avoid any conduct or activity which would be dishonest, deceitful or fraudulent in nature, or which would cause unjust harm to others.
- 5. In our business and our operations, we promote and enforce a culture with safety at its core.
- 6. We will ensure our business practices will have a positive and lasting impact on our environment, our cultures and community, and our economy for future generations.
- 7. We will operate our business on the basis of sound business judgment and information and strive to keep informed of the latest developments and knowledge pertinent to the tourism industry.
- 8. We will assist in maintaining the integrity of this Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct by upholding the principles contained herein.

_____	_____
Date	Signature
_____	_____
Organization	Name

# Tool Kit for Providers

These tools and templates are yours to use in your business as you see fit. You can copy and paste as is, copy and edit to better suit your business, or use them as an example for creating your own tool or template if you do not have one. You may also want to look at these tools for ideas on ways to improve any tools and templates you may already have in place.

**Criteria 1. d. Thoughtfully crafted, with a flow and/or theme that provides an excellent and optimal guest experience.**

Template with Sample Content for a Botanical Garden (example):	
Arrival	Guest arrives to welcome signage, which includes directional signage to parking (to the right) and entrance (to the left). Guests proceed to entrance, walking along a pathway with various plants and sculptures creating a beautiful welcome.
Step 1	Upon entering, welcome desk attendant greets guests warmly, provides all necessary information, provides a map of the gardens (both paper copies and QR code available, depending on guest preference), indicates where and when interpretive talks take place, etc. Umbrellas are available in an umbrella stand by the door for guest use in the event of inclement weather.
Step 2	Guest embarks on a self-guided walk of botanical gardens. Signage provides information on plants, with a garden theme to the signage, and sometimes includes gardening tips. Locations and times of interpretive talks are clearly indicated at those locations.
Step 3	Washrooms are clearly indicated with signage along the path as well as on the map. There are two washroom facilities along the path, in addition to the entrance.
Step 4	Guided walk ends at the tea room and gift shop. Restrooms are available. Umbrellas may be left there. Staff strives to give personal goodbye and invitation to return to all guests as they leave.
Conclusion	Directional signage from there to parking includes warm farewell and invitation to return. Area for upcoming special events to be featured as well.

Criteria 2. a. Led by people who have been trained and receive ongoing training on customer service and hospitality, as well as on the experience delivery and how to conduct the experience. This may include, but not be limited to, history, culture, nature, and general knowledge as applicable, as well as skill development in hospitality, service, storytelling, handling difficult situations, and so on.

Template with Sample Training Plan:	
<b>Training Provider</b>	I.e., In-house training or name of company providing training
<b>Training Content</b>	<p>List of the Training Content, i.e.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service &amp; Hospitality Expectations and How-Tos</li> <li>• Experience Delivery (routes, timelines, how-tos)</li> <li>• Operational Information to be Shared (i.e. what to expect, where washrooms can be found, when meals are served)</li> <li>• Commentary or Other Information to be Shared (i.e. history, culture, nature, storytelling)</li> <li>• Handling Difficult Guests and Difficult Situations</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul>
<b>Training Timelines</b>	<p>When Training Takes Place, i.e.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2-hour training pre-season, typically the week before opening for the season</li> <li>• 1-hour online program expected to be completed by the end of the first week of work</li> </ul>
<b>Support Materials</b>	Include a list of any handouts, tools provided, etc.

Criteria 2. c. Accurate, ensuring the experience matches any titles and descriptions that have been published and/or provided to the guest. This includes ensuring all information on websites, tourism listings, and other locations is updated as needed, and that the information is consistent across all.

Template with Sample Process to Ensure Accuracy:	
Step 1	I.e., All information on websites, tourism listings, and other locations are checked for accuracy according to our checklist prior to the season (include date)
Step 2	I.e., Each time information changes, all information is updated for accuracy on all websites, tourism listings, and other locations according to our checklist (if things change at regular times, include those in these steps)
Step 3	I.e., Once a year, all images and other materials are checked for accuracy and refreshed as needed

Sample Checklist for Accuracy:

Our information can be found at the following locations and must be checked for accuracy according to our process and timelines.

- Our website (give address)
- Our social media accounts (list)
- Our TAP listing
- Our third-party review site listings
- Other (list as applicable)

Criteria 2. d. Consistent, not only following published dates, hours, durations, etc., but also following the established and expected inclusions, timelines, routes, etc.

Criteria 2. e. Flexible enough to allow responsiveness to the needs of the guests throughout the experience.

Template with Sample Process on Guest Experience Delivery to allow consistency and flexibility.	
<b>Published Details</b>	I.e., dates, hours, durations, etc.
<b>Published Description</b>	Include a copy of the published description here, with the intent to help your team understand what guests are expecting.
<b>Inclusions</b>	What is included in the experience (if applicable).
<b>Timelines</b>	Detail any timelines, routes, or other experience execution details as applicable.
<b>Options for Flexibility</b>	Detail any options for flexibility as applicable – for example, where less time could be spent, where more time could be spent, alternative walking routes for mobility challenges, adapting for late arrivals, etc. It would be a best practice to empower your team to respond to needs in the moment if an occasion requires flexibility and there are no guidelines for it.

Criteria 3. a. Safety briefings conducted at the beginning of the experience.

Safety briefings include information for guests on being safe throughout the experience, advising guests on common safety hazards and asking guests to please advise your team should any incident occur. The information included in your safety briefing should advise caution for the most common hazards your guests may encounter. This is a sample of a safety briefing script, and examples of additional safety briefings during the experience are also outlined. Please feel free to adapt these samples to your experience, share the safety briefings with your team, and include them in your processes and training.



**Sample safety briefing script for the beginning of the experience:**

“I’m delighted to have you join me for this experience, and we’re going to have a great time today! Before we get started, I want to remind you that your safety and comfort are very important to us, so please (include whatever may be relevant to your experience, these are some examples):

- Watch your step getting on and off the bus and remain seated while the bus is moving.
- Let me know if you have any food allergies or dietary restrictions.
- Follow all our teams’ instructions during the experience for your comfort and safety.

If you have any concerns, or if any incidents occur, even little bumps and bruises, please bring them to my attention right away. Again, I want you to be comfortable, safe, and having fun all through the experience today.”

Examples of additional site-specific safety briefings during the experience. Again, please ensure any risks include safety briefings prior to that component the experience:

- When guests are crossing a street: “Please use the crosswalk when the walk signal is on to cross safely and watch the curb.”
- When guests are required to walk up or down stairs: “Please watch your step on the stairs and hold on to the handrails.”
- When guests are visiting a rocky beach: “Please be mindful that the rocks on the beach can be slippery and watch your step.”

**Criteria 3. b. Risk management plans are in place for the experience provider, including clear plans on what to do in an emergency.****Sample Guidelines for a risk management plan**

It is important for experience providers to have a risk management plan that is comprehensive and covers every eventuality. This risk management plan typically includes, but is not limited to, the steps to follow in case of an emergency or incident, the steps the experience provider takes to minimize risk, the steps necessary to ensure the experience is safe and secure, and more. Since each experience provider is different, each risk management plan is different, but each Exceptional Experience provider has one. If you are looking to develop or improve your risk management plan, it is advisable to contact your insurance provider, lawyer, or other expert for assistance in developing a comprehensive risk management plan that is suited to your company. Some things you may want to consider in your risk management plan include:

- Proactive Risk Management – including the ways that you strive to minimize risk. This would include, but not be limited to, safety briefings to communicate potential hazards, first aid kits, safety equipment as necessary for the experience (i.e. life jackets, snorkelling vests), and more.
- Emergency Plans – including how to respond in the event of an emergency. The emergency plan and procedures should include all the steps for how to handle emergencies and should consider every eventuality.
- Communication Plans – Communication plans should be in place for any crisis or situation that is included in the risk management plan. These communication plans should include guidelines for internal communications, as well as external communications. They should also include the lists of the crisis teams and all emergency contact information.

**Criteria 3. c. Training for the team on the risk management and emergency plans to ensure everyone is fully aware of their own roles and capable of executing all components of the plan.**

Template with sample process for training the team on risk management:	
Training Content	<div>List of the Training Content – i.e.</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Steps for minimizing risk in the experience</li><li>• What to do in an emergency</li><li>• Other</li></ul>
Training Timelines	<div>When Training Takes Place – i.e.</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Included in pre-season training</li></ul>
Support Materials	<div>Include a list of any handouts, tools provided – i.e. emergency contact information, incident report forms, etc.</div>

## Criteria 3. d: Sample Incident Form Template

### I. Incident Information

Team Members Present	
Date of Incident	Time of Incident      AM   PM
Physical Location of Incident (name and full address)	

### II. Guest Information

First Name	Last Name	
Address		Country
Home Phone	Cell Phone	Other
Date of Birth		Gender

### III. Incident Details

Type of Incident:	<input type="checkbox"/> Illness	<input type="checkbox"/> Incident	<input type="checkbox"/> Injury	<input type="checkbox"/> Death
What was the guest doing just before the incident occurred? (Describe the activity)				
What happened? (Describe how the incident occurred)				
Where did the incident occur? (hotel lobby, cross walk, bus #, rail car #, etc.)				

**III. Incident Details cont'd**

What object or substance directly harmed the passenger? (Examples: "concrete floor," "chlorine"  
– if machine, specify

What was the incident? (Explain part of body affected and how it was affected – be more specific  
than "hurt," "pain," or "sore." Examples: "strained back," "burn on right hand."

**IV. Treatment**

Was medical assistance offered?  
Yes    No

If yes, when:

Were authorities contacted?  
(police, fire, ambulance)                      Yes    No

If yes, when:

Was a report number provided?  
Yes    No

If yes, report number:

Were photographs taken?  
Yes    No

If yes, by whom and date:

Was treatment given?  
Yes    No

If yes, when:

Did Guest refuse treatment?  
Yes    No

Minor on-site first aid?  
Yes    No

Minor treatment in clinic or hospital?  
Yes    No

Emergency evacuation / emergency room?  
Yes    No

Hospitalization for more than 24 hours?  
Yes    No

In the case of death of Passenger,  
date death occurred:

Name & Address of treating physician:

Name & Address of treating hospital / clinic:

Name, Address & Phone # of witness(s) to the incident:

V. Additional Details / Signature

Further details / explanation. Provide a narrative describing the events leading up to the incident, the actual incident, injuries sustained and further action, if any, required.	
Completed By	Date Completed
Guest Signature	
Witness Signature (witness to the signature)	

Criteria 3. f. Guest maximums are set and adhered to in order to ensure comfort, safety and optimal experience.

Sample Guidelines for Guest Maximums:	
10	Experience led as is with one interpreter.
20	Experience led as is with one interpreter and one sweep. For the beach walk, the group separates, and each interpreter takes a group of 10. The group comes back together after the beach walk.
Group size cannot exceed 20, due to equipment restrictions.	

Criteria 4. a. Guest Service Procedures, including expected response times to inquiries (within 48 hours) and booking confirmations (within 24 hours)

Sample Guest Service Procedures:	
Inquiries	I.e., Respond to all guest inquiries within 48 hours. Detail what information should be included when responding to an inquiry.
Bookings	I.e., Provide booking confirmations within 24 hours. Detailed booking and cancellation policies to be communicated, and any other information to be included.
Arrival Process	I.e., Checklist process for arrivals, including warm welcome, handling payments, providing necessary information, etc.
Experience Delivery	I.e, Checklist process for what needs to be prepared prior to the experience delivery, what needs to be in place, etc.
Other	Any other processes or tools to provide exceptional guest service should be included in your guest service procedures.



Criteria 4.c. Booking and Cancellation Policies, including clear payment policies and clear cancellation policies that are communicated to the guest, with a 24-hour cancellation policy recommended.

Template For Booking & Cancellation Policies:	
<b>Booking Policy</b>	Detail your booking policy, including clear payment policies.
	Detail how this booking policy is communicated to guests – i.e., listed on your website, sent with inquiries, and any other ways.
<b>Cancellation Policy</b>	Detail your cancellation policy, ensuring it is reasonable and in line with industry standards, with a 24-hour cancellation policy recommended.
	Detail how this cancellation policy is communicated to guests – i.e., listed on your website, sent with inquiries, sent with bookings/confirmations, and any other ways.

Criteria 4.d. Rate Policies, including honouring rates to guests, not raising rates inappropriately (i.e., before a contract expires or mid-way through the season), clearly identifying high-season and low-season rates if applicable, etc.

Template For Rate Policies:	
<b>Rate Policy</b>	Detail when rate increases take place
	Detail when high-season and low-season rates apply
	Detail any other information that is important to your rate policy

## Criteria 4. j. Staff Appearance Policy, including uniform or dress code guidelines.

### Sample Guidelines for Staff Appearance Policy:

**Uniforms:** A uniform is an excellent way to ensure that representatives of your company have a professional appearance, and you may want to consider a uniform. Alternatively, dress code guidelines are equally acceptable.

**Dress Code:** A dress code should take into account the type of work your team is doing and the type of experience they are delivering. In many instances, a short-sleeve shirt with a collar in one solid colour, dark pants or Bermuda shorts, and closed-toe shoes is a very appropriate dress code. In some instances, this may be too restrictive, while in others it may be too open to interpretation. Sometimes, culturally relevant clothing or accessories are appropriate. Other times, hats or sunglasses are recommended. You'll want to apply a dress code that is appropriate for your experience and circumstance.

**Other Guidelines for Professional Appearance:** In addition to a uniform or dress code, your staff appearance policy should include other guidelines, such as the following:

- Maintain personal hygiene, which includes the following: keep skin clean, control body odour, keep hair washed and neat, keep teeth clean and breath fresh. Use cosmetics sparingly, and refrain from using fragrances, as allergic reactions to scents are becoming more common.
- Follow the company dress code and maintain your uniform or dress attire, including cleaning, pressing and repairing your outfit as required.
- Do not smoke, vape, or chew gum while in front of guests, and follow all company guidelines and policies regarding smoking, alcohol use, and any other guidelines.
- Ensure that facial features are visible. Remove dark glasses or sunglasses at least upon meeting guests, and avoid hairstyles that cover your face, as guests are more comfortable when they can see your eyes.

Criteria 5. a. Perform regular evaluations of their own program, evaluating all aspects of the experience (i.e. welcome, service, quality, timeliness).

Sample process for conducting evaluations:	
1	The Experience will be evaluated at least once per year by a designated evaluator. The evaluator should be the same person or one of a small group of people to ensure consistency.
2	If the experience has received legitimate complaints from guests, it will be evaluated immediately.
3	The Evaluator will take part in the experience and stay for the entire experience, from beginning to end. It is recommended that the Evaluator not draw attention to themselves. It may be helpful for the Evaluator to have a standard message in case they are asked, to avoid guests thinking there is a problem with the experience. An example of this message could be “Maria is joining us on the experience today to learn more about it” or “Our company likes to go on all of our experiences every few months to ensure everything is going well.”
4	The Evaluator will complete the Tour Evaluation Form and share it with the experience provider to follow up as necessary.

## Sample Form:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluation	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Experience was easy to find and access				
Welcome was warm and inviting				
Safety briefing was delivered appropriately				
Team members met expectations in terms of hospitality and service, including appearance				
Team members were prompt and flexible as needed				
Team members were enthusiastic and engaging				
Team members were knowledgeable				
Team members added to the experience overall				
Information provided was clear and easily understood				
Experience was clean, safe and comfortable				

Evaluation	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Guest questions and concerns were responded to appropriately				
Experience had an authentic element				
Experience included a wow moment				
Guests appeared satisfied with the experience				
Experience matched the tour description				
Experience met my expectations				
Experience exceeded my expectations				
There are areas of concern to address				
There are areas for improvement				
Overall, this is an exceptional experience				

**Criteria 5. b. Respond to feedback received from guests (positive or negative), including online reviews from third-party review sites.**

**Criteria 5. c. Resolve issues and respond to complaints appropriately and in a timely manner.**

**Criteria 5. d. Have a documented process for handling guest feedback, particularly issues and complaints.**

**Sample Process for handling guest feedback, including resolving issues and complaints:**

1. Assign a team member or team members to be responsible for monitoring and collecting feedback, both received directly and via third-party review sites, as well as to be responsible for responding to feedback, and resolving issues and complaints.
2. Acknowledge receipt of the feedback.
  - a. For positive feedback, respond within 72 hours, thanking the guest for their comments.
  - b. For negative feedback or complaints, respond immediately. Explain that you are looking into it and will reply as soon as possible.
3. For negative feedback, investigate the complaint. This may involve research or asking questions of other team members. When asking questions, ensure you are asking open-ended questions (i.e. "Can you tell me what happened today?"), and ask follow-up questions as needed to explore the issue (i.e. "Were there any adjustments to the menu for any reason?"). These types of questions help to keep the person being asked from becoming defensive.
4. Once you have an understanding, explain that there's been a complaint from a guest and you were just looking to understand where it may be coming from and what might have happened, and ask if there is any additional information they would like to share with you.
5. Formulate a response to the guest. Be honest and accurate and accept any responsibility. Things sometimes go wrong, even for the best experience providers, but what matters most is how it is handled.
6. Send your response as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours. Express your apology for their dissatisfaction, include any next steps you will be taking to ensure it does not happen again, and include what you feel is appropriate to offer the guest, if anything. Thank the guest for bringing the issue to your attention.