



Working together with our community

Council-In-Committee Meeting – April 14, 2026

Subject: Amplify Norfolk Wrap-Up Report
Report Number: CDS-26-052
Division: Community & Development Services
Department: Administration
Purpose: For Information

Recommendation(s):

That staff report CDS-26-052 Amplify Norfolk Wrap-Up Report be received as information.

Executive Summary:

Amplify Norfolk was launched as a three-year pilot initiative (2022–2024) to support the post-pandemic recovery of Norfolk County’s tourism and live-entertainment sectors. Designed to de-risk new live events through matching grants of up to 50% of eligible expenses, the program focused specifically on growing visitation during the shoulder seasons of spring and fall. Over its term, Amplify Norfolk successfully strengthened Norfolk County’s cultural profile, attracted new visitors, supported local not-for-profit organizations, and generated meaningful economic activity.

Through the development of new large-scale events and enhanced cultural programming, the initiative delivered a strong return on investment. Major events drew thousands of attendees, significantly boosted local spending, and increased overnight stays across the county. Amplify Norfolk also earned provincial recognition, receiving an Ontario Tourism Award of Excellence and reinforcing Norfolk County’s emergence as a credible and growing live entertainment destination.

In addition to tourism impacts, the program helped build local capacity by providing seed funding that empowered community groups to scale new ideas, expand programming, and develop long-term event sustainability. High profile performers and well-known Canadian artists elevated the visibility of Norfolk County’s cultural offerings and broadened the region’s audience reach.

While the program was successful, several administrative challenges were identified during its review, including unclear eligibility criteria, increased grant thresholds that were difficult for smaller groups to meet, and reduced staff capacity following the end of

a dedicated contract position. Despite these constraints, Amplify Norfolk continued to generate substantial community and economic benefits.

As the initiative concludes following its final approved year in 2025, Norfolk County retains a stronger cultural tourism brand, established events that can continue independently, enhanced capacity to host live entertainment, and a measurable economic legacy. Amplify Norfolk stands as a high impact, award winning program that played a significant role in the county's post-pandemic recovery and long-term tourism growth.

Discussions:

Amplify Norfolk was introduced as a three-year pilot initiative (2022–2024) to help rebuild Norfolk County's tourism and live-entertainment sectors following the COVID-19 pandemic. Its primary aim was to de-risk new live events by offering matching grants of up to 50% of eligible expenses, with a strategic focus on increasing tourism during the spring and fall shoulder seasons. In July 2024, Council approved the continuance of the program into the 2025 calendar year, authorizing one final year of grants.

This initiative successfully strengthened Norfolk County's cultural profile, attracted new visitors, supported local organizations, and generated meaningful economic activity, helping establish the county as a growing destination for live entertainment.

Key Achievements

1. Major Economic Impact

Amplify Norfolk directly supported new large scale live events that brought meaningful tourism spending into the county. The 2023 Fairgrounds Festival alone generated over \$745,000 in direct spending and an estimated economic benefit exceeding \$1.78 million, with local accommodations reaching near 100% occupancy for the weekend (Tourism Regional Economic Impact Model). Complementary events, such as the 2023 Pumpkinfest featuring Bedouin Soundclash, also attracted substantial crowds and increased off-season visitation. Together, these outcomes represent a strong return on the municipality's investment.

2. Award Winning Initiative

Amplify Norfolk received province wide recognition for excellence when Norfolk County won a prestigious Ontario Tourism Award of Excellence for the initiative, celebrating its innovation and success in growing local events and attracting visitors. This award was through Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO). This recognition further reinforced Norfolk's profile as an emerging live events destination.

In addition, Norfolk Economic Development won a national award through the Economic Developer Association of Canada (EDAC). These awards recognize outstanding marketing and communication efforts that help drive local economic growth, and Norfolk's recent economic development projects have set a benchmark for creativity, impact, and community involvement.

3. Support for Local Organizations & Tourism Development

Amplify Norfolk provided critical seed funding to not-for-profit organizations and volunteer driven events, helping them scale their ideas and reduce upfront risk. The program encouraged new event creation, expansion of cultural programming, development of community capacity for hosting large events, and increased overnight stays and regional tourism. Together, these efforts elevated the county's event landscape, showcasing its venues and creative talent to new audiences.

4. High-Profile Performances & Enhanced Cultural Offerings

Events supported under Amplify Norfolk attracted well-known Canadian artists, increasing media attention and drawing visitors from beyond the region. The initiative showcased prominent performers such as The Beaches, Sloan, Finger Eleven, Theory of a Deadman, Trooper and many others. This caliber of programming significantly strengthened Norfolk County's reputation and firmly established it as a credible and increasingly recognized entertainment destination.

Program Learnings

While the initiative was successful, the final program review identified several administrative challenges, including unclear eligibility criteria for some applicants, increased grant sizes that required significant matching funds that were difficult for smaller organizers to secure, and limited staff capacity after the dedicated contract position ended in 2023. Despite these constraints, the program continued to deliver substantial community and economic benefits.

In conclusion, Amplify Norfolk achieved its objective of catalyzing new live entertainment events, strengthening tourism during shoulder seasons, and stimulating economic activity throughout the county. The program delivered a strong return on investment and helped raise Norfolk's profile as a destination for major cultural events. As the initiative concludes following its final approved year in 2025, Norfolk County retains a stronger cultural tourism brand, successful new events that can continue independently and a measurable economic legacy that benefits residents and businesses. Amplify Norfolk was a high impact, award winning initiative that successfully supported Norfolk County's post-pandemic recovery and long-term tourism growth, reinforcing the County's profile as an emerging live events destination.

Finance Comments:

The Amplify Norfolk initiative was originally approved with a total budget of \$375,000, funded equally from 2022 to 2024 through the Council Initiative Reserve. In July of 2024, Council approved continuing the program into 2025 to utilize the remaining \$125,000 of unspent funds. As such, the Approved 2025 Levy Operating Budget included an allocation of \$125,000, funded by the Council Initiative Reserve, for a final year of Amplify Norfolk.

Over the duration of the initiative, a total of \$303,770 of the approved funding was expended. Funds were allocated toward direct event grants, advertising and promotion, staff time, and direct purchases in support of events.

Table 1 – Summary of the Amplify Norfolk Initiative Program Costs

	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Grants Provided	\$-	\$69,770	\$50,000	\$99,000	\$218,770
Other Services	-	\$85,000	-	-	85,000
Total	\$-	\$154,770	\$50,000	\$99,000	\$303,770

As the program has concluded, surplus funds will be uncommitted in the Council Initiative Reserve for other future uses.

Strategic Plan Linkage:

Connecting Norfolk - Bringing the community together with cultural, physical and technological linkages

Amplify Norfolk aligns with the Strategic Plan priority of Connecting Norfolk by bringing people together through shared cultural experiences, strengthening community ties, and increasing engagement across the county. The initiative enhanced cultural linkages by supporting local events, showcasing regional talent, and creating spaces where residents and visitors could connect through entertainment.

Attachment(s):

None

Approval:

Reviewed and Approved By:
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