

ONTARIO WINE
APPELLATION AUTHORITY



2025-28

BUSINESS PLAN

BUSINESS PLAN

2025-2028

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1. Corporate Overview

The Ontario Wine Appellation Authority (OWAA) previously operated as VQA Ontario (VQAO). In 2021, the corporate brand was changed to better reflect the regulatory mandate and consumer-driven objectives of the organization. The organization was incorporated in November 1998 to implement the Vintners Quality Alliance Act, 1999 (VQA Act). The VQA Act was proclaimed on June 29, 2000, and the responsibility to administer the Act was delegated to OWAA. This date marked the beginning of a regulated “appellation of origin” system to govern the composition, standards and labelling of Ontario wines of origin. OWAA maintains consumer trust and the integrity of local wine appellations by enforcing winemaking and labelling standards and educating consumers about the authenticity of appellation.

OWAA operates under an Administrative Agreement with the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement. A modernized Agreement, completed in 2023, sets a new course for governance and accountability obligations through standardized reporting and performance indicators. 2023 also saw the implementation of a new 5-year Strategic Plan which continues to guide OWAA’s goals with respect to governance, regulatory modernization in the context of evolving consumer expectations and industry needs.

Participation in Ontario’s appellation system is voluntary, and wineries are not required to obtain VQA certification to produce and sell wine in Ontario. However, all Ontario wineries who wish to use regulated VQA label claims must be certified to relevant standards. The focus of OWAA is on label integrity and certification and as such, it does not represent the commercial interests of the Ontario wine industry, nor does it market VQA wines.

2. Vision, Mission and Values

VISION

Consumers trust Ontario’s wine appellation system to make informed decisions on the wines they drink

MISSION

Ensure value, integrity and authenticity, in Ontario’s evolving appellation system and diverse wine landscape

VALUES

Transparency and Fairness	Carry out statutory authority with transparency and fairness and uphold high ethical standards.
Accountability	Accountable for its decisions and engage in effective and fair dispute mediation to resolve conflict.
Firmness and Responsibility	Discharge regulatory responsibility firmly to ensure consumers can rely on label integrity for all VQA wines.
Responsiveness	Conduct operations openly, providing stakeholders with access to information and timely responses to inquiries. Promote the value and benefits of VQA appellations and wines.
Effectiveness	Carry out efficient and cost-effective operations, pursue service improvements and burden reduction.

STRATEGY

ENGAGE	EVOLVE	EDUCATE	EXECUTE
our stakeholders	our regulatory framework	our consumers	our mandate

3. Governance and Strategic Oversight

As a provincial regulator, OWAA is accountable to the Government of Ontario, consumers and to its industry stakeholders. Within this accountability framework, OWAA guides its business through its 5-year strategic plan, executed through its annual business plan. OWAA's Board of Directors provides strategic and financial leadership, developing strategic goals for the organization, leading engagement with government, industry, and sector stakeholders and overseeing management's execution of strategy. Both the strategic plan and the annual business plan are approved by the Board and reviewed by the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement (MPBSDP) to ensure continued alignment with governing legislation and regulation.

OWAA is governed by a 13-member Board of Directors and operates with a full and part-time staff of 6 professionals. Members of the Board have no direct involvement in regulatory operations.

The governance structure reflects the principles of self-management, with three-quarters of the Board of Directors elected from the regulated community. Representation and engagement with our regulated community is key to ensuring the Authority is current with consumer and industry trends and can maintain relevant and effective regulations governing origin, composition, winemaking procedures and labelling.

Members of the Board of Directors comprise:

- 9 individuals elected from the regulated industry representing small, medium and large wineries with regional distribution among Ontario's three primary wine growing appellations,
- 1 individual approved by the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement
- 1 individual who is a Director of Grape Growers Ontario
- 1 individual who is a Director or Officer of the Ontario Restaurant, Hotel and Motel Association
- The immediate past-chair

Elected Directors serve for a 3-year term commencing with their election at an Annual Meeting of Members and may stand for re-election. Appointed Directors serve at the pleasure of the appointing organization and may serve an indefinite term.

A Nominating Committee is established each year to review skills represented on the Board, gaps that need to be filled, and upcoming vacancies. The Committee strives to identify candidates that result in a balance of skills and experience, such as governance and strategy, business management, viticulture and winemaking, customer service and marketing. Other factors, including diversity, equity and inclusion, geographical representation and consumer insights are also taken into account.

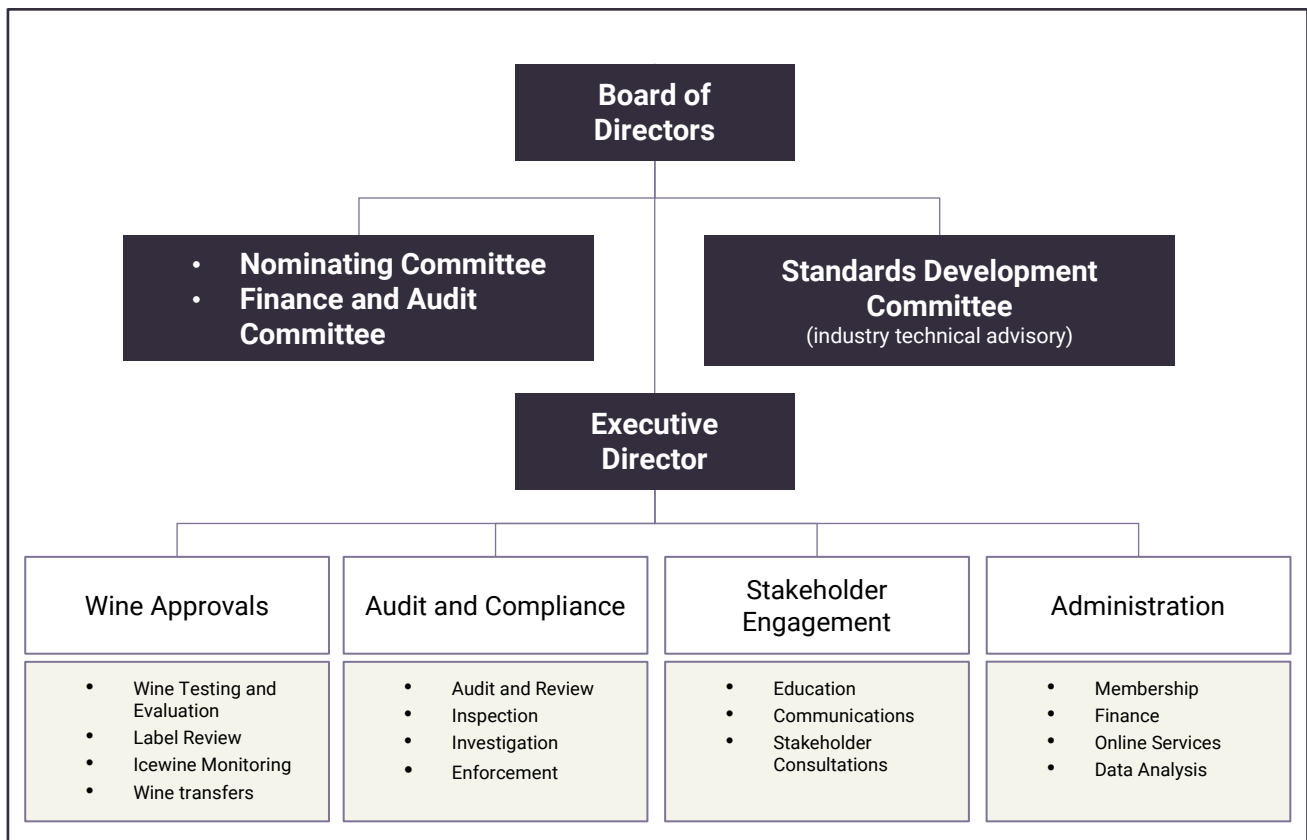
4. Mandate and Services

OWAA’s core mandate includes the following operating objectives:

- To establish, monitor and enforce an appellation of origin system in accordance with the VQA Act that allows consumers to identify wines on the basis of where the grapes are grown, the methods used in making the wine and other quality standards;
- To regulate the use of specified terms, descriptions and designations associated with the VQA appellation system;
- To act as the Wine Authority under the VQA Act, and to participate in discussions with government and other stakeholders which relate to wine standards;
- To inform, educate and work with the grape and wine sector, governments and the public to promote the value and benefits of VQA appellations of origin and VQA-certified wines.

OWAA meets this mandate by registering participating wineries, evaluating and approving wines that meet the wine standards and verifying compliance through testing, audit and inspection. OWAA supports its regulatory mandate with education programs, stakeholder engagement and a strong customer service ethic.

5. Organization Chart



6. Strategic Plan

OWAA guides its business through a 5-year strategic plan.

A major strategic review was completed in 2022-23 and OWAA published its new 2023-2028 strategic plan in 2023.

Development of the current strategic plan included formal consultations with government, regulated wineries, industry stakeholder groups, wine and hospitality educators and others involved in consumer research, wine marketing, hospitality and media. These consultations provided insights on opportunities to continually evolve and modernize Ontario's appellation system and the wine standards that support it. A survey of OWAA's wine industry stakeholders in late 2022 purposefully probed the value and the effectiveness of the Authority's operations. Their responses demonstrated high satisfaction with service levels and operational management, and strong support of the appellation system that delivers label integrity for consumers and adds value to the regulated community.

The inaugural Client Satisfaction Survey conducted in July-August 2024 confirmed continuing high levels of support:

- 79% of respondents, mostly from the regulated community, agreed it is important to maintain a regulated appellation system
- 99% were mostly or completely satisfied with their interactions with OWAA
- 86% believe OWAA is effective in enforcing VQA rules and regulations

7. Consumers

Consumer research available from the Wine Marketing Association of Ontario shows high levels of awareness of the VQA certification and its assurance of origin and quality. Consumer trust in VQA wines remains high but further opportunity exists to increase consumer understanding of individual wine regions across the province of Ontario, the scope of the wine testing and certification, and the role of the Authority.

8. Key Stakeholder Relationships

Key Stakeholders	How OWAA works with its Key Stakeholders
Consumers	OWAA is a publicly accountable organization. It protects wine consumers through wine testing, inspections and audits to establish claims of origin, and when necessary, enforcement actions to ensure accurate labelling with respect to the wine in the bottle. OWAA ensures consumers can rely on label integrity and make informed purchase choices.
Regulated Industry	OWAA works closely with industry stakeholders, through its regulated wineries, grape growers and related organizations, to ensure VQA regulations and procedures are reasonable, valued, and support a competitive and credible foundation for the industry. OWAA also promotes improved awareness and understanding of Ontario’s wines and winegrowing regions, the appellation system, and its value to both consumers and producers.
Government	As an administrative authority working under statutory delegation from the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement, OWAA works with government to achieve its goals consistent with a modern governance framework and the aims of the VQA Act. OWAA maintains accountability to the Ministry through strong lines of communication and works with other Ministries and Agencies involved in wine issues, including the Alcohol and Gaming Commission, Liquor Control Board of Ontario, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness. OWAA also collaborates with national and international bodies in trade discussions related to wine standards to promote global recognition and acceptance of Ontario’s VQA appellation system.
Other Stakeholders	OWAA works closely with institutions that provide wine education, wine marketing and support services to the industry, as well as with hospitality, media, wine influencers and highly engaged consumers.

BUSINESS PLANNING

9. Risk Management

Risk management is accomplished by an annual review of existing and emergent risks, including an in-depth assessment of strategic risks and risk mitigation strategies. The risk register and effectiveness of mitigation strategies is reviewed and updated every 6 months. In addition, risk management is incorporated into the OWAA’s day-to-day management activities and actions adjusted as needed. Regular status reports are provided to the Board of Directors on risk identification and mitigation. These levels of review and response ensure a robust framework to identify and manage risks, assess their potential impact on the organization and prioritize risk mitigation strategies.

10. Complaint Handling

OWAA responds to all complaints received and aims to provide a timely and fair resolution for all complaints within its jurisdiction received from the public, its regulated industry and other stakeholders.

11. French Language Services

OWAA provides French language services upon request. OWAA staff includes a French speaking employee, and any oral or written communications received in French are provided with a response in French.

12. Accessible Goods, Services and Facilities

OWAA is committed to providing equal access to goods, services or facilities in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005. All OWAA staff have completed training to ensure customer service is provided in an accessible manner. OWAA has adapted the principles of website accessibility developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and found in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (WCAG 2.0). Adapted to both HTML and PDF versions of documents, these guidelines include a range of accessibility features. Individuals can request accessibility accommodations in person, by telephone, electronic or written communications.

13. Performance Measures

In accordance with the Administrative Agreement, the Minister has approved the following performance measures.

EFFECTIVENESS	
OWAA effectively administers the VQA Act by ensuring consumers can identify Ontario's wines of origin and rely on the accuracy and integrity of the VQA label when making a decision to purchase.	
Measure	Target Outcome (Fiscal 2026)
Rate of label compliance as measured by retail inspection outcomes	At least 95% of labels offered for retail sale to consumers are compliant
Rate of compliance with origin, composition and labelling regulations as measured by the rate of success in wine approvals process	At least 95% of wines tested are approved to use terms

EFFICIENCY	
OWAA efficiently administers the VQA Act by ensuring high performance in delivering its regulatory activities.	
Measure	Target Outcome (Fiscal 2026)
Time to complete applications to use regulated terms	95% completed within 21 days

PERFORMANCE

OWAA performs at a high level by operating transparently and with a customer service focus that minimizes regulatory burden for the regulated community while ensuring integrity in the appellation system.

Measure	Target Outcome (Fiscal 2026)
Overall satisfaction rating as measured by a survey of participating wineries every 3 years	95% completely or mostly satisfied

14. Strategic Objectives, Activities and Targets

ENGAGE	EVOLVE	EDUCATE	EXECUTE
Enhance stakeholder relationships through active and regular interactions	Create a dynamic, inclusive and comprehensive VQA appellation system	Increase knowledge of Ontario’s VQA appellations and standards	Execute the strategy and mandate through strong governance and operational effectiveness
<p>1.1 Further understanding of consumer needs and expectations</p> <p>1.2 Enhance stakeholder engagement to raise OWAA’s profile with stakeholders</p> <p>1.3 Strengthen and expand relationships with government stakeholders</p>	<p>2.1 Engage industry stakeholders to expand and further define Ontario’s appellation regions and identity</p> <p>2.2 Align the future state VQA grape varietal list with consumer and industry expectations</p> <p>2.3 Continue to update composition and labelling rules to reflect consumer needs and industry developments</p>	<p>3.1 Develop curriculum on Ontario appellations</p> <p>3.2 Create, enhance and deliver VQA wine education for college programs, and wine education guilds</p> <p>3.3 Expand education programs to the hospitality sector</p>	<p>4.1 Maintain a strong governance framework</p> <p>4.2 Monitor stakeholder satisfaction</p> <p>4.3 Deliver effective, results-oriented and cost-efficient service</p> <p>4.4. Be a trusted source of industry data</p>

Strategic Objective #1: ENGAGE

Enhance stakeholder relationships through active and regular interactions

GOAL	ACTIVITIES
1.1 Further understanding of consumer needs and expectations	1.1.1 Develop and implement strategy to engage consumers and obtain feedback.
1.2 Enhance stakeholder engagement to raise OWAA’s profile with stakeholders	1.2.1 Execute communications/outreach plan for OWAA’s government and industry stakeholders 1.2.2 Maintain and expand engagement with wineries and trade associations to better understand their perspectives and educate industry about the appellation system 1.2.3 Continue to build on key stakeholder relationships, including Grape Growers Ontario, Ontario Craft Wineries, Wine Growers Ontario, Wine Marketing Association of Ontario, regional Wine Associations, National and International Wine Associations and others
1.3 Strengthen and expand relationships with government stakeholders	1.3.1 Meet all provisions of Administrative Agreement and supporting relationship with MPBSD 1.3.2 Demonstrate value for money and efficiency through outcomes-based performance measures 1.3.3 Increase collaboration with other Administrative Authorities

ACTIVITY TARGETS (2025-26)		
Measure	Target	Status Report
Consumer education strategy is informed by available research from Wines of Ontario and others	Obtain and review at least one consumer survey	Annually
Number of liaison meetings with government	2	Annually
Number of meetings, events, seminars, newsletters	20	Annually
Number of outreach events with industry stakeholder organizations	3	
Administrative Agreement requirements are incorporated into Business Planning and Annual Report, including new Minister-approved performance measures		Annually

Strategic Objective #2: EVOLVE

Create a dynamic, inclusive and comprehensive VQA appellation system

GOAL	ACTIVITIES
2.1 Engage industry stakeholders to expand and further define Ontario's appellation regions and identity	2.1.1 Define issues and opportunities for the Board related to undertaking an appellation and sub-appellation review 2.1.2 Define and determine structural issues, conceptual framework, and risks of contemplated actions 2.1.3 Consult with industry and other stakeholders to test concepts and ensure alignment
2.2 Align the future state VQA grape varietal list with consumer and industry expectations	2.2.1 Review the policy for adding new grape varieties (in parallel with appellation review) 2.2.2 Consult grape growers, academia about future planting trends in Ontario and elsewhere 2.2.3 Create a plan to collect consumer perceptions related to grape varieties (regional trends, blending rules, brix, etc.)
2.3 Continue to update composition and labelling rules to reflect consumer needs and industry developments	2.3.1 Consult with industry on emerging trends and practices that may impact wine standards (consumer demand for new wine categories, winemaking technology, labelling trends) 2.3.2 Review rule change process (industry driven versus OWAA-led) 2.3.3 Monitor relationship of sustainable certification to appellation

ACTIVITY TARGETS (2025-26)		
Measure	Target	Status Report
Number of OWAA members	200	Annually
Number of VQA-certified wines and the number of wines labelled with sub-appellations	>2000, >10%	Annually
Continue regulatory change process informed by stakeholder consultation on appellation system, appellation definitions, grape varieties and labelling rules	Implement approved regulation changes Complete review of pending regulation changes for new wine categories and designations	March 2026
Future involvement in Sustainable Winemaking program determined	Board approval of future role, outcome dependent on stakeholder decisions	March 2026

Strategic Objective #3: EDUCATE

Increase knowledge of Ontario’s VQA appellations and standards

GOAL	ACTIVITIES
3.1 Develop curriculum on Ontario appellations	3.1.1 Create a modular education curriculum focused on Ontario’s wine appellations and wine standards that includes a consumer oriented introductory level course through to a full-length certificate program, including online delivery 3.1.2 Improve and expand educational content for all stakeholder audiences 3.1.3 Raise consumer awareness of Ontario appellations and VQA wines by providing resources and information. Be “the Authority” on appellation in Ontario
3.2 Create, enhance and deliver VQA wine education for college programs, and wine education guilds	3.2.1 Build relationships with Ontario’s colleges, hospitality schools and wine designation programs to integrate Ontario’s appellations into their curricula 3.2.2 Provide in-person and online resources to educational institutions to support the delivery of appellation education
3.3 Expand education programs to the hospitality sector	3.3.1 Create education options for professionals already working in Ontario’s hospitality sector to learn about Ontario’s appellations and VQA wines 3.3.2 Raise awareness of and use of Ontario appellations across Ontario’s hospitality sector

ACTIVITY TARGETS (2025-26)		
Measure	Target	Status Report
Number of educational institutions and programs that have embedded OWAA’s appellation micro course	4	Annually
Number of participants that have viewed OWAA’s online appellation course resources	>1000	Annually
Number of participants that have completed OWAA’s appellation introduction course and exam and received certificates	>500	Annually
Number of participants that have completed OWAA’s multi-stage expert course and received certificates	>25	Annually
Consumer awareness results from Wine Marketing Association Ontario consumer research if available	n/a	As available

Strategic Objective #4: EXECUTE

Execute the strategy and mandate through strong governance and operational effectiveness

GOAL	ACTIVITIES
4.1 Maintain a strong governance framework	4.1.1 Complete bylaw review to ensure modern governance structure 4.1.2 Implement new Administrative Agreement 4.1.3 Continue to recruit and train a balanced and capable Board of Directors
4.2 Monitor stakeholder satisfaction	4.2.1 Conduct a regular winery satisfaction survey of VQA wineries, industry stakeholders and government 4.2.2 Adopt a continuous learning environment, learning from and acting upon external feedback
4.3 Deliver effective, results-oriented and cost-efficient service	4.3.1 Maintain high service standards and motivated staff 4.3.2 Maintain a strong and stable financial position 4.3.2 Operate in an open, transparent and fair manner that values efficiency and customer service
4.4. Be a trusted source of industry data	4.4.1 Expand data analysis and reporting capabilities 4.4.2 Ensure stakeholders and consumers have accurate information about Ontario’s wines and appellations, both to understand appellation wines and to support future development of the industry

ACTIVITY TARGETS (2025-26)		
Measure	Target	Status Report
Board evaluation results	Board evaluation indicates at least 80% computed average performance	Annually
Financial stability	Reserve targets met	Annually
Collect stakeholder feedback on data needs and publish production and sales data	Report on production by region and variety, and VQA sales by channel	Annually
Overall satisfaction rating as measured by a survey of participating wineries	95% overall satisfaction rating	Every 3 years, beginning 2024/25
Operations:		
Average response time to inquiry	<24 hours during business days	Annually
Online services availability	97% during business hours	Annually

Compliance:		Status Report
Retail inspections completed	At least 75% of VQA wineries At least 95% of wines observed in retail inspections are compliant	Annually
Compliance reviews completed	Risk based, minimum 65% of member wineries At least 90% completed with no findings	Annually
Site audits completed	Risk based, minimum 25% of member wineries At least 80% completed with no findings	Annually
Compliance coaching	At least 30 sessions	Annually
Rate of label compliance as measured by retail inspection outcomes	At least 95% of labels offered for retail sale to consumers are compliant	Annually
Rate of compliance with origin, composition and labelling regulations as measured by the rate of success in wine approvals process	At least 95% of wines tested are approved to use terms	Annually
Wine approvals:		
Application processing	At least 95% of applications receive approval	Annually
Chemical Analysis	95% applications processed within 21 days of sample receipt	Annually
Sensory Analysis	95% sensory analysis completed within 15 days of sample receipt	Annually
Time to complete applications to use regulated terms	95% completed within 25 days of sample receipt	Annually

15. Resourcing

OWAA is self-funded by winery fees and fee-for-service revenues. As part of its risk management policy, a reserve fund is maintained to mitigate against identified risks and unanticipated circumstances. The Authority maintains a highly cost-efficient structure and has been able to implement a reduction of annual membership dues from \$2000 to \$500 over its history, making the program more affordable and accessible for wineries.

In 2024, OWAA implemented a new streamlined option for chemical analysis that offered a less expensive option to obtain approval to use VQA regulated terms, without automatic bundling with more extensive testing. Uptake of this new option will be monitored and reviewed by the end of 2025. Maintaining an affordable fee structure is an important consideration given voluntary participation in the VQA program.

The majority of OWAA's revenue is collected through volume fees levied on the sale of VQA wines. As noted in previous sections, VQA wine sales growth has not yet fully recovered from COVID impacts and uncertainty related to global wine markets and local retailing changes makes financial forecasting difficult. Winery participation in the VQA program is expected to remain stable in the short to medium term, barring any changes to government incentive programs or market conditions.

OWAA plans to run moderate operating deficits in the forecast period to draw down OWAA's substantial cash reserves from \$1,200,000 to \$850,000 by the end of fiscal 2028. Revenue forecasting is conservative, and the fee structure is reviewed annually. Financial planning will be adjusted as needed.

A three-year financial plan is outlined in Appendix B, including projected revenue and operating expenses.

APPENDIX A

Board of Directors

As at March 31, 2025

OFFICERS	DIRECTORS
Derek Cartlidge Colio Estate Wines <i>President and Chair, Ontario Wine Appellation Authority</i>	Tony Elenis Ontario Restaurant, Hotel and Motel Association
Gabriel Demarco Cave Spring Vineyard <i>Vice-Chair, Ontario Wine Appellation Authority</i>	Shiraz Mottiar Malivoire Wine Company
Nadia Senchuk Leaning Post Wines <i>Treasurer, Ontario Wine Appellation Authority</i>	Erika Neudorf Arterra Canada
Louise Engel Featherstone Estate Winery <i>Secretary, Ontario Wine Appellation Authority</i>	Mary Shenstone Ontario Government
	Paul Speck Henry of Pelham Family Estate Winery
	Dan Sullivan Rosehall Run Vineyards
	Mark Torrance Andrew Peller Ltd
	Kevin Watson Grape Growers of Ontario
	Brian Schmidt Vineland Estates Winery <i>Past Chair, Ontario Wine Appellation Authority</i>

STAFF ORGANIZATION

Laurie Macdonald, Executive Director
Katherina Radcliffe, Director, Wine Standards and Communications
Peter Harris, Director, Audit and Compliance (Designated Inspector/Investigator)
Susan Piovesan, Compliance Officer/IT Systems Administrator (Designated Inspector)
Helen Ly, Office Supervisor/ Wine Testing Coordinator
Stan Loree, Accountant

APPENDIX B

Financial Projections to March 31, 2028

	Forecast FY2026	Forecast FY2027	Forecast FY2028
Membership fees	96,300	98,000	99,000
Approval fees	695,000	688,820	695,708
Sales levy fees	1,016,000	1,046,480	1,077,874
Other income	43,000	40,000	40,000
Total Revenue	1,850,300	1,873,300	1,912,582
Salaries & benefits	820,800	855,555	863,313
Contracted services	15,000	15,000	15,000
Meeting expenses	15,000	15,000	15,000
Wine approval costs	705,000	722,625	740,691
Office and general	27,000	30,500	31,000
Travel	15,500	17,000	17,000
Rent & occupancy	68,000	70,000	74,000
Information technology	25,000	20,000	20,000
Professional services	48,000	45,000	45,000
Education and communications	200,000	200,000	200,000
Amortization	32,000	32,000	32,000
Total Expense	1,971,300	2,022,680	2,053,004
Net revenue over expense	-121,000	-149,380	-140,421

Notes

1. Significant uncertainty exists related to future VQA wine sales that could impact revenue projections. Forecasts are conservative.
2. Wine approval volumes are projected to be similar to previous years. Revenue and expense related to wine approvals reflect cost recovery based on internal cost allocation.
3. Excess reserves collected during the pandemic continue to be drawn down through planned operating deficits throughout the forecast period.