



2014-2015 BUSINESS AND OPERATIONAL PLAN

April 1 2014 - March 31 2015





CONTENTS

Executive Summary..... 2

1. Introduction and Year in Review 5

2. Tourism Context 9

3. The Business and Operational Plan – April 2014-March 2015..... 11

 3.1 Explorers’ Edge Strategic Shift..... 11

 3.2 Explorers’ Edge Vision, Mission and Mandate..... 11

 3.3 Guiding Principles and Strategic Goals..... 12

 3.4 The Business and Operational Plan 2014-2015..... 14

4. Going Forward – Recommendations for 2014-2015..... 25

5. References..... 27

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Explorers’ Edge Organizational Chart..... 7

Table 1: 2013 Explorers’ Edge Accomplishments Under the Ministry’s Five Pillars..... 6

Table 2: RTO 12 Estimated Visits, Spending and Tourism Operators..... 9

Table 3: Overarching Goals for Explorers’ Edge..... 12

Table 4: Strategic Goals – DDP 2014-17..... 13

Table 5: Explorers’ Edge Draft Business and Operational Plan 2014-2015..... 14

Appendix

A. Board and Staff..... 28

B. 2013/2014 & 2014/2015 Preliminary EE Operational Plan Budget..... 29

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Explorers' Edge 2014-15 BUSINESS and OPERATIONAL PLAN

The Explorers' Edge *Business and Operational Plan (2014-15)* builds on last three years of RTO12 successes since the organization's inception in 2010-11. The Plan reflects priorities in a "new" three-year *2014-17 Destination Development Plan (DDP)*, priorities which were mapped out by the Board of Directors in a Strategy Session in October 2013. The *Business and Operational Plan 2014-15* further elaborates on these priorities and identifies associated tactics, timeframes, responsibilities and measurables.

Progress achieved in 2013 is consistent with the previous two years of operation. The organization can boast of several successes under the five Pillars designated by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (OMTCS):

1. Marketing and Promotion

2013 is the first year that Explorers' Edge has had advertising in market year-round, producing a significant market presence, strong social media reach and innovative transacting programs. In addition, the organization has collaborated with other agencies (Fednor, Northern OTMPC) to leverage funds and build capacity. A downloadable i-Phone app, EE video ads and the introduction of pay-to-play programs for operators are additional successes. A Partnership Program Fund created in 2012 was launched to identify regional operators and organizations that could work with RTO12 to develop innovative marketing and promotions to "move the needle forward," e.g. Lake of Bays Brewery, Golf Muskoka, Santa's Village, Muskoka Steamships.

2. Product

Development and Innovation: Explorers' Edge developed a pilot Product Development Fund, with 25 applications awarded throughout the Region since the program's inception.

3. Investment Attraction

Explorers' Edge has worked and communicated local, regional and provincial investment programs in coordination with the communication of support resources to regional stakeholders.

4. Workforce Development & Training

A Social Media Training Suite was developed to help tourism operators and stakeholders learn how to leverage the power of social media for their own business and organizational success. This follows successful training programs in previous years such as Disney and Google training.

5. Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability

The on-line Tourism Operator Forum went "live" with a searchable database for EE's 600+ members. A new Customer Relationship Management software program will strengthen relationships with operators. A Tourism Indicator Framework was developed to gauge the health of the Region's tourism industry on a timely basis and was piloted in late 2013. EE is the only RTO engaged in this type of research.

In addition, a governance review was conducted, including bylaws, policies and Committee Terms of Reference. Over and above these elements, the annual AGM was held in May 2013 and a financial audit was completed in 2013. The organization is in good financial health.

Tourism Context

In 2011, there were 4.7 million visits to the Explorers' Edge region, with an estimated \$598 million in spending.

Strategic Shift

The upcoming year represents a strategic shift for Explorers' Edge. In the strategic approach presented in the **2014-17 DDP**, Explorers' Edge is positioned as an organization **focused on the consumer**, where collaboration and leveraging resources through partnerships are at the forefront of activities.

In conjunction with this strategic shift, the Board updated the organization's Vision, Mission and Mandate and identified Guiding Principles and Operating Principles to guide the organizations goals.

The *2014-15 Business and Operational Plan* reinforces the strategic goals found in the *2014-17 DDP*. Strategies, initiatives and actions for April 1, 2014 – March 31, 2015 are presented along with responsibilities, timelines, required resources and monitoring and measurement outcomes.

The *2014-15 Business and Operational Plan* is divided into two parts:

Part A: identifies ongoing business activities including: updates to EE's situation, strategic directions, timelines, market/brand awareness and assessment, governance, collaboration and consumer insights, in addition to administrative activities and reporting.

Part B: presents strategic priorities, initiatives and associated tactics under the five Pillars set out by the Ministry.

Recommendations Going Forward

Finally, several recommendations are made in the areas of goal-setting, increased staff, continuing with "pay-to-play" activities and partnering with other organizations to strengthen workforce development.



1. Introduction and Year in Review

RTO 12 was established in 2010 by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, representing the broad geographic area of Algonquin Park, Almaguin Highlands, Parry Sound and Muskoka, and branded as “Explorers’ Edge” (EE) in 2011. This *Business and Operational Plan (2014-15)* builds on successes undertaken by Explorers’ Edge during the past three years and reflects priorities set out by the Board of Directors in the “new” three-year *Destination Development Plan (2014-17)*.

Stemming from five strategic Pillars specified by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, and following from the previous plan, the **DDP 2014-17** identifies 35 strategic priorities identified as *High, Medium* or *Low* by the Board of Directors. The *Business and Operational Plan 2014-15* further elaborates on these priorities and identifies associated tactics, timeframes, responsibilities and measurables. **Refinements to the Plan are expected to be made throughout the year as opportunities are presented and activities evolve.**

Progress Achieved in 2013

Explorers’ Edge (EE) can boast of major successes in the past year. The organization has navigated a successful start-up mode and is focused on developing marketing programs that provide ROI and measurement/tracking of these programs.

The next few pages highlight the progress achieved in 2013. Major accomplishments for the year are shown in **Table 1** based on the five Pillars designated by the Ontario Ministry of Toronto, Culture and Sport (OMTCP):

1. Marketing and Promotion,
2. Product Development and Innovation,
3. Investment Attraction,
4. Workforce Development & Training, and
5. Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability.

Additional accomplishments are noted in the areas of:

- i. Marketing,
- ii. Organizational Development,
- iii. Operator/Stakeholder Engagement, and
- iv. Research.

Over and above these elements, the annual AGM was held in May 2013 and a financial audit was completed in 2013. The organization is in good financial health.

1. Introduction and Year in Review (con't)

Table 1: 2013 Explorers' Edge Accomplishments Under the Ministry's Five Pillars

1. **Marketing and Promotion**
 - Successful Year-Round (four seasons) in-market Campaigns; 2013 is the first year the EE has had advertising in market **year-round**, with “heavy ups” for shoulder seasons
 - Marketing Transacting Programs Strengthened (Fuel and Fun Up over Last Year; Spring Fuel and Fun successful)
 - Collaborated with partners to leverage \$105,000 and in-kind contributions (OTMPC – *Fall Blue*, FedNor-Port Loring, Northern OMPTC – *Ride the Edge*) to be used for marketing and capacity-building
 - Brand Health Study showed Explorers' Edge brand steadily climbing upwards in awareness
 - Downloadable I-Phone App
 - EE video ads being used on YouTube (high click through rates)
 - Generated Revenue: through pay-to-play radio cost-sharing with operators
2. **Product Development and Innovation**
 - Partnered with OMTPC to manage pilot Tourism Product Development Fund (ends 2013)
3. **Investment Attraction**
 - Worked with Regional economic development agencies
4. **Workforce Development & Training**
 - Regional Capacity Building i.e. Port/Loring Restoule, Almaguin Highlands, Parry Sound
 - Developed Social Media Training Suite for tourism operators and stakeholders
5. **Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability**
 - On-line Tourism Operator Forum: Searchable Database with 600 members
 - Customer Relationship Management Software program
 - Online research resources for operators
 - Tourism Indicator Framework development to gauge health of industry on a timely basis
6. **Governance**
 - Governance Review (Bylaws, Policies, Committee Terms of Reference)

i. Marketing

Three marketing components were identified as successes: i. Market Presence, ii. Social Media, and iii. Transacting Program.

Market Presence: Increase in market presence occurred as a result of having a strong brand as well as unique and differentiating campaigns in market throughout fall and winter seasons i.e. *Winter Turns Up the Fun, This Fall's Can't Miss Colour is BLUE, Ride the Edge*.

Social Media: success resulted from a marketing and communication strategy established in 2012 and continued through 2013. From early days, Explorers' Edge has been at the forefront of technology, incorporating social media in all activities, with the express intent of highlighting the entire region and avoiding duplication of services.

Transacting Programs: The successful “tipping point program”, the “Fuel and Fun Promotional Package” was offered during Spring as well as Fall to increase shoulder season visitation by offering online incentives to consumers. The program is open to all operators and has a built-in tracking mechanism.

1. Introduction and Year in Review (con't)

ii. Organizational Development

EE is governed by a 16-member volunteer Board of Directors. A “lean and mean” staff of four conduct the day-to-day activities of the organization. Board and staff members are identified in **Appendix A**.

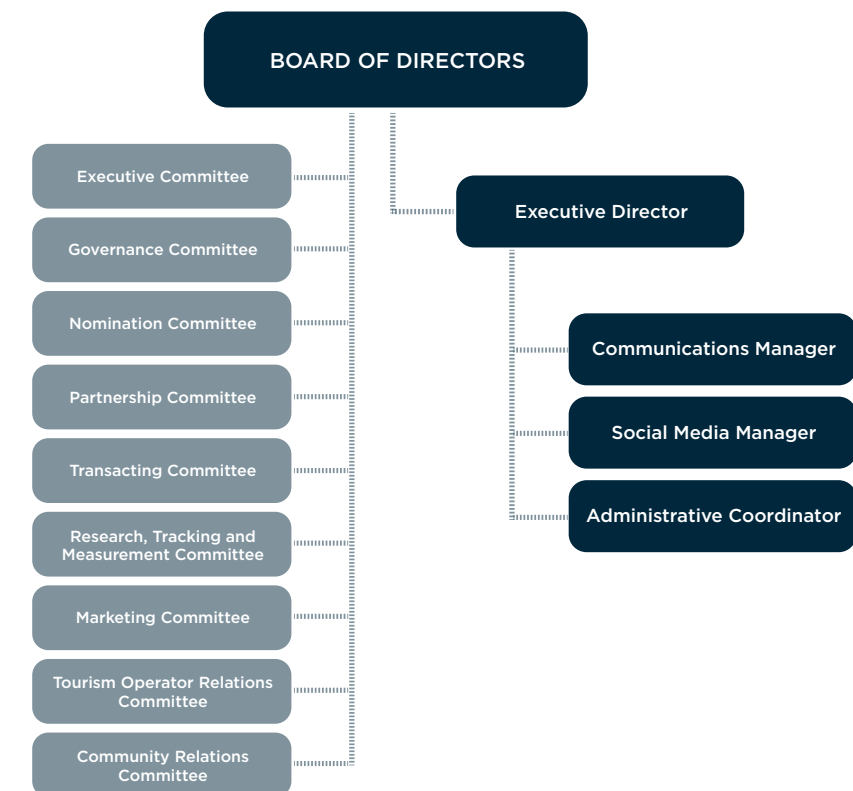
In order to meet the goals established by EE, the Board established an Executive Committee and seven additional working committees to help provide direction and guidance for Explorers Edge:

1. Transacting,
2. Marketing and Promotion,
3. Tourism Operator Relations,
4. Community Relations,
5. Research, Tracking and Measurement,
6. Governance, and
7. Partnership.

There is also an ad hoc Nominations Committee. Each committee is headed by a Board member and the structure is inclusive tourism stakeholders with expertise and/or interest in a particular Committee.

The Organizational Chart (at 2013) is shown in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Explorers' Edge Organizational Chart



1. Introduction and Year in Review (con't)

The Executive meets twice monthly; the Board and Committees meet monthly. The Terms of Reference and membership of each of these Committees are shown on RTO 12's website at <http://rto12.ca/category/committees/>. The committees rely on processes in the development of activities, objectives and strategies that are transparent, and committee initiatives are regularly disseminated for feedback from a wide range of industry stakeholders. The outcomes of processes are also shared with different committees to provide additional feedback.

During the past year, EE governance was strengthened as bylaws, policies and Committee structures were reviewed.

iii. Operator/Stakeholder Engagement:

During the past year, EE has continued to engage industry by communicating through quarterly newsletters, program updates, town halls, stakeholder presentations and one-on-one meetings. In 2012 the Tourism Operator Relations Committee implemented a Tourism Operator Engagement Strategy that continued in 2013. This strategy fosters mutually beneficial, two-way communication with the industry on EE programs, initiatives and tourism topics.

EE does not currently have the infrastructure capacity to develop tourism products on its own, and so in an effort to build product across the region, Explorers' Edge implemented a pilot project called the **Tourism Product Development Fund** in 2012 and 2013 to support product development in the region (though no flow-through or granting was provided). Tourism product development proposals were solicited from regional stakeholders to develop products and to create product development strategies, and several were chosen (e.g. Friends of Algonquin Park Wildlife Centre, Arrowhead Provincial Park Ice Trail, Park 2 Park Trail, Muskoka Chautauqua Round Table, Canadore College Packaging Workshops, Gravenhurst Chamber of Commerce LGBT training seminars).

A Partnership Fund was created in 2012 and put into motion for the 2013 / 2014 fiscal year. The partnership fund was created to stimulate strong partnerships and facilitate a strategic coordinated approach to tourism development. Explorers' Edge facilitated partnerships that tourism stakeholders that communicated their ability to move the needle forward.

In its ongoing efforts to build tourism in the region, EE will continue to act as a catalyst and support capacity building and product development through the Partnership Fund (as funding for the pilot Product Development Fund is at an end). The Partnership Fund will allow EE to use future resources in a more diversified manner.

iv. Research – Tourism Indicator Framework

Throughout the past year, the Executive Director (ED) and Research, Tracking and Measurement (RTM) Committee continued to update the Board of Directors on relevant research, market trends and competitive analysis. The RTM Committee has commissioned a pilot *Tourism Indicator Framework* for EE to better understand industry performance in a timely fashion. This work is complementary to the OMTCS's work on performance measures currently being conducted by Deloitte. The four components of the EE Tourism Indicator Framework are: 1. a Visitor Exit Survey, 2. Tourism Business Performance Index, 3. Organizational Program Performance (Program Metrics), and 4. Brand Health. Initial results are expected in early 2014.



2. Tourism Context

Several documents were reviewed to: a) set the stage for both the renewed **DDP 2014-17** and the **2014-15 Business and Operational Plan** and, b) summarize what has gone before. Major references for both plans are noted in **Section 5. References**.

Table 2: RTO 12 Estimated Visits, Spending and Tourism Operators

Visits and Spending:			
2008:	3.5 million visits;	\$662 million spending	
2010:	3.8 M	\$513 M	"
2011:	4.7 M	\$598 M	"
Businesses:			
2008:	1,738 establishments		
2010:	1,688 establishments		
2011:	Unavailable at time of press		

A comparison of where EE "sits" in comparison to other RTOs (2010) as well as an outlook to 2015 and snapshot of visitor markets (2011) are provided in the DDP 2014-17.

¹ Note: 2010 data and 2011 data cannot be directly compared due to changes in survey methodology. 2011 Data Sources: analysis based on Statistics Canada microdata which contain anonymous data collected in the *Travel Survey of Residents of Canada* and the *International Travel Survey*. Computations prepared by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture. Released 2013.



3. The Business and Operational Plan – April 2014-March 2015

3.1 Explorers' Edge Strategic Shift

The upcoming year represents a strategic shift for Explorers' Edge. In the strategic approach presented in the *2014-17 DDP* Explorers' Edge is positioned as an organization **focused on the consumer** where collaboration and leveraging resources through partnerships are at the forefront of activities.

3.2 Explorers' Edge Vision, Mission and Mandate

The vision, mission and mandate of Explorers' Edge guide the organization and are presented in the *DDP 2014-17*, however since they guide the organization, they are worth repeating here.

Explorers' Edge **VISION**

In three years (2017), EE will be the most popular tourism destination in Ontario.

The associated **MISSION**

Explorers' Edge is an operator-driven organization whose mission is to develop a profitable and thriving tourism industry in the Region.

Explorers' Edge **MANDATE**

The Explorers' Edge mandate is to *TIIC*:

- **T**rain
- **I**nnovate
- **I**gnite, and
- **C**ollaborate with...

... industry stakeholders to help consumers choose our tourism destination and products.



3.3 Guiding Principles and Strategic Goals

As previously noted and outlined in the 2014-17 DDP, 2014 represents the beginning of a strategic shift for EE, with an expressed focus on collaboration and leveraging funds. As such, a **Guiding Principles** were adopted by the Board in October 2013, that augment five internally developed **Operating Principles** to guide programming. These Principles represent the fine-tuning of the strategies outlined in the original DDP and expanded to include “four seasons” (as opposed to shoulder seasons) for the next three years.

Guiding Principles – 2014-2017 Strategy

- Leverage strategic collaborations to develop strategies, programs, products and communications that significantly increase the volume of visitors to the Explorers’ Edge Region.
- Use strategy and process as guiding beacons to ensure the success of the organization and its initiatives.

Operating Principles

- Change perceptions
- Build new audiences
- Increase four season business
- Leverage significant strategic partnerships
- Engage multiple operators

The **overarching goals** presented in **Table 3** drive the strategic focus for Explorers’ Edge and were established in 2011. The previous and *2014-17 DDP* underscore the challenge of doubling tourism receipts by the Year 2020 (as outlined in the Sorbara Report); they also highlight that the RTO focus is to **increase tourism business earnings as well as grow the industry base**.

Table 3: Overarching Goals for Explorers’ Edge

1. Double tourism receipts by 2020.²
2. Identify regional priorities that move the Provincial RTO agenda forward.
3. Change how government and industry work together to develop and foster economic growth.
4. Maximize and measure the impact of private and public tourism investments and new and revitalized product.
5. Reach out to consumers before they get here and once they arrive so that we can welcome more tourists.
6. Set standards for success to become more internationally competitive in areas such as workforce development, skills training and others.
7. Establish measureable ROI criteria.

² This goal was established by the Sorbara (2009) report and may be revisited by individual RTOs – as more reliable, timely and accurate benchmarks are established. The OMTCS currently uses accommodation sector data as the primary measurement tool to gauge industry performance.

These overarching goals are supplemented by EE’s strategic goals presented below.

As specified by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, both the DDP and Business and Operational Plans address **Five Strategic Pillars** to guide specific goals, strategies and activities: 1. Marketing and Promotion, 2. Product Development and Innovation, 3. Investment Attraction, 4. Workforce Development and Training, and 5. Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability.

Using the Pillars as a guide, the strategic goals shown in **Table 4** drive the strategic focus for 2014-17.

Table 4: Strategic Goals – DDP 2014-17

1. **Marketing and Promotion**
 - i. **Markets:**
 - Attract international travellers already coming to the GTA/Ontario.
 - Broaden our target markets beyond the GTA.
 - Identify and respond to markets that have the best pay-off (yield), including Niche Markets.
 - Explore competitive “tipping point” programs.
 - Utilize OTMPC Segmentation Research in planning.
 - ii. **Four-Season Destination:** Focus on developing four-season visits to the Region through strategic marketing initiatives that differentiate each season.
 - iii. **Technology:** Continue to grow existing and potential market segments using technology.
 - iv. **Transacting On-line:** Explore on-line transaction capability (ability to reserve, sell and purchase on-line).
 - v. **Media Relations:** Establish and implement a media relations strategy and plan.
2. **Product Development and Innovation**
 - i. Lead the RTOs with innovative product development for measurable results and strategic differentiation.
 - ii. Continue to offer product-development workshops.
 - iii. Collaborate to assist in development of web-based routes and trails (e.g. boating).
3. **Investment Attraction**
 - i. Continue to develop and strengthen economic development links.
 - ii. Explore strategy for attracting unique investment that will differentiate the region.
4. **Workforce Development & Training**
 - i. Explore an incentive program to entice workers to work in RTO 12.
 - ii. **Operator Education:** Continue to assess tourism workforce needs and resources and partner to develop and deliver programs if feasible e.g. social media workshops).
5. **Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability**
 - i. **Operator Engagement:** Continue to strengthen ties and communication with Industry.
 - ii. Engage multiple operators when possible.
 - iii. Continue to conduct relevant consumer, market and product development research and measure established programs.
 - iv. Continue to develop and strengthen industry and organizational performance measures.
 - v. Build official sub-regional communications strategy and tactics to attract travellers to each sub-region and to make it easy for consumers to choose to visit the sub-regions.

3.4 The Business and Operational Plan 2014-2015

To accomplish these goals, priorities were set by the Board during the October 7-8 2013 Strategy Session. These priorities (ranked High (H), Medium (M) or Low (L) are shown in **Table 5**, along with associated strategies, initiatives and actions as well as timelines, responsibility and estimated costs. Costs are estimated and expected to shift throughout the year.

The *Business and Operational Plan (Table 5)* covers operational activities for the April 1, 2014-March 31, 2015 period. The Operating Budget associated with these activities is shown in **Appendix B**.

Table 5: Explorers Edge Business and Operational Plan 2014-15

PRIORITY/STRATEGIC FOCUS	BP	OBJECTIVES	KEY ACTIVITIES/TACTICS APRIL 1 2014-MAR 31 2015	C/N	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<i>Numbers correspond with the DDP BP=Board Priority; CN = C (Continued) or N (New)</i>					
Key Priority Area: GOVERNANCE and OPERATIONS					
Governance					
Effective Governance: Govern EE through effective leadership; strong industry representation and following systems, policies and procedures		i. Foster organizational capacity with an engaged committee structure in order to deliver regional tourism mandate	1. Review succession plan	N	Clean audit of finances and procurement processes
		ii. Manage our assets and liabilities responsibly.	2. Complete a skill matrix to identify priority areas for board member recruitment	C	Effective board participation achieved (at least 70% of board members have participated in all meetings)
		iii. Deliver expected results on time	3. Provide new board members with on-boarding including review of conflict of interest, code of conduct etc.	C	Business plan participation (TPA) deliverables achieved on time and on budget
	Determine future membership model for the organization (34 - Board Priority: Low)	iv. To examine membership options for EE. promote organizational excellence	4. Offer a minimum of 2 workshops that help board	C	Ratio of actual spend vs budget
	Determine future funding model for Explorers' Edge (35-Board Priority Medium)	v. To examine options for moving toward a financially sustainable organization	5. Conduct quarterly board reviews of RTO plans and performance measures against stated objectives and targets; adjust as required	C	Percentage and percentage change of industry stakeholders that have participated in RTO planning activities
		6. Solicit stakeholders input for business and project plans and report back on activities and decisions	C	% change of industry stakeholders who have partnered and collaborated in RTO activities	
		7. Regularly review activities, finances at board meetings	C	% change of industry stakeholders that have participated in RTO planning activities	
Operations					
Administrative Activities, Reporting, Situation Analysis, Strategic Directions, Critical path		i. To be recognized by regional tourism operators and stakeholders as a regional tourism resource and catalyst	1. Annual update for Business and Operational Plan		Increase of operators and stakeholders who work with the RTO on specific projects and initiatives
		ii. Effective committee participation achieved (at least 50% of committee members have participated in all meetings)	2. Executive, Board and Committee Meetings		Operators involved in RTO committee and/or project work, not including partnership fund or anticipated product development initiative
			3. Collect and analyse program data, reconcile programs and negotiate TPA		Participation with local/regional tourism and/or economic planning processes to offer subject matter input
			4. Fulfill and communicate performance metrics/measurables as outlined in the MTC Transfer Payment Agreement		Operator involvement in RTO committee and/or project work, not including partnership fund or anticipated product development initiative
			5. Interact with provincial government agencies: OTMPC, OTMPC, Northern Committee, Ministry of Tourism, Sport and Culture, Transfer Payment Agreement, TIAO		

Table 5: Explorers Edge Business and Operational Plan 2014-15 (con't)

PRIORITY/STRATEGIC FOCUS	BP	OBJECTIVES	KEY ACTIVITIES/TACTICS APRIL 1 2014-MAR 31 2015	C/N	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<i>Numbers correspond with the DDP</i>					
<i>BP=Board Priority; CN = C (Continued) or N (New)</i>					
Strategic Pillar 1: Marketing & Promotion					
Key Priority Area: CONSUMER MARKETING/SOCIAL MEDIA					
Brand: Incorporate the EE brand in all marketing programs and social media programs (1)	H	i. Expand visitors to the region by building on existing brand recognition.	1. Update 2014-2015 <i>Marketing Plan</i> , based on Marketing Committee feedback	C	Brand use in all materials; all marketing activities measured through analytics; ROI an ongoing priority
Reinforce the regional brand (6)	H	ii. Be more efficient in advertising buys	2. Negotiate up-front annual deals with radio and online properties to provide bargaining power & improve buy efficiency (up to 10%): tactical radio, tactical print	N	Brand awareness & health research
Explore expanded markets (2)	H	iii. Brand: Change perceptions of customers from target markets.	3. Track awareness	C	Increase the percentage of aided brand awareness in target markets
Continue to ensure that campaigns are fresh & creative (3)	H	iv. Provide greater reach & access to EE region by linking the the consumer to regional information, experiences & packages that correspond with seasonal & general tourism marketing initiatives	4. Monitor quarterly reports	C	Increase the percentage of unaided sub-regional awareness in target markets
Continue to develop marketing campaigns (broadcast & some print) aimed at GTA market and beyond; experienced-based campaigns (4)	H	v. Strengthen consumer, trade and media databases	5. Explore collaborative partnerships with Toronto & beyond (e.g. "Town and Country" campaign) & large events (e.g. WorldPride 2014)	C	Brand awareness and health research
Participate in selected travel trade and media promotions (9)	M	vi. Explore gateway signage to further reinforce the brand	6. Explore markets beyond the GTA (e.g. other Ontario, Air Canada, Porter Lufthansa partnerships)	N	Increase the number of likes on Facebook & Followers on Twitter
Explore signage options at gateways (and perhaps across Region) (10)	M		7. Explore niche markets available through strategic collaboration (e.g. corporate, international, activity-based, incentive travel)	N	Increase seasonal web analytics
			8. Participate in Ministry programs such as website, publication and travel trade (TBEX conference)	C	Increase Sojourner Mailing list, the open rate and the click through
			9. Directly generate operator-level sales via promotions	C	Using 2013/2014 as a baseline year collect visitor data on past or planned return
Key Priority Area: MARKETING - WEBSITE					
Continue to strengthen an active web-based presence (5).	H	i. Drive qualified prospects to Explorersedge.ca and then direct them to operator websites	1. Continue to keep branded content on the website which enables higher Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	C	Social media analytics; visits & stays
		ii. Create clear messaging, one united voice, with regards to tourism development and leadership	2. Drive qualified prospects to ExplorersEdge.ca, and then direct them to operator websites	C	Increase seasonal web analytics
		iii. Expand main point of access to information for consumers, operators, tourism stakeholders	3. Continue to use Search Engine Marketing (SEM) program With the new website and associated Google AdWords program	C	Increase web traffic
		iv. Provide relevant, timely and accurate information to consumers, stakeholders and operators	4. On-line Display (EE promotional Ads)	C	Increase the Sojourner Mailing list, the open rate and the click through
		v. Create and appetite for travel amongst consumers visiting the site.	5. Branded Content (e.g. Explore the Edge, Fall Blue contest)		Using 2013/2014 as a baseline year collect visitor data to capture past or planned return
Key Priority Area: MARKETING - TRANSACTING					
Establish feasibility of a transacting website (8)	M	i. Examine feasibility of transacting website that goes beyond beyond a reservation system	1. Explore possible options and costs of transacting website.	N	If feasible, Implementation Plan at end of 2014; Target implementation by 2015
Increase visitation by offering consumers tipping point programs (i.e. Fuel and Fun)		ii. Continue to develop consumer web-based tipping point programs that: * increase average daily spend * convert day trippers that attend regional attractions into overnight or multiple night stays * convert the VFR segment into overnight or multiple night stays	2. Continue to offer signature tipping point programs ensuring programs are competitive.	C	End of year sustain operator engagement in tipping point programs
Explore Air Miles Redemption; EE Coupon and/or Gift Certificate Program (12)	L	iii. Explore additional ways of transacting using redemption programs	3. Examine opportunities to collaborate on transacting programs with other RTO's	N	Increase transactions taking place as a result of tipping point programs

Table 5: Explorers Edge Business and Operational Plan 2014-15 (con't)

PRIORITY/STRATEGIC FOCUS	BP	OBJECTIVES	KEY ACTIVITIES/TACTICS APRIL 1 2014-MAR 31 2015	C/N	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<p><i>Numbers correspond with the DDP</i> <i>BP=Board Priority; CN = C (Continued) or N (New)</i></p> <p>Strategic Pillar 1: Marketing & Promotion Key Priority Area: <u>MARKETING – VIDEO/IMAGE BANK DEVELOPMENT</u></p>					
Continue to develop video and image bank		<p>i. Communicate experiences with the consumer with visual & audio cues (photography & videography)</p> <p>ii. Provide greater seasonal selection of images to operators</p> <p>iii. Increase the percentage of images by 20% presented for the online consumer, (2012/2013 as a baseline xxx)</p> <p>iv. Increase the percentage of operators who use images and videos on their respective sites by 25%. Link to the Explorers' Edge landing page from the video/image prompt (using 2012/2013 as a baseline year xxx operators were using the assets)</p>	<p>1. Update with content YouTube, Vimeo, flickr, Facebook,</p> <p>2. Track Downloads</p> <p>3. Develop an agreement with the Explorers' Edge photographer of record that includes monthly images (change from seasonal image contract in 2011/2012 & 2012/2013)</p>	<p>C</p> <p>C</p> <p>C</p> <p>C</p>	<p>By the end of the year have 10% of photographs used in all marketing material</p> <p>Video reach evidenced by the number of downloads/ views during marketing campaigns</p> <p>Track the # of downloads per video (YouTube)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • change likes • change of channel subscriptions • change of downloads of created photos
<p>Strategic Pillar 2: Product Development & Innovation Key Priority Area: <u>PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT</u></p>					
Continue to encourage greater packaging of weekend (or longer events) (13).	H	i. Build on success of the product development fund	1. Facilitate building of packages for weekend and longer events	C	Number packages listed on website
Encourage operators to take advantage of 'product workshops' (14).	M	ii. Encourage participation in product development-related workshops	2. Continue to offer product development workshops (experiential, product development)	C	Number operators/development stakeholders participating in workshops
Educate operators how to take advantage of Eco-designations within their respective sectors (15)	L	iii. Encourage operators to "go green" for increasingly sophisticated/discerning consumers	3. Research tourism-eco designations in various sectors and provide links for operators on website	N	Number links accessed by operators
Develop and promote routes and trails (e.g. culinary, art, cycling, hiking, snowmobiling) (16)	M	iv. Encourage use of extensive trail network throughout the Region	4. Promote trails across seasons	C	Number website clicks on trail routes
Encourage events in all seasons (17)	H	v. Create "buzz" around events – especially large scale – in all seasons	5. Promote large-scale events in the Region	C	Northern Ontario collaborations, grants/loans received
Encourage sports tourism (e.g. triathlons, Winter Games) (18)	M	vi. Explore partnerships to take advantage of large sporting events in or near the Region	6. Explore potential for capitalizing on sporting events (e.g. Pan Am Games 2014, triathlons, Winter Games)	C	New products/programs developed
Collaborate to optimize use of the Northern Ontario incentive grant/loan program (20)	H	vii. Collaborate to leverage funds that encourage product development	7. Continue to explore collaborative opportunities to develop product	C	
<p>Strategic Pillar 3: Investment Attraction Key Priority Area: <u>INVESTMENT ATTRACTION – INVESTOR RELATIONS</u></p>					
Outreach, Meetings					
Continue to respond to investment overtures as required (working closely with economic development organizations in Region (21)	M	i. Work with economic development agencies to identify identify potential tourism investment opportunities for the Region	1. Engagement sessions, meetings, presentations etc.	C	Simple counts of frequency and contact with agencies
Continue to liaise closely with existing economic development	M	ii. Increase the flow of tourism investment information between	2. Attendance at regional, provincial conference sharing	C	Add additional operator/stakeholder outreach activity
		iii. Increase investment in the tourism industry to enhance visitor experience	3. Website updates to Admin section	C	Increase the number of stakeholders/operators attending investment education session
			4. Web performance review, i.e. organizational document downloads	C	
			5. Review investment attraction in the region	N	

Table 5: Explorers Edge Business and Operational Plan 2014-15 (con't)

PRIORITY/STRATEGIC FOCUS	BP	OBJECTIVES	KEY ACTIVITIES/TACTICS APRIL 1 2014-MAR 31 2015	C/N	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<p><i>Numbers correspond with the DDP</i> <i>BP=Board Priority; CN = C (Continued) or N (New)</i></p> <p>Strategic Pillar 3: Investment Attraction Key Priority Area: INVESTMENT ATTRACTION - INVESTOR RELATIONS</p>					
Membership					
Provide operators and stakeholders with the necessary tools, trends, applicable tourism development opportunities and applicable information to succeed		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Engage operators and stakeholders in EE activities and programs ii. Encourage operators and stakeholders to utilize provided resources iii. Encourage operators and stakeholders seek out posted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop, based on feedback from 2013-14 networking, Investment Attraction next steps 2. Work with OTMPC to deliver research toolkits and information sessions 3. Update the board on a quarterly basis i.e. Operator 4. Solicit operator and stakeholder input through the operator forum on Investment Attraction needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C C C C 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the # of times research has been shared with industry via downloads Sustain the # of newsletters distributed to stakeholders/ Operators Sustain the # of engagement sessions Increase by 25% the number of page views to the logo download section of rto12.ca over last year (2013/14 - xxx)
Strategic Pillar 4: Workforce Development & Training Key Priority Area: WORKFORCE COORDINATION/FACILITATION					
Work with other agencies to help identify industry needs and collaborate to encourage and deliver relevant training (23)	H	i. Work with existing organizations to coordinate workforce development, prospect/opportunities in EE & facilitate/communicate workforce opportunities	1. Continue to act as an entity/agency on behalf of Loring and Restoule Business Association, in a pilot capacity, helping to develop an Online Visitor Information Centre project/Digital media plan	C	Increase the # of coordinated workforce development meetings
Continue with Web-based Marketing Seminars/presentations (e.g. social media) (24)	H	ii. Gain a greater understanding of the labour market landscape	2. Working with OTEC, finalize summary of services and workforce development needs	N	Increased involvement of operators and sectorial organizational leaders
Continue to promote availability and desirability of careers	L	iii. Gather input on implications of labour market development	3. Review workforce resources in the region	C	
Strategic Pillar 5: Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability Key Priority Area: INDUSTRY COMMUNICATION, LIAISON					
Continue all industry liaison activities begun in Years 1-3 (27)	H	i. Foster outreach to operators, facilitated by information sharing throughout the Region	1. Meetings, presentations, face-to-face activities	C	Counts of numbers reached - member satisfaction & feedback
Develop educational materials informing industry of market research findings (28)	L	ii. Facilitate development of industry capacity by providing relevant information	2. Provide most recent research findings on website, on tourism trends, RTO 12 and Ministry market research	C	Number and types of partnerships with other RTOs, esp. 13
Continue to strengthen communications with industry throughout RTO 12 (29)	H	iii. Strengthen communications with operators	3. Finalize CRM database	C	Increased/sustained membership
Continue to engage operators in EE activities and programs (30)	H	iv. Explore joint marketing; joint product development, other initiatives that benefit operators	4. Employ direct mail, Operator Forum and other techniques to engage operators	C	Increased Number of paid, registered tourism operator memberships
Continue to refine Operator Forum database (31) from the Business-to-Business Receptive operators segment	M	v. To increase the number of paid, registered, tourism operator memberships	5. Leverage the Forum & position as an "enabler" for members to develop partnerships/collaborative marketing programs	C	Addition of names to the Member segment - shifted from the Business-to-Business Receptive operators segment
Collaborate with other RTOs (esp. RTO 13) (32)	H	vi. To move Business-to-Business Receptive operators from from that segment to the Member segment	6. Conduct regional outreach campaign to develop committee structure to add value to priority program areas	C	Additional subscribers to Quarterly Outreach Newsletter
Advocacy: continue to represent member concerns to province and other levels of government (33)	L	vii. To increase by 10% the number of subscribers to the the Stakeholder Quarterly Outreach Newsletter	7. Revise stakeholder satisfaction survey conducted in 2013-14	C	

Table 5: Explorers Edge Business and Operational Plan 2014-15 (con't)

PRIORITY/STRATEGIC FOCUS	BP	OBJECTIVES	KEY ACTIVITIES/TACTICS APRIL 1 2014-MAR 31 2015	C/N	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<p><i>Numbers correspond with the DDP</i> <i>BP=Board Priority; CN = C (Continued) or N (New)</i></p> <p>Strategic Pillar 5: Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability</p> <p>Key Priority Area: ACCOUNTABILITY – RESEARCH, TRACKING & MEASUREMENT</p>					
Continue to implement and finalize Tourism Indicator Framework (26)	H	i. Develop a detailed account-ability system using performance measurement metrics tailored to RTO 12	1. Continue to collect baseline of data in four key performance measure areas: i. Brand Health ii. Organizational Program Performance iii. Tourism Business Performance iv. Visitor Exit Survey	C	2014/15 dashboard metrics for each of the 4 performance measures
Continue to undertake region-wide market research (7)	M	ii. Develop an online dashboard capturing the data collected across the four performance measures iii. Continue to keep abreast of and integrate relevant Ministry research with our own	2. Continue to track and disseminate Ministry-generated consumer research 3. Continue to conduct brand awareness research	C C	Number of views of the developed online dashboard Number of downloads of the Tourism Indicator Quarterly Report
<p>Key Priority Area: : PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM</p>					
Continue to actively manage the Partnership Program	H	i. To enhance the government’s support for tourism at a regional level by encouraging strong partnerships and a coordinated approach to product development, regional planning and marketing ii. To enhance alignment, strategic partnerships, ROI, and collaboration between Explorers’ Edge and tourism partners which include but not limited to destination marketing organizations, other levels of government, and the private sector iii. To deliver a program that supports destination management partnerships in : a) Marketing b) Tourism Product Development c) Investment Attraction/Investor Relations d) Workforce Development/Training	Dependent on Partnership Fund project applications		Performance measures will be linked to each individual program. Completed Schedule C from each partner C Established baseline re: brand recognition and partnership perception/recognition through visitor exit survey Using 2013-14 as a baseline year develop at a minimum 15 coordinated partnerships Using 2013-14 as a baseline year develop at a minimum 1 partnership for each of the destination management priorities Using 2013-14 as a baseline year develop at a minimum 1 partnership in one of the following tourism partners: destination marketing organizations, level of government and the private sector



12. Going Forward – Recommendations for 2014-2015

In addition to the priorities and actions identified for 2014-2015, several operational recommendations for moving forward are:

1. Board

Revisit goal of “doubling revenues” suggested in the Sorbara report and revise using 2011 Ministry data as a base.

2. Staff

Consider the need for an additional staff person(s) who can assist with operator relations and engagement.

3. Marketing and Promotion

Continue to establish “pay-to-play” activities for future campaigns to permit opportunities for operator involvement and possible revenue generation

4. Workforce Development

Partner with existing organizations to offer workshops that expand operator capacity and industry training.

13. References

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Appendix A

Board of Directors and Staff (at October 31, 2013)

Don MacKay, Chair
Muskoka Highlands
1040 South Monck Drive, Bracebridge ON

Tony Armstrong, Vice Chair
Back Country Paint Ball
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Andrew Vitich, Secretary and Treasurer
Sunny Point Resorts, Cottages & Inn
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Jerry Feltis
Mill on Main, Rocky Crest Resort
RR#1 Hamer Bay Road, MacTier, ON

Jackie Leung
Fern Glenn Inn B&B
1462 Fern Glen Road, Emsdale ON

Michelle Berry
Parry Sound KOA Campground
276 Rankin Lake Road, Parry Sound ON

Andrew Ryeland
Bear Claw Tours
35 Shoebottom Rd, Seguin ON

Resource Members

Jim Murphy, Warden
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Nicole Saulnier
Georgian Bay Airways
11A Bay Street, Parry Sound ON

John Miller
Muskoka Steamship & Historical Society
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Anthony Rizzo
Doe Lake Campground Rizzort
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Hilary Chambers
Sun Dog Gallery
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Laura Hernando, Tourism Industry Advisor
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Appendix B

2013/2014 & 2014/2015 Preliminary EE Operational Budget

TYPE OF EXPENSE	2014	2015
OPERATING COSTS/ADMINISTRATION		
Salaries and Benefits	\$255,000	\$300,000
Finance and Administration	\$10,000	\$10,000
Travel and Meeting Expenses	\$43,000	\$43,000
General Administration (office rent/utilities, phone, office equipment)	\$45,000	\$45,000
Other Administration (Insurance, bank charges)	\$4,500	\$4,500
Subtotal	\$357,500	\$402,500
GOVERNANCE INDUSTRY RELATIONS		
Outreach/Meetings	\$5,000	\$5,000
Tourism Industry Relations	\$38,000	\$12,000
Website/Membership	\$26,000	\$26,000
Subtotal	\$69,000	\$43,000
MARKETING		
Consumer Marketing/Social Media	\$598,500	\$626,000
Image Bank Development	\$12,000	\$12,000
Media/PR		\$21,000
Transacting	\$150,000	\$150,000
Subtotal	\$760,500	\$809,000
PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT		
Product Development	\$50,000	\$35,000
Research	\$70,000	\$30,000
Subtotal	\$120,000	\$65,000
INVESTMENT ATTRACTION/INVESTOR RELATIONS		
Outreach/Meetings	\$5,000	\$2,500
Subtotal	\$5,000	\$2,500
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT/TRAINING		
Workforce Training	\$20,000	\$10,000
Subtotal	\$20,000	\$10,000
PARTNERSHIP FUNDING		
Partnership Activities	\$332,000	\$332,000
Subtotal	\$332,000	\$332,000
TOTALS	\$1,664,000	\$1,664,000

