



2017 – 2018 Business and Operational Plan

(April, 2017 – March 31, 2018)



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Executive Summary

The years 2011-2016 (the first five of the RTO's existence) saw not only the organization's focused work to build a solid administrative foundation, strong tourism stakeholder relations and benchmark governance, but also our extremely successful launch into the (then) universally uncharted waters of social content marketing.

In 2011, when the Board made the decision to concentrate on social media and content for domestic marketing, they empowered staff to take a calculated risk (despite external naysayers) to try something new, in order to significantly change the way tourism is done in this region and to increase visitation.

Fast forward to 2017: with exceptional social content marketing results year-over-year, we are not only the leading content marketer among the RTOs (resulting in increased visitation), but we have also been the catalyst for a significant number of tourism partners to become successful content marketers themselves (including the local DMO). We have come a long way since we took our first wobbly steps into this new marketing frontier in our effort to increase visitation.

In 2017-2018, RTO12 will once again confidently steer the ship into uncharted waters as we now work strategically to attract international visitors, thereby developing new audiences for our region while working towards our corporate vision of making this the most popular destination in Ontario.

In 2017-2018 we will develop significant destination building initiatives, including commercial air service to the Muskoka Airport, itinerary and package development, international content marketing campaigns and lead nurturing work flows, a tourism ambassador program, and enhanced travel infrastructure – all under the RTO's branded strategy called **"Worldly Wise."**

With sanctioning from our Board of Directors, tourism stakeholders and from respondents to the Ministry's RTO Stakeholder Survey, we will take the lead in developing this branded destination ("the great Canadian wilderness north of Toronto") so we are truly globally competitive.

A key initiative to increase our competitiveness on the world stage will be our product offerings. To that end, the Board of Directors will invest in a significant **Product Development Strategy** in order to identify which products will work hardest to attract domestic and international audiences, and which will require significant investment by the RTO (through funding, partnership and resources) to bring up to par.

We will continue to develop our "blue chip" programs, including our "tipping point transacting programs" (e.g. Fuel & Fun), our "Signature Suite of Self-Guided Mobile Tours," (e.g. www.bikecottagecountry.ca), our database lead nurturing (which resulted in open rates up to 48% and CTRs of up to 20%), as well as our Tourism Excellence North program to optimize individual business offerings and results.

Finally, 2017-2018 will see the establishment of a new 3-Year Destination Development Plan (2017-2020), one that will encapsulate our push into both domestic and international markets while continuing to use our consumer-centric approach.

RTO12 Vision, Mission and Mandate: Revisited in 2017-2018

The first half of the 2017-2018 fiscal year will see a focus on our Product Development Strategy and our Worldly Wise Strategy, both of which will be integral to the formation of a new 3-Year Destination Development Plan (DDP) in the fall of 2017. To that end, to start the year, we will maintain our focus on the Vision, Mission and Mandate of the 2014-2017 DDP to inform our work.

Vision – In three years (2017), EE will be the most popular tourism destination in Ontario (we are arguably this on social media now)

Mission – Explorers’ Edge is an operator-driven organization whose mission is to develop a profitable and thriving tourism industry in the region.

Mandate: “TIIC”

- Train
- Innovate
- Ignite
- Collaborate (with industry stakeholders to ensure travellers choose our tourism destination and its products).

Guiding Principles

These were adopted by the Board in October 2013, and were augmented by five internally developed Operating Principles to further guide programming. The Guiding Principles of the DDP are applicable to the BOP2016-17 as well, and will inform all RTO12 work in 2016-2017.

Guiding Principles – DDP 2014-2017

- Leverage strategic collaborations/partnerships 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 of the region
- Build new audiences
- Increase four season business
- Engage multiple operators

Strategic Goals

The 2014-17 DDP also underscores the challenge of doubling tourism receipts by the Year 2020 (a MTCS objective) and emphasizes alignment with the strategic goals of MTCS in order to attempt to achieve this:

- Double tourism receipts by 2020
- Identify regional priorities that move the provincial RTO agenda forward.

- Change how government and industry work together to develop and foster economic growth.
- Maximize and measure the impact of private and public tourism investments and new and revitalized product
- Reach out to consumers before they get here and once they arrive so that we can welcome more tourists.
- Set standards for success to become more internationally competitive in areas such as workforce development, skills training and others.
- Establish measureable ROI criteria.

These overarching goals are supported by RTO12's comprehensive strategic goals presented further below in this document (see chart).

Regional Overview and Assessment

Insight from the MTCS Tourism Research Unit

RTO12 Estimated Visits:

- 2008: 3.5 million visits
- 2010: 3.8 million visits
- 2011: 4.8 million visits
- 2012: 4.1 million visits
- 2013: 4.3 million visits
- 2014: 4.3 million visits

RTO12 Estimated Spending:

- 2008: \$662 million in spending
- 2010: \$513 million in spending
- 2011: \$598 million in spending
- 2012: \$596 million in spending
- 2013: \$614 million in spending
- 2014: \$589 million in spending

RTO12 Businesses:

- 2008: 1,738 establishments
- 2010: 1,688 establishments
- 2011: 1,666 establishments
- 2012: 1,757 establishments
- 2013: 1,795 establishments
- 2014: 1,905 establishments

In 2014 the region of Explorers' Edge observed:

- Visitor Spending = \$589 M
- Total GDP = \$353 M, 8.0% of Region 12's GDP (highest % of all RTO's)
- Total employment = 5,700 jobs, 12.0% of Region 12's employment (highest % of all RTO's)
- Total tax revenues = \$186 M; \$93 M federal, \$77 M provincial and \$16 M municipal
- Largest # of regional campsites in the region with 4,000 campsites

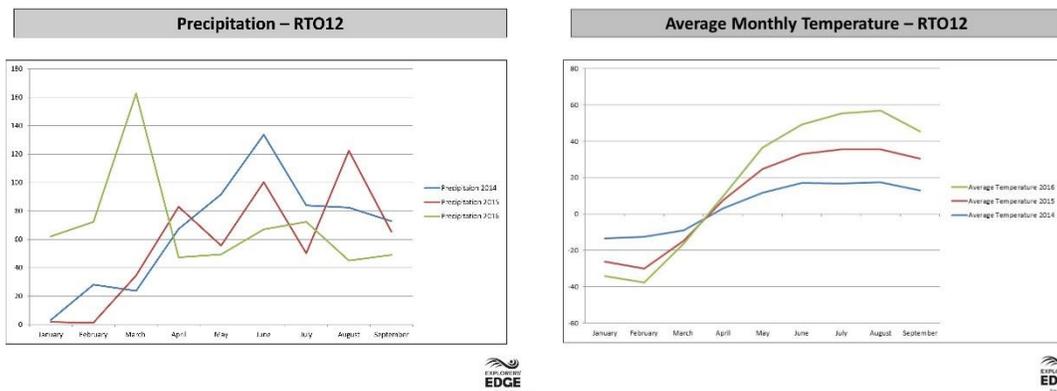
2016: Increased Occupancy

During the previous fiscal year, based on occupancy intelligence gathered by PKF consultants, RTO12 was able to improve overall results (compared to the provincial averages) on all fronts of collected data – occupancy, average daily rate and revenue per room. As our region is so dependent on favourable weather, with any year-over-year decreases being directly attributable to poorer weather, the assumption by the Board of Directors is that, “all weather being equal”, RTO12’s efforts to build tourism in the region are working.

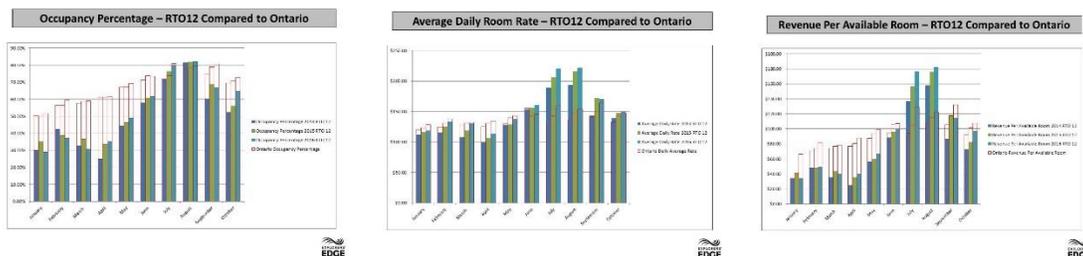
Based on the overall increase in occupancy for RTO12, it is recommended by the Board of Directors that a philosophy of “stay the course” be implemented across the programs of the RTO in the 2017-2018 strategy.

Regional Weather Data – Precipitation and Average Temperature

The summer and fall of 2016 saw year-over-year warmer than average temperatures with a decline in precipitation which complimented the outdoor regional tourism product resulting in favourable occupancy rates for the 2016 travel season.



PKF Occupancy Data



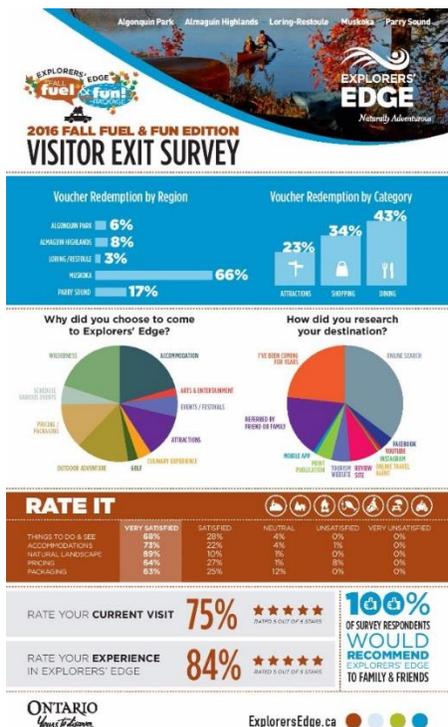
Sub-regional Organic Search Increases

As Explorers' Edge continues to produce exceptional social content marketing results year-over-year the sub-regions continue to yield results as a result of our efforts. According to Google Keyword Planner the average monthly searches for each sub-region are noted below.

	F2016	F2015	F2014	Change 16v15
Algonquin Park	40,500	33,100	N/A	22%
Muskoka	27,100	18,100	12,100	50%
Parry Sound	9,900	8,100	6,600	22%
Almaguin Highlands	590	320	N/A	84%
Restoule	480	390	320	23%

The inference from this is that the social/content/mobile marketing strategy that was introduced in mid-2014 continues to yield results in terms of building new audiences for the region.

Fall Fuel & Fun Visitor Exit Survey



In an effort to leverage our popular Fuel & Fun program to glean traveller insight, after the Fall 2016 edition Explorers' Edge distributed a Visitor Exit Survey to gain critical feedback on the program as well as participants' overall experience in the region.

Gathering this information allowed for valuable analysis of where Fuel & Fun travelers were using their vouchers (including geographical distance between accommodation and attraction), how and why they chose to come to the region, and how satisfied they were with their experience.

Voucher redemption favoured dining followed by shopping and attractions, with Muskoka being the top sub-region for redemption.

Overwhelmingly, those travellers who chose our destination as a result of the transacting program not only rated us favourably in regards to their current visit and general experience of the region, but 100% indicated that they would recommend the region to family and friends.

Tourism Satisfaction Survey

RTO12 / Explorers' Edge continues to set the benchmark in the province of Ontario for industry engagement, satisfaction and collaboration for RTOs. The results of the second provincial industry satisfaction survey again indicate that our focusing intentionally on strategy, process and transparency resonates with our industry colleagues. Highlights include:

- 181 responses to the Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey (a significant increase year-over-year)
- 82% indicated yes to have partnered or collaborated with RTO12 (increase year-over-year)
- RTO12 received a 77% satisfaction rating (when you exclude those who didn't respond: increase year-over-year)
- Strategic Marketing Campaigns, Partnership, Investment Attraction and Product Development were the top areas in which the stakeholders expressed a desire for the RTO to concentrate on (which aligns with our current work strategy)
- Areas for improvement include increased communication with stakeholders, partnerships and leveraging funding opportunities topped the list.
- 93% of respondents cited that the RTO should take the leadership role in attracting international visitors to the region
- Related to International vs. Domestic target audiences, respondents indicate that 1/3 of the overall spend should be used in international markets – the rest for domestic audiences.

Snap shot of the 107 responses from stakeholders when asked their opinion of what the RTO did well:

- Thank you for reaching out. We feel you are doing a great job. Love your work!
- Keep up the great work!
- It is great working with them.
- Keep up the great work! I am proud to have you representing Muskoka
- Explorers Edge has been fantastic for our area.
- We really appreciate the work you are doing, Thank You!
- Inspired, innovative and enthusiastic staff and Board of Directors
- Thanks for the work that you do!
- Apparently RTO12's promotional efforts really paid off!
- There were an increase of paddlers and boats in 2016 over 2015 than there were in our inaugural 2011 year.
- Thank you!
- Keep up the great work!
- I just want to thank Explorers Edge for raising the awareness of The Group of Seven Outdoor gallery and attracting more visitors to our area. Great Job.
- Well done, Explorers' Edge. Keep up the great work and ongoing progress.
- I have had my best two years ever, 2015 and 2016.
- Highly appreciative of RTO12 initiatives and direction
- Great to work with James and staff.
- Thanks for you work!
- Great job! Keep up the excellent work!
- Thank you for your support in the Almaguin Highlands. Your efforts and presence in our region are truly appreciated. We look forward to continuing to partner with you in building tourism capacity throughout the region.

2016 Brand Health Research

The objective of this research is to understand the relative standing of the Explorers' Edge (EE) region compared to competing regions in Ontario, based on past visitation behaviour, intent to visit and current perceptions. This is the fourth brand tracking survey over the past 5 years. 505 responses were collected online in March 2016

Visitation behaviour:

- Visitation patterns have changed very little over the five three years. Niagara continues to dominate as the most commonly visited destination followed by Muskoka in second place. Respondents 35-44 considerably more likely to visit Muskoka and Algonquin Park. Muskoka and Niagara have the highest rate of repeat visits
- Summer continues to be the most popular season to visit EE, though there are signs of progress with respect to shoulder seasons. Older consumers are slightly likely of all age groups to visit in fall, while younger consumers indicate a slightly higher propensity to visit in winter. Niagara continues to be the least seasonal of all regions

Awareness/recall & consideration/intent:

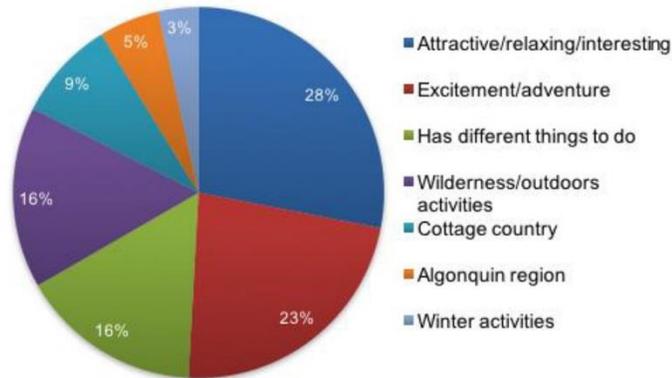
- With unaided recall, Niagara is top of mind, with Muskoka in second place. Algonquin Park is the fifth most mentioned destination, up from previous years. Three sub-regions in EE were not named as recalled destinations
- Niagara, Muskoka and Collingwood are at the top of travelers' consideration sets (little change year-over-year in where they intend to visit in the next 9 months). Torontonians and 25-34 year olds are the most likely to include Explorers' Edge sub-regions in their consideration sets
- Niagara, Hamilton and Muskoka top the list of destinations that respondents intend to visit in the next 12 months. Respondents under 35 and living in Toronto show the greatest intent to visit Explorers' Edge
- **Overall awareness of Explorers' Edge is highest ever at 9%.** Prior visitors to EE, travelers 25-44 and residents of Toronto/GTA have highest levels of awareness. Those who are aware of Explorers' Edge associate it with words consistent with our brand positioning. Likelihood to visit the region is the highest in the five years of measurement with younger travelers show the highest level of intent overall.

Regional perceptions:

- "Momentum" is one measure of the perceived popularity of a region: It is based on the difference between those who say a region is "gaining ground" less those who say a region is "losing ground". Muskoka, Parry Sound and Algonquin are seen to be increasing in popularity while Almaguin Highlands and Port Loring are seen to be doing the opposite
- As was the case in 2014, EE's regions score high on vacation decision criteria related to nature and family-friendliness. We do not fare well on others factors such as proximity, accommodations, accessibility, cultural activities, attractions and dining/entertainment and packaged deals

Explorers' Edge Brand Associations

- Those who are aware of Explorers' Edge associate it with words consistent with our brand positioning



Q37B. Please explain what the Explorers' Edge region means to you?

Consumer travel decision process:

- A region's website is still the most important planning tool; digital activities are three of the top five actions taken
- Places to stay, things to do and places to eat all three rank high in the purchase decision, though where to stay and things to do are slightly more important in the decision process. Younger travelers value dining options more than older ones
- An assessment of 15 potential motivators to visit the region revealed that local food movements and a multiplicity of outdoor activities are most likely to motivate the decision to visit

Building Success: Looking Back to Move Forward

To understand what RTO12 hopes to achieve with BOP17-18, it is necessary to first understand the work conducted in the previous fiscal year and how we will build on it for even greater success. Analyzing the previous year's results, 2016-2017 proved to be very successful for RTO12. The organization can boast of significant achievements under the Five Pillars designated by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (MTCS), including the following:

1. Marketing and Promotion

Domestic

- RTO12 continued its year-round social mobile content marketing strategy (including inhouse content creation) to increase traffic to the consumer-facing website explorersedge.ca (and once again significantly increase traffic year-over-year)
- Increased referrals out to operators
- Explorers' Edge Facebook page has 144K likes and is now a leading social platform for travel in Ontario and Canada; according to analysis site Karma, we have the best social engagement of all the RTOs and provincial marketing agency
- 1 million mark website visitors – milestone reached in January of 2017 (well above yearly target)
- 6.5K lead nurturing database emails added this past fiscal year (1500 over target): open rates for segmented lists up to 48% and CTRs up to 20%
- Lead nurturing offers emailed to database helped to add approximately 100 participants to the Fall Fuel & Fun program, making it “sold out” for the first time in the programs existence (bumped to over 500 registrants)

International Marketing

- ‘The Canada 150 Strategy’ – development Q2&Q3 – launched Q4
- Leveraged 150th birthday buzz to target ex-pats in the U.S. & U.K. to encourage them to promote the great Canadian wilderness using content marketing and contest campaign
- Leads added into segmented database for international audiences to nurture them down the purchase funnel
- Leveraged fund from OTMP and FedNor
- Complimented by partnership between EE, OTMPC and Deerhurst Resort for a trade mission

Partnership Fund

- RTO essentially took on the role of an in-house marketing agency to help partner stakeholders meet their business objectives and ours with content marketing
- CONTENT partnerships included website audits (responsive? blog functionality?), content creation and distribution via social channels
- Partnered with EVENTS such as Bracebridge Fire & Ice and Parry Sound Active Women's Winter Weekend promote these events with content marketing and provide exit survey creation and distribution as well

- PRODUCT PARTNERSHIPS included signage for the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve and the Loring Restoule Business Association, as well as craft beer strategy development

OTMPC

- Listed in the Northern FSI and provided our extensive paddling inventory to help OTMPC Northern develop its Canadian Canoe Culture campaign

2. Product Development

- Package and Itinerary Development: drafted 20 itineraries for consideration (based on Destination Canada EQ Segments) and finalized 10 regional itineraries for future consideration, with some suggested packaging ideas included
- Paddling images, content and video: Birchbark Media engaged to develop photos and video to position this region as a premier paddling destination. Featured canoe, kayak and SUP tourism operators. Specifically the program resulted in a 2-minute promotional video and 4 videos featuring online influencer Kevin Callan – a.k.a. “The Happy Camper.”
- Content added to the Self-Guided Mobile Tours sites

3. Investment Attraction

Much of the focus for this Pillar continued to be the marathon road to bringing commercial air service and international travellers to the Muskoka Airport. To that end, Enterprise Canada was contracted to articulate a communication plan for approaching an airline to partner with. The airline industry was consulted confidentially to determine what it will take to see this happen. The report by Enterprise Canada noted the following:

- There is enough airline interest in providing commercial air service to Muskoka to justify moving forward with this project
- There is a need for strict confidentiality on this project
- We need to demonstrate that Muskoka is prepared and ready to welcome commercial airline service and to then work to sustain its success
- We may use a “2nd Tier” carrier out of Toronto to pilot this program to ensure growth is strategic, steady and sustainable
- There is support for this initiative among the resort industry in Muskoka.
- This is as a long-term project.
- A strong, sustained local commitment is required
- “First and last mile” considerations must be articulated and resolved (e.g. signage, transportation, concierge, packages, tours, etc.)
- There are uncertainty and risk factors beyond the community’s control such as other more attractive routes opening up to an airline resulting in their moment’s notice disengagement

4. Workforce Development & Training

Explorers' Edge continued with its tourism operator engagement strategy of conducting "Ask Me Anything" sessions: featured presenters participated from TripAdvisor, Kuration (content marketing), Bokun Booking Systems (attractions), Google Analytics and MTCS (government programs, Laura Hernando), who were available on scheduled dates to answer any and all questions from regional tourism stakeholders.

Additionally, staff members gave instructional presentations on social media marketing (Parry Sound, Kate Monk) and Jack Rabbit Booking System for Business (Parry Sound Chamber of Commerce, Tyler Francis).

The main development and training program for Explorers' Edge is "Tourism Excellence North" – a partnership between RTO12, RTO13 and FedNor intended to teach best practices and enhance quality of experience offered by individual operators in order to increase their bottom line. Some of the highlights of this program include:

Broker Training (the training of the trainers): North Bay (Chambers of Commerce EDs, Economic Developers)

Fast Track to Success: Johnston's Cranberry Marsh, Lake of Bays Lodge, Bondi Cottage Resort, Hidden Valley Highlands Ski Area, Parry Sound Bikes, White Squall Paddling Centre and Sand Lake Cottages & Inn

Case Study: shoulder season (winter) product development of multiple ice trails (Hanna Park, Bracebridge Winter Village, Johnston's Cranberry Marsh and Muskoka Wharf in Gravenhurst)

Enhancing the Visitor Experience (Sudbury): a 3-day workshop to enhance and develop a range of tourism products and services in communities located along cycling corridors that showcase the stories, cuisine and culture unique to businesses and to Northern Ontario

Experience Travel Training for Operators (Kilarney): a 2-day workshop for businesses providing the tools and insight needed to design and deliver high yield tourism experiences that showcase the stories, cuisine and culture unique to businesses and to Northern Ontario

5. Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability

Continuing with our successful Tourism Operator Relations Strategy, RTO12 continued to communicate using the Tourism Operator Forum and a Customer Relationship Management software program (HighRise). Industry email communications were composed and dispatched monthly. The Tourism Indicator Framework solicited confidential intelligence from the stakeholder community and compiled the results into helpful buckets of info to help tourism stakeholders make informed decisions. (Another RTO contacted RTO12 to find out how to create this useful, one-of-a-kind dash board for stakeholders.)

As previously noted, RTO12's Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey results indicate that 77% of respondents are happy with our performance and communication. Over 100 tourism operators attended the last AGM in June 2016. Explorers' Edge is proud to have an extremely engaged Board of Directors (comprised of tourism owners) who have a 90% annual attendance rate at Board meetings.

2017 – 2018: Globally Competitive & Worldly Wise

With emphasis on continuing to develop domestic visitation while introducing efforts to also build international visitation, all activities of the BOP17-18 (using the MTCS Pillars for guidance) are designed to serve these two purposes.

The BOP17-18 will focus on the following initiative highlights:

Marketing and Promotion:

- Continued investment in “social, mobile, content” as our primary marketing strategy
- Apply the “social, mobile, content marketing” to both international and domestic markets thus continuing to target audiences in Southern Ontario while introducing the targeting of new audiences, particularly from the U.S. and the U.K. (This will be particularly important as we implement our Canada 150 Strategy.)
- Continued investment in media relations/PR to complement our content strategy and domestic and international marketing campaigns
- Continuation of the Fuel & Fun program, with the examination of a tipping point program for international markets (to coincide with commercial air service).
- The development and implementation of the Worldly Wise Strategy (e.g. itinerary and package development, international content marketing campaigns and lead nurturing work flows, a tourism ambassador program, and enhanced travel infrastructure such as signage) to attract international and domestic visitors.

Product Development and Innovation:

Product Development Strategy:

Phase One: Preliminary inventory and asset research and environmental scan (including reviews of existing plans e.g., municipal long-range plans etc.), and identification of tourism product gaps (all pertaining to being a globally competitive branded destination). Recommendations on how to fill those gaps including the resources required.

Phase Two: A broad industry consultation process which, in conjunction with the intelligence gathered in Phase One, will result in a Situation Analysis and Interim Report identifying short-term strategic priorities (3-5 years).

Phase Three: Based on the consultations, research, the Situation Analysis, consumer-market matching, gap identification and recommendations, the development of a comprehensive Tourism Product Development Strategy for Explorers’ Edge will be completed. The Strategy will guide our decision making relating to tourism product development moving forward, taking into account the goals and objectives as outlined.

Investment Attraction:

- Continue to lead the strategy, process and collaboration that will ensure the introduction of regional commercial air service into Muskoka Airport (CYQA).

Workforce Development and Training

- Continuing execution and implementation of the Tourism Excellence North initiative.
- The development and implementation of the Worldly Wise Strategy (e.g. tourism ambassador program, package and itinerary development with tourism operators, etc.)

Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability:

- RTO12 will continue to work within its solid, open and transparent governance structure using collaborative working committees
- Development of a 2017 – 2020 DDP that will emphasize the “Worldly Wise” approach, Product Development, increasing domestic and international visits, and the introduction and sustainability of commercial air service.

2017 – 2018 Strategic Plan: Objectives, Key Activities and Timelines, Performance Measures

Governance

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Governance and Administration			
Governance			
<p>Effective Governance: Govern EE through effective leadership; strong industry representation and following strategy, systems, policies and procedures.</p> <p>Review future membership model for the organization</p> <p>Review future funding model for Explorers' Edge</p> <p>Committee Review & Update</p>	<p>a) Foster organizational capacity with an engaged committee structure in order to deliver regional tourism mandate.</p> <p>b) Manage our assets and liabilities responsibly</p> <p>c) Deliver expected results on time</p> <p>d) Continue to examine revenue generation options for moving toward a financially sustainable organization.</p> <p>e) Review Terms of Reference as well as ●: Selection Criteria, ●Terms, ●Numbers, ●Competency-based skill sets required for all Committees.</p>	<p>a) Review succession plan. Q3</p> <p>b) Complete a skills matrix to identify priority areas for board member recruitment.Q3</p> <p>b) Provide new board members with on-boarding including review of conflict of interest, code of conduct etc. Q1</p> <p>b) Offer a minimum of 2 workshops that help board promote organizational excellence. Q2 – Q3</p> <p>b) Solicit stakeholders' input for business and project plans and report back on activities and decisions.Q3 – Q4</p> <p>b) Regularly review activities, finances at board meetings.Q1 – Q4</p> <p>c) Conduct quarterly board reviews of RTO plans and performance measures against stated objectives and targets; adjust as required.Q1 – Q4</p> <p>d) Continue discussion examining paid membership options for EE.</p>	<p>a) Effective committee participation achieved (goal and target – min at least 50% of committee members have participated in all meetings).</p> <p>b) Effective board participation achieved (goal and target – min at least 70% of board members have participated in all meetings).</p> <p>c) Business plan participation, results of the financial audit and operational reporting (operating goals met, clean audit)</p> <p>d) Time allotted to the discussion of organizational "financial" sustainability and the future funding model (target - during two board meetings and operational planning)</p> <p>e) Membership (target of 200 paid members)</p>

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Operations			
Administrative Activities, Reporting, Situation Analysis, and the development of a updated 3 year Strategic Direction / Critical Path	<p>a) Be recognized by regional tourism operators and stakeholders as a regional tourism resource and catalyst.</p> <p>b) Achieve effective committee participation</p> <p>c) ensure the RTO continues with an industry engaged strategy for tourism and destination development</p>	<p>a) Annual update for Business and Operational Plan. Q3</p> <p>a) Collect and analyse program data, reconcile programs and negotiate TPA. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>a) Fulfill and communicate performance metrics/measurable as outlined in the Transfer Payment Agreement. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>b) Executive, Board and Committee Meetings. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>b) Interact via communication with provincial government agencies as it relates to organizational strategy, progress and outcomes. Q1- Q4</p> <p>c) working with a strategist chart the 2018 – 2021 strategy for the RTO</p>	<p>a) Number of stakeholders operators involved in RTO committee and/or project work, not including partnership fund or anticipated product development initiative. (Target - 14 stakeholders)</p> <p>a) RTO participation with local/regional tourism and/or economic planning processes to offer subject matter input. (goal and target – participation on 5 initiatives)</p> <p>a) Number of regional agencies that the RTO interacts with (target - 22 agencies)</p> <p>b) At least 50% of committee members have participated in all meetings)</p> <p>c) RTO stakeholder strategy presentation and feedback from stakeholders (target – 80 stakeholder completed feedback surveys)</p>

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability			
Continue to liaise with industry stakeholders.	a) Foster outreach to operators, and facilitate information sharing.	a) Provide most recent research findings on website, on tourism trends, RTO 12 and Ministry market research. Q2 Q4	a) Response rate and results of the Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey. (Goal and target – 100 responses and a 75% satisfaction rating)
Develop educational materials informing industry of market research findings.	b) Continue to facilitate development of industry capacity by providing relevant information.	b) Meetings, presentations, face-to-face activities throughout the Region. Q1- Q4	b) Number of new subscribers to Quarterly Outreach Newsletter. (target – 45)
Continue to strengthen communications with industry throughout RTO 12.	c) Strengthen communications with operators.	c) Review, update and assess gaps in the CRM database. Q1	c) Number and types of partnerships with other operators (goal and target - 2)
Continue to engage operators in EE activities and programs.	d) Explore joint marketing, joint product development, and other initiatives that benefit operators.	d) Employ direct mail, Operator Forum and other techniques to engage operators. Q1 & Q4	d) Number of joint marketing, joint product development, other initiatives that benefit operators (target – 2)
Continue to refine Operator Forum database.	e) Increase the number of paid, registered, tourism operator memberships	e) Leverage the Forum & position as an “enabler” for members to develop partnerships/collaborative marketing programs. Q1, Q3 & Q4	e) Increase the number of paid, registered, tourism operator memberships (by 75).
Collaborate with other RTOs (e.g. RTO 13).	f) Sustain the number of subscribers to the Stakeholder Quarterly Outreach Newsletter and increase open rate	f) Conduct regional outreach campaign to develop committee structure to add value to priority program areas. Q1	f) Sustain the number of subscribers to the Stakeholder Quarterly Outreach Newsletter and increase open rate by 2%
Advocacy: continue to represent member concerns to province and other levels of government.		g) Continue industry outreach with one on one interaction	

Marketing

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Marketing			
Consumer Marketing			
Reinforce both the regional and sub-regional brands via content development focus on social media, SEM and content marketing for both domestic and international markets .	<p>a) Increase website analytics, sessions, users, page views, pages/session & average session duration.</p> <p>b) Provide increased number of tourism experiences & packages that correspond with seasonal and general tourism marketing initiatives.</p> <p>c) Ensure marketing content encompasses experiences, geography, sectors and that it includes calls to action.</p>	<p>Activity related to a) Increase website analytics, sessions, users, page views, pages/session & average session duration.</p> <p>Gathering pertinent information to assess current marketing leading to intelligence that will increase analytics, the RTO will i) ascertain feedback from stakeholders via marketing committee meetings and stakeholder interactions, specifically via presentation at various chamber, DOM and Municipal meetings and ii) circulate monthly monitor tracking reports that include change in website traffic, traffic sources, media performance, outbound referrals, social engagement etc. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Developing regional content that includes the use of both in house and third party resources who will develop story ideas, interview stakeholders, research product, capture images (both still and video) with the outcome of content which will be posted to the RTO consumer site explorersedge.ca Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Activities related to b) Provide increased number of tourism experiences & packages that correspond with seasonal and general tourism marketing initiatives. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Both in house and third party resources will search and interact with stakeholders providing workshops and presentations related to the 2016 – 2017 packages and itinerary report. The activity will also encompass education on the</p>	<p>PI related to a)</p> <p>Regional Content developed (target – 60 pieces on Explorers’ Edge website and on applicable microsites) Consumer opt-in for the consumer e-mail database (target – 4,000). Website analytics including: visits (target – 800,000), page views (target – 1.5 million), pages/session (target – 1.51) & avg session duration (target – 1.00 minute)</p> <p>PI related to b)</p> <p>Listed Packages (target - 40)</p> <p>PI related to c)</p> <p>Feedback and communication received from stakeholders on content (target – 60 emails)</p>

		<p>use and applicability of the EE logo, specifically the Canada 150. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Activities related to c) Ensure marketing content encompasses experiences, geography, sectors and that it includes calls to action. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Both in house and third party resources will review, on a monthly basis, marketing reports that reconcile content. The activity will include updates to stakeholders via monthly newsletter highlighting content and ascertaining industry feedback. Q1 – Q4</p>	
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Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
On-line Channels & Social Media			
Continue to strengthen an active, integrated internet/on-line presence.	Create an interest for travel to the region among consumers visiting on-line channels.	<p>Working with the strategist the RTO will monitor consumer product and experience interest on social media platforms and report back to stakeholder’s updates. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>In house resources will monitor, update and respond to travel enquiries related to content on social media channels in coordination with strategist feedback and insight Q1 – Q4</p> <p>In house resources will update social media channels with consumer information using both intelligence gathered at the regional level and provincial level (OTMPC) Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Strategist will provide monthly analysis and market insight into best practices while alerting the RTO to any significant social media changes (algorithms, platform updates i.e. Facebook & twitter) Q1 – Q4</p>	<p>Social media analytics: - Facebook Likes (target – 10,000 new)</p> <p>- Twitter followers (target – 1000 new)</p> <p>- Social media mentions (target – 5,000 new)</p> <p>- Social media comments (target - 2,000 new)</p> <p>- Social media Post Likes (target – 25,000 new)</p> <p>- Social media clicks to Website (target – 100,000 new)</p>

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Media / PR Program			
<p>Participate in selected travel trade and media promotions to facilitate a positive media coverage of RTO12</p>	<p>Increase in brand/story awareness and produce unpaid, positive and engaging editorial coverage in target markets.</p>	<p>Activities related to meeting the objective of increasing the brand/story awareness and produce unpaid, positive and engaging editorial coverage in target markets include the following.</p> <p>In house resources will ascertain, through stakeholder feedback and the monitoring of consumer feedback (in Q4 the RTO will take into consideration outcomes of the Product Development strategy), relevant product and experiences that will have the most impact in the media. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>The RTO will then engage a third party PR Media firm to develop the press / media release through interviews and research followed by the circulation of those press releases to the developed RTO communication list. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>The coordination with the RTO' third party programs OTMPC will be engaged over the course of year to better understand opportunities to engage media FAM trip to the region. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>The media / PR and OTMPC FAM activities will be continually update on the RTO12 website. Q1 – Q4</p>	<p>Increase number of media visits (target – 8)</p> <p>Increase in the number of media contacts in the database (target – 12)</p> <p>Increase in unique visits to the RTO media communication page (target – benchmark)</p> <p>Increase impressions in earned media and in value of media impressions (target 20% year over year)</p>

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Image Bank			
Continue to develop video and image bank.	Expand image bank selection and size to further aid both the RTO and regional stakeholders.	<p>Activities related to expanding image bank selection and size to further aid both the RTO and regional stakeholders include the following:</p> <p>Step one: using in house resources with feedback from photographers (and board, stakeholders, strategist, OTMPC etc.) the RTO has used in the past Identify image bank gaps. Q1</p> <p>Step two: Working with photographers that have been screened (through an EOI process) arrange photo shoots based on gaps and feedback. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Step three: In house resources will communicate updates to stakeholders and tourism partners. Q2 & Q4</p>	<p>Increase in stakeholder’s requests to use imagery in travel and tourism marketing.</p> <p>Increase in # of downloads and subscriptions on photography and videography platforms.</p>

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Transacting			
<p>Provide consumers with tipping point program(s) aimed at growing international and shoulder season travel with the strategic focus to prompt new visits to the region.</p> <p>Of note: the tipping point program Fuel and Fun offers consumers, during the shoulder season a \$50 gas card and two \$25 spending vouchers when they book two nights in the region (vouchers are not redeemable at the accommodation which in turn prompts travellers to move throughout the region indulging in product and experiences)</p>	<p>The objective is to increase average daily spend related to the program, introduce new travelers to regional product and encourage the use of packages and special offers.</p>	<p>Activities related to meeting the objective of increasing average daily spend related to the program, introducing new travelers to regional product and encouraging the use of packages and special offers include the following:</p> <p>Step one, in house, is to review historical program out comes in order to understand impact and relevance of the program. Q1</p> <p>Ongoing regional coordination with stakeholders to field feedback and opportunities for collaboration (this activity is done via webinar Ask Me Anything, presentations and newsletter correspondence) , Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Working with in house resources the team develops dates, communication channels, creative look of the program followed by activities related to fielding consumer applications and finally the delivery of the packages to accommodations. Q2</p> <p>Launch program to consumers via in house resources and leverage stakeholder marketing channels via social media. Q2</p> <p>To conclude the program In-house resources will field a visitor exit survey to consumers who participated in the program. Q3</p>	<p>Change in first time visitation from those consumers who participated in the program (target – 75%) and pre-planned visitation (target – 18%)</p> <p>Redemption rate of vouchers (target – 70%)</p> <p>Transacting Visitor Exit Survey response (target – 100)</p> <p>Operator Satisfaction with the transacting program (target – 85% satisfied or highly satisfied)</p>

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Transacting			
<p>Jack Rabbit Referral system: Maintain, grow and sustain on-line referrals (8); continue to ensure operator sites are up-to-date.</p>	<p>a) Consumer – to provide a breadth of accommodation, experience and package offering</p> <p>b) Industry - To sustain operator involvement while attempting to expand the widget to additional partner websites.</p>	<p>a) Using in house resources the RTO will review on a monthly basis gaps in the accommodation, experience and package list followed by updating the widget with any new relevant information. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>b) Using in house resources activates will be undertaken in order to coordinate stakeholders field feedback and opportunities for collaboration (specifically the RTO will provide and on-line webinar Ask Me Anything and present the program in each sub-region) Q1 – Q4</p>	<p>a) Online referral and reservation system referrals (target – 40,000)</p> <p>b) Change in the number of operators with a rate and inventory information on JackRabbit (target - 20 operators) & increase Number of packages listed on the Jack Rabbit platform (target - 45)</p>

Product Development

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Product Development			
Product Development Strategy			
Development of a Product Development Strategy	Identify opportunities for public and private sector collaboration at enhancing tourism product in the region as well as find creative solutions to support private sector operators to grow their business.	<p>Using in house resource the RTO will develop and execute a RFP in order to engage and on-board a third party regarding the strategy development and execution of a product development strategy Q1</p> <p>The selected third party will provide the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Preliminary Research on current regional product b) Broad Industry Consultation Process (outreach meetings and town halls) c) In coordination with in house resources the development of a comprehensive Tourism Product Development Strategy. d) The communication of the strategy to regional stakeholders <p>In house resource activities in Q4 will include a survey to stakeholders related to satisfaction levels on the strategy.</p>	<p># of tourism stakeholders involved in the product development consultation process (target – 80)</p> <p># of town halls associated with the development of the strategy (target ~ 3)</p> <p># of post strategy presentations (target – 4)</p> <p>Feedback survey completions (target ` 40) with a 60% project outcome satisfaction response)</p>

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Product Development			
Cycling			
Completion of regional cycling workshops and market readiness seminars.	Ensure cycle market readiness consistency region wide	Work with Ontario by Bike to complete cycle market readiness with Muskoka and Almaguin Highlands tourism stakeholders.	# of tourism stakeholders involved in the Ontario by Bike seminars (target – 40)
Self-Guided Mobile Tours			
Ensure that consumer centric philosophy is integrated into the communication and development of regional product.	Continue to refine the suite of self-guided mobile tours, maintaining and growing the tours related to cycling, craft beer and group of seven.	<p>In house resources in coordination, with third party input, will update and refine the developed self-guided mobile tours.</p> <p>Third party product experts will trouble shoot and identify self-guided mobile tours gaps while offering un biased insight (in the form of an assessment report) into opportunities for enhancement. Q1 – Q3</p> <p>In house resources will then communicate updates to tourism industry partners (regionally, provincially and federally) Q1 – Q4</p>	<p># of updates to the suite of self-guided mobile tours (target – 6)</p> <p>Presentation of the self-guided tour assessment report to stakeholders (target – 3 presentations)</p>
Research			
Continue to improve the Tourism Indicator Framework.	The development of an annual report via online dashboard capturing the data collected across the key performance measures (HST, attractions, occupancy, weather, etc.). Include PKF data.	<p>Over the course of the year using staff resources the RTO will network with stakeholder to assemble data related to Organizational Program Performance, Tourism Business Performance, Visitor Intelligence via an Exit Survey Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Staff resources will also acquire and analyze consumer market research; review for DDP next year Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Additionally staff resources will continue to keep abreast of and integrate relevant Ministry research while Q1 – Q4</p>	<p>Sustain the number of section items and indicators included in the Tourism Indicator Framework (target - 6 sections and 6 indicators)</p> <p>Number of views / downloads of the online dashboard (target - 250).</p> <p>Number of participants in the online dashboard (target- 35)</p> <p>Number of research presentations (target - 6)</p>

Investment Attraction

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Investment Attraction			
Provide operators and stakeholders with the necessary tools, trends applicable tourism development opportunities and applicable information to succeed.	<p>a) Ensure tourism related opportunities are top of mind in the context of economic development</p> <p>b) Explore programs for attracting unique investment that will differentiate the region</p> <p>c) To position the region as an investment opportunity to the airline industry as it relates to commercial air service.</p>	<p>a) Using in house resources disseminate relevant tourism related investment attraction information to stakeholders on a quarterly basis Q1 – Q4</p> <p>b) Using in house resources organize investment attraction networking event(s) with regional economic developers. Q1 & Q3</p> <p>c) Using in house resources communicate commercial regional air service opportunities to the airline community via presentations, networking and airline interaction. In house resources will also ensure the broader regional group of stakeholders is involved and abreast of developments. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>This will also include activities related to engagement sessions with the District of Muskoka, Muskoka Airport, Transport Canada, CATSA, regional stakeholders and consultant outreach. Q1, Q3 & Q4</p> <p>The RTO will engage a third party via a EOI process to develop a strategy that ensures all relevant gaps and opportunities are considered in the consumer experience related to a regional airline experience (the RTO refers to this as a “Wordly Wise Strategy”). The strategy will outline all the considerations that need to be addressed in the final mile once a consumer has engaged in travel to the region via air.</p>	<p>a) # of attendees at investment seminar / workshop(s) (target 20)</p> <p>b) # of program / projects created or maintained (target – 2)</p> <p>c) # of regional outreach engagement sessions (target - 5) and the development of an airline “Wordly Wise” strategy / report.</p>

Workforce

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Work Force			
Needs Identification			
Work with other agencies to help identify industry needs and collaborate to encourage and deliver relevant tourism training.	Identification of workforce gaps and opportunities related to the regional tourism workforce.	<p>Using in house resources the RTO will work with existing organizations to coordinate workforce development, prospect/ opportunities in EE & facilitate/communicate workforce opportunities.</p> <p>As a result of in house interaction with stakeholders the RTO will update committees and partners with information related to the regional workforce (via newsletters, Ask Me Anything presentations and social media industry posts.</p> <p>The RTO will also assigning staff resources to review workforce and assimilate resources in the region and produce quarterly reports to be posted to the website. Q1 – Q4</p>	<p>Number of workforce development opportunities communicated (target – 5)</p> <p># of tourism participants in skills development programs communicated by the RTO (target - 15) & the satisfaction of those participants (target – 80% indicate high satisfaction)</p>
Tourism Career Desirability			
Promote availability and desirability of careers in tourism industry throughout RTO 12	Position the region as a welcoming world class destination for a tourism career.	<p>In house resources will work with existing RTO committees to flesh out opportunities, strengths and desirability of the region as a tourism career.</p> <p>Content will be developed via in house and third party interviews, research and photography to be placed on the RTO12 website and communicated to those seeking a career in tourism via a social media channels.</p>	<p># of stakeholders participating in the development of content (target – 20)</p> <p># of pieces of content produced on the desirability of a career in tourism (target – 3)</p>

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Work Force			
TEN			
Implementation of the Tourism Excellence North (TEN)	In the final year of the pilot program the objective will be to review, reconcile and better understand its impact and future applicability.	<p>Staff resources will be used in order to perform the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilize brokers via weekly communication (development of newsletters, one-on-one phone calls etc.) • Attending TEN management meetings • Coordinate training solutions • Interview and solicit feedback from stakeholders, past participants and partners • Develop report on the impact of the program as it relates to product and experiences. • Communicate pilot initiatives via webinars, presentations and social interaction. 	<p># of regional brokers communicating the program (target – 8)</p> <p># of Management meetings (target – 3)</p> <p># of stakeholders interviews (target – 25)</p> <p># of training solutions that the RTO coordinated (target - 12)</p>

Partnership Allocation

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Workforce Development			
Strengthen regional product and operators via participation in the Tourism Excellence North Program	Increase stakeholder participation in tourism development opportunities, specifically increasing the quality of the visitor experience both the operator and municipal level.	<p>The third party, TEN staff, will provide the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate brokers with information related to on line resources • Execute regional case studies (interviews, video, research) • Develop and refine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-assessment tools • Group learning programs for communities i.e. Best Practice Missions • Multi-day workshop for operators and community partners immerses participants in the 'what' and the 'how ' of experiential travel. • Experience Travel Training for Operators • Group learning programs for operators i.e. Best Practice Missions • Operator Personalized Coaching – Fast Track to Success 	<p># of stakeholder participating in the Tourism Excellence North partnership (target - 25)</p> <p>Programs include: Best Practice Mission Fast Track to Success Case Studies</p> <p># of Operators registered (target – 200)</p>
Content Marketing			
Enhancing and expanding tourism content related to RTO12 across/throughout/with tourism stakeholders.	Increase of information (blogs/content) and the impact of such information in the market place for consumers.	<p>Using staff resources work with regional stakeholders in the development of content related to regional product offering via collaborative partnerships. Q1</p> <p>Third party content development includes research, interviews and photography (in some cases video). Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Using staff resources develop necessary contracts. Q1 – Q2</p>	<p># of content pieces produced (goal and target – 10)</p> <p>Partner satisfaction with the partnership (target 75% satisfied)</p>

		<p>Using staff resources on board partners and AOR. Q2 – Q3</p> <p>Engage agency of record to traffic content on Facebook. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Using staff resources execute, track and report back on project deliverables. Q2 – Q4</p> <p>Using staff resources solicit feedback on the content partnership. Q-4</p>	
Event and Festival Marketing			
Marketing of regional events and festivals through program communication tactics before, during and post events and festivals.	Ensure regional events and festivals have the necessary reach and communication tactics in place to bring net-new travellers to the region.	<p>Using staff resources work with regional event organizers to develop collaborative partnerships, flesh out applicable tactics (social media advertising, radio, print, on-line ads). Q1</p> <p>Engage third party(s) to execute a suite of tactics to drive event gate receipts and package sales (related to the event and aligned with overnight accommodation). Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Using staff resources develop necessary third party contracts. Q1 – Q2</p> <p>Using staff resources on board partners and AOR. Q2 – Q3</p> <p>Using staff resources execute, track and report back on project deliverables. Q2 – Q4</p>	<p># of events and festivals strengthened as a result of RTO partnership (target – 8)</p> <p># of event packages sold (target – 100 benchmark)</p> <p># of consumer visitor exit surveys associated with partnership events (target – 400)</p>

Marketing Plan

Based on the exceptional results with the “social/content/mobile marketing strategy” that was implemented in 2014-2015 (see above), and on the information gleaned from the Tourism Business Indicator Framework, the Board of Directors of RTO12 has recommended that the marketing strategy for 2017-2018 be a continuation of what was set in place in the previous year, with the introduction of various refinements (e.g. quality of content over quantity, the testing of new channels, the application of our domestic approach to the international programs, etc.).

Marketing Mission

To make our target audience (“Ontario Explorers”) aware of the Explorers’ Edge region and of the exceptional tourism offerings found in the sub-regions within, in order to convert targeted audiences into overnight travelers to the region.

Marketing Manifesto

As our target audience continues to turn away from traditional advertising and other interruptive marketing, we will continue to use content marketing to ensure this region is foremost in their consideration when they are thinking of travelling. Of particular note, we will attempt to ensure we have a high standard of content and social interactions, so that our efforts are optimized.

The challenge with traditional advertising is that most of what it communicates is irrelevant to our target needs or reaches them at the wrong time. What distinguishes content is that it seeks not to interrupt, but to be found – and to be found at precisely the moment when the target is ready to consider our message. Moreover, because it's better suited to inform and educate, our content will attract visitors to Explorers’ Edge and its 5 sub-regions, and engage potential customers much earlier in the path to purchase.

And unlike traditional advertising, content marketing doesn't limit the scope of our message, and allows us to communicate the breadth and depth of the Explorers’ Edge proposition and be inclusive of ALL the regions it comprises. (It also means more of our marketing budget is spent on reaching the prospect and not on agency fees and creative development.)

We have already found our voice as social mobile content publishers, and have proven that content marketing can bring qualified prospects to the region.

In 2017-2018 we will fully commit ourselves to solidifying our place as the leading content marketers in the Ontario tourism industry, and to out-performing our competitors for the attention of Ontario Explorers. We will publish more compelling content – content designed to convince and convert - and ensure that it is fully optimized for the social mobile consumer.

We will once again be Ontario tourism’s leading social mobile content marketers in 2017-2018.

Brand Positioning

A quintessentially Canadian wilderness experience just 2 hours from the city.

Tagline

“The great Canadian wilderness just north of Toronto.”

Brand Voice

Earnest, approachable, informed and, most of all, “Canadian”

Marketing Priorities

Publish exceptional content that serves the ‘Ontario Explorers’ segment as well as specific niche markets (pertaining to product development – cycling, paddling, craft beer and culinary) and promote it via social media (inbound marketing) primarily

While our focus will be on “discoverers” (i.e. new audiences), our content marketing strategy will also attract “searchers” (i.e. audiences planning trips who are further down the purchase funnel)

Grow amount of quality traffic to the Explorers’ Edge website (800K visits total)

Grow number of qualified referrals out to tourism stakeholder websites (200K total)

Convert Visitors: Nurture consumer leads and convert them to “heads-in-beds” and increase the number of leads in the segmented database

Target U.S. and U.K. markets (via the Partnership Program – articulated at the end of this Marketing Plan)

Marketing Objectives 2017-2018

- Publish 60 pieces of exceptional quality content across multiple websites (new and updated): 1) www.explorersedge.ca (most important) 2) www.bikecottagecountry.ca 3) www.go7murals.ca and 4) www.cottagecountrybeertrail.ca
- Drive 800K visits to the Explorers’ Edge website using content marketing
- Add 4K leads to the email database
- Drive 200K referrals to regional tourism stakeholder websites
- Increase the number of Earned Media impressions
- Continue to promote the brand for competitive positioning

Priority Target Market(s)

- Ontario Explorers: Married with kids – 35 to 60 years old. Above average household income (HHI) and education. Uses digital media to plan holidays and enjoys broadcast media like radio during commute. Takes family trips in Ontario every summer.
- We will target Ontario Explorers who are not actively seeking information (a.k.a. “discoverers”) by increasing the amount of content published on social media platforms
- We will target Ontario Explorers who are actively seeking information (a.k.a. “searchers”) by increasing the amount of content on Explorersedge.ca and with search engine advertising.
- The Ontario Explorers (2012) mirrors the identified Connected Explorer that was segmented in the Consumer Insight Research Segmentation Report (2013).

Secondary Market(s)

- International (specifically the U.S.)

Marketing Tactical Plan

Content Publishing Strategy

We focus editorial content on the following:

- Content that is attractive to our six established marketing “Personas” – Motorsports Enthusiasts, Food & Culture Fans, Outdoor Adventurers, Family Vacationers, Hunters & Fishers, Fit & Sportives
- The purchase decision criteria where EE is perceived to be lacking against competitor regions (these include proximity/accessibility, accommodations, cultural activities, attractions and dining/entertainment)
- Communities of interest, or niches, such as cyclists and paddling enthusiasts, etc.
- We will publish content that has universal appeal (and thus highly shareable) but still connects to the region (e.g. “Winter Photography: Don’t Put Your Camera Away Just Yet”)
- We will publish 60 new pieces of content in 2017-2018 using this strategic mix as a guideline
- We will produce high quality content, which may include quality videos and photos, as well as text that is optimized for search (and includes no fewer than 500 words).

Primary Marketing Channel(s)

- Facebook
- Hubspot
- Instagram

Marketing Funnel: Inbound Marketing to Move Followers Further Down the Funnel

By using content marketing to attract email sign-ups (inbound marketing), Explorers’ Edge intends to develop more targeted communications with interested parties in order to move them further down the “purchase funnel” (i.e. turn “discoverers” into “searchers” into “purchasers”). This is known as the Lead Nurturing Strategy, which relies on email marketing software from Hubspot to build enhanced customer experiences (as per the “Consumer –Centric Regional Application” from the 2014-2017 DDP) to enhance customer relations (and ongoing selling).



Lead Nurturing Program Objectives

The strategy for 2017-2018 is to convert more leads (travel planners) into purchasers (travellers who book in our region). We will measure this based on referrals out to tourism stakeholder websites and on package clicks (trackable in the Hubspot back end). The primary objectives of the Lead Nurturing Strategy, now that Personas have been established and the audiences are being segmented based on Personas, will be twofold:

Continue to build the overall list of email recipients

- Introduce additional calls to action that will evoke more bookings in the region e.g. package offers in content or in email newsletters with approximately 40 packages promoted
- Marketing automation software (Hubspot) will make it possible to increase the potential success of our Lead Nurturing Strategy by doing the following:
 - Automating the deployment of customized email based on the behaviour of our website users (e.g. which specific pieces of content are leads clicking on? Can additional direct response content be sent to them around their interests to send them further down the purchase funnel?)
- One-off emails to address tourism challenges or promote a specific program (example Fuel & Fun)

The Lead Nurturing Strategy will entail that each segmented user is sent, at a minimum, four quarterly e-newsletters that contain specific calls to action.

Timing for Lead Nurturing Strategy Implementation

In market week of April 1, 2017 and run to week of March 31, 2018

Marketing Partnerships with OTMPC

Explorers' Edge participated in multiple co-branded marketing initiatives with OTMPC in the previous fiscal year, including the (costly and ineffective) Northern FSI. In 2017-2018 we will consider – but not commit to – the following OTMPC initiatives:

- Group of Seven
- Canada150 programs
- International Opportunities
- Canadian Paddle Culture

Media Relations / PR

RTO12 will continue to work with our AOR (Enterprise Canada) to build awareness of the branded destination, our programs and products using strategic media outreach tactics.

Testing New Tactics

Explorers' Edge will continue to research and test multiple advertising tactics in order to optimize our results (while ensuring cost-effectiveness of each tactic).

Tracking / Measurement

As part of our marketing management, we will track the results of the campaign and provide a “dashboard” of results. These metrics include:

- Web ad impressions/clicks
- Traffic profiles/trends on Explorers’ Edge websites
- Visits by influential bloggers to the region
- Social media posts
- Social network mentions (Facebook/Twitter)
- New interactions with Explorer's Edge (including e-news sign ups)
- Net new Facebook fans and Facebook interactions (insights)
- Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Pinterest and Google Plus insights
- Referrals – Jack Rabbit Referral System and outbound links

The Partnership Program

In an effort to achieve optimal results with the Partnership Funds provided to RTO12 (and to build greater volume of visitors to the region), partnerships in 2017-2018 will focus on the following areas:

Workforce Development

- RTO12 will continue to partner with FedNor, NOHC, and RTO13 to develop the TEN Program, specifically a suite of 10 training solutions designed to strengthen the ability of tourism operations to respond to changes in the marketplace, to adapt to quality visitor expectations, and to develop innovative experiences that raise the bar on visitor value and deliver increased returns for operations and the destination as a whole.

Content Marketing Partnerships

- Content will focus on information that is attractive to our six established marketing “Personas” – Motorsports Enthusiasts, Food & Culture Fans, Outdoor Adventurers, Family Vacationers, Hunters & Fishers, Fit & Sportives
- The purchase decision criteria where EE is perceived to be lacking against competitor regions (these include proximity/accessibility, accommodations, cultural activities, attractions and dining/entertainment)
- Communities of interest, or niches, such as cyclists and paddling enthusiasts, etc.
- We will publish content that has universal appeal (and thus highly shareable) but still connects to the region (e.g. “Winter Photography: Don’t Put Your Camera Away Just Yet”)

Event and Festival Marketing

- The regional partnership allocation for Festival & Events will help attract visitors to the province and encourage them to stay longer and spend more in the region. Based on past results, RTO12 will favour the projects of those programs that clearly articulate how they are going to target tourists (i.e. bring visitors to the region, not just exist for permanent and seasonal residents) and how they will promote overnight packages pertaining to the event.

Risk Identification, Assessment, and Mitigation Strategies

While there are no identified barriers or possible risks to successfully delivering on BOP2017-2018, the Board of Directors will wisely defer some decisions until more data are obtained. The Board at times will also, if necessary, restructure a project such that the impact of early decisions on “downstream” execution is minimized. Additionally, projects will also be reviewed for go or no-go decisions at identifiable, discrete points.

RTO12 project risk management is an iterative process that begins in the early phases of each project and is conducted throughout the project life cycle. The RTO applies proactive, systematic thinking about all possible outcomes before they happen and defining procedures to accept, avoid, or minimize the impact of risk on the project.

Types of risk that are considered during the process include:

- Financial risk of the budget and project costs
- Government/political risk such as regulatory change, legislative change or policy change
- Physical risk such as natural disasters, fire, accidents, death etc.
- Technical risk such as IT security, infrastructure, software etc.
- Participants i.e. project managers, team members, stakeholders and experts.
- The following Best Practices are implemented by the RTO to mitigate risk:
- Identify Early – identify risks as early as possible in the project lifecycle.
- Identify Continuously – continue to identify and reevaluate project risk.
- Analyze – analyze the potential impact of the identified project risk.
- Define and Plan – define risk thresholds and triggers
- Communicate – regularly communicate status and risk
- Update – update stakeholders as often as possible
- Educate- educate the entire board of directors and encourage them to actively communicate and mitigate risk

Business and Operational Overview

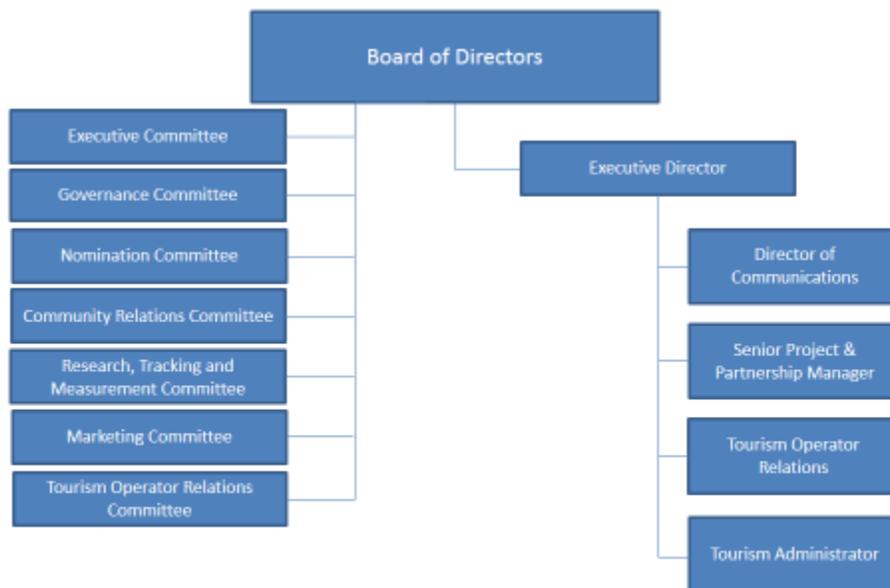
EE is governed by a 16-member volunteer Board of Directors. A “lean and mean” staff of five employees conduct the day-to-day activities of the organization. Board and staff members are identified in Appendix A.

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. Marketing and Promotion, 2. Tourism Operator Relations, 3. Community Relations, 4. Research, Tracking and Measurement, 5. Governance. 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 Executive meets weekly; the Board meets bi-monthly and Committees meet quarterly. 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.

Organizational Chart



Budget Items	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL
Administration & Overhead					
Salaries & Benefits	95,750	95,750	95,750	95,750	383,000
Finance and Administration (Accounting, Audit, Legal)	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	10,000
General Administration (Office Equipment, Rent, Telephone)	14,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	44,000
Travel and General Expenses	15,000	15,000	10,000	10,000	50,000
Other Administration (Insurance, Bank Charges)	1,250	1,250	1,250	750	4,500
SUBTOTAL	128,500	124,500	119,500	119,000	491,500
Governance - Industry Relations					
Outreach/Meetings	1,250	1,250	1,250	1,250	5,000
Governance , Policy, Communication, Planning (AGM, Operational Planning, Governance Training)	2,500	2,500	15,000	5,000	25,000
Membership	3,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	6,000
Website	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	10,000
SUBTOTAL	9,250	7,250	19,750	9,750	46,000
Marketing and Promotion					
Marketing & Social Media					
Social Media Advertising - Domestic	40,000	80,000	40,000	52,000	212,000
Social Media Advertising - International	20,000	30,000	20,000	5,000	75,000
OTMPC	5,000	-	-	-	5,000
Content Development / Guest Authors	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	10,000
Promotions/Contests/Incentives	10,000	5,000	2,500	2,500	20,000
Creative Development	-	-	2,500	2,500	5,000
Project Mgmt.	10,763	10,763	10,763	10,763	43,050
Strategy Development / Strategist	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	48,000
Lead Nurturing	4,200	4,200	4,200	4,200	16,800
Image Bank	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	10,000

Media/PR	10,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	25,000
Transacting - Spring Fuel and Fun	30,000	-	-	-	30,000
Transacting - International	-	30,000	-	-	30,000
Transacting - Jack Rabbit	65,000	-	-	-	65,000
SUBTOTAL	211,963	181,963	101,963	98,963	594,850
Investment Attraction					
Outreach/Meetings	2,000.00	2,000.00	1,000.00	-	5,000
SUBTOTAL	2,000	2,000	1,000	0	5,000
Product Development and Innovation					
Product Development Strategy	60,000	-	-	-	60,000
Mobile Self-Guided Tour Updates	-	5,000	-	-	5,000
Cycling Development	5,000	5,000	-	-	10,000
Research	10,000	-	-	5,000	15,000
SUBTOTAL	75,000	10,000	-	5,000	90,000
Workforce Development					
Workforce Development	20,000	5,000	5,000	499	30,499
SUBTOTAL	20,000	5,000	5,000	499	30,499
Partnership					
Workforce Development (TEN)	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	48,000
Content Marketing	20,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	65,000
Event and Festival Marketing	20,000	20,000	9,000	4,000	53,000
SUBTOTAL	52,000	47,000	36,000	31,000	166,000
TOTAL AGREEMENT COSTS	498,713	377,713	283,213	264,212	1,423,849