



2015-2016 BUSINESS AND OPERATIONAL PLAN

April 1, 2015 - March 31, 2016
(Updated January 13, 2015)



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Explorers' Edge 2015-16 BUSINESS and OPERATIONAL PLAN

The Explorers' Edge *Business and Operational Plan (2015-16)* builds on RT012 successes since the organization's inception in 2010. The Plan reflects priorities in the three-year *2014-17 Destination Development Plan (DDP)*, which were mapped out by the Board of Directors in a Strategy Session in October 2013. The Business and Operational Plan 2015-16 further elaborates on these priorities and identifies associated tactics, timeframes, responsibilities and measurables.

Progress achieved in 2014 is consistent with the previous three years of operation. The organization can boast of several successes under the five Pillars designated by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (MTCS):

1. **Marketing and Promotion**

2014 Explorers' Edge undertook a significant year-round content strategy, which produced ongoing market presence and strong social media reach and engagement. In addition, an online referral and reservation system was introduced to further drive operator referrals and to build on the consumer-centric philosophy established in the prior Destination Development Plan. The organization also continued with its highly successful signature transacting program – Fuel and Fun, and garnered earned media for regional stakeholders. Collaboration with OTMPC continued, including the development of the Northern Ontario Free Standing Insert (FSI), one of four FSIs distributed as part of the provincial marketing strategy. The Partnership Fund Program entered into its second year with regional partnerships supporting events, niche markets, product development and workforce development. The Partnership Fund was again leveraged with FedNor/Industry Canada, ensuring partnerships had an even greater impact on regional tourism development.

2. **Product Development and Innovation**

Explorers' Edge built on the success of 2013 product development that included the Ice Trail and the Ride the Edge, and made additional strategic investment and planning in cycling, golf, the natural landscape, arts and culture (Group of Seven) and fishing.

3. **Investment Attraction**

In 2014 Explorers' Edge facilitated opportunities via Economic Development breakfast presentations that communicated local, regional and provincial investment programs and best practices. As a result the Community Relations Committee saw an increase in participation from various levels of government.

4. **Workforce Development & Training**

Over the course of the year a continued focus was placed on Social Media Training, encouraging tourism operators and stakeholders to learn how to leverage the power of social media for their own business and organizational success. The year also saw an increased use of the RTO/OTMPC segmentation research, the use and understanding of which was promoted through workshops.

5. **Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability**

In 2014 the RTO continued with the online Tourism Operator Forum, Customer Relationship Management software program and updated Tourism Indicator Framework. Over the course of 2014 the RTO also administered a stakeholder satisfaction survey that garnered the highest response (126 stakeholder responses) of any RTO in the province, and produced a 72% approval rating of stakeholders being satisfied (18%) or highly satisfied (54%). Only 2% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the RTO and its initiatives.

In addition, a governance review was conducted, pointing out strengths and weaknesses in order to improve operations. The annual AGM was held in June 2014 and a financial audit was completed in 2014. The organization is in good financial health and continues to rely on strong governance to forge its way in the industry.

Tourism Context

In 2012, 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 continued 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 organization's goals.

The *2015-16 Business and Operational Plan* reinforces the strategic goals found in the 2014-17 DDP. Strategies, initiatives and actions for April 1, 2015–March 31, 2016 are presented along with responsibilities, timelines, required resources and monitoring and measurement outcomes.

The *2015-16 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.



1. Introduction and Year in Review

Regional Tourism Organization 12 (RTO 12) was established in 2010 by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism to represent the broad geographic area of Algonquin Park, Almaguin Highlands, Parry Sound and Muskoka; the geographical area was branded “Explorers’ Edge” (EE) in 2011. This *Business and Operational Plan (2015-16)* builds on successes undertaken by Explorers’ Edge during the past four 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 2015-16* 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 2014

Explorers’ Edge (EE) can boast of major successes in the past year. The organization has matured foundationally, and is now focused delivering its strategic consumer-centric approach, which entails engaging “searching or discovering audiences” through branded content development, social and SE marketing, investment in an online referral system and website re-design, and the continuation of differentiating “tipping point programs,” such as Fuel & Fun. As always, the administrators do everything with a constant eye to ROI, risk management, and sound measurement/tracking.

The next few pages highlight the progress achieved in 2014. Major accomplishments for the year are shown in **Table 1** based on the five Pillars Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (MTCS):

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 June 2014 and a financial audit was completed in 2014. 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 content strategy; 2014 is the first year that EE has moved from a “start & stop” marketing campaign platform to an in-market year-round content development strategy.

→ Marketing Transacting Programs Strengthened and Continued – Fuel and Fun continues to bring new visitors to the region and provides consumers with an incentive to choose EE over other travel destinations.

→ Collaborated with partners to leverage \$60K and in-kind contributions (OTMPC-Free Standing Insert (FSI), Northern OTMPC-Ride the Edge FAM Tours) to be used for marketing and capacity-building.

→ Brand Health Study showed Explorers' Edge brand steadily climbing upwards in awareness.

→ Implementation of an Online Referral and Reservation System.

→ Increase in Media FAM tours.
2. Product Development and Innovation
- Building off the success of the Ride the Edge product development program EE turned its attention to Groups of Seven, Natural Landscapes, cycling, fishing and culture, efforts that included inventory overview, operator development and content expansion.
3. Investment Attraction
- Worked with Regional economic development agencies and provided opportunities to learn about provincial best practices, strategies and opportunities with the provincial government.
4. Workforce Development & Training
- Regional Capacity Building continued in Port/Loring Restoule, Almaguin Highlands, Parry Sound.

→ Continued to develop Social Media Training Suite for tourism operators and stakeholders.

→ Provided key resources and education to market segmentation research via Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation and Muskoka Tourism.
5. Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability
- On-line Peer to Peer Forum (former Tourism Operator Forum) re-deployed.

→ Increased use of the Customer Relationship Management Software program.

→ Online research resources for operators that includes sub regional data resources.

→ Tourism Indicator Framework development to gauge health of industry in a timely basis saw increased participation and usage, while expanding to include MTCS research data and RTO Stakeholder Survey outcomes.

→ The RTO assisted the District of Muskoka and Muskoka Tourism in the project management of the Muskoka Tourism Marketing Summit, facilitating communication & organization.
6. Governance
- Governance Review (Bylaws, Policies, Committee Terms of Reference).

i. Marketing

Four marketing components were identified as successes:

- i. Market Presence,
- ii. Social Media,
- iii. Transacting Program, and
- iv. Media Relations.

Market Presence: Increase in market presence occurred as a result of having strong content as well as unique and differentiating experiences communicated in market throughout the year.

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

Social Media: Continued success as a result of a refinement in the marketing and communication strategy established in 2012 and continued through 2014. From early days, Explorers' Edge has been at the forefront of digital marketing, incorporating social media in all activities to promote the entire region.

Transacting Programs: The successful “Fuel and Fun Promotional Package” was offered during Spring as well as Fall to increase shoulder season visitation by offering incentives to consumers. The program is open to all operators and has a built-in tracking mechanism. The program continues to bring new first-time visitors and to help travelers choose this region over other destinations in the shoulder seasons.

Media Relations: EE hosted key Familiarization Media Tours in our region over the course of the year.

ii. Organizational Development

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

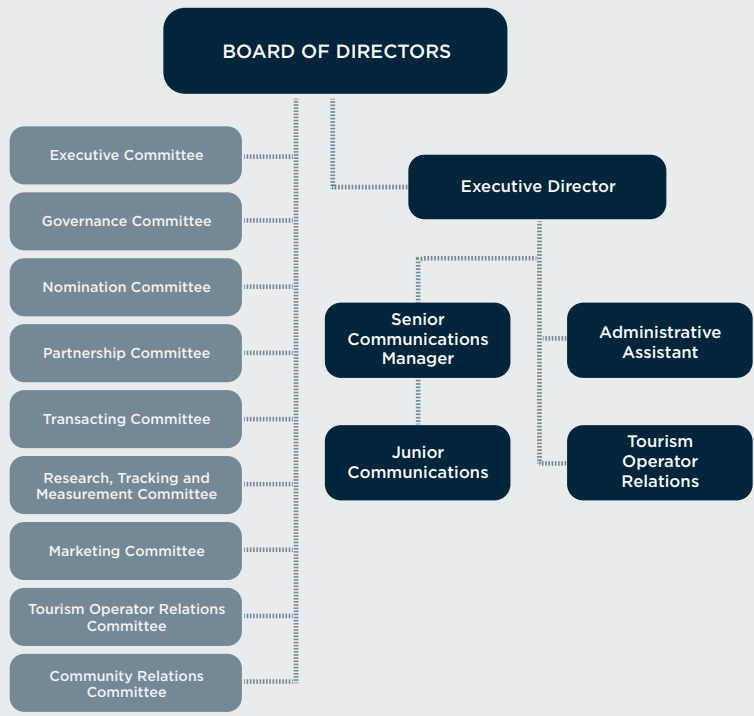
In order to meet the goals established by EE, the Board established an Executive Committee and seven additional working committees to help provide direction and guidance for Explorers Edge:

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 2014) is shown in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Explorers' Edge Organizational Chart



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

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.

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 2014. In 2014 the strategy was complimented with a full time staff position, the Tourism Operators Relations **coordinator**. This strategy fosters mutually beneficial, two-way communication with the industry on EE programs, initiatives and tourism topics.

A Partnership Fund was created in 2012 and continued into the 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 with 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, workforce development and product development.

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 built on the pilot *Tourism Indicator Framework* for EE to better understand industry performance in a timely fashion.

The components of the EE Tourism Indicator Framework expanded from the original four areas:

- 1. a Visitor Exit Survey,
- 2. Tourism Business Performance Index,
- 3. Organizational Program Performance (Program Metrics), and
- 4. Brand Health to include Social Media overview component, 2012 Ministry Travel Data and 2014 Stakeholder Satisfaction results.

2. Tourism Context

Several documents were reviewed to:

- a) set the stage for the **2015-16 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:	4.8 M “	\$598 M “
2012:	4.1 M “	\$596 M “

Businesses:

2008:	1,738 establishments
2010:	1,688 establishments
2011:	1,666 establishments
2012:	1,757 establishments



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 2015-March 2016

3.1 Explorers' Edge Strategic Shift

The upcoming year represents a continuation in the strategic shift established in the 2014-17 DDP. Explorers' Edge continues to position itself 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**

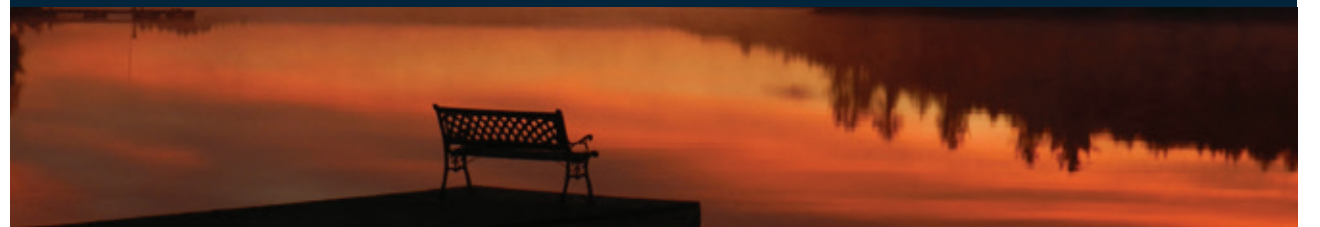
Explorers' Edge is an operator-driven organization whose mission is to develop a profitable and thriving tourism industry.

Explorers' Edge **MANDATE**

The Explorers' Edge mandate is to **TIIIC**:

- **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
- 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 MTCS currently 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 Ministry of Tourism of Tourism, Culture and Sport, 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/Investor Relations,
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.

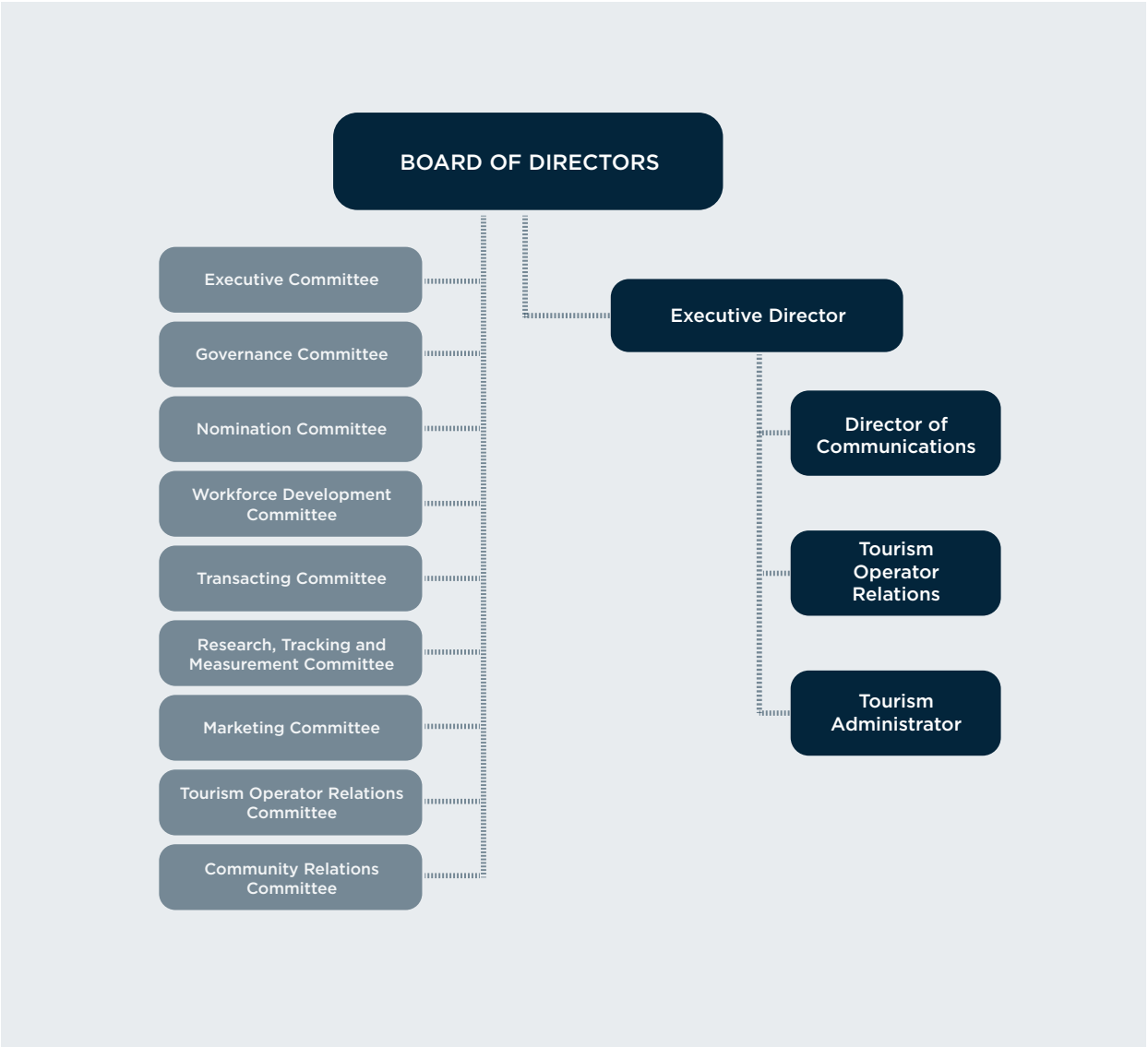
Table 4: Strategic Goals – DDP 2014-17

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 2015-2016

To accomplish these goals, priorities were set by the Board during the October 15-16, 2014 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 organizational structure that will support the 2015-2016 business and operational plan:



The *Business and Operational Plan (Table 5)* covers operational activities for the April 1, 2015 – March 31, 2016 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	OBJECTIVES	KEY ACTIVITIES/TACTICS APRIL 1, 2015-MAR 31, 2016	C/N	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<i>Numbers correspond with the DDP</i> <i>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 strategy, systems, policies and procedures. (Q1-Q4 activity)	Foster organizational capacity with an engaged committee structure in order to deliver regional tourism mandate.	Review succession plan.	N	Results of the financial audit (goal and target – clean audit)
Determine future membership model for the organization. (Board Priority - Low) (Q3 activity)	Manage our assets and liabilities responsibly.	Complete a skill matrix to identify priority areas for board member recruitment.		Effective board participation achieved (goal and target – min 70% of board members have participated in all meetings).
Determine future funding model for Explorers’ Edge. (Board Priority - Medium) (Q3 activity)	Deliver expected results on time.	Provide new board members with on-boarding including review of conflict of interest, code of conduct etc..		Business plan participation (TPA) deliverables achieved on time and on budget. (goal and target – plan is submitted on time).
	To examine membership options for EE.	Offer a minimum of 2 workshops that help board promote organizational excellence.		Time allotted to the discussion of organizational “financial” sustainability and the future funding model (goal and target – the topic is broached at two board meetings and operational planning).
	To examine options for moving toward a financially sustainable organization.	Conduct quarterly board reviews of RTO plans and performance measures against stated objectives and targets; adjust as required.		Results of operational reporting (progress and final) (goal and target – Operational Goals Met).
		Solicit stakeholders input for business and project plans and report back on activities and decisions.		
		Regularly review activities, finances at board meetings.		
OPERATIONS				
Administrative Activities, Reporting, Situation Analysis, Strategic Directions, Critical path. (Q1-Q4 activity)	To be recognized by regional tourism operators and stakeholders as a regional tourism resource and catalyst.	Annual update for Business and Operational Plan.		Number of stakeholders who work with the RTO on specific projects and initiatives (goal and target – 14).
	Effective committee participation achieved (at least 50% of committee members have participated in all meetings).	Executive, Board and Committee Meetings.		RTO participation with local/regional tourism and/or economic planning processes to offer subject matter input. (goal and target – participation on 5 initiatives).
		Collect and analyse program data, reconcile programs and negotiate TPA.		Percentage and percentage change of industry stakeholders that have participated in RTO planning activities. (goal and target – feedback on planning activities from 6 stakeholders).
		Fulfill and communicate performance metrics/measurable as outlined in the MTC Transfer Payment Agreement.		Number of regional agencies that the RTO interacts with (goal and target – 22 agencies).
		Interact with provincial government agencies: OTMPC, Northern Committee, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, Regional Tourism Unit, TIAO.		
INDUSTRY COMMUNICATION, LIAISON AND ACCOUNTABILITY				
Continue liaise with industry stakeholders. (Board Priority – High) (Q1-Q4 activity)	Foster outreach to operators, facilitated by information sharing.	Meetings, presentations, face-to-face activities throughout the Region.		Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey (goal and target – 75% satisfaction rating).
Develop educational materials informing industry of market research findings. (Board Priority – Low) (Q1 & Q3 activity)	Continue to facilitate development of industry capacity by providing relevant information.	Provide most recent research findings on website, on tourism trends, RTO 12 and Ministry market research.		Response rate of the Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey. (goal and target – 100 responses).
Continue to strengthen communications with industry throughout RTO 12. (Board Priority – High) (Q1-Q4 activity)	Strengthen communications with stakeholders.	Finalize CRM database.		Number and types of partnerships with other RTOs (goal and target – 2).
Continue to engage operators in EE activities and programs. (Board Priority – High) (Q1-Q4 activity)	Explore joint marketing; joint product development, other initiatives that benefit stakeholders.	Employ direct mail, Operator Forum and other techniques to engage operators.		Membership (goal and target 125 paid members).
Continue to refine Operator Forum database. (Board Priority – Low) (Q1 & Q3 activity)	To increase the number of paid, registered, tourism operator memberships by 25.	Leverage the Forum & position as an “enabler” for members to develop partnerships/collaborative marketing programs.		Number of new subscribers to Quarterly Outreach Newsletter. (goal and target – 45).
Collaborate with other RTOs. (Board Priority – High) (Q1-Q4 activity)	To sustain the number of subscribers to the Stakeholder Quarterly Outreach Newsletter while increasing the open rate by 2%.	Conduct regional outreach campaign to develop committee structure to add value to priority program areas.		
Continue to represent stakeholder concerns to province and other levels of government. (Board Priority – Low) (Q1 & Q3 activity)	To sustain the response rate and satisfaction rate as it relates to the Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey.	Provide revisions and feedback as it relates to the MTCS stakeholder satisfaction survey.		
	To sustain the number of subscribers to the Stakeholder Quarterly Outreach Newsletter while increasing the open rate by 2%.			
	To sustain the response rate (125 regional responses) and satisfaction rate (72% approval rating) as it relates to the Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey.			

Table 5: Explorers Edge Business and Operational Plan 2015-16 (con't)

PRIORITY/STRATEGIC FOCUS	OBJECTIVES	KEY ACTIVITIES/TACTICS APRIL 1, 2015-MAR 31, 2016	C/N	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
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Numbers correspond with the DDP
CN = C (Continued) or N (New)

Key Priority Area: GOVERNANCE and OPERATIONS

RESEARCH, TRACKING AND MEASUREMENT

Continue to improve Tourism Indicator Framework.
(Board Priority – High) (Q1-Q4 activity)

Continue to undertake consumer market research.
(Board Priority – Medium (Q4 activity)

Develop a detailed account-ability system using performance measurement metrics tailored to RTO 12.

Refine the online dashboard capturing the data collected across the four performance measures. Currently the dashboard collects HST, attractions, occupancy & weather.

Refinement will include the presentation and applicability of 4 additional performance measures. (Set targets based on current data).

Continue to keep abreast of and integrate relevant Ministry research with our own.

Continue to collect baseline of data in four key performance measure areas:

1. Brand Health,
2. Organizational Program Performance,
3. Tourism Business Performance,
4. Visitor Exit Survey.

Continue to track and disseminate Ministry-generated consumer research.

Continue to conduct brand awareness research.

The number of section items included in the Tourism Indicator Framework (goal and target 6 sections).

The number of indicators included (goal and target 6 indicators. (Number of survey respondents and percentage of change of baseline data).

Number of views / downloads of the developed online dashboard (goal and target 250).

Number of participants in the online dashboard (goal and target 35 participants).

Key Priority Area: MARKETING

CONSUMER MARKETING

Brand: Incorporate the EE brand in all marketing programs and social media programs.
(Board Priority – High) (Q1-Q4 activity)

Reinforce both the regional brand and sub-regional brands.
(Board Priority – High) (Q1-Q4 activity)

Explore expanded markets and test with low risk niche markets.
(Board Priority – High) (Q1-Q4 activity)

Continue to ensure that marketing content is fresh & creative.
(Board Priority – High) (Q1-Q4 activity)

Continue to develop marketing programs aimed primarily at GTA market and beyond; main focus on social media, SEM and content marketing,
(Board Priority – High) (Q1-Q4 activity)

Explore signage options at gateways (and perhaps across Region).
(Board Priority – Medium) (Q1-Q4 activity)

Brand: Increase aided brand awareness of Explorers' Edge.

Increase website analytics, sessions, users, page views, pages/session & avg session duration.

Provide greater reach & access to EE region by linking the consumer to regional information via developed content, the RTO will develop an additional 25 pieces of content over the 2014-2015 total.

Provide greater tourism experiences & packages that correspond with seasonal & general tourism marketing initiatives.

Ensure marketing content encompasses experiences, geography, sectors and that is fresh and creative.

Explore gateway signage to further reinforce the regional brand.

Update 2014-2015 *Marketing Plan*, based on Marketing Committee feedback.

Negotiate with advertising partners to provide bargaining power & improve buy efficiency.

Track brand awareness on an annual basis.

Sharing of monthly monitor tracking reports that include change in website traffic, traffic sources, media performance, outbound referrals, social engagement etc.

Quarterly committee updates.

Bi monthly board updates.

Explore collaborative partnerships with RTO and event organizers (provincially & regionally).

Explore markets beyond the GTA (e.g. other Ontario, Air Canada, Porter Lufthansa partnerships).

Explore niche markets available through strategic collaboration (e.g. corporate, international, activity-based, incentive travel).

Participate in Ministry programs such as website, publication and travel trade.

Regional Content developed (goal and target – TBD).

Listed Packages (goal and target – TBD).

Output Referrals (goal and target – TBD).

Consumer opt-in for the consumer e-mail database (goal and target – TBD).

Aided brand awareness (goal and target – TBD).

Website analytics, sessions (goal and target – TBD), users (goal and target – TBD), page views (goal and target – TBD), pages/session (goal and target – TBD) & avg session duration (goal and target – TBD).

MEDIA / PR PROGRAM

Participate in selected travel trade and media promotions to facilitate positive media coverage of RTO12.
(Board Priority – Medium) (Q1, Q2 & Q4 activity)

Increase in brand/story awareness and produce unpaid, engaging and positive editorial coverage in target markets.

Regional outreach to gauge feedback on media opportunities.

Engage industry partners (OTMPC, sub regional partners, operators) on media opportunities.

Meet with media representatives at key marketplaces.

Review communication list.

Execute media tours. Track media engagement.

Increase number of media visits (goal and target – 8 visits).

Increase in the number of media contacts in the database (goal and target – 12).

Increase in unique visits to the RTO media communication page (goal and target – benchmark).

Table 5: Explorers Edge Business and Operational Plan 2015-16 (con't)

PRIORITY/STRATEGIC FOCUS	OBJECTIVES	KEY ACTIVITIES/TACTICS APRIL 1, 2015-MAR 31, 2016	C/N	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<i>Numbers correspond with the DDP</i> <i>CN = C (Continued) or N (New)</i>				
Key Priority Area: MARKETING				
IMAGE BANK Continue to develop video and image bank. (Board Priority – High to Medium) (Q1-Q4 activity)	Communicate experiences with the consumer with visual & audio cues (photography and videography). Provide greater seasonal selection of images to stakeholders.	Update with content YouTube, Vimeo, flickr, Facebook, web sites and partner sites. Track downloads & subscriptions. Develop an agreement(s) with regional photographer(s). Provide OTMPC a link to the RTO online Flickr Database.		Change in stakeholder’s requests to use imagery in travel and tourism marketing. Track the change in # of downloads and subscriptions on photography and videography platforms.
TRANSACTIONING Jack Rabbit Referral System Maintain, grow and sustain online referrals. (Board Priority – Medium) (Q1-Q4 activity)	Continue to develop consumer web-based tipping point programs that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase average daily spend,• Increase first time visitation to the region,• Convert travellers to visit our region,• Incentivize travellers to partake in a regional experience,• Extend the travellers stay through incentive offerings,• Encourage the use of packages and special offers.	Strategize enhancements to Signature Tipping Point Programs. Coordinate with stakeholder to field feedback and opportunities for collaboration. Coordinate shoulder season signature tipping point programs, ensuring programs are competitive. Explore gaps and opportunities in the area of package development. Communicate outcomes with the Transacting Committee on a quarterly basis.		Online Referral and Reservation system analytics. Signature Tipping Point Program change in first time visitation and pre-planned visitation. Change in redemption rates.
Fuel and Fun - Spring and Fall Maintain, grow and sustain Signature Tipping Point Programs. (Board Priority – High) (Q1 & Q3 Activity)	Sustain first time visitation to the region via the prompted program travel survey which identified that for 75% of the participants the program prompted to choose our region over another travel destination. Lower the number of travelers that have used the program for a return visit – 25% in 2014 – 2015 identified that it was a return visit – the program is to prompt new visitation to the region Lower the number of travellers that have used the program even though the trip was pre-planned – 30% in 2014 – 2015 identified that a trip was pre-planned – the program objective is to encourage new travel to the region.	Coordinate with stakeholder to field feedback and opportunities for collaboration. Communicate outcomes with the Transacting Committee on a quarterly basis. Provide stakeholders with information related to the Fuel and Fun program on a regular basis.		Signature Tipping Point Program change in first time visitation and pre-planned visitation. Sustain the redemption rate of 65% for the voucher portion of the program. Evaluate year over year the economic impact of program using Ontario Tourism Regional Economic Impact Model TREIM.
ON-LINE CHANNELS & SOCIAL MEDIA Continue to strengthen an active, integrated internet/ on-line presence. (Board Priority – High) (Q1-Q4 activity)	Create an appetite for travel among consumers visiting on-line channels. Provide relevant, timely and accurate information to stakeholders and operators on the RTO12 website.	Continue to ensure branded content on the website which enables higher Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Update the website on a quarterly basis to coincide with seasonal and regional experiences. Update social media channels with consumer information that aligns with Ontario Explorer segment and changes perceptions using OTMPC segmentation research Optimize all landing pages with social sharing functionality.		Social media analytics (goal and target – TBD). The number social media mentions (goal and target – TBD). Social media comments (goal and target – TBD). Social media Post Likes (goal and target – TBD). Social media clicks to Website (goal and target – TBD).

Table 5: Explorers Edge Business and Operational Plan 2015-16 (con't)

PRIORITY/STRATEGIC FOCUS	OBJECTIVES	KEY ACTIVITIES/TACTICS APRIL 1, 2015-MAR 31, 2016	C/N	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<i>Numbers correspond with the DDP</i> <i>CN = C (Continued) or N (New)</i>				
Key Priority Area: PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT				
PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT				
Educate operators on how to take advantage of Eco-designations within their respective sectors. (Board Priority – Medium) (Q1-Q4 activity)	Raise the profile of Eco –designation with stakeholders in the region.	Disseminate information related to eco-designation on a quarterly basis to regional stakeholders.		# of opens of information on the RTO12 website related to Eco-designation (goal and target – 80 opens). Click through rate of regional correspondence as it relates to Eco-designations (goal and target - 2%). # of requests from RTO staff on information related to Eco-designations (goal and target – 3 requests).
Georgian Bay (Q1 & Q3 activity)	To develop a market ready inventory as it relates to product in the vicinity of Georgian Bay.	Develop work plan outlining steps for project development. Develop RFP or EOI if required. Determine if the product there is feasibility to collaborate to optimize the use of grant/loan programs (FedNor, Northern, Trillium, Eastern). Engage Contractor. Begin to identify strategy around the collection of experience and stories aligned with RTO.		# of new experiences created (goal and target – 5). # of enhanced experiences/packages (goal and target – 10). # of partnerships created (goal and target 5). #of packages created that include Georgian Bay product (goal and target – 4).
Winter Non – Motorized (Q4 activity)	To identify winter non-motorized trails that include but are not limited to Nordic Trails, Dog Sledding, Ice Trail, Fat Biking etc.	Develop work plan outlining steps for project development Develop RFP or EOI if required. Determine if the product there is feasibility to collaborate to optimize the use of grant / loan programs (FedNor, Northern, Trillium, Eastern). Engage Contractor. Begin to identify strategy around the collection of experience and stories aligned with RTO.		# of new experiences created (goal and target – 3) # of enhanced experiences / packages (goal and target 18). # of partnerships created (goal and target 3). #of packages created that include Winter Non-Motorized product (goal and target – 2). # of new experiences created (goal and target – 4).
Paddling (Q1 activity)	To identify the paddling product that currently exists in the RTO and assess market readiness and develop and inventory.	Develop work plan outlining steps for project development. Develop RFP or EOI if required. Determine if the product there is feasibility to collaborate to optimize the use of grant/loan programs (FedNor, Northern, Trillium, Eastern). Engage Contractor. Begin to identify strategy around the collection of experience and stories aligned with RTO around.		# of enhanced experiences/packages (goal and target 8). # of partnerships created (goal and target 4). #of packages created that include Paddling product (goal and target – 4).
Craft Beer and Wineries (Q3 activity)	Assess the market readiness of craft beer and wine product in the RTO. Inventory all related experiences as it relates to craft beer and wine in the RTO.	Develop work plan outlining steps for project development. Develop RFP or EOI if required. Determine if the product there is feasibility to collaborate to optimize the use of grant/loan programs (FedNor, Northern, Trillium, Eastern). Engage Contractor. Begin to identify strategy around the collection of experience and stories aligned with RTO and craft beer/ wine product.		# of new experiences created (goal and target – 6). # of enhanced experiences/packages (goal and target 5). # of partnerships created (goal and target 8). #of packages created that include Craft Beer and Wine (goal and target – 4).

Table 5: Explorers Edge Business and Operational Plan 2015-16 (con't)

PRIORITY/STRATEGIC FOCUS	OBJECTIVES	KEY ACTIVITIES/TACTICS APRIL 1, 2015-MAR 31, 2016	C/N	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<i>Numbers correspond with the DDP</i> <i>CN = C (Continued) or N (New)</i>				
Key Priority Area: INVESTMENT ATTRACTION/INVESTOR OUTREACH				
INVESTMENT ATTRACTION/INVESTOR OUTREACH Provide operators and stakeholders with the necessary tools, trends, applicable tourism development opportunities and applicable information to succeed. (Board Priority – Low) (Q1-Q4 activity)	Continue to develop and strengthen economic development links with regional stakeholders. Explore programs for attracting unique investment that will differentiate the region.	Disseminate relevant Investment Attraction information to Stakeholders on a quarterly basis Carry out a needs assessment as it relates to investment attraction, share and post results Organize one investment attraction networking event.		Number of attendees at investment seminar / workshop(s) (goal and target 20). # of program / projects created (goal and target – 1).
Key Priority Area: WORKFORCE COORDINATION/FACILITATION				
WORKFORCE COORDINATION/FACILITATION Work with other agencies to help identify industry needs and collaborate to encourage and deliver relevant tourism training. (Board Priority – High to Medium) (Q1 activity) Continue with on-line seminars/presentations (e.g. social media). (Board Priority – Medium) (Q3 & Q4 activity) Continue to promote availability and desirability of careers in tourism industry throughout RTO 12. (Board Priority – High to Medium) (Q3 & Q4 activity)	Work with existing organizations to coordinate workforce development, prospect/ opportunities in EE & facilitate/ communicate workforce opportunities. Gain a greater understanding of the labour market landscape. Keep abreast and disseminate information on new seminars. Put on-line. Respond to inquiries. Gather input on implications of labour market development plan related to tourism.	Establish an Ad Hoc Committee to examine options to obtain employees for EE, esp. in the summer months (e.g. examine partnerships among large resorts (winter/ summer), other RTO's, scholarships, succession plans, blogs by current employees). Review workforce resources in the region. Review applicability of Visit Program (in development in 2014-2015). Review applicability of the regional mentorship program (in development in 2014 – 2015).Provide industry with relevant workshops and webinars related to social media training and development.		# of workforce development opportunities offered (goal and target – 5). # of participants in skills development programs (goal and target – 15). Satisfaction level of delivery of training (goal and target – 80% indicate high satisfaction). Results of surveys related to effectiveness of training (goal and target – 80% of respondents indicate improvement to their business as a result of training).
Key Priority Area: PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM				
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM Continue to actively manage the Partnership Fund Program. (Board Priority – High) (Q1-Q4 activity)	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. To enhance alignment, strategic partnerships, ROI, and collaboration between Explorers' Edge and tourism partners which include but are not limited to destination marketing organizations, other levels of government, and the private sector. 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.		# of partnerships created (goal and target – 10). Dollars leveraged (goal and target \$166,000).



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Appendix A

Board of Directors and Staff (at October 31, 2014)

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

Jerry Feltis, Vice Chair
Mill on Main, Rocky Crest Resort
RR#1 Hamer Bay Road, MacTier, ON

Andrew Vitch, Secretary and Treasurer
Sunny Point Resorts, Cottages & Inn
41 Sunny Point Road, Seguin ON

Don MacKay
Muskoka Highlands
1040 South Monck Drive, Bracebridge ON

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

Andrew Ryeland
Bear Claw Tours
35 Shoebottom Rd, Seguin ON

Diane Wiber
Winding Fences Farm
1102 Ambleside Lane, Utterson ON

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

John Miller
Muskoka Steamship & Historical Society
185 Cherokee Lane, Gravenhurst ON

Anthony Rizzo
Doe Lake Campground Rizzort
882 Ferguson Road, Katrine ON

Hilary Chambers
Sun Dog Gallery
463 Pine Grove Rd, Port Loring ON

Curt Dunlop
The Griffin Gastro Pub / Muskoka Beer Festival
9 Chancery Lane, Bracebridge ON

Jeff Suddaby
3 Guys and a Stove
154 Golden Pheasant Dr, Huntsville ON

Kim Loader
Port Cunnington Lodge and Resort
1679 Port Cunnington Rd. Dwight ON

Drew Rachar
Ther Ridge at Manitou Golf Club
160 The Inn Road, McKellar ON

Resource Members

Laura Hernando, Tourism Industry Advisor
Ministry Tourism, Culture and Sport

Staff Members

James Murphy, Executive Director
james@explorersedge.ca

Erin Wilcox, Tourism Administrator
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Kate Monk, Director of Communications
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Tyler Francis, Tourism Operator Relations
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Appendix B

2015-2016 EE Operational Budget

TYPE OF EXPENSE	2015
OPERATING COSTS/ADMINISTRATION	
Salaries and Benefits	\$260,000
Finance and Administration	\$10,000
Travel and Meeting Expenses	\$48,000
General Administration (office rent/utilities, phone, office equipment)	\$47,000
Other Administration (Insurance, bank charges)	\$4,500
Subtotal	\$369,500
GOVERNANCE INDUSTRY RELATIONS	
Outreach/Meetings	\$5,000
Tourism Industry Relations	\$12,000
Website/Membership	\$16,000
Subtotal	\$33,000
MARKETING	
Consumer Marketing/Social Media	\$625,000
Image Bank Development	\$25,000
Media/PR	\$15,000
Spring Fuel and Fun	\$42,000
Fall Fuel and Fun	\$65,000
Jack Rabbit	\$65,000
Total Transacting	\$172,000
Subtotal	\$837,000
PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT	
Georgian Bay	\$15,000
Winter Non-Motorized	\$10,000
Paddling	\$15,000
Craft Beer and Wine	\$10,000
Total Product Development	\$50,000
Research	\$30,000
Subtotal	\$80,000
INVESTMENT ATTRACTION/INVESTOR RELATIONS	
Outreach/Meetings	\$2,500
Subtotal	\$2,500
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT/TRAINING	
Workforce Training	\$10,000
Subtotal	\$10,000
PARTNERSHIP FUNDING	
Partnership Activities	\$332,000
Subtotal	\$332,000
TOTALS	\$1,664,000

Appendix C

Quarterly Budget Breakdown

Budget Items	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL
Administration & Overhead					
Salaries & Benefits <i>5120</i>	65,000	65,000	65,000	65,000	260,000
Finance and Administration <i>5160</i>	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	10,000
General Administration <i>5132, 5186, 5140</i>	15,250	15,250	8,750	8,750	48,000
Travel and General Expenses <i>5150, 5151, 5181</i>	12,250	12,250	12,250	10,250	47,000
Other Administration <i>5105, 5135</i>	250	250	3,750	250	4,500
Subtotal	95,250	95,250	92,250	86,750	369,500
GOVERNANCE INDUSTRY RELATIONS					
Outreach/Meetings <i>5208</i>	1,250	1,250	1,250	1,250	5,000
Governance , Policy, Communication, Planning <i>5207</i>	5,000	5,000	2,000	-	12,000
Membership <i>5205</i>	-	3,000	3,000	-	6,000
Website <i>5206</i>	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	10,000
SUBTOTAL	8,750	11,750	8,750	3,750	33,000
MARKETING AND PROMOTION					
Marketing & Social Media <i>5440</i>	350,000	250,000	25,000	-	626,000
Image Bank <i>5462</i>	10,000	4,000	11,000	-	21,000
Media/PR	3,000	3,000	3,000	6,000	15,000
Transacting - Spring Fuel and Fun	42,000	-	-	-	42,000
Transacting - Fall Fuel and Fun	-	-	65,000	-	65,000
Transacting - Jack Rabbit	16,250	16,250	16,250	16,250	65,000
SUBTOTAL	421,250	273,250	120,250	22,250	837,000
PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION					
Product Development - Georgian Bay	7,500	-	7,500	-	15,000
Product Development - Winter Non-Motorized	-	-	-	10,000	10,000
Product Development - Paddling	15,000	-	-	-	15,000
Product Development - Craft Beer and Wine	-	-	10,000	-	10,000
Research <i>5484</i>	25,000	-	-	5,000	30,000
SUBTOTAL	47,500	-	17,500	15,000	80,000
INVESTMENT ATTRACTION/INVESTOR RELATIONS					
Outreach/Meetings	625	625	625	625	-
SUBTOTAL	625	625	625	625	2,500
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT/TRAINING					
Workforce Training	7,500	-	-	2,500	-
Subtotal	7,500	-	-	2,500	10,000
PARTNERSHIP					
Partnership Activities	200,000	100,000	32,000	-	-
Subtotal	200,000	100,000	32,000	-	332,000
TOTAL AGREEMENT COSTS	780,875	480,875	271,375	130,875	1,664,000

