

2016 -2017 Business and Operational Plan

(April 1, 2016 – March 31, 2017)



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Executive Summary

2016-2017 promises to be a seminal year for RTO12.

After five years in operation, RTO12 has achieved sound foundational success with all its core initiatives. The time has therefore come for the organization to introduce new projects that are intended to substantially increase the amount of visitation to the region and to foster true destination development, for the benefit of all tourism stakeholders.

2016-2017 will see a continuation of proven “blue chip” initiatives such as content marketing, lead nurturing and “tipping point transacting programs,” as well as the introduction of innovative new projects (e.g. regional air service into Muskoka, package and itinerary implementation) to target new audiences (the U.S. and U.K.).

We will continue to work collaboratively with multiple tourism stakeholders in order to achieve maximum impact across the region, including fostering partnerships with other RTOs and with additional funding agencies.

Despite fiscal cuts to our operating budget by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (MTCS), the Board of Directors is confident that the staff of RTO12, the team of exceptional consultants we work with, and the various committees of the Board composed of regional stakeholders (marketing, community relations, governance, research, tourism operator relations) will work optimally to produce some of the organization’s most significant work to date.

It is anticipated that the internal motto of “do more with less” will serve RTO12 well as we continue to move forward with a smaller operating budget, and the reliance on our guiding beacons – strategy and process – will allow us to continue to produce exceptional work.

The Explorers’ Edge **Business and Operational Plan 2016-17 (BOP16-17)** reflects the continuing priorities that were identified in the organization’s three-year **Destination Development Plan (DDP) 2014-17**, which was created by the Board of Directors at a strategy session in October 2013.

The **BOP16-17** elaborates on these priorities and identifies associated tactics, timeframes, responsibilities and measurable objectives the RTO will use in the upcoming fiscal year to continue to develop tourism in Algonquin Park, the Almaguin Highlands, Loring-Restoule, Muskoka and Parry Sound, as mandated by the MTCS.

2016-2017: The Strategic Shift Continues

The upcoming year's efforts will see a continuation of the strategic shift established in the **RTO's 2014-17 DDP**.

Explorers' Edge continues to position itself as an organization **focused on the consumer**, where **collaboration and leveraging resources through partnerships** are the primary activities emphasized in order to achieve a significant increase in the volume of visitors to the region. (This is part of our "Consumer-Centric Regional Application" that is identified in the DDP.)

RTO12 Vision, Mission and Mandate

The vision, mission and mandate of Explorers' Edge guide the organization and are presented in the **DDP 2014-17**. Since they guide the organization's upcoming year's work, they are worth repeating here:

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

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

Guiding Principles for the organization 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 & OTMPC

As a result of changes and delays with Statistics Canada, the MTCS's research arm was unable to update travel statistics for the RTOs. Additionally, the Ontario Tourism Marketing Corporation put on hold its segmentation research during 2015 and did not have alternative research to share with Ontario's tourism industry. As a result, the following (somewhat outdated) information was provided to RTO12 by the Tourism Research Unit regarding visitation:

RTO12 Estimated Visits:

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

RTO12 Businesses:

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

The Tourism Business Indicator Framework: RTO12's Proprietary Source of Market Intel

In an effort to extract pertinent, up-to-date information on the state of the tourism industry across the region and the potential impact of our programs on industry results, in 2014 RTO12 developed its own **Tourism Business Indicator Framework** to gather intelligence (in a timely manner) that could 1) inform our work and 2) help inform the work of tourism stakeholders in the region. In the previous fiscal year reports were created quarterly, but moving forward an annual report will be generated during the year and presented at the annual AGM (starting at the June 2016 AGM).

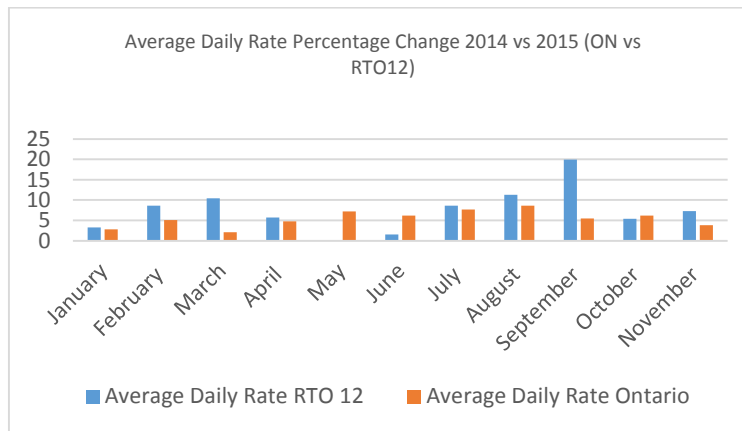
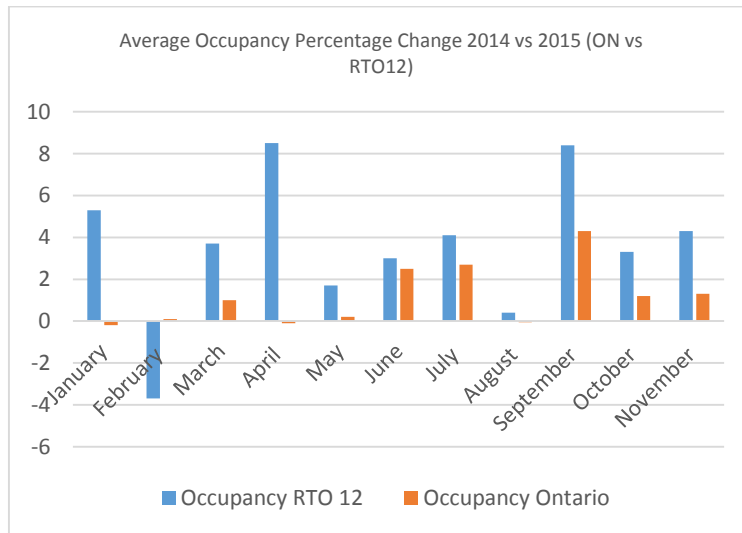
The following provides a glimpse into analytics reviewed, assessed and taken into account for operational planning in 2016-2017.

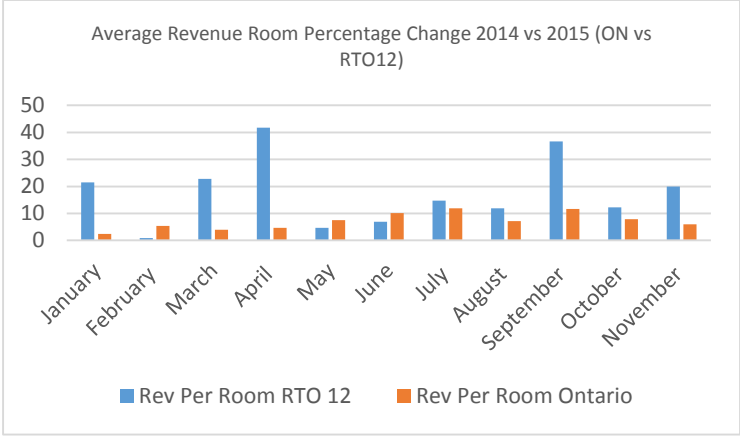
2015: Increased Occupancy

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 2016-2017 strategy.

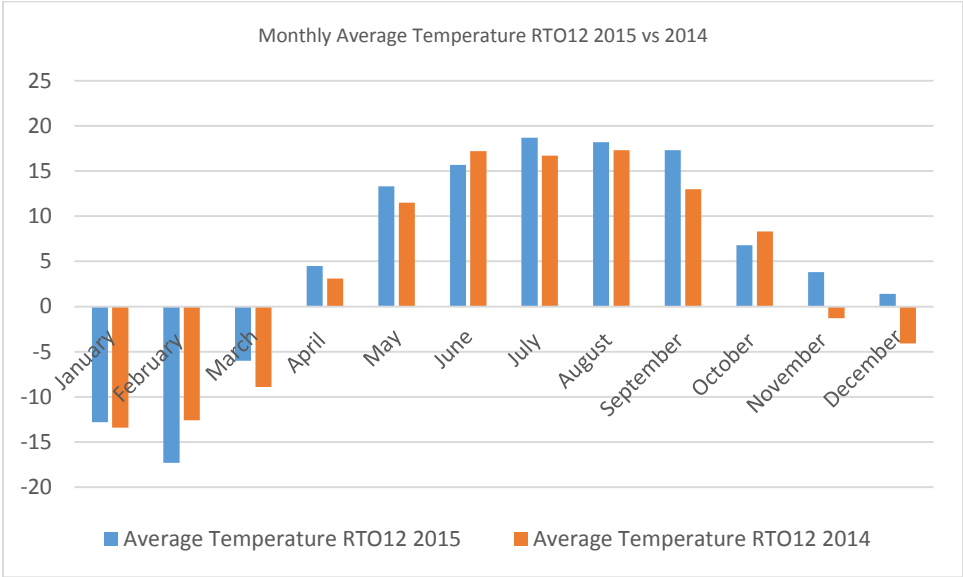
PKF Occupancy Data

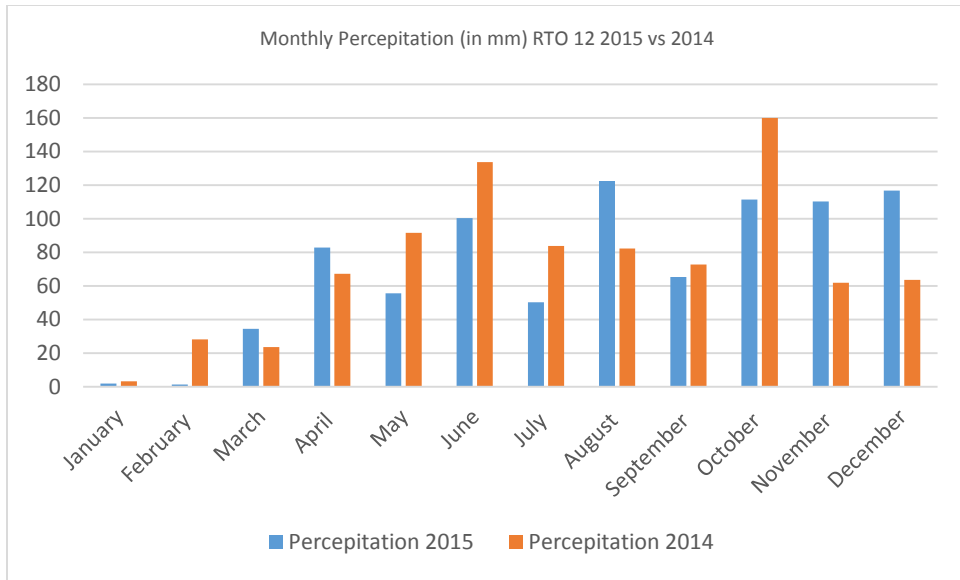




Regional Weather Data - Precipitation and Average Temperature

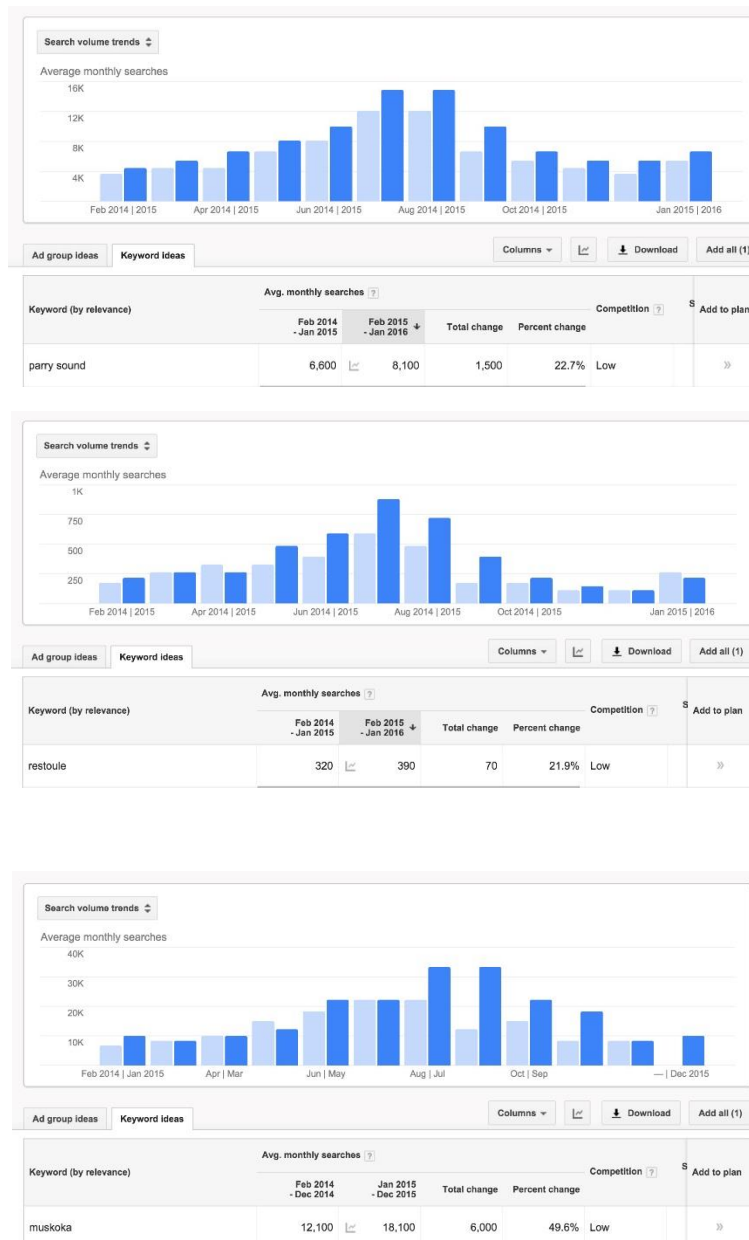
February 2015 featured 16 days with -20 degree temperature (and colder), which had a negative effect on occupancy rates during that month. The summer and early fall travel seasons also saw year-over-year warmer than average temperatures.





Organic Search Increases on ExplorersEdge.ca

Page views from organic traffic to the Explorers' Edge consumer website were up 161% in 2015, resulting in 103K page views. This is an incredible increase in the amount of traffic year-over-year results (16% of traffic was from organic search). The inference from this is that the social/content/mobile marketing strategy that was introduced in mid-2014 is beginning to yield results in terms of building new audiences for the region and attracting vacation planners. Further, the consistent increase in sub-regional organic search results suggest that the RTO's social/content/mobile marketing strategy is putting the sub-regions in the consideration set of travellers as well.

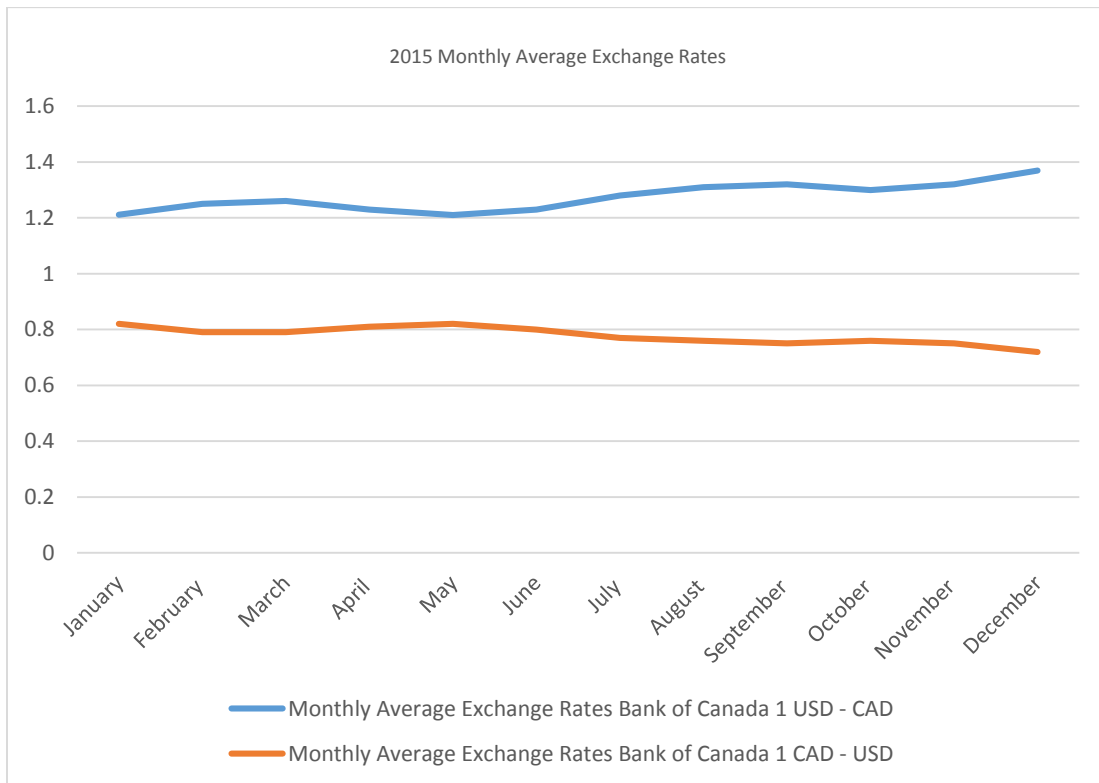


The overall takeaway for planning purposes is that the strategy of using content marketing to attract discovers is also increasingly successful in attracting “searchers.” This suggests that it is important to continue with the social/content/mobile marketing strategy.

Bank of Canada – Monthly Average Exchange Rates

During the fiscal year of 2015-2016, the RTO regularly updated information related to the exchange rate between the USA and Canada. This was important to consider as Muskoka and Algonquin Park, in particular, have historically been chosen destinations for American travellers.

Ongoing monitoring of the exchange rate has resulted in further validation that targeting US audiences in particular will be important in 2016-2017, and the strategy developed by RTO12 to target U.S. & U.K. travellers will be very important.



Building Success: Looking Back to Move Forward

To understand what RTO12 hopes to achieve with its **BOP16-17**, it is necessary to understand the work conducted in the previous fiscal year. Analyzing the previous year's results, 2015-2016 proved to be very successful for RTO12. The organization can boast of several significant achievements under the Five Pillars designated by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (MTCS), including the following:

1. **Marketing and Promotion:** In 2015, Explorers' Edge undertook a significant year-round content marketing strategy and continued its strong social media marketing program in an effort to significantly increase both traffic to the consumer-facing website (www.explorersedge.ca) and to increase the number of referrals out to tourism operator/stakeholder websites. Of note, the Explorers' Edge Facebook page now has over 101K fans, making it second only to Toronto in terms of number of followers (and we will soon usurp Toronto from its number one position).

The main goal of increasing visitation to the site to 700K visits was easily exceeded, and by the end of fiscal 2015, RTO12 will have achieved over 875K visits to the site (as opposed to 679K in the previous fiscal years). The objective of sending 150K referrals out to tourism operators and stakeholders was also exceeded, and will reach over 218K referrals by the end of fiscal 2015.

With the strategy of combining social media promotion tactics, content execution, and a responsive website to target mobile users (known internally at RTO12 as the "social/mobile/content strategy...or "SoMoCo"), the program was particularly successful in meeting the evolving needs of travel audiences who increasingly rely on their mobile devices to plan and book travel: by the end of fiscal year, 70% of RTO12s internet visits came from mobile devices, as opposed to 5% in 2012. RTO12 was successful in anticipating this shift from desktop to mobile usage, and benefitted from this foresight.

We firmly believe that our "SoMoCo" marketing strategy has allowed RTO12 to use a smaller marketing budget (comparable to other RTOs and DMOs) in order to create efficiencies and to produce competitive results in an extremely cost-effective way. By focusing our efforts and refining them in the content marketing sphere, we were able to do great work with limited dollars. This also eliminated the need for more costly "stop and go campaigns," the implementation of which yielded poorer results in fiscal years past.

In addition, a lead nurturing program was developed in 2015 – 2016 in order to strengthen consumer communication via email marketing using Hubspot automation;

this was an outcome of and development from the RTO's "Consumer-Centric Regional Application," which was established in the DDP.

By segmenting our status quo list of email recipients and by segmenting any new email newsletter sign-ups, RTO12 was able to increase the effectiveness of our email marketing efforts by ensuring more targeted communication (based on personal interests) would increase both open rates and click through rates. The segments were established by creating six "Personas", which staff developed based on four years of marketing, social media observations and reviewing of results. The six Personas targeted now are:

- **Motorsports Enthusiasts** (interested in anything with a motor...ATVs, snowmobiles, boats, PWC, motorcycles, etc.)
- **Outdoor Adventurers** (prefer non-motorized activities and visits to the wilderness in general)
- **Family Vacationers** (do their planning with the family in mind)
- **Hunters & Fishers** (primarily fishers as only in the northern-most reaches of our region is hunting generally accepted)
- **Food & Culture Enthusiasts** (enjoy arts, entertainment, history, food & drink)
- **Fit & Sporty Folks** (enjoy participating in sporting events such as paddling, running, etc)

Of note, with the introduction of the lead nurturing strategy (using Hubspot e-marketing software) and the increase in email sign ups via inbound marketing (i.e. socially promoted content), RTO12 increased stagnant open rates hovering around 29% for our newsletters to a range of open rates (depending on the Persona targeted) from 34%-53%, and of click through rates hovering around 4.5% to a range between 6-13%. (Industry average for both indices are considerably lower than what we achieved, and indeed the folks at Hubspot expressed that they did not normally see such high results from their clients.) RTO12 will continue with Hubspot automation in the upcoming year, but after now having somewhat adjusted to the softwares capabilities, we will attempt to increase email output and thereby conversions of visitors to the region using more marketing emails than just the quarterly editions.

The organization also executed its highly successful signature transacting program – Fuel & Fun - which continues to be a popular initiative for tourism operators and tourists alike. Of note, the Spring 2015 edition saw its greatest increase in package registrants, indicative of a slow shoulder season gaining traction with travellers.

2015-2016 saw the introduction of RTO12's investment in a communications strategy and media relations. The engagement of a consultant to help push out stories for RTO12 proved highly successful in garnering earned media for the RTO and regional stakeholders. By the end of fiscal 2015, earned media will have resulted in an

estimated 28,495,640 media impressions and an estimated PR value of \$1,191,980. With first-year results that required a budget an investment in the tens of thousands only, it became evident that earned media is a cost-effective component of our overall marketing plan, and that the media is extremely interested in stories coming out of our region.

In 2015, a strategy to target audiences in the U.S. and U.K. was developed internally at RTO12, and its existence opened the doors to discussions with regional air service carriers, and with federal tourism and business development stakeholders. The strategy yielded the selection of a consultant to help RTO12 target audiences in the U.S. and U.K., and foundational work began in spring 2016. It is anticipated that this strategy will result in additional investment by FedNor (subject to approval) in the RTO. The strategy will also see the development of regional packages to target these audiences: a consultant was selected to help with this process, and RTO12 will be working with former marketing executives at the CTC, in order to target the CTC's "authentic experiences" segment.

Collaboration with OTMPC continued, including the partnering on photography/video services, on co-branded email marketing, and with our participation in the Northern Ontario digital Free Standing Insert (FSI) program.

The Partnership Fund Program entered into its third year, with regional partnerships supporting new events (e.g. the extremely successful "Fire & Ice Festival" in Bracebridge), niche markets, and product development (e.g. re-branding of the Muskoka Steamships Boat & Heritage Centre).

- 2. Product Development and Innovation:** Making the best of a competitively small product development budget, RTO12 continued the development of key products, including cycling and craft beer. After the successful development of the Group of Seven Outdoor Gallery Self-Guided Tour (www.go7murals.ca) in the previous fiscal year, in 2015-2016 Explorers' Edge undertook the development of two additional self-guided mobile tours to establish a "Signature Suite of Self-Guided Mobile Tours." With the positioning of "*Tour, Train & Trek All Year Long*", www.bikecottagecountry.ca targets recreational and endurance cyclists to attract them to the region for overnight visitation. With the positioning "*Great Canadian Craft Beer in the Great Canadian Wilderness*," www.rockstreeslakesbeer.ca targets consumers interested in travel experiences that feature food and drink, while associating the tours with the Explorers' Edge brand.

Anticipating the national and provincial promotion that will launch in 2016-2017 for the celebrations of Canada's 150th birthday, in 2015-2016 RTO12 engaged a consultant to develop a comprehensive inventory of all paddling experiences in the region, pertaining to routes, experiences, and mode (canoe, kayak and SUP). The consultant was also contracted to provide strategic recommendations for marketing this inventory to

specific target audiences (beginners, intermediate and highly experienced paddlers). The inventory and strategic recommendations will be integral to the continuing development of the Explorers' Edge region as a premier paddling destination in the world in 2016-2017 and beyond.

3. **Investment Attraction:** In 2015-2016, Explorers' Edge took on a leadership role to organize multiple stakeholders in order to commence the process of bringing commercial air service to the Muskoka Airport (CYQA). The Muskoka Airport is an underutilized asset when it comes to bringing tourists to the region; the RTO recognized an opportunity to use the airport to increase visitation to the region and began the process of bringing this to fruition.

Working in partnership primarily with the District of Muskoka (the administrators of the airport), RTO12 engaged an industry consultant to create the road map to introduce CATSA-designated security screening at the airport, a requirement to bring commercial flights for international destinations, including the US. It is anticipated that this first requisite for bringing flights to the region (getting CATSA designation and establishing basic infrastructure for commercial travel at the airport) will be completed in 2016, and that the process for bringing a bona fide regional carrier to Muskoka will begin thereafter.

RTO12 led and coordinated discussions with multiple stakeholders throughout the preliminary process, including CATSA and Transport Canada, as well as tourism operators. The RTO will continue in this lead role, with the understanding that commercial flights into the region have broader implications for increasing tourism receipts in the province of Ontario. Ensuring all the steps are met to allow regional air service to commence at the Muskoka Airport will be a major priority of the RTO12 Board of Directors in 2016-2017.

4. **Workforce Development & Training:** In partnership with RTO13, FedNor and NOHFC, over the course of the year the RTO developed and moved forward "Tourism Excellence North", a unique partnership that aims to introduce a training and workforce development program to tourism operators, similar to the successful program established by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) in the Maritimes. This program will ensure that tourism operators in RTO12 and RTO13 have access to the assessment tools they need to inventory their own businesses, with the objective of then further allowing them to improve their businesses for optimal results. Given the geographical size of the two RTOs and the number of tourism operators located therein, the execution of this program is a major, multi-year undertaking.

In addition, the RTO continued with its "Ask Me Anything" forums, which enabled tourism operators to get invaluable insight from industry experts on specific topics (e.g. "How to Get Earned Media for Your Business," with Stephen Murdoch, Vice-President of Enterprise Canada). RTO12 also co-hosted workforce training workshops with

stakeholder partners (e.g. the Parry Sound Chamber of Commerce Digital Marketing Workshop, which featured instruction on “Content Marketing 101” by the RTO12 Director of Communications).

5. **Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability:** In 2015 the RTO continued with the online Tourism Operator Forum, the Customer Relationship Management software program, the unique Tourism Indicator Framework, and with industry email communications.

Of note, it was decided by the Board of Directors (at the recommendation of the Governance Committee) that enhanced guidelines were necessary to strengthen the committees of the Board (in order to obtain optimal input and effectiveness), and to that end the committees were disbanded in March 2016, only to be re-established with new Terms of Reference. The changes included a set term of committee membership, the introduction of a maximum number of participants on a committee at one time, and the specific composition of the committees required (industry experts, board members and regional tourism stakeholders).

2016-2017: Kicking It Up a Notch

The **BOP16-17** will focus on the following areas pertaining to each Pillar designated by the MTCS.

Marketing and Promotion:

- Continued investment in “social, mobile, content marketing” as our primary marketing strategy
- Continued investment in media relations/PR to complement our content strategy (releases will align with content “hooks”)
- Continued targeting of audiences in Southern Ontario, while introducing the targeting of new audiences to attract increased visitation, particularly the U.S. and the U.K. (This will be particularly important as we ramp up our Canada 150 efforts.)
- Continuation of the Fuel & Fun program, with the introduction of a re-brand and new tactical strategy for the spring editions.

Product Development and Innovation:

- Paddling Product Development – using the extensive paddling inventory that was developed in 2015-2016, RTO12 will develop a marketing strategy to position our region as a premier paddling destination in Ontario, in Canada and in the world. (This will be particularly important as we ramp up our Canada 150 efforts.)

- Introduction of a new self-guided mobile tour/responsive microsite featuring paddling product to increase RTO12's "signature suite of digital tours," which promote multiple tourism operators.
- Content development to support the marketing of websites in the signature suite of self-guided mobile tours.

Investment Attraction:

- Continue to lead the 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.
- Investigation into the possible collaboration between RTO12 and an Ontario College to foster future employment opportunities for graduating students in the region (and thereby helping the resort industry, which was negatively impacted by the changes to the federal Temporary Foreign Workers program).

Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability:

- RTO12 will conduct a Governance review and will oversee the efficacy of the revised Board committees.

2016-2017 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>Determine future membership model for the organization</p> <p>Determine future funding model for Explorers' Edge</p> <p>Committee Review</p>	<p>Foster organizational capacity with an engaged committee structure in order to deliver regional tourism mandate.</p> <p>Manage our assets and liabilities responsibly</p> <p>Deliver expected results on time</p> <p>Continue discussion examining paid membership options for EE.</p> <p>Continue to examine revenue generation options for moving toward a financially sustainable organization.</p> <p>vi. Review Terms of Reference as well as ●: Selection Criteria, ●Terms, ●Numbers, ●Competency-based skill sets required for all Committees.</p>	<p>Review succession plan. Q3</p> <p>Complete a skills matrix to identify priority areas for board member recruitment.Q3</p> <p>Provide new board members with on-boarding including review of conflict of interest, code of conduct etc..Q1</p> <p>Offer a minimum of 2 workshops that help board promote organizational excellence. Q2 – Q3</p> <p>Conduct quarterly board reviews of RTO plans and performance measures against stated objectives and targets; adjust as required.Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Solicit stakeholders' input for business and project plans and report back on activities and decisions.Q3 – Q4</p> <p>Regularly review activities, finances at board meetings.Q1 – Q4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Effective board participation achieved (goal and target – min at least 70% of board members have participated in all meetings). ● Effective committee participation achieved (goal and target – min at least 50% of committee members have participated in all meetings). ● Business plan participation, results of the financial audit and operational reporting (operating goals met, clean audit) ● Time allotted to the discussion of organizational "financial" sustainability and the future funding model (target - during two board meetings and operational planning) ● Membership (target of 125 paid members)

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Operations			
Administrative Activities, Reporting, Situation Analysis, Strategic Directions, Critical path	<p>Be recognized by regional tourism operators and stakeholders as a regional tourism resource and catalyst.</p> <p>Achieve effective committee participation (at least 50% of committee members have participated in all meetings)</p>	<p>Annual update for Business and Operational Plan. Q3</p> <p>Executive, Board and Committee Meetings. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Collect and analyse program data, reconcile programs and negotiate TPA. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Fulfill and communicate performance metrics/measurable as outlined in the Transfer Payment Agreement. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Interact via communication with provincial government agencies as it relates to organizational strategy, progress and outcomes. Q1- Q4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Number of stakeholders operators involved in RTO committee and/or project work, not including partnership fund or anticipated product development initiative. (target - 14 stakeholders) ● RTO participation with local/regional tourism and/or economic planning processes to offer subject matter input. (goal and target – participation on 5 initiatives) ● Number of regional agencies that the RTO interacts with (target - 22 agencies)

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability			
<p>Continue to liaise with industry stakeholders.</p> <p>Develop educational materials informing industry of market research findings.</p> <p>Continue to strengthen communications with industry throughout RTO 12.</p> <p>Continue to engage operators in EE activities and programs.</p> <p>Continue to refine Operator Forum database.</p> <p>Collaborate with other RTOs (e.g. RTO 13).</p> <p>Advocacy: continue to represent member concerns to province and other levels of government.</p>	<p>Foster outreach to operators, and facilitate information sharing.</p> <p>Continue to facilitate development of industry capacity by providing relevant information.</p> <p>Strengthen communications with operators.</p> <p>Explore joint marketing, joint product development, other initiatives that benefit operators.</p> <p>Increase the number of paid, registered, tourism operator memberships (by 50).</p> <p>Sustain the response rate (100-125 regional responses) and satisfaction rate (75 approval rating) as it relates to the Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey.</p> <p>Sustain the number of subscribers to the Stakeholder Quarterly Outreach Newsletter and increase open rate by 2%</p>	<p>Meetings, presentations, face-to-face activities throughout the Region. Q1- Q4</p> <p>Provide most recent research findings on website, on tourism trends, RTO 12 and Ministry market research. Q2 Q4</p> <p>Review, update and assess gaps in the CRM database. Q1</p> <p>Employ direct mail, Operator Forum and other techniques to engage operators. Q1 & Q4</p> <p>Leverage the Forum & position as an “enabler” for members to develop partnerships/collaborative marketing programs. Q1, Q3 & Q4</p> <p>Conduct regional outreach campaign to develop committee structure to add value to priority program areas. Q1</p> <p>Contribute and provide input to the development of the provincial stakeholder satisfaction survey. Q3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Response rate and results of the Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey. (goal and target – 100 responses and a 75% satisfaction rating) ● Number of new subscribers to Quarterly Outreach Newsletter. (target – 45) ● Number and types of partnerships with other RTOs (goal and target - 2) ● Number of views of the online research hub located at rto12.ca/documents/research/ (goal and target - 250)

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Research, Tracking and Measurement			
<p>Continue to improve the Tourism Indicator Framework.</p> <p>Acquire and analyze consumer market research (7); review for DDP next year.</p>	<p>Reduce frequency of TIF report to annual reporting (from 3 times).</p> <p>Refine the online dashboard capturing the data collected across the key performance measures (HST, attractions, occupancy, weather, Port Carling locks boat numbers, canoe/kayak rentals, provincial park receipts.. Include PKF data.</p> <p>Continue to keep abreast of and integrate relevant Ministry research with our own.</p> <p>Gain a greater understanding of brand awareness and consumer intelligence as it relates to the RTO product offering.</p>	<p>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 Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Continue to track and disseminate Ministry-generated consumer research Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Analyze consumer data, presenting the outcomes to the committee, board of directors and regional stakeholders. Q1 – Q4</p>	<p>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>

Marketing

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Marketing			
Consumer Marketing			
<p>Brand: Incorporate the EE brand in all marketing programs and social media programs.</p> <p>Reinforce both the regional and sub-regional brands.</p> <p>Continue to explore expanded markets (2) and test low risk niche markets.</p> <p>Continue to ensure that marketing programs and content are fresh & creative.</p> <p>Continue to develop marketing programs aimed at GTA market and beyond; main focus on social media, SEM and content marketing.</p>	<p>Brand: increase aided brand awareness of Explorers' Edge.</p> <p>Increase website analytics, sessions, users, page views, pages/session & average session duration.</p> <p>Provide greater reach & access to EE region by linking the consumer to regional information, via developed content, developing an additional 25 pieces of content for the year.</p> <p>Provide increased number of tourism experiences & packages that correspond with seasonal and general tourism marketing initiatives.</p> <p>Ensure marketing content encompasses experiences, geography, sectors and that it includes calls to action.</p>	<p>Update 2014-2015 Marketing Plan, based on Marketing Committee feedback. Q1</p> <p>Development of monthly monitor tracking reports that include change in website traffic, traffic sources, media performance, outbound referrals, social engagement etc. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Quarterly committee updates. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Bi monthly board updates. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Assigning staff resources in the communication of use and applicability of the EE logo on stakeholder communication. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Assigning staff resources and enlisting product experts to develop content</p> <p>Assigning staff resources to research, develop and articulate tourism experiences and packages.</p> <p>Assigning staff resources in the exploration of collaborative partnerships stakeholders at a federal, provincial and regional level. Q1, Q2, Q3</p> <p>Explore markets beyond the GTA (e.g. other</p>	<p>Regional Content developed (target – 150 pieces on Explorers' Edge website and on two microsites)</p> <p>Listed Packages (target - 40)</p> <p>Consumer opt-in for the consumer e-mail database (target – 4,000).</p> <p>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>Change from 2013 in aided and un aided brand awareness (goal and target – increase of 1%)</p>

		<p>Ontario, Air Canada, Porter Lufthansa partnerships etc.). Q1 & Q3</p> <p>Explore niche markets available through strategic collaboration (e.g. corporate, international, activity-based, incentive travel). Q1 & Q3</p> <p>Participate in OTMPC programs as relevant to include but not limited to the provincial marketing and advertising tactics. Q1- Q4</p>	
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Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Media / PR Program			
Participate in selected travel trade and media promotions to facilitate a positive media coverage of RTO12	<p>Increase in brand/story awareness and produce unpaid, positive and engaging editorial coverage in target markets.</p> <p>Increase media release outputs.</p>	<p>Regional outreach to gauge feedback on media opportunities. Q1</p> <p>Engage industry partners (OTMPC, sub regional partners, operators) on media opportunities. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Meet with media representatives at key marketplaces. Q1 & Q2</p> <p>Review communication strategy. Q3</p> <p>Execute media tours. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Track media engagement. 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.	<p>Identify image bank gaps. Q1</p> <p>Arrange photo shoots. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Assigning staff resources in the communication of updates to stakeholders and tourism partners. Q2 & Q4</p> <p>Acquire necessary images that support the RTO marketing activities. Q1 – 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>Fuel & Fun – Revamp Spring program to prime the pump of niche markets using RTO developed product.</p> <p>Fuel & Fun - Maintain, grow and sustain, Fall program to increase visitation.</p> <p>Program Aim: to prompt new visits to the region.</p>	<p>Increase first time visits to the region via the prompted program travel survey (75% of program participants chose EE over other destinations)</p> <p>Increase the number of first time visitors to the region via transacting programs</p>	<p>Encourage net new visits to the region via transacting programs associated with product in the spring while continuing with the Fuel and Fun in the fall 2016 Q2 & Q3</p> <p>Coordinate with stakeholders to field feedback and opportunities for collaboration. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Communicate outcomes with the Transacting Committee on a quarterly basis. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Provide stakeholders with information related to transacting programs on a regular basis. Q1 – Q4</p>	<p>Spring benchmark of visitation and pre-planned visitation (benchmark)</p> <p>Fall Signature Tipping Point Program change in first time visitation (target – 75%) and pre-planned visitation (target – 18%)</p> <p>Redemption rate of vouchers (target – 70%)</p> <p>Operator Satisfaction with the Fuel and Fun program (target – 85% satisfied or highly satisfied)</p>
<p>Jack Rabbit Referral system: Maintain, grow and sustain on-line referrals (8); continue to ensure operator sites are up-to-date..</p>	<p>Continue to develop consumer web-based tipping point programs that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase average daily spend ● Convert day trippers into overnight/multiple night stays ● Incentivize travelers to partake in a regional experience. ● Extend traveler stays through incentive offerings ● Encourage the use of packages and special offers. 	<p>Coordinate with stakeholders to field feedback and opportunities for collaboration Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Explore gaps and opportunities in the area of package development Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Provide regional outreach and training session(s) to stakeholders on package development and implementation of an online rate and inventory system Q1 – Q4</p>	<p>Change in the number of operators with a rate and inventory information on JackRabbit (target - 20 operators)</p> <p>Increase Number of packages listed on the Jack Rabbit platform (target - 45)</p> <p>Online referral and reservation system referrals (target – 40,000)</p>

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
On-line Channels & Social Media			
Continue to strengthen an active, integrated internet/on-line presence (5).	Create an appetite for travel to the region among consumers visiting on-line channels.	<p>Ensure branded content on the website to enable higher SEO Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Update social media channels with consumer information that aligns with Ontario Explorer segment and changes perceptions using OTMPC segmentation research Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Update website on a quarterly basis Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Optimize all landing pages with social sharing functionality 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)</p> <p>- Social media comments (target - 2,000)</p> <p>- Social media Post Likes (target – 25,000)</p> <p>- Social media clicks to Website (target – 100,000)</p> <p>-Visits by influential bloggers to the region</p>

Product Development

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Product Development			
<p>Focus on developing regional product.</p> <p>Maintaining and growing the signature suite of self-guided mobile tours.</p> <p>Educate operators on how to take advantage of Eco-designations within their respective sectors.</p>	<p>Raise the profile of Eco-designations with stakeholders in the region.</p> <p>Position RTO12 as the definitive paddling destination in Ontario.</p> <p>Launch the paddling self-guided mobile tour.</p> <p>Continue to monitor prior year product development initiatives</p>	<p>Disseminate information related to eco-designation on a quarterly basis to regional stakeholders Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Collaboration to optimize the use of grant / loan programs Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Review and utilize paddling strategic recommendations - develop next steps. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Continue to develop the suite of self-guided mobile tours that support RTO product. Q3 – Q4</p> <p>Communicate product updates to tourism industry partners (regionally, provincially and federally). Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Continue to monitor product in general and examine future product development opportunities with a goal of developing 1-2 key products per year (sample products include : Georgian Bay Biosphere, craft beer & wineries, cuisine, fishing, Ridge the Edge, Ice Trail, Group of 7; weddings) Q1 – Q4</p>	<p># of opens of information on the RTO12 website related to Eco- designation (target – 80)</p> <p># of new/enhanced experiences (target new – 5, enhanced - 10)</p> <p># of partnerships created (target - 5)</p> <p># of packages created including paddling product (target – 4)</p> <p># of updates to the suite of self-guided mobile tours (target – 6)</p> <p># of regional products featured by / with tourism industry tourism partners (regionally, provincially and federally). (target – 6)</p>

Work Force Development

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Work Force			
<p>Work with other agencies to help identify industry needs and collaborate to encourage and deliver relevant tourism training (23). Continue with on-line seminars/ presentations (e.g. social media) (24). Continue to promote availability and desirability of careers in tourism industry throughout RTO 12 (25). Implement the Tourism Excellence North (TEN) Create ad hoc committee to explore job opportunities for staffing (job site, job fair) Explore opportunities to improve service quality across the board.</p>	<p>i. Work with existing organizations to coordinate workforce development, prospect/ opportunities in EE & facilitate/communicate workforce opportunities. ii. Position the RTO as a workforce development hub collecting and sharing resources related to workforce development iii. Ensure workforce partnerships and programs are top of mind with regional stakeholders</p>	<p>Updating the Ad Hoc Committee in examining 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). Q1 Assigning staff resources to review workforce and assimilate resources in the region. Q3 Assigning staff resources to the communication of the Tourism Excellence North program. Q1 – Q4 Assigning staff resources in the review and development of the Small Business Accreditation Program Assigning staff resources in the continued dialogue as it relates to the Small Business Accreditation program. Q1 & Q3 Assigning staff resources as it relates to providing the regional industry with relevant workshops and webinars related to social media training and development. Q1 – Q4 Assigning staff resources educating workforce partners on programs while keeping them abreast via the dissemination of workforce related information. Q3 – Q4</p>	<p>Number of workforce development opportunities communicated (target – 5) # of participants in skills development programs (target - 15) Satisfaction level of delivery of training (target – 80% indicate high satisfaction) Results of surveys related to effectiveness of training (target – 80% of respondents indicate improvement to their business as a result of training) # of stakeholders participating in recommended program(s)</p>

		Examine ambassador Program, improving the customer experience, business accreditation (e.g. Whistler) Q3 – Q4	
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Partnership Allocation

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Partnership			
<p>Broadening the RTO's market reach with international market development via marketing, communication, package and itinerary development.</p> <p>Enhancing and expanding tourism content related to RTO12 across/throughout/with tourism stakeholders.</p> <p>Amplification of regional events and festivals through program communication tactics before, during and post events and festivals.</p> <p>Strengthen regional product and operators via participation in the Tourism Excellence North Program</p>	<p>Working with provincial and federal partners communicate product offering, packages and itineraries of the RTO into new markets i.e. US and UK.</p> <p>Increase of information (blogs/content) and the impact of such information in the market place for consumers.</p> <p>Ensure regional events and festivals have the necessary reach and communication tactics in place to bring net-new travellers to the region.</p> <p>Increase stakeholder participation in tourism development opportunities, specifically increasing the quality of the visitor experience both the operator and municipal level.</p>	<p>Using staff resources communicate partnership allocation priorities to regional stakeholders. Q1 & Q3</p> <p>Using staff resources determine review and meet with regional stakeholders in order to assemble annual partnerships. Q1 – Q2</p> <p>Using staff resources review and present opportunities to the RTO board and applicable committees. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Using staff resources access applicable partnerships with other partners that may include FedNor, NOHFC, OTMPC, Sector Associations, Ontario Trillium Foundation, District of Muskoka, Muskoka Tourism, Chambers of Commerce, regional BIAs and regional operators. Q1 – Q2</p> <p>Using staff resources develop necessary partnership contracts, MOU's and deliverables. Q1 & Q2</p>	<p># of partnerships created and projects executed (target - 10)</p> <p>Dollars leveraged (target - \$166,000)</p> <p># of content pieces produced (goal and target – 10)</p> <p># of events and festivals strengthened as a result of RTO partnership (target – 8)</p> <p>Related to the broadening of the RTO market reach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listed Packages (target - 8) • Consumer opt-in for the consumer e-mail database (target – 500) • page analytics including: visits (target – 30,000), page views (target – 100,000), pages/session (target – 1.51) & avg session duration (target – 1.00 minute) <p># of stakeholder participating in the Tourism Excellence North partnership (target - 25)</p>

Investment Attraction

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Investment Attraction			
<p>Provide operators and stakeholders with the necessary tools, trends applicable tourism development opportunities and applicable information to succeed.</p> <p>The development of commercial air service to the Muskoka Airport CYQA</p>	<p>Continue to develop and strengthen economic development links</p> <p>Explore programs for attracting unique investment that will differentiate the region</p> <p>Access new markets via the development of commercial air service.</p>	<p>Disseminate relevant Investment Attraction information to stakeholders on a quarterly basis Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Organize investment attraction networking event(s). Q1 & Q3</p> <p>Communicate commercial regional air service progress ensuring the broader regional group of stakeholders is involved and abreast of developments. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Assigning staff resources in the engagement sessions with the District of Muskoka, Muskoka Airport, Transport Canada, CATSA, regional stakeholders and consultant outreach. Q1, Q3 & Q4</p>	<p># of attendees at investment seminar / workshop(s) (target 20)</p> <p># of program / projects created or maintained (target – 2)</p> <p># of regional outreach engagement sessions (target - 5)</p>

Marketing Plan

Based on the exceptional results garnered with the “social/content/mobile marketing strategy” that was implemented in 2015-2016 (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 2016-2017 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, 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.

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 proved that content marketing can bring qualified prospects to the region.

In 2016-2017 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 be Ontario tourism’s leading social mobile content marketers in 2016-2017.

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

Marketing Objectives 2016-2017

- Publish 150+ pieces of exceptional quality content across three websites: 1) Explorers’Edge.ca (most important) 2) www.bikecottagecountry.ca and 3) www.rockstreeslakesbeer.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).








Marketing Tactical Plan

Content Publishing Strategy

We focus editorial content on the following:

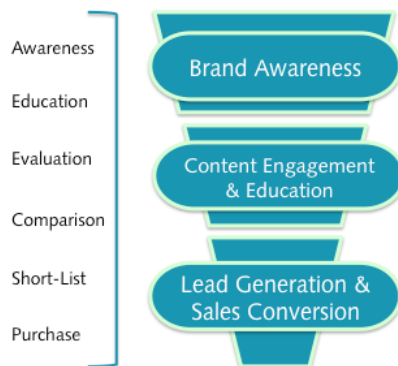
- Content that is attractive to our six established marketing “Personas” – Motorsports Enthusiasts, Food & Culture Fans, Outdoor Adventurers, Family Vacationers, Hunters & Fishers, Fit & Sportives
- The purchase decision criteria where EE is perceived to be lacking against competitor regions (these include 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 150 pieces of content in 2016-2017 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).

Marketing Channels

	Primary Audience(s)	Primary Platform Role	Platform Content
	Searchers & Discoverers	Organic and paid search, lead capture/CRM, sales	Original long-form text and embedded video content
	Discoverers	Amplify blog and YouTube content to reach people unaware of EE	Blog links and YouTube link posts, photo posts, curated third party content
	Searchers, Trade	Communicate "in-the-moment" developments	EE news and promotions, especially those of interest to travel trade
	Searchers & Discoverers	Educate and entertain, build SEO	EE news and promotions, especially those of interest to prospects who already have EE in their consideration set
	Discoverers	Reinforce EE's brand position and create desire to visit	The best in photography from the region
	Searchers	Conversion to heads-in-beds	Participate in forums, add content to EE destination page
	Searchers	Conversion to heads-in-beds	EE news, offers and promotions targeted to the specific segment needs

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 2016-2017 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:

- 1) Continue to build the overall list of email recipients (increase by 4K)
- 2) 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?)
- Managing content publication and tracking content interactions across online and social platforms (e.g. Did they mention a piece of content on social media? Can we target them with additional content on that subject?)

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, 2016 and run to week of March 31, 2017.

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. Based on previous years' work (and the results of previous partnered activities) and - up until this point in the year - the high level only information provided by OTMPC Northern, it has been determined that the following will be invested in with OTMPC:

- Co-branded email(s) - particularly useful at garnering e-newsletter sign-ups
- Social media promotion via Ontario Travel's social channels

Media Relations / PR

RTO12 saw great success in 2015-2016 by working with a third party consultant to create earned media impressions. RTO12 will continue with this program, with the objective of increasing media releases, that will centre on the consumer brand and on product in the region.

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), starting with Instant Articles on Facebook in 2016-2017.

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 2016-2017 will focus on the following areas:

International Market Development and Marketing

In the October 2012 report from OTMPC & TNS entitled “Applying Consumer Insights to Attract North American Visitors,” it is recommended that Ontario regions wanting to grow tourism receipts and build the industry must “appropriately develop and package regional product” to thereby “attract new and peripheral visitors.”

With our **International Destination Travel Development** project, RTO12, through a third party expert, will work with tourism businesses and additional stakeholders to establish a suite of packages and itineraries that will attract “new and peripheral visitors” (specifically international travellers from the U.S. and U.K.), that will move these visitors around the region for extended stays, and that will increase the amount of money spent in the region during visitation (particularly “imported” dollars).

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 be focused on:

- 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*”)

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 **BOP16-17** 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

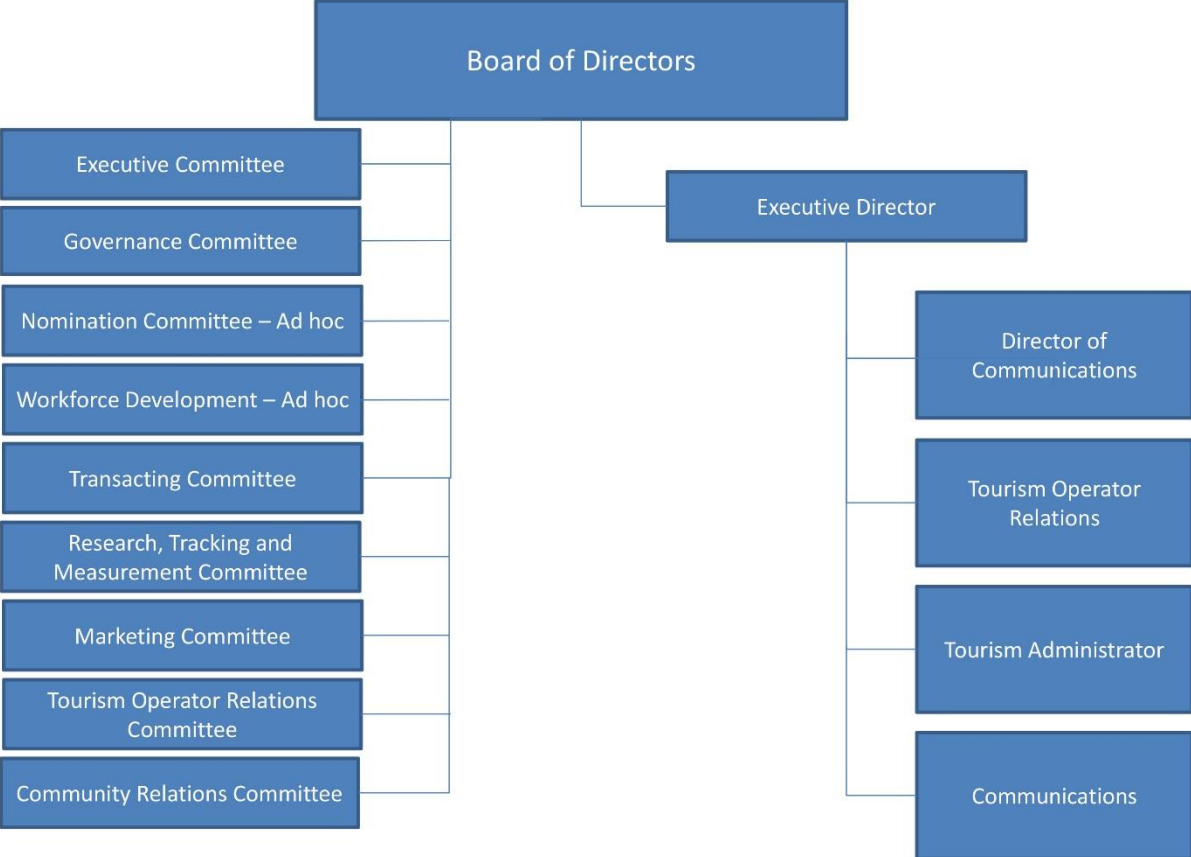
EE is governed by a 16-member volunteer Board of Directors. A “lean and mean” staff of five employees conduct the day-to-day activities of the organization. Board and staff members are identified in Appendix A.

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



Budget

Budget Items	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL
Administration & Overhead					
Salaries & Benefits	74,500	74,500	74,500	74,500	298,000
Finance and Administration	3,750	3,750	3,750	3,750	15,000
General Administration	13,000	13,000	13,000	13,000	52,000
Travel and General Expenses	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	48,000
SUBTOTAL	103,250	103,250	103,250	103,250	413,000
Governance - Industry Relations					
Outreach/Meetings	1,250	1,250	1,250	1,250	5,000
Governance , Policy, Communication, Planning	5,000	5,000	20,000	2,000	32,000
Membership	-	3,000	3,000	-	6,000
Website	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	10,000
SUBTOTAL	8,750	11,750	26,750	5,750	53,000
Marketing and Promotion					
Marketing & Social Media					
Social Media Advertising - Facebook Ads	100,000	76,000	50,000	50,000	276,000
Search Engine Marketing - Google Adwords	50,000	10,000	10,000	5,000	75,000
Content Promotion Stack Adapt / Programmatic Native / Instant Articles / Google Amp (SEM)	30,000	20,000	5,000	850	55,850

OTMPC	-	-	10,000	-	10,000
Content Development / Guest Authors	5,000	5,000	-	-	10,000
Promotions/Contests/Incentives	-	-	-	10,000	10,000
Creative Development	-	-	-	5,000	5,000
Project Mngmt (Facebook)	10,163	10,163	10,163	10,163	40,650
Project Mngmt (Google)	2,625	2,625	2,625	2,625	10,500
Project Mngmt (Stack)	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500	6,000
Monthly Retainer (\$4,000 x 12 months)	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	48,000
Lead Nurturing	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	24,000
Image Bank	10,000	5,000	5,000	-	20,000
Media/PR	10,000	5,000	5,000	-	20,000
Transacting - Spring Fuel and Fun	30,000	-	-	-	30,000
Transacting - Fall Fuel and Fun		-	55,000	-	55,000
Transacting - Jack Rabbit	65,000	-	-	-	65,000
SUBTOTAL	332,288	153,288	172,288	103,138	761,000
Investment Attraction					
Outreach/Meetings	10,000	10,000	5,000	-	25,000
SUBTOTAL	10,000	10,000	5,000	-	25,000
Product Development and Innovation					

Product Development - Winter Non - Motorized	-	-	10,000	-	10,000
Product Development – Self Guided Mobile Tour	15,000	15,000	-	-	30,000
Research	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	40,000
SUBTOTAL	25,000	25,000	20,000	10,000	80,000
Workforce Development					
Workforce Development	-	-	-	-	-
SUBTOTAL	-	-	-	-	-
Partnership					
International Market Development	49,000	-	-	-	49,000
Workforce Development (TEN)	10,500	10,500	10,500	10,500	42,000
Content Marketing	20,000	15,000	-	-	35,000
Event and Festival Marketing	20,000	20,000	-	-	40,000
SUBTOTAL	99,500	45,500	10,500	10,500	166,000
TOTAL AGREEMENT COSTS	578,788	348,788	337,788	232,637	1,498,000

Revised Budget

Budget Items	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL
Administration & Overhead					
Salaries & Benefits	74,500	74,500	74,500	74,500	298,000
Finance and Administration	3,750	3,750	3,750	3,750	15,000
General Administration	12,250	12,250	12,250	12,250	49,000
Travel and General Expenses	10,750	10,750	10,750	10,750	43,000
SUBTOTAL	101,250	101,250	101,250	101,250	405,000
Governance - Industry Relations					
Outreach/Meetings	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	4,000
Governance , Policy, Communication, Planning	5,000	5,000	2,000	-	17,000
Membership	-	3,000	1,500	-	4,500
Website	2,500	2,500	2,500	500	8,000
SUBTOTAL	8,500	11,500	7,000	1,500	33,500
Marketing and Promotion					
Marketing & Social Media					
Social Media Advertising - Facebook Ads	100,000	76,000	50,000	50,000	276,000
Search Engine Marketing - Google Adwords	50,000	10,000	10,000	5,000	75,000
Content Promotion Stack Adapt / Programmatic Native / Instant Articles / Google Amp (SEM)	30,000	20,000	5,000	850	55,850

OTMPC	-	-	10,000	-	10,000
Content Development / Guest Authors	5,000	5,000	-	-	10,000
Promotions/Contests/Incentives	-	-	-	10,000	10,000
Creative Development	-	-	-	5,000	5,000
Project Mngmt (Facebook)	10,163	10,163	10,163	10,163	40,650
Project Mngmt (Google)	2,625	2,625	2,625	2,625	10,500
Project Mngmt (Stack)	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500	6,000
Strategy Development / Strategist	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	48,000
Lead Nurturing	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	24,000
Image Bank	10,000	5,000	5,000	-	20,000
Media/PR	10,000	5,000	5,000		20,000
Transacting - Spring Fuel and Fun	15,000	-	-	-	15,000
Transacting - Fall Fuel and Fun		-	55,000	-	55,000
Transacting - Jack Rabbit	60,000	-	-	-	60,000
SUBTOTAL	312,288	153,288	172,288	103,138	741,000
Investment Attraction					
Outreach/Meetings	10,000	5,000	5,000	-	20,000
SUBTOTAL	10,000	5,000	5,000	-	20,000
Product Development and Innovation					

Product Development – Self Guided Mobile Tour	15,000	15,000	-	-	30,000
	10,000	-	8,000	10,000	28,000
SUBTOTAL	25,000	15,000	8,000	10,000	58,000
Workforce Development					
Workforce Development	-	-	-	-	-
SUBTOTAL	-	-	-	-	-
Partnership					
International Market Development	49,000	-	-	-	49,000
Workforce Development (TEN)	10,500	10,500	10,500	10,500	42,000
Content Marketing	20,000	15,000	-	-	35,000
Event and Festival Marketing	20,000	20,000	-	-	40,000
SUBTOTAL	99,500	45,500	10,500	10,500	166,000
TOTAL AGREEMENT COSTS	556,538	331,538	304,038	226,388	1,423,500