



2020 – 2021 Business and Operational Plan

(April 1, 2020 – March 31, 2021)

Contents

Executive Summary 1

RTO12 Vision, Mission and Mandate: Revisited in 2017-2018 2

RTO12 2020 - 2021 Goals 2

 Organizational Goals 3

Governance 5

Regional Overview and Assessment 9

 Insight from the MTCS Tourism Research Unit 9

Continued Development of Commercial Air Service 12

Crisis Communications: Ongoing Funding, Development & Deployment 12

Product Development Framework 13

Building Success: What’s Ahead At RTO12 14

2019-Early 2020 Partnerships Review 18

Key Learnings of the Past Nine Years: 20

EE Continued Strategic Direction:..... 20

2020 - 2021 Business and Operational Plan Summary 21

2019 – 2020 BOP: Objectives, Key Activities and Timelines, Performance Measures 22

 Governance 22

 Marketing 25

 Product Development 29

 Product Development / Research 30

 Investment Attraction 31

 Workforce 32

 Partnership Allocation 33

Marketing Plan 35

The Partnership Program 39

 International Marketing and Development Partnerships 39

 Domestic Marketing and Development Partnerships 39

 Stakeholder Training Workshops 39

 Sub Regional Signage Programs 39

 Workforce Development: Work-Integrated Learning Opportunities 39

Risk Identification, Assessment, and Mitigation Strategies 40

2019-2020 Budget 41

Executive Summary

Established in 2010, Explorers' Edge (EE) is one of eleven Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) funded by the Ontario Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries representing the geographic areas of Algonquin Park, the Almaguin Highlands, Loring-Restoule, Muskoka, Parry Sound and South Algonquin. This Business and Operational Plan (BOP20-21) outlines the annual strategy, provides a brief background on the status of the organization, and specifies goals and activities, concluding with key activities, timelines, performance measures and budget. The BOP20-21 priorities were finalized by the Board of Directors during a regular meeting of the Board that was held at the Super 8 Motel in Parry Sound, Ontario on January 14, 2020.

EE has solidified itself as a leader in regional destination development in Ontario. With a forward-thinking, strategic staff that is overseen by a private sector Board of Directors, the organization remains at the forefront of social marketing, innovative programs and tourism partnerships. After a decade in operation, Explorers' Edge has proven itself to be a strategic, driven organization focused on building rural tourism, particularly with its successful introduction of commercial air service into the Muskoka Airport in June of 2019 (10-week seasonal service). The second season of service will commence on June 27, 2020, and finish on September 8, 2020. Key to the long-term success of this specific program will be the continued development of packages and itineraries, the introduction of a package and itinerary platform, and the continuation and further development of traveller dispersion strategies and tactics to benefit as many tourism stakeholders as possible (e.g. the Explorers' Edge airport shuttles). EE will also undertake to receive Travel Industry Council of Ontario (TICO) accreditation, in order to sell packages directly to consumers.

In Fiscal 2020–2021, extensive and long-term work will commence to address the significant labour shortages and lack of affordable housing that are a threat to the sustainability of the tourism industry here. The launch of RTO12's 'Workforce Thrusters Strategy' will include work in the following areas: 1) the creation of "social enterprise catalyst housing" to attract industry employees 2) training and education revitalization by the industry itself to attract and inspire the next generation of workers (and which will feature work-integrated learning opportunities), and 3) a regional or supplemental currency to offset the traditionally low-paying jobs in the industry, particularly for entry-level positions.

Finally, Explorers' Edge will continue to build internal processes to conduct outreach to Indigenous stakeholders, to ultimately assist them in building their self-determined tourism product offerings.

Of Note: The BOP20-21 has been developed in advance of the highly-anticipated unveiling of the Ontario Tourism Strategy (OTS) by the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism & Culture Industries (date TBD). RTO12 has created this BOP to the best of its ability while the OTS is pending, with the hope that major changes will not be required once it is announced.

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

The 2020-2021 fiscal year will see a continued focus on International Markets and the continued development of commercial air service, both of which are outputs of the **5-Year Regional Tourism Strategy (RTS 2018-23)**. Additionally, significant and greater focus will be placed on the launch of the Workforce Thrusters Strategy, which is also an output of the RTS.

Vision – In five years (2023), the Explorers' Edge region will be the most popular tourism destination in Canada.

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 then inspire consumers to choose our tourism destination and products).

RTO12 2020 - 2021 Goals

The mandated pillars by Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism & Culture Industries for the RTO to work within continue to include:

- **Product Development** – to enhance visitor experience through well-designed tourism products that meet current and future visitor demand
- **Investment Attraction/ Investor Relations** – to increase investment in the tourism industry to enhance visitor experience
- **Workforce Development and Training** – facilitate and support the attraction, development and retention of a tourism workforce to enhance the visitor experience
- **Marketing** – to increase awareness of Ontario as a travel destination and increase conversion in target markets

- **Partnership** – to become a catalyst in building strategic alignment and promoting collaboration within the industry

Additional – Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability

Explorers’ Edge Guiding Principles

- 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.

Explorers’ Edge Operating Principles

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

RTO12 Domestic Brand

Branded for domestic consumer reference as ***Explorers’ Edge*** in 2011, the organization’s Board-sanctioned brand positioning is: ***“a quintessentially Canadian wilderness experience just two hours from the city.”***

Visit www.explorersedge.ca

RTO12 International Brand

“The great Canadian wilderness just north of Toronto.”

Visit www.thegreatcanadianwilderness.com

Organizational Goals

The following goals will shape the work of Explorers’ Edge for the next year five years:

Marketing

- Attract international travelers to the region
- Explore competitive packages and itineraries for international markets
- Identify tipping point and incentive programs for international markets
- Focus on developing the destination as four-seasons through innovative programs
- Enhance photography inventory for regional partners
- Utilize media for broader communication of regional assets

Product Development

- Lead with product that differentiates our destination from others
- Explore and align new product that will distinguish our destination
- Continue to communicate product development in the region

Investment Attraction

- Continue to develop and strengthen economic development links
- Enhance investment attraction programs with regional partners
- Create tourism related investment attractions opportunities for regional stakeholders

Workforce Development

- Establish tourism specific training mechanisms that meet the current workforce challenge facing the industry
- Continue to assess the ongoing workforce needs and needed resources via collaborative partnerships
- Look to international markets to supplement the current workforce base
- Position the region as a training and innovation hub for tourism

Partnership

- Create a shared vision for tourism growth
- Ensure regional partners understand the region tourism strategy
- Support regional priorities and programs

Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability

- Engage multiple operators when possible
- Continue to strengthen ties and communication with industry
- Ensure the industry is well informed on all tourism related topics (marketing, research, product development, training, investment etc.)

Governance

The RTO has sustained an open and transparent governance philosophy since its inception and has adopted an unwavering reliance on process. Composition of the Board of Directors is developed using a nomination process, and representation on the Board pertains to geographic, sector, gender, skill set considerations. As priority membership is given to business owners or their key GMs/presidents, the RTO Board of Directors has been composed of private sector tourism operator stakeholders since it was created. Ex-Officio members also sit at the table to lend expertise and input. The Board meets bi-monthly, with the Executive conferring weekly. A list of Board of Directors as of January 1, 2020 is as follows:

[Jeff Suddaby](#), Chair

jeff@3guysandastove.com, (705) 783-8404

3 Guys and a Stove, 54 Golden Pheasant Dr, Huntsville, ON

[Curtis Dunlop](#), Vice Chair

curt@thegriffinpub.ca (705) 646-0438

The Griffin Gastro Pub / Session Muskoka, 9 Chancery Lane, Bracebridge, ON

Brenda Scott, Secretary

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Angela Pollak

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laura.ross@ontario.ca (705) 646-0641
Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, 5 Dominion St, Bracebridge, ON

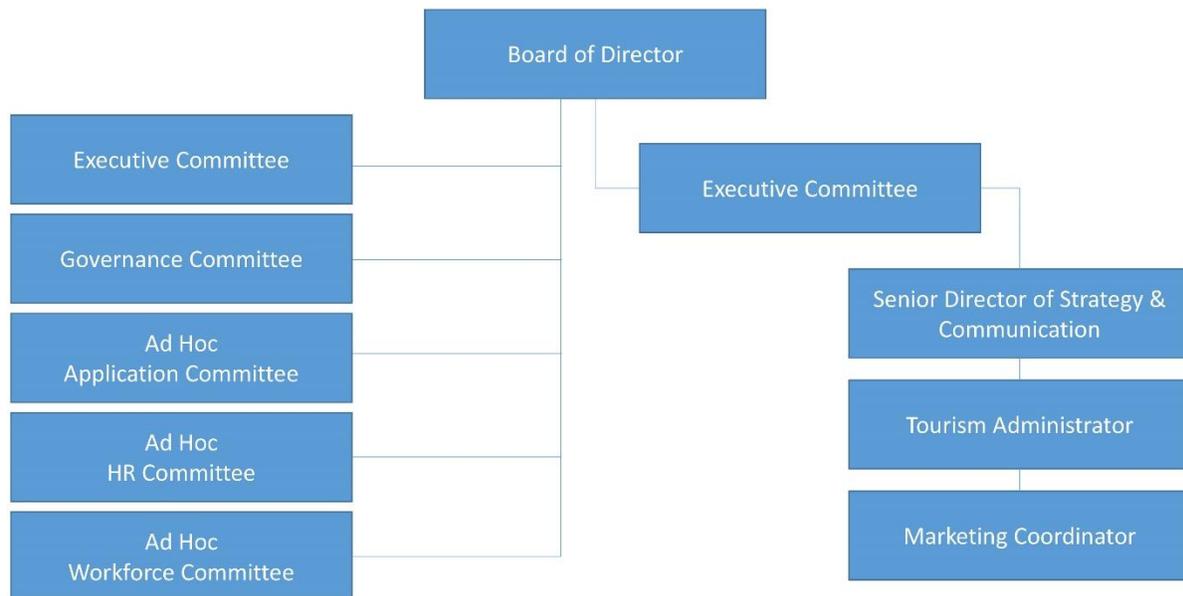
With an objective of keeping administrative costs as low as possible, a staff of four conducts the ongoing work of EE.

Explorers' Edge is governed by an eight (8) member Board of Directors representing each of the six sub-regions (Algonquin Park, Almaguin Highlands, Loring-Restoule, Muskoka, Parry Sound and South Algonquin). Five committees oversee the work of the organization:

1. Executive Committee
2. Governance Committee
3. Ad hoc – Nomination Committee
4. Ad hoc - Workforce Development Committee
5. Ad hoc – Human Resources

Committee Terms of Reference are available on the rto12.ca website. Committee updates are provided at each Board meeting.

In 2017 the Governance Committee reviewed bylaws, policies and procedures as well as the Terms of Reference for each Committee. In addition, Explorers' Edge undergoes annual financial audits as a requirement of its open and transparent philosophy. The organization is in sound financial standing.



Chair: Jeff Suddaby

Owner of 3 Guys and a Stove, located in Huntsville, ON, Jeff has ushered in an exceptional culinary experience for tourists and locals alike. In 2014 Jeff joined the RTO Board, after long-standing experience holding positions on other boards, including the Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce.

Executive Director: James Murphy

After completing a college diploma in Hotel and Resort Management, James completed an undergraduate degree at the University of New Brunswick with a Bachelor of Applied Management in Hospitality & Tourism in 2004. In 2008 James received his Master of Arts, Recreation and Leisure Studies, Tourism Planning and Policy degree from the University of Waterloo. Post-graduation, James served as the general manager of SAVOUR Muskoka, a culinary tourism initiative aimed at bridging the gap between supplier and restaurant chef while at the same time creating a culinary identity for the region of Muskoka and Parry Sound. During this time he was involved in tourism initiatives on district and provincial levels as a Board member with Muskoka Tourism, the Ontario Culinary Tourism Association (OCTA) and the Muskoka Lakes Chamber of Commerce. James has also worked on projects with the Canadian Tourism Commission (now Destination Canada), Canadian Relais & Chateaux Association and Statistics Canada. James joined RTO12 as Executive Director in 2011 is responsible for the introduction of strong governance, administrative procedures, additional funding revenue and the organization’s industry-leading programs.

Senior Director, Strategy & Communications: Kate Monk

Kate Monk holds a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) from the University of Toronto, where she majored in English literature at Victoria College. She also earned post-graduate certificates in public relations and media copywriting from Humber College in Etobicoke, Ontario, graduating with honours. She is a proven business strategist and communications professional, with particular interest in transformation, innovation, and benchmarking beyond the status quo. Kate joined RTO12 in 2011 and has been responsible for the creation of its most innovative programs.

Tourism Administrator: Erin Smit

Erin holds a BA in Sociology from Laurentian University and a diploma in Hotel & Resort Operations from Georgian College in Barrie. She joined Explorers' Edge under a one-year FedNor contract and then joined the team permanently. She is the lead on project management for most undertakings at RTO12, and for operator outreach. Erin also acts as the organization's office administrator.

Marketing Coordinator: Jack Hopkins

Jack graduated from the Trent University School of Business in 2017 where he achieved a Bachelor of Business Administration degree with a specialization in Marketing and Consumer Culture. Prior to joining RTO12 in 2018, Jack spent seven memorable summers working as a golf services attendant at both public and private golf courses in Muskoka.

Regional Overview and Assessment

Insight from the MTCS Tourism Research Unit

RTO12 Estimated Visits:

- 2008: 3.5 million visits
- 2010: 3.8 million visits
- 2011: 4.8 million visits
- 2012: 4.1 million visits
- 2013: 4.3 million visits
- 2014: 4.3 million visits
- 2015: 4.4 million visits
- 2016: 4.7 million visits
- 2017: 4.5 million visits

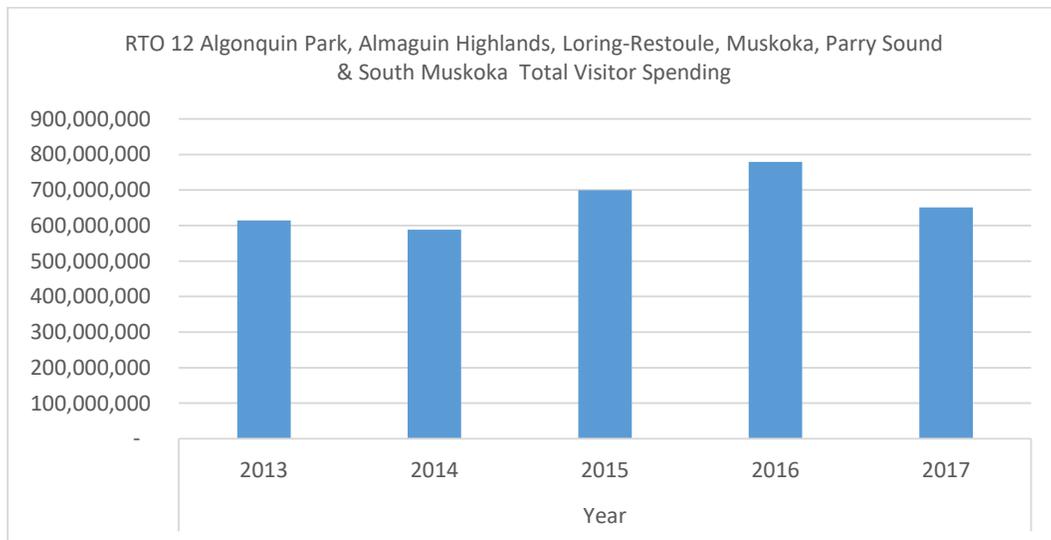
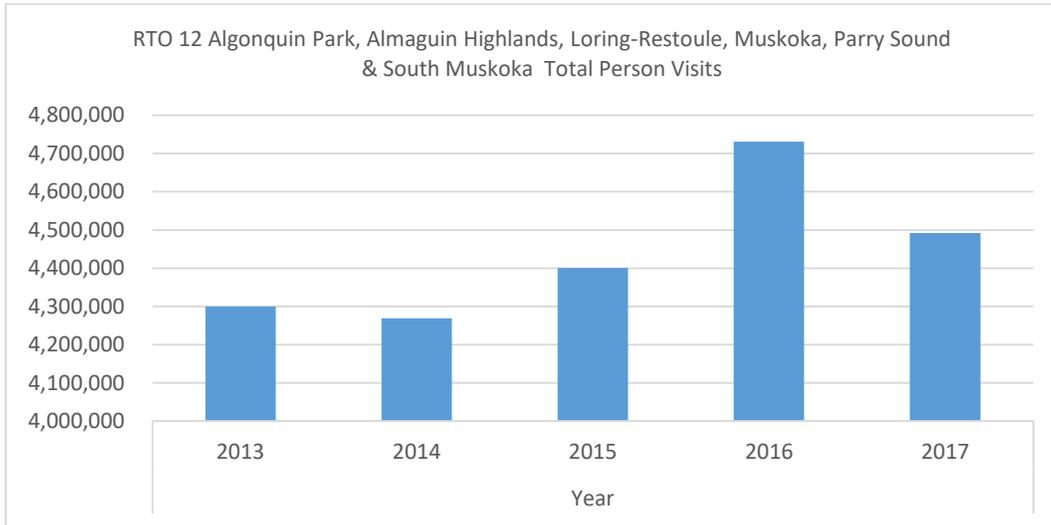
RTO12 Estimated Spending:

- 2008: \$662 million in spending
- 2010: \$513 million in spending
- 2011: \$598 million in spending
- 2012: \$596 million in spending
- 2013: \$614 million in spending
- 2014: \$589 million in spending
- 2015: \$699 million in spending
- 2016: \$778 million in spending
- 2017: \$650 million in spending

RTO12 Businesses:

- 2008: 1,738 establishments
- 2010: 1,688 establishments
- 2011: 1,666 establishments
- 2012: 1,757 establishments
- 2013: 1,795 establishments
- 2014: 1,905 establishments
- 2015: 1,921 establishments
- 2016: 1,931 establishments
- 2017: 1,958 establishments

2017 saw a slight decrease in visitor spending and visitation to the region; this is possibly attributable to tourists attending Canada 150 celebrations elsewhere in the province, particularly Ottawa.



Of note, also: June and July of 2017 were extremely wet months, which is traditionally a detriment to visitation.

Sum of Total Precip (mm)	Column Labels												Grand Total
Row Labels	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Grand Total
2017	48.1	30.7	57.2	122.2	123.5	138.5	63.2	81.6	57.6	76.8	53.8	35.2	888.4
2018	38.9	63.7	21.4	88.9	65.9	43.7	39.2	114.1	30.3	70	98.8	68.5	743.4
2019	33.5	68.4	50.7	129.5	101	86.9	20.7	84.4	58.8	151.5	87.8	17	890.2
Grand Total	120.5	162.8	129.3	340.6	290.4	269.1	123.1	280.1	146.7	298.3	240.4	120.7	2522

International Travel Survey, US and Overseas Residents Visiting Canada (Inbound)

Total Trips

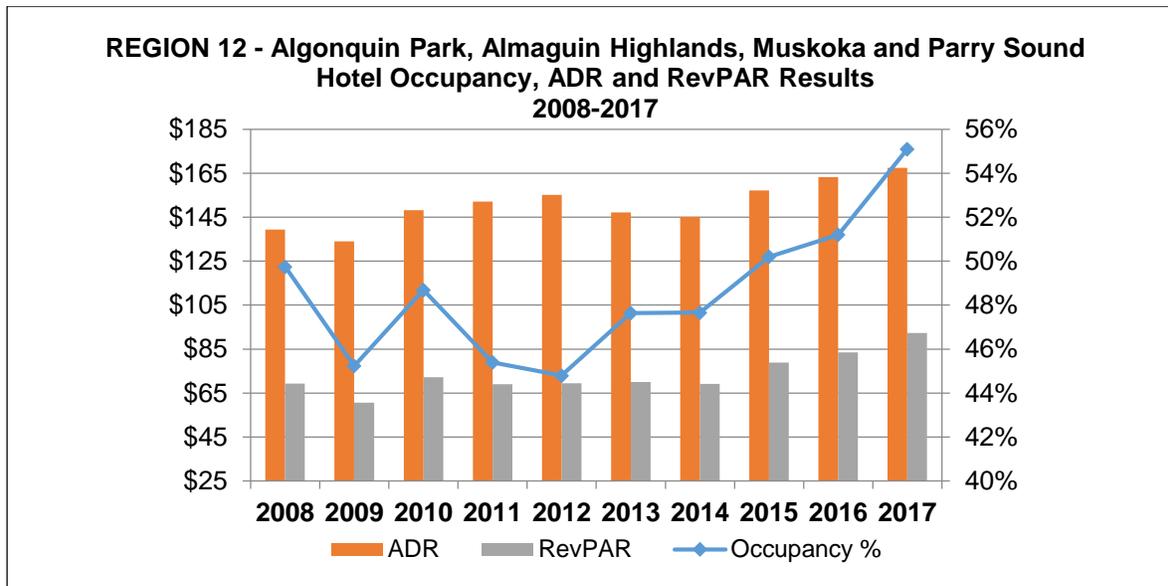
- 2017 ~ 359,000
- 2018 ~ 415,000

Overall international visits were up from 2017 (359,000) to 2018 (415,000), thanks to the increase in US visits, which more than made up for the drop in overseas visits. Additionally, there was a significant jump in larger groups (5 or more people) from the US, but shorter stays with more same-day and 1-overnights occurred, with a corresponding drop in 20-or-more night stays.

Despite the increase in US visitation, the shift in the US visitors' length of stay impacted overall spending. The data indicates the US visitors stayed for shorter times, and if they stayed longer, they were likely shacking up WTF being accommodated by friends and family. This observation, along with overall drop in overseas visitors, potentially indicates why there was a decrease in spending.

Regional Tourism Picture and Outlook for Hotel Occupancy, ADR and RevPAR Results

- Year-Over-Year 2017 vs. 2016 (YOY15v14) the region increased Hotel Occupancy, ADR and RevPAR



Continued Development of Commercial Air Service

The marathon development of commercial air service to the region finally came to fruition in 2019. RTO12 partnered with Porter Airlines to introduce twice-weekly summer service, with the first flight to Ontario's 'cottage country' and the Muskoka Airport on June 28, 2019. With the introduction of Porter's seasonal Muskoka flights, travellers now have an additional transportation option for visiting the great Canadian wilderness just north of Toronto.

EE also facilitated a successful shuttle bus service to and from the Muskoka Airport corresponding to Porter arrivals and departures, which saw passengers transported across five main routes throughout the region, from Parry Sound in the west to Whitney on the south-east side of Algonquin Park.

The first season of commercial air service was considered a success by all partners, and EE looks forward to continuing to develop this important program, in order to attract more international visitors to the region.

The second season will launch on June 25, 2020 and run until September 8, 2020. EE plays an integral role in the marketing of this service to domestic and international audiences, and we work closely with airline representatives in this regard. For the 2020 flying season, we are also looking forward to working with additional representatives from Porter Escapes, the airline's vacation and packaging division.

Notably, for 2020-2021 EE will undertake to achieve TICO accreditation, so that we can commence marketing packages for this service directly to consumers in our designated marketing areas.

The commercial air service program is the ongoing fulfilment of a 3-year, tri-party contract between RTO12, Porter Airlines and the District of Muskoka (owner of the airport/CYQA).

Crisis Communications: Ongoing Funding, Development & Deployment

In 2019, some tourism operators in the RTO12 catchment (especially parts of Muskoka and Almaguin) endured significant challenges due to excessive spring flooding (e.g. damage and rebuild costs, late openings, etc.). This was the second natural disaster to afflict the region, with misinformation in the media regarding the Parry Sound 33 wildfires deterring visitation to the Town of Parry Sound in the previous year (primarily summer and fall of 2018).

During each of these unanticipated natural disasters and because of their respective detrimental effects on businesses, RTO12 commenced immediate crisis communications development and deployment in order to assure travellers (particularly in southern Ontario) that the entire region was still "open for business." This communication (in the form of immediate content marketing and PR campaigns) required utilising core budget in an unforeseen manner to reach audiences.

Significant operator outreach was also conducted during each situation, in order to ascertain as clear an understanding as possible as to the direct and indirect impacts of these natural disasters on tourism businesses. During Spring 2019 flooding, a crisis management report, complete with long-term and short-term recommendations as well as input from affected regional stakeholders, was created and

delivered to Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries (entitled “Ontario Flood 2019: Minister of Tourism, Culture & Sport Briefing”) to garner additional support for regional tourism stakeholders affected.

Moving forward and in anticipation of future natural disasters occurring, RTO12 will now have a dedicated budget line to ensure counter-messaging campaigns can be developed, funded and deployed quickly, in order to pre-emptively counter any potential dips in visitation due to these occurrences. This will commence in the BOP20-21 budget.

Product Development Framework

RTO12 Product Development Framework: Worldly Wise			
Tangible			Intangible
Current Digital Assets	Differentiated KTAs	New / Gap	New / Gap
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bike Cottage Country • Cottage Country Beer Trail • Group of Seven Outdoor Gallery • Fish the Edge • Ride the Edge • Golf Muskoka • Current Inventory Asset • Paddling Inventory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being Lakeside • Wildlife Viewing • Guided nature tours • Indigenous Culture / Tourism • Paddling • Hiking in Nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visiting Friends & Relatives (VFR) • Culinary Tourism • International Itineraries & Packages • Indigenous Culture / Tourism • Arts & Culture • Corporate Travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce Development (Service) • Transportation (accessibility) • Sustainability to Consider the main offering (the landscape) and to avoid "over tourism"

In 2018, RTO12 released its substantial Product Development Framework (PDF) Report, which continues to be an ongoing beacon for product development at the RTO.

Of note for BOP20-21 pertaining to the PDF:

- After successfully developing packages for the seasonal air service with a third-party travel agency, RTO12 will undertake to achieve TICO accreditation, in order to sell packages directly to consumers ourselves. This will allow us to align package offerings with suggested itineraries, and with content marketing initiatives (which will most likely pertain to the KTAs)
- Our commercial air service partner is incorporating the Key Tourism Activities (KTAs) into their efforts to target audiences in American markets (aligning with our own strategy)
- RTO12 will commence analyzing VFR opportunities by partnering with various educational institutions (to create “work-integrated learning opportunities”)
- RTO12 will commence research into the potential return of passenger rail service
- RTO12 will continue to facilitate shuttle bus service out of the Muskoka Airport to disperse Porter Airlines passengers to tourism businesses across the entire region
- RTO12 will launch its substantial, long-term “Workforce Thrusters Strategy” in order to address labour shortages and the lack of affordable housing for entry-level employees in particular

Building Success: What's Ahead At RTO12

To understand what RTO12 hopes to achieve with BOP20-21, it is necessary to first understand the work conducted in the previous fiscal year and how we will build on it for even greater success. Fiscal 2019-2020 proved to be very successful for RTO12, and the organization can boast of significant achievements under the Five Pillars designated by the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism & Culture Industries, including the following (with some initiatives crossing more than one Pillar for outcomes):

- **Commercial Air Service Launched (investment attraction/marketing):**

After five years of development across many levels of government and with input and assistance from various stakeholders, our region became the first in Canada to welcome a commercial airline under the new federal CATSA cost-recovery program.

Entering into a 3-year, tri-party contract with the District of Muskoka (owner of the airport) and Porter Airlines in 2019, RTO12 is working hard to leverage this service to bring more international visitors to Muskoka, and to disperse them across our entire region.

The inaugural season of Porter Airlines' summer service to Muskoka was considered a great success by all parties. It was particularly important for setting benchmarks (outbound loads, inbound loads, overall loads) for improvement, and Fiscal 2020-2021 will see RTO12 refining our marketing strategy and tactics to ensure these benchmarks are surpassed.

RTO12 is particularly pleased to have formed strong working relationships with members of Porter Airlines marketing and communications staff, with representatives of Nieuport Aviation (owners of the arrivals and departures area at Billy Bishop Toronto Island Airport), and with CATSA managers and staff who worked the Muskoka flights.

- **Development of the International Program - The Great Canadian Wilderness (marketing):**

An outcome of the substantial Environics research associated with the Product Development Framework was the identification of high potential markets in the US, and the six differentiated Key Tourism Activities in our region, which RTO12 commenced promoting to attract these markets. In Fiscal 2020-2021, our airline partners will also use this intelligence at their discretion for their own outreach purposes.

In 2019, RTO12 fully participated in Destination Canada's Rendez-vous Canada event in Toronto as a platinum sponsor. This was our first travel trade show to commence lead nurturing strategies for international tour operators and travel media (and the RTO's sponsored luncheon – complete with interactive wolf howl – was a particular success). We will return to RVC in Quebec City in 2020 to continue to build these important relationships.

In 2019, RTO12 successfully developed packages for the commercial air service program using a third-party travel agency; in 2020 we will obtain our TICO licensing in order to develop and sell packages directly to consumers.

- **Investment in Indigenous Tourism Development (product development):**

In partnership with FedNor Industry Canada, RTO12 identified over a dozen First Nations within the RTO catchment, and conducted initial outreach with representatives from four First Nations at a facilitated gathering at Wausauksing (Parry Sound) in the spring of 2019. We have since made new connections out of that event, and we continue to conduct relationship building and outreach within our region. It is the RTO12 staff's recommendation that, moving forward, an Indigenous representative join the Board of Directors, in order to optimize opportunities for reconciliation and authentic Indigenous cultural tourism development.

- **Dispersion and Packaging (product development/marketing):**

In an effort to disperse commercial air service passengers from CYQA to ensure that as many tourism businesses as possible in the region benefited from the program, for the inaugural Porter Airlines service in summer 2019, RTO12 offered passengers the "Fly & Explore Package" upon their arrival at the Muskoka Airport. A variation of the long-standing "Fuel & Fun Package," passengers of Porter flights were offered 4 x \$25 vouchers to spend at participating attractions, restaurants and shops across the region, which were redeemable during the times the seasonal service was offered. With tracking functionality added to each voucher, this was a way for RTO12 to assess the potential dispersion of passengers and their greater economic impact in the region.

Additionally, RTO12 facilitated a 5-route shuttle bus service in and out of the airport, which was an important tactic for ensuring greater economic benefit for regional operators (and was labelled "last mile considerations" as early as 2016). In 2020, the Fly & Explore Package will be refined to target audiences in designated American marketing areas, so that we can further track international visits and expenditures. The package will incentivize travel to our region from the States.

Additionally, pertaining to the shuttle busses, RTO12 engaged the services of Meridian Systems to customize bookings for each route. This allowed for passenger tracking (and improved customer service), as well as modest revenue generation for the overall project (tickets were \$10 per passenger per one way).

- **Great Lakes Cruising Development on Georgian Bay (investment attraction/marketing):**

In partnership with the Town of Parry Sound, RTO12 is a long-standing member of the Great Lakes Cruising Coalition. In 2019, RTO12 participated in cruise programs arriving at the Parry Sound Harbour by covering the costs of shuttle busses to the downtown core from moored cruise ships.

In 2020, RTO12 will work closely with the town's economic development officer in order to be of further service in the development of on-shore product for arriving cruises. The opportunities to disperse passengers out to tourism operators will increase, as the number of ships arriving climbs steadily over the next 5 years (and with Viking Cruises scheduled to come in 2022).

- **Georgian College Classroom Instruction & Fam Tours (workforce development/partnership):**
In 2019, RTO12 partnered with the Hospitality, Tourism and Recreation Department at Georgian College in Barrie, Ontario to deliver two extensive Familiarization Tours in the Explorers' Edge region for students. As an outcome of this in late 2019, and in an effort by RTO12 staff to develop greater understanding of tourism education delivery in the province, RTO12 senior staff will develop and the Executive Director will deliver a 14-week Tour & Package Sales course for the January 2020 semester at Georgian College. Key to this participation will be the inclusion of work-integrated learning opportunities between the RTO and the second-year students, and this initiative will inform one of the three 'Workforce Thrusters' moving forward (i.e. training and education revitalization).

Of note, in 2019 and early 2020, RTO12 senior staff participated in classroom instruction and as guest speakers at Ryerson University's Ted Rogers School of Management, interacting with students and professors at the Hospitality & Tourism School. Outcomes of this participation included the development of class Fam Tours in our region in 2020, as well as RTO12's participation in a multi-university case study competition.

- **Municipal Accommodation Tax Development and Programming (marketing/partnership):**
Starting in early 2019, the RTO12 Executive Director was a member of the Advisory Committee that formed the Huntsville Municipal Accommodation Tax Association (HMATA), which now administers the HMAT in that town. Additionally, in late December 2019 and early January 2020, RTO12 and HMATA created a partnership to deliver a winter "Fuel & Fun Package" program for execution over Winter 2020. This program will be called "Huntsville's Winter Wonders Travel Package." It is anticipated that RTO12 will continue to build programs with the HMATA moving forward.
- **Partnerships:**
The RTO continued to align strategies with regional stakeholders by fostering partnerships that increased the competitiveness of small to medium sized tourism stakeholders. These included the Downtown Parry Sound Business Association's Girlfriends' Getaway Weekend, the Muskoka Lakes Museum Paddling In Muskoka Event, the Great Muskoka Paddling Experience, The Muskoka Maple Trail, and more. RTO12 will continue to look for opportunities to partner on projects, particularly with those whose business objectives align with the RTO.

Additionally, in 2019, RTO12 partnered with Destination Ontario on crisis communication programs pertaining to Parry Sound 33 and the Muskoka Flooding, which included social media marketing and onsite broadcasts organized by media coordinator, Kevin Forget. We also worked with Destination Ontario to promote the packages offered for the Porter Airlines service, particularly golf.

RTO12 staff also participated in a successful sales mission to New York that was organized by Destination Ontario. We look forward to continuing to work with Destination Ontario when strategic opportunities arise.

- **Governance Development & Review:**

The Board and Executive Director reviewed the RTO's committee structure, completed a Bylaws review and updated the organization's policies and procedures. Work completed resulted in Bylaw updates being motioned at the AGM, with the most significant being Board composition now limited to 7-11 members at a time.

- **Industry Liaison & Outreach:**

RTO12 optimized its Industry Newsletter list in 2019, and also created a dedicated operator-only list of contacts for communicating important programs moving forward (which has 800 addressees). The internal CRM program (Highrise) continues to be an important tool for operator relations, with updates being made regularly by RTO12 staff. (This is important for succession purposes as well.)

In December 2019, RTO12 senior staff conducted four well-attended Town Halls across the region to bring tourism stakeholders up-to-speed on the RTO's upcoming plans, including the introduction of the Workforce Thrusters Strategy. This was an opportunity for stakeholders to be engaged in the RTO12 planning process, and we will continue with these sessions moving forward.

The RTO12 Executive Director met quarterly with municipal and agency stakeholders in the region, and invited them in particular to share their own strategic plans for moving tourism forward, in order to foster greater alignment between organizations. RTO12 will continue to organize these meetings moving forward.

The RTO12 Executive Director attended scheduled meetings of Venture Muskoka – a group of economic development representatives from the area.

In 2019 and early 2020, RTO12 staff conducted numerous training and consultations with tourism stakeholders, including the South Algonquin Business Association. Staff also participated as panel facilitators and guest speakers at the Ontario Tourism Summit, in an effort to showcase the successes of rural tourism stakeholders. The RTO12 Executive is a member of the on-site planning committee for the 2020 Ontario Tourism Summit, which will take place at Deerhurst Resort.

RTO12 hosted its 2nd Annual Regional Tourism Summit in Parry Sound, Ontario in June of 2019. The event was well attended, and of note was the introduction of the Open Mic session, wherein tourism stakeholders were invited to take the stage and educate attendees on successful and innovative programs they were undertaking at their properties. Speakers from across all six sub-regions joined us in RTO12 to take the mic and "tell us more." RTO12 will host its 3rd Annual Regional Tourism Summit in June 2020.

In 2019, the RTO12 Executive Director acted as a point person/liaison between the 13 RTOs and the Ontario Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, in order to streamline

communications between the two. This included orchestrating and facilitating meetings, and creating agendas.

- In 2019, RTO12's Senior Director of Strategy & Communications was a member of the Advisory Committee for the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario's annual Ontario Tourism Summit.

2019-Early 2020 Partnerships Review

Muskoka Chambers	Ontario Chamber of Commerce Annual General Meeting and Convention. The off-site portion that took place at the Muskoka Wharf included a tourism breakout workshop that was co-hosted by the regional chamber of commerce and the RTO.
MTMA Partnership	Muskoka Tourism Marketing Agency and the RTO partnered on a international marketing / retargeting program to support year one of commercial air service.
Golf Muskoka	Golf Muskoka and the RTO partnered on a content marketing program, investment in Golf Ontario and development of golf packages (supporting commercial air service).
Georgian College	Georgian College and the RTO partnered on the development of FAM trips to the region with first year Georgian College Students enrolled in Tourism and Eco-tourism programs. The spring program brought 20 students to Muskoka Lakes and Parry Sound with the fall program bringing 40 students to Bracebridge and Huntsville.
Deerhurst Resort	Deerhurst Resort and the RTO partnered on the communication of the grand opening of Lakeside Lodge with a emphasis on commercial air service, shuttle service and Fly and Explore program.
Town of Gravenhurst	The township partnered with the RTO in the development of content for both domestic and international audiences that support commercial air service in 2019 & 2020.
Town of Bracebridge	The township partnered with the RTO in the development of content for both domestic and international audiences that support commercial air service in 2019 & 2020.
Town of Huntsville	The township partnered with the RTO in the development of content for both domestic and international audiences that support commercial air service in 2019 & 2020.
Muskoka Travel Service	Marketing and communication of shuttle service and packages associated with commercial air service.
Parry Sound Tourism	Parry Sound Tourism partnered with the RTO in marketing of sub-regional product via a billboard placement (signage) on the 400-series highways.

Town of Parry Sound	The Town of Parry Sound partnered with the RTO on international development related to the dispersion of travellers during the 2019 Cruise Ship Season.
Huntsville Chamber of Commerce	Huntsville Chamber of Commerce partnered with the RTO on the development of online marketing to communicate the Snowfest event in Huntsville.
FedNor	Phase two of the international communication of the KTA's to support commercial air service in addition to the Indigenous development workshops and outreach.
Trestle Brewery / PS Bikes	Partnership with Trestle Brewery and Parry Sound Bikes in the communication of their Off The Gravel event via communication and signage.
Parry Sound DBA	Partnership with Parry Sound DBA in the marketing and communication of the November Girlfriends Getaway weekend.
Stockey Centre	Partnership with Stockey Centre on the marketing, dispersion and communication of the One of a Kind show in Parry Sound.
Trestle Hop on Hop off	Partnership with Trestle Brewery on the girlfriends Hop on Hop Off event November 22, 2019 during girlfriends get away weekend.
Bracebridge Fire and Ice	Working with the BIA, Chamber of Commerce and Town of Bracebridge the RTO will partner on the development and communication of the Fire and Ice festival in winter 2020.
Georgian College (Winter FAM)	Working with the college the partnership will introduce third year students to winter product and business owners in the region. The FAM will include a RTO workshop on employment opportunities.
Huntsville Accommodation Tax	Partnering with the Huntsville Accommodation Tax Association in the development of a winter voucher / dispersion program and content marketing.
Almaguin Highlands	Partnership with Director of Economic Development Almaguin Community Economic Development to produce winter content and photography.

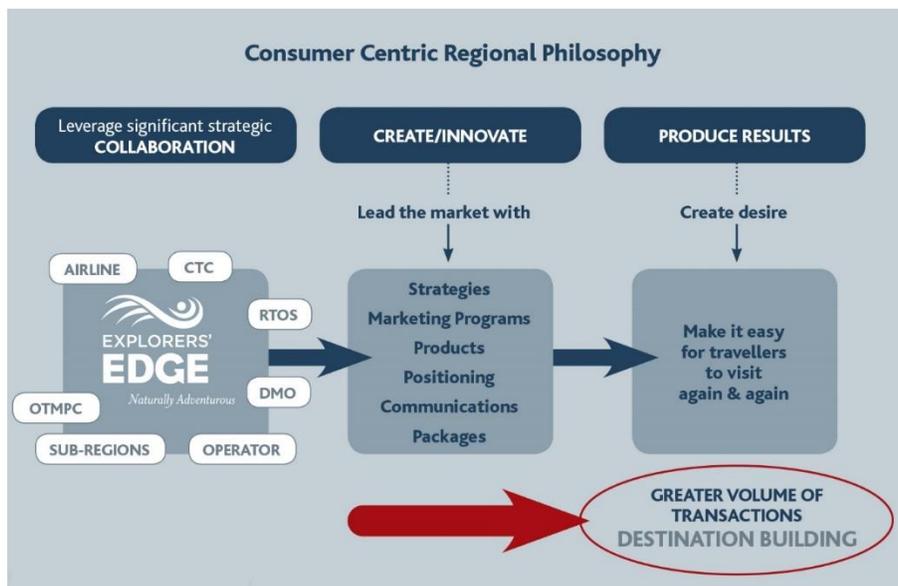
Key Learnings of the Past Nine Years:

- Strategy & Process are the keys to EE's success
- Do more with less is our ongoing mantra
- Dispersion strategies are needed to ensure provincial and federal marketers meet rural tourism objectives
- Don't ever rely on the status quo – be willing to lead the way and try something new
- Don't rely on consultants for final programming – instead use them a resource to formulate dynamic planning
- Business owners are key to success at Board level because they empower the organization to take smart risks
- Our best work comes when we consider the consumer/traveller: ask what will make it easier for the visitor to choose our destination?

EE Continued Strategic Direction:

Explorers' Edge will continue to build new audiences for the region by focusing on product development, international marketing, and leveraging greater partnership and funding opportunities. Workforce development – and the launch of the innovative 'Workforce Thrusters Strategy' in 2020 – will be the most important initiative of BOP20-21.

Continuing with a 'Consumer-Centric Approach' (where consumer wants and needs are the key considerations), the organization's focus is ultimately on three important areas: collaboration, innovation, results.



2020 - 2021 Business and Operational Plan Summary

Governance 251,007	Marketing 530,600	Product Development 55,000	Investment Attraction 20,500	Workforce 105,000	Partnership 186,000
<p>Effective Governance: Govern EE through effective leadership; strong industry representation and utilization of strategy, policies and procedures.</p> <p>Review & Update policies, bylaws, director make-up and committee structure.</p> <p>Deliver Town Halls as an opportunity to interact with directors and learn about RTO programming.</p> <p>Third Annual Regional Tourism Summit.</p> <p>Explore business awards and tourism employee awards.</p> <p>Administrative Activities, Reporting, Situation Analysis and the updating of the 5 year Regional Tourism Strategy.</p> <p>Continue to liaise with industry stakeholders to ensure that they are aware of regional strategies, priorities and programs. Monthly industry newsletters-</p>	<p>Reinforce both the regional and sub-regional brands via content development.</p> <p>Introduce regional KTAs to domestic and international audiences while building the lead nurturing database.</p> <p>Participate in Rendez-vous Canada to continue exposure to travel trade and media.</p> <p>Develop and execute International incentive & dispersion program.</p> <p>Work with Porter Airlines on seasonal service marketing.</p> <p>Review and update online referral platform in order to support transacting/conversion associated with international audiences.</p> <p>Introduce trackable packages and itineraries to international and domestic audiences.</p> <p>Acquire TICO license to sell packages.</p> <p>Dedicated budget and resources to potential crisis communications pertaining to natural disasters.</p>	<p>Facilitate dispersion of international travellers throughout the regional provide access to regional tourism product.</p> <p>Maintain related product self-guided mobile tours.</p> <p>Facilitate regional Indigenous communication and product development. Seek Indigenous participation on the RTO12 Board for authentic stakeholder development.</p> <p>Promote the Group of Seven 100th founding anniversary.</p> <p>Develop content to promote the KTAs to international audiences.</p> <p>Maintain membership in the Great Lakes Cruising Coalition and continue to work with the Town of Parry Sound to improve passenger experience/dispersion while docked.</p>	<p>Provide operators and stakeholders with the necessary tools, trends applicable tourism development opportunities and applicable information to succeed.</p> <p>Communicate timely regional investment and facilitate information related to investment best practices.</p> <p>Explore partnership and investment opportunities associated with regional training, accommodation and development hubs i.e. Regional Innovation and Training Centre.</p> <p>Continue to liaise with regional economic development agencies to ensure that the tourism impact remains a top priority.</p> <p>Commence preliminary conversations and research pertaining to passenger rail service return.</p>	<p>Undertake concept research and feasibility study related to the Workforce Thruster Strategy. The study will include areas of research, amalgamated into a greater road map for business case development.</p> <p>Continue to promote availability and desirability of careers in tourism industry throughout RTO 12.</p> <p>Support business owners with skills and knowledge training.</p> <p>Continue to partner with post-secondary institutions to foster greater awareness of employment opportunities in the region, and to inspire graduating students to work here.</p> <p>RTO12 senior staff to do speaking engagements and course instruction with universities, colleges and high schools when the opportunity presents itself to build stronger relations.</p>	<p>Broadening the RTO's market reach with international marketing.</p> <p>Continue to transition the RTO's move from domestic to international marketing with domestic marketing campaigns.</p> <p>Support and offer regional training workshops.</p> <p>Explore signage programs with regional partners.</p> <p>Continue to work with provincial colleges and universities on workforce integrated learning opportunities.</p>

2019 – 2020 BOP: Objectives, Key Activities and Timelines, Performance Measures

Governance

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Governance and Administration			
Governance			
<p>Effective Governance: Govern EE through effective leadership; strong industry representation and following strategy, systems, policies and procedures.</p> <p>Review & Update director make-up and committee structure</p>	<p>a) Foster organizational capacity with regional stakeholders and ensure committee are engaged in order to deliver regional tourism mandate.</p> <p>b) Manage our assets and liabilities responsibly.</p> <p>c) Deliver expected results on time.</p> <p>d) Review Terms of Reference (Selection Criteria, Terms, and Numbers) to ensure competency-based skill sets required for the Board of Directors and all Committees.</p>	<p>a) Review succession plan, bylaws and policy documents. Q1-Q4</p> <p>a) communicate organizational developments and updates via e-mail and monthly webinars to regional stakeholders Q1-Q4</p> <p>a) administer post committee and board surveys to capture relevant feedback and foster engagement Q1-Q4</p> <p>a) solicit tourism stakeholder for membership Q1-Q4</p> <p>b) Complete a skills matrix to identify priority areas for board member recruitment.Q3</p> <p>b) Provide new board members with on-boarding materials including review of conflict of interest, code of conduct etc. Q1</p> <p>b) Offer a minimum of 2 workshops that help board promote organizational excellence. Q2 – Q3</p> <p>b) Solicit stakeholders' input for business and project plans and report back on activities and decisions.Q3 – Q4</p> <p>b) Regularly review activities, finances at board meetings.Q1 – Q4</p> <p>c) Conduct board reviews of RTO plans and performance measures against stated objectives and targets; adjust as required.Q1 – Q4</p>	<p>a) Effective committee participation achieved (goal and target – min at least 50% of committee members have participated in all meetings).</p> <p>a) Membership (target of 200 paid members).</p> <p>b) Effective board participation achieved (goal and target – min at least 70% of board members have participated in all meetings).</p> <p>c) Business plan participation, results of the financial audit and operational reporting (operating goals met, clean audit)</p> <p>c) Governance updates and discussions at the board table regarding committee items</p> <p>d) Time allotted to the discussion of organizational "financial" sustainability and the future funding model (target - during two board meetings and operational planning)</p>

		<p>c) review Governance Committee terms of reference and action items for current fiscal year Q1</p> <p>d) Continue discussion examining paid membership options for EE. Q3</p>	
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Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Operations			
Administrative Activities, Reporting, Situation Analysis, and the review/update of 5 year regional tourism strategy	<p>a) Be recognized by regional tourism operators and stakeholders as a regional tourism resource and catalyst.</p> <p>c) recognize tourism businesses for their commitment and outstanding achievements</p>	<p>a) Annual update for Business and Operational Plan. Q3</p> <p>a) Collect and analyse program data, reconcile programs and negotiate TPA. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>a) Fulfill and communicate performance metrics/measurable as outlined in the Transfer Payment Agreement. Q1 – Q4</p>	<p>a) Number of stakeholders operators involved in RTO committee and/or project work, not including partnership fund or anticipated product development initiative. (Target - 14 stakeholders)</p> <p>a) RTO participation with local/regional tourism and/or economic planning processes to offer subject matter input. (goal and target – participation on 5 initiatives)</p> <p>a) Number of regional agencies that the RTO interacts with (target - 22 agencies)</p> <p>b) Number of tourism business that submit for Regional Tourism Summit Participation (target – 10 businesses)</p>

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability			
<p>Continue to liaise with industry stakeholders to ensure that they are aware of regional strategies, priorities and programs.</p>	<p>Continue to strengthen communications with industry throughout RTO12 by:</p> <p>a) Foster outreach to operators, and facilitate information sharing while continuing to facilitate the development of industry capacity by providing relevant information.</p> <p>b) Strengthen communications with operators.</p> <p>c) Explore joint marketing, joint product development, and other initiatives that benefit operators.</p> <p>d) Continue to represent member concerns to province and other levels of government.</p>	<p>a) Provide most recent research findings on website, on tourism trends, RTO 12 and Ministry market research. Q2 Q4</p> <p>a) Facilitate six month and year end webinars with stakeholders Q1 – Q4</p> <p>a) Review current mailing list, confirm contacts and develop monthly regional e-mail communication. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>a) Meetings, presentations, face-to-face activities throughout the Region to coincide with email campaigns and monthly webinars. Q1- Q4</p> <p>b) Review, update and assess gaps in the CRM database by gathering intelligence from stakeholders via a survey on how they want to receive RTO updates. Q1</p> <p>c) circulate partnership communication as a trigger to gather possible initiatives and foster information gathering example; Utilize the operator forum, webinars and circulated forms to engage stakeholders. Q1 & Q4</p> <p>d) Participation in events such as TIAO Queens Park, TIAC conference, consultation round table session, RTO round tables etc.</p>	<p>a) Response rate and results of the Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey. (Goal and target – 100 responses and a 75% satisfaction rating)</p> <p>a) attendees at monthly RTO webinar updates (10 per webinar)</p> <p>a) Number of new subscribers to Quarterly Outreach Newsletter. (target – 45)</p> <p>b) Respondents to communication survey (goal and target - 45)</p> <p>c) Number of joint marketing, joint product development, other initiatives that benefit operators (target – 4)</p> <p>d) identification of three stakeholder concerns to be communicated to the Board of Directors and levels of government</p>

Marketing

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Marketing			
Content Development			
Reinforce both the regional and sub-regional brands via content development.	<p>a) Provide greater reach & access to EE region by linking the consumer to regional information, via developed content</p> <p>b) Capture consumer email addresses in the lead nurturing program for future communication</p> <p>c) Increase website analytics, sessions, users, page views, pages/session & average session duration (via content).</p>	<p>a) Development of regional content via researching story ideas, interviewing stakeholders, alignment with research (includes interviews, photography development and regional outreach)</p> <p>b) Assigning staff on a weekly basis to work with the lead nurturing third party to develop, deploy and monitor segmented emails.</p> <p>c) Assigning staff on a daily basis to update consumer website with new content, events, pictures, listings and packages by scanning regional and provincial partner sites and social accounts.</p> <p>Additional Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update 2019-2020 Marketing Plan, based on the transition to international markets and TICO licence. Q1 • Circulation of monthly monitor tracking reports that include change in website traffic, traffic sources, media performance, outbound referrals, social engagement etc. Q1 – Q4 • Assigning staff resources in the exploration of collaborative partnerships stakeholders at a federal, provincial and regional level. Q1, Q2, Q3 • Participate in OTMPC programs as relevant to include but not limited to the provincial marketing and advertising tactics. Q1- Q4 	<p>a) Regional Content developed (target – 6 domestic pieces on Explorers’ Edge website and on applicable microsites and target -10 international pieces)</p> <p>d) Consumer opt-in for the consumer e-mail database (target – 1,500).</p> <p>c) Domestic website analytics including: visits (target – 250,000), page views (target – 500k), pages/session (target – 1.23) & average session duration (target – 1.00 minute)</p> <p>c) International website analytics including: visits (target – 100,000), page views (target – 200k), pages/session (target – 1.15) & average session duration (target – 80 seconds)</p>

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Social Media Marketing			
Introduce regional product to domestic and international audiences.	Create awareness of regional product and travel experiences consumers visiting on-line channels.	<p>Traffic developed content over social media channels monitoring, updating and responding to travel enquiries related to posted information. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Update social media channels with information related to regional product and experiences</p> <p>Respond and interact with travel enquiries across multiple social media platforms</p>	<p>Domestic Social media analytics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facebook Likes (target – 2,000 new) - Twitter followers (target – 200 new) - Social media mentions (target – 500) - Social media comments (target - 500) - Social media Post Likes (target – 5,000) - Social media clicks to Website (target – 50,000) <p>International Social media analytics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facebook Likes (target – 4,000 new) - Social media mentions (target – 700) - Social media comments (target - 700) - Social media Post Likes (target – 8,000) - Social media clicks to Website (target – 100,000)
International Trade Shows			
Introduce regional product to international group tour companies	Make international connects and ascertain interest in regional content and enhance regional awareness	<p>Attend international trade show including Rendezvous Canada and communication regional product.</p> <p>Pre-show outreach to attendees where applicable</p> <p>Research tradeshow audiences</p> <p>Staff and volunteer training</p> <p>Post show ROI measurement</p>	<p># of trade shows (goal 1)</p> <p># of tour leads and content adoption leads (12)</p>

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>a) Continue brand/story awareness and produce unpaid, positive and engaging editorial coverage in target markets.</p> <p>b) Continue media release outputs related to work being completed during fiscal year.</p>	<p>a) Regional outreach to gauge feedback on media opportunities. Q1</p> <p>a) Engage industry partners (OTMPC, sub regional partners, operators) on media opportunities. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>a) Meet with media representatives at key marketplaces. Q1 & Q2</p> <p>b) Review communication strategy. Q3</p> <p>b) Coordinate media tours. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>b) Track media engagement. Q1 – Q4</p>	<p>a) Maintain number of inbound media visits (target – 8)</p> <p>a) Outbound media visit to an international destination (target -1 international media event)</p> <p>a) Increase in the number of media contacts in the database (target – 12)</p> <p>a) Increase in unique visits to the RTO media communication page (target – benchmark)</p> <p>b) Coordinated Media Tours (target – 4)</p>
Transacting			
Provide international travellers associated with commercial air service incentive to explore the region while implementing a tool to track economic impact.	<p>Gain intelligence from first time international air travellers to the region.</p> <p>Disperse travellers throughout the region exploring tourism product.</p>	<p>Continue Fly and Explore voucher program, agreements, and mechanisms associated with international voucher program.</p> <p>Coordinate with commercial airline (Porter) and airline package partner (Porter Escapes) to identify international tourists.</p> <p>Communicate outcomes with the board of directors and stakeholders on the commencement of the program. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Provide stakeholders with information related to transacting programs on a regular basis. Q1 – Q4</p>	<p>Dispersion – continue traveller spending & dispersion in the region (target – voucher redemption in all sub regions)</p> <p>Redemption rate of vouchers (target – 70%)</p> <p>Transacting Visitor Exit Survey (target – 50 responses)</p> <p>Operator Satisfaction with the transacting program (target – 85% satisfied or highly satisfied)</p>
Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Reservation Platform			

Consumer centric approach to international traveller dispersion	The objective is to provide the consumer a flexible platform to book a shuttle from the airport into sub regions of RTO12.	Identify and work with operators to ensure that shuttle stops are online and recent. Coordinate with stakeholders to field feedback and opportunities for collaboration Q1 – Q4	Increase in the number of consumers using the shuttle service (target – 140 bookings)
Package Development			
Establishing a ROI / output mechanism for the RTO	To interact with tourism operators in order to build packages and transact with consumers.	Provide regional outreach and training session(s) to stakeholders on package development and implementation of an online rate and inventory system. Q1 – Q4 Work with TICO to establish and gain licence in order to sell packages. Q1 – Q4	Bench mark first year of TICO Licence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revenue • Expenses • # of packages • # of stakeholders participating

Product Development

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Product Development			
Transportation			
Ensure international travellers have access to regional tourism product.	Improve connectivity across multiple product offerings, provide a world class welcoming visitor experience and the collection of visitor exit information related to their stay.	<p>Continue regional transportation routes and drop off points.</p> <p>Continue Visitor welcome experience and visitor exit survey.</p> <p>Communicate the transportation options out to stakeholders and travellers.</p> <p>Develop report / information related to product, routes and best practices</p> <p>Align transportation routes with package and itinerary information/offering</p>	<p># of product linked to transportation routes (target – 12)</p> <p># of operators taking part in the transportation program (target -12)</p>
Product Applicability			
Review Key Tourism Activities (KTA's)	Evaluate the KTA's to assess gaps and applicability	<p>Review RTO12 Product Research & Framework against learnings from first and second year of international marketing and dispersion.</p> <p>Present findings to directors and identify next steps in the development of product for international audiences.</p>	Documentation and communication of next steps related to the product development of KTA's

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Self-Guided Mobile Tours Enhancement			
Ensure self-guided mobile tours are operating optimally	Current self-guided mobile tours have up-to-date content, mapping and functionality.	<p>Trouble shoot self-guided mobile tours for accuracy and applicability.</p> <p>Develop content specific to each tour (in-house)</p> <p>Engage tourism stakeholders to push out suite of self-guided tours</p>	<p>Track web analytics and usage of self-guided mobile tours</p> <p>Tourism operators communicating the self-guided mobile tours (target – 20)</p>

Product Development / Research

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Product Development / Research			
Industry Statistics			
Track the health of regional tourism industry via applicable travel and tourism statistics.	Gather applicable and relevant research.	<p>Track monthly occupancy percentages, average daily rate & Revenue per available room. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Using staff resources the RTO will network with stakeholder to assemble data related to Organizational Program Performance & Tourism & Business Performance, Visitor Intelligence via an Exit Survey Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Track and disseminate Ministry- generated consumer research, statistics and tourism updates Q1 – Q4</p>	<p>Number of views / downloads of the online research findings (target - 125).</p> <p>Number of participants participating in the research dialogue via Regional Tourism summit, quarterly stakeholder meetings and monthly webinars (target- 55)</p> <p>Number of research presentations (target - 2)</p>

Investment Attraction

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Investment Attraction			
Communication			
Provide operators and stakeholders with the necessary tools, trends applicable tourism development opportunities and applicable information to succeed.	Develop and strengthen economic development links ensuring tourism is top of mind and integrated into regional investment projects.	<p>Disseminate relevant Investment Attraction information to stakeholders on a quarterly basis Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Explore and participate in programs for attracting unique investment that will differentiate the region.</p> <p>Communicate investment attraction opportunities to potential investors</p> <p>Communicate transportation programs ensuring the broader regional group of stakeholders is involved and abreast of developments. Q1 – Q4</p> <p>Continued development support of commercial air service to the Muskoka Airport CYQA, great lake cruising to Parry Sound and regional rail service.</p>	<p>Involvement in regional investment seminar / workshop(s)/projects (target 20)</p> <p># of regional outreach engagement sessions that the RTO participates in (target - 15)</p>

Workforce

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Workforce			
Work Force Overview & Information Sharing			
Monitor the current workforce landscape.	Continue to glean updates and relevant information from regional partner in order to gain an understanding of current work force resources, gaps, best practices, resources and applicable partners.	<p>Review of current workforce development tools and programs.</p> <p>Work with existing organizations to coordinate workforce development, prospect/ opportunities in EE & facilitate/communicate workforce opportunities.</p>	<p>Number of workforce development opportunities communicated (target – 5)</p> <p># of participants in the development and communication of the workforce overview (target - 15)</p>
Work Force Communication			
Continue to promote availability and desirability of careers in tourism industry throughout RTO 12 (25).	Position the RTO as a workforce development hub collecting and sharing resources related to workforce development.	<p>Make necessary website update to rto12.ca related to workforce development.</p> <p>Create content position the region as a career option related to tourism.</p> <p>Ontario University and College integration and presentation</p>	<p>Website analytics related to workforce development (benchmark year)</p> <p># of pieces of content related to workforce development (target – 1)</p> <p># of University and College presentations (target – 10)</p>
Work Force Study			
To address workforce challenges in our regional industry (lack of workers) by eliminating two main barriers to more people choosing to work in tourism here: 1) lack of affordable housing and 2) low wages (usually minimum wage) for entry-level tourism positions	Research and develop two innovative concepts to break down these barriers: introduction of “social enterprise catalyst housing” (that is community and industry-invested housing) and a regional currency to offset low wages in this industry. Both programs could potentially also apply to other industries facing the same barriers, such as the regional building trades industry.	<p>The development of a regional ‘social enterprise catalyst housing’ road map for creating this new housing model for our industry (to off-set the high cost of living here and to train employees to succeed in tourism and financial planning for moving up the housing continuum).</p> <p>The development of a regional currency proposal that will benefit multiple stakeholders (entry-level and low-income workers, local businesses and municipalities that rely on tourism as a GDP measurement).</p>	<p>Industry & stakeholder interviews (target – 35)</p> <p>Industry online sessions (target 2)</p>

Partnership Allocation

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
International Marketing and Development			
Broadening the RTO's market reach with international marketing.	Communicate the breadth of tourism product to international markets via stakeholder partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using staff resources communicate partnership opportunities followed by third party development of strategy, tactics and deliverables. Q1 Work with third party to establish work plan, key deliverables and dates. Q1 Using staff resources communicate mid partnership progress and final report to stakeholders Q2 – Q4 	# of international marketing campaign partnerships (goal and target – 6)
Domestic Marketing and Development			
Ensure domestic marketing continues.	Sustain domestic marketing with partnered programs aimed at domestic audiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using staff resources communicate partnership opportunities followed by third party development of strategy, tactics and deliverables. Q1 Work with third party to establish work plan, key deliverables and dates. Q1 Using staff resources communicate mid partnership progress and final report to stakeholders Q2 – Q4 	# of domestic marketing campaign partnerships (goal and target – 6)
Stakeholder Training Workshops			
Augment and cohost regional training programs	Expand on the breadth of regional training programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using staff resources communicate partnership opportunities followed by third party development of strategy, tactics and deliverables. Q1 Work with third party to establish work plan, key deliverables and dates. Q1 Using staff resources communicate mid partnership progress and final report to stakeholders Q2 – Q4 	# of partnered tourism training programs (goal and target – 2)

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
Signage			
Support sub-regional way finding signage programs	Ensure consistency and expand signage program sub regionally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using staff resources communicate partnership opportunities followed by third party development of strategy, tactics and deliverables. Q1 Work with third party to establish work plan, key deliverables and dates. Q1 Using staff resources communicate mid partnership progress and final report to stakeholders Q2 – Q4 	# of partnered signage (goal and target – 1)
Workforce			
Augment and cohost regional workforce integrated learning program/opportunities	Bridge the gap between student expectations and employer expectation while inspiring students to continue their career in tourism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using staff resources communicate partnership opportunities followed by third party development of strategy, tactics and deliverables. Q1 Organize student stakeholder interactions. Work with third party to establish work plan, key deliverables and dates. Q1 Using staff resources communicate mid partnership progress and final report to stakeholders Q2 – Q4 	# of students participating (goal and target – 150) # of stakeholders participation (goal and target – 12)

Marketing Plan

The Board of Directors of RTO12 has recommended that the marketing strategy for 2020-2021 be a continuation of what was established in the 5-Year Regional Tourism Strategy (2018). This involves primarily the attraction of more international visitors to the region, as well as the support of commercial air service.

Marketing Mission

To make our target audiences (domestic and international) aware of the Explorers' Edge region and of the exceptional tourism offerings found in the six sub-regions, in order to convert targeted audiences into overnight travelers to the region.

Marketing Manifesto

We will continue to use content marketing to ensure this region is foremost target audiences' consideration when they are thinking of travelling.

What distinguishes content is that it seeks not to interrupt, but to be found – and to be found at precisely the moment when target audiences are 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 six sub-regions, and engage potential customers much earlier in the path to purchase. Primarily, with content, we are targeting “discoverers” at the top of the purchase funnel.

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

We have already found our voice as social mobile content publishers, and have proven that content marketing can bring qualified prospects to the region. In 2020-2021 we will continue to leverage the competitive advantage we, as a small DMO, have in building international visitation using content. We will also work with industry partners to insert packages as a conversion in the content and, once our TICO license is secured, we will sell packages directly as a Call To Action (CTA) in the content.

Additionally, and based on our Year-1 commercial air service marketing results, we will also use display advertising and retargeting strategies to encourage travellers to book a flight to the region aboard Porter Airlines (summer service only).

Overall Brand Positioning

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

International Brand

The Great Canadian Wilderness just north of Toronto.

Brand Voice

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

Marketing Priorities

Publish exceptional content pertaining to the differentiated Key Tourism Activities (KTAs) that will motivate American visitors in particular to visit our region. The six KTAs are:

Being Lakeside

Hiking

Paddling

Wildlife Viewing

Guided Nature Tours

Indigenous Tourism

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) by using airline display ads and retargeting of visitors to the Great Canadian Wilderness and Explorers’ Edge websites.

Primary Designated Marketing Areas: New York, Boston, Chicago and Washington D.C. (with greatest investment being made in New York in order to optimize spend).

Marketing Objectives 2020-2021

- Publish minimum of 15 hard working pieces of exceptional quality content (10 international and 5 domestic), to be posted to TheGreatCanadianWilderness.com and ExplorersEdge.ca
- Drive 400,000 visits to the Explorers’ Edge website using content marketing and 200,000 visits to the Great Canadian Wilderness site
- 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 (particularly accessibility / proximity factors) for competitive positioning

Priority Target Market(s)

High Potential Markets include the four Designated Marketing Areas (DMAs) that were established in the 2018 Product Development Framework (New York, Boston, Chicago and Washington, D.C.). Targets on Facebook will be identified who indicate an interest in travel to Canada, travel to Ontario, and in the Key Tourism Activities. The New York DMA will assume primary investment, as this was the second-most popular point of origin for travellers who flew to Muskoka aboard Porter Airlines in the summer of 2019.

High Potential Markets of RTO12 for International Marketing

Estimated Number of Individuals Over 25, Interested in KTA & Likely to Visit Ontario in Next 24 months

Activity	Interested in activity	NY	Chicago	DC	Boston	Total
Population (2016 Estimate)		20,153,634	9,512,999	6,131,977	4,794,447	40,593,057
Enjoying local cuisine (restaurants, farmers markets)	94%	4,557,785	2,151,384	1,386,759	1,084,274	9,180,202
Being lakeside (beach, relaxing on the dock, swimming)	87%	4,212,962	1,988,619	1,281,843	1,002,242	8,485,666
Visiting local museums	84%	4,093,386	1,932,177	1,245,460	973,796	8,244,819
Watching live theatre/music	84%	4,090,605	1,930,864	1,244,614	973,134	8,239,218
Day cruises	80%	3,890,385	1,836,355	1,183,695	925,503	7,835,938
Visiting local arts and crafts shops/galleries	78%	3,815,303	1,800,915	1,160,850	907,641	7,684,709
Wildlife viewing	77%	3,770,810	1,779,913	1,147,313	897,056	7,595,091
Guided nature tours and wildlife viewing	73%	3,570,590	1,685,404	1,086,393	849,425	7,191,812
Taking winery tours	71%	3,445,452	1,626,336	1,048,319	819,656	6,939,762
Learning about Indigenous culture	71%	3,439,890	1,623,711	1,046,627	818,332	6,928,560
Hiking in nature	67%	3,239,670	1,529,202	985,707	770,701	6,525,281
Taking brewery tours	64%	3,111,752	1,468,822	946,787	740,270	6,267,630
Visiting spas	58%	2,803,080	1,323,121	852,870	666,838	5,645,908
Padding (canoeing, kayaking, paddleboarding)	51%	2,502,750	1,181,358	761,491	595,391	5,040,990
Bike touring (leisure)	48%	2,341,461	1,105,226	712,417	557,022	4,716,126
Motorboating/personal watercraft/waterskiing	46%	2,230,228	1,052,721	678,573	530,560	4,492,082
Camping	42%	2,043,912	964,776	621,884	486,236	4,116,808
Fishing	40%	1,957,706	924,084	595,655	465,728	3,943,174
RVing	36%	1,760,267	830,888	535,582	418,759	3,545,496
ATVing/Snowmobiling	35%	1,726,897	815,137	525,429	410,820	3,478,283
Road biking	34%	1,637,911	773,133	498,353	389,651	3,299,048
Ice Skating	33%	1,624,006	766,570	494,123	386,343	3,271,042
Mountain biking	32%	1,548,924	731,129	471,278	368,481	3,119,812
Downhill Skiing/Snowboarding	30%	1,482,184	699,626	450,972	352,604	2,985,386
Visiting Yoga retreats	30%	1,482,184	699,626	450,972	352,604	2,985,386
Golfing	29%	1,415,444	668,124	430,665	336,727	2,850,960
Tobogganing	28%	1,368,170	645,809	416,282	325,481	2,755,741
Snowshoeing	26%	1,276,402	602,493	388,360	303,650	2,570,905
Cross-country skiing	25%	1,204,101	568,364	366,362	286,449	2,425,276
Motorcycling	24%	1,170,731	552,613	356,208	278,511	2,358,063

Marketing Tactical Plan

Content Publishing Strategy

We focus editorial content on the following:

- Domestically, minimum 6 pieces that explore the depth of product offering in the six sub-regions
- Internationally, a minimum of 10 pieces of original content that promote the KTAs of the region
- Additional partnership content as it develops, and if it aligns with the objectives of the RTO

Primary Marketing Channel(s)

- Facebook (promoted posts and ads)
- Display advertising (for transactional promotion, such as “Book Your Flight”)
- Retargeting with display

Lead Nurturing Program Objectives

Lead nurturing (email marketing) remains an important objective for domestic and international audiences. The CTA of “sign up of our newsletter” will continue to be integral to each piece of content. However, content promotion to American audiences will have more than one CTA, including “book your flight” and “book your vacation package” with Porter Escapes, when the air service is on sale only (the airline loads the purchase and pricing functionality in early spring).

RTO12 will continue to segment domestic audiences by persona (outdoor adventurers, family vacationers, food and culture enthusiasts, motors on anything, and hunters and fishers), and by KTA internationally.

Marketing Partnerships with Destination Ontario

Recognizing that Destination Ontario's marketing plan for Northern Ontario (presented December 2019) features drive market content opportunities, RTO12 will instead seek one-off opportunities to promote the commercial air service and packages. RTO12 will also seek to partner with Destination Ontario for crisis communication deployment, and on potential trade missions to the Designated Market Areas.

Media Relations / PR

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

Testing New Tactics

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

Tracking / Measurement

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

- Web ad impressions/clicks
- Traffic profiles/trends on Explorers' Edge websites
- 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)
- Conversion on the Package and Itinerary Platform (TBD)
- Travel packages purchased (from Porter Escapes, a third-party package developer, or RTO12 once our TICO license is secured)
- Improvement to load factors aboard commercial air service (based on confidential 2019 benchmarks)

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 2020-2021 will focus on the following areas:

International Marketing and Development Partnerships

- Development of content will focus on information that is attractive to our high potential markets (New York, Chicago, Boston, Washington, D.C.) and features our motivational and differentiated Key Tourism Activities
- 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. "Paddling After Tom")

Domestic Marketing and Development Partnerships

- The regional domestic partnership allocation will assist in the transition of the RTO from domestic audiences to international audiences.
- Partnerships will focus on campaigns that support the international marketing program first and foremost
- Based on past results, RTO12 will favour campaigns 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 campaign.

Stakeholder Training Workshops

- The regional training workshop partnership allocation will support stakeholder training needs throughout the region and ensure tourism context is intertwined into each project.
- Partnerships will focus on international and product development, examples would include indigenous product development, international cultural sensitivity, workforce development, marketing communication etc.
- Based on past results, RTO12 will favour workshops that clearly articulate outcomes and align with regional strategies and objectives.

Sub Regional Signage Programs

- The signage partnership allocation will support municipalities and local service boards in an effort to develop signage in the sub-regions of RTO12.
- Partnership will focus on key tourism assets that support travel dispersion.

Workforce Development: Work-Integrated Learning Opportunities

- The workforce partnership allocation will support partners in an effort to introduce post-secondary students to stakeholders and experiences in the region of Explorers' Edge.
- The partnership will focus on work-integrated learning opportunities in order to inspire students to revitalize current educational delivery with real-time instruction

Risk Identification, Assessment, and Mitigation Strategies

While there are no identified barriers or possible risks to successfully delivering on BOP2019-2020, 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

2019-2020 Budget

Budget Items	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL
Governance and Administration					
Salaries & Benefits	29,140	29,140	29,140	29,138	116,558
Governance	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	8,000
Overhead / Facilities	13,750	13,750	13,750	13,750	55,000
Finance and Administration (Accounting, Audit, Legal)	4,612	4,612	4,612	4,613	18,449
Travel	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	40,000
Industry Relations / Stakeholder Engagement	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	8,000
Information Technology	2,500	0	0	2,500	5,000
SUBTOTAL					251,007
Product Development					
Salaries & Benefits	8,750	8,750	8,750	8,750	35,000
Regional Product Dispersion	0	5,000	10,000	0	15,000
Research	0	3,000	2,000	0	5,000
SUBTOTAL					55,000

Marketing and Promotion					
Salaries & Benefits	21,250	21,250	21,250	21,250	85,000
Social Media Advertising - Domestic	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	40,000
Social Media Advertising - International	100,000	100,000	50,000	0	250,000
Content Development / Guest Authors / FAM Tours	1,000	500	0	1,000	2,500
Promotions/Contests/Incentives	1,000	3,000	0	1,000	5,000
Creative Development	2,000	4100	30,000	10000	46,100
Project Mgmt. Ad Trafficking	19,800	1,800	1,700	1,700	25,000
Strategist (Retainer)	7,500	7,500	7,500	7,500	30,000
International Trade Show	15,000	0	5,000	0	20,000
Newsletter	750	750	750	750	3,000
Reservation Platform	5,000	5,000	4,000	0	14,000
Transacting / Dispersion / Tracking	0	0	10,000	0	10,000
SUBTOTAL					530,600
Investment Attraction					
Salaries & Benefits	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	20,000
Outreach/Meetings	250	0	250	0	500
SUBTOTAL					20,500

Workforce Development					
Salaries & Benefits	13,750	13,750	13,750	13,750	55,000
Workforce Development	20,000	20,000	10,000	0	50,000
SUBTOTAL					105,000
Partnership					
Salaries & Benefits	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	20,000
International Marketing & Development	50,000	25,000	15,000	20,000	110,000
Domestic Marketing & Development	10,000	6,000	0	0	16,000
Workforce Development	0	10,000	0	0	10,000
Stakeholder Training Workshops	0	0	10,000	0	10,000
Signage	0	10,000	10,000	0	20,000
SUBTOTAL					186,000
TOTAL AGREEMENT COSTS					1,148,107