

**Explorers' Edge Board of Directors Meeting Minutes**  
**Monday, January 14, 2013**  
**Sherwood Inn, Port Carling**

**Present:** Gary Froude, Andy Vitch, Diane Wiber, Dan Feasby, Lois Barron-Ralph, Don MacKay, Jerry Feltis, Michelle Berry, Andrew Ryeland, Mike Laba, Nicole Saulnier, Tony Armstrong, Jackie Leung, Ken Turner

**Absent:** Randy Mitson

**Staff:** James Murphy, Erin Wilcox

**Guests:** Laura Hernando (MTCS), Jim Murphy (Algonquin Park), Chris Milner (Director of Northern Marketing Partnerships for OTMPC), Hilary Chambers (Pine Grove Resort Cottages)

**Call to Order:** Gary Froude called the meeting to order at 9:39am

**Approval of Agenda- Monday, January 14, 2013:**

**Motion:** Tony Armstrong

**Seconded:** Dan Feasby

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried**

**Approval of Minutes- December 4, 2012:**

**Motion:** Andrew Vitch

**Seconded:** Michelle Berry

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried**

**Operational Plan Presentation:**

ED Murphy spoke to Operational Plan Draft presented at December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012 Board of Directors Meeting. Spoke to changes that were asked to be made in regards to the board and budget (BOD had asked to tweak Operational Plan to cover a two year span as per information provided by MTCS rep Laura Hernando). As well, ED Murphy has drafted Schedule C and D to be submitted to MTCS. The basis for discussion at this meeting includes changes to the budget, as well as development of Schedule D (still some back and forth with the ministry to fine tune strategy and deliverables). Schedule C will cover performance indicators, tracking, deliverables, outlined strategy, etc. ED Murphy then opened the table to questions. Dan Feasby asks for clarification surrounding flexibility/possibility of changes to tweak Year Two after it has been submitted. ED Murphy clarified that there will be room to tweak later on; painless

process in place to make changes should that be needed; comfortable with current allocations for this year and next. ED Murphy outlined the budget:

- Operational Plan image bank is \$1000/month
- Marketing \$598K
- Transacting at \$150K to run programs like Fuel & Fun
- Workforce training, ideas relating to workshops to engage operators and community - \$20K.
- Research and tracking \$70K
- Tourism Product Development Fund \$50K

ED Murphy spoke to the partnership funding; ministry allocated \$166K and that EE has now accepted business plans and programs from regional stakeholders and operators to match funds and move tourism forward in our region.

ED Murphy stated that part of developing tourism in our region is supporting strategy and planning. The tourism product development fund has set a precedent in funding operational plans that help develop strong tourism strategy. He continued that the only change to the budget at this point is increasing the Product Development Fund to order to facilitate development, strategy and operational plans. Jerry Feltis asked about funding for research committee; ED Murphy responded the framework will be developed for Year End and the budget will be used to deliver the framework. Diana Wiber commented the whole of RTO12 region and applicable analytics will be captured under the research budget. Plan for the committee is to meet later this month and brainstorm next steps for the framework in order to meet the 2013 – 2014 budget spend.

ED Murphy discussed money being allocated to partnership funding, said applications are now closed, and suggested a handful of applications may be better suited to Tourism Product Development Fund (PDF). Dan Feasby points out PDF applicants are limited to \$10K per ask. ED Murphy noted that the success of the industry is tied to the health and success of partner organizations; we rely on other organizations to help us disseminate information and move tourists throughout the region. Don MacKay spoke to the importance of getting programs into the marketplace to move forward tourism while being discerning; he noted that more strategic plans that take months to complete and could be irrelevant before being implemented.

ED Murphy spoke to marketing, product development and research in Year Two; some things will most likely change. Laura Hernando spoke to two-year Operational Plan; funds cannot flow until they are aware of how they will be used; payment schedule, ministry does not want to see anyone in a cash flow pinch. Laura Hernando spoke to ministry dollars and how Explorer's Edge can spend money brought in as an independent organization, but ministry money needs to be spent as laid out in the Operational Plan (ministry is in trusting relationships with the RTOs, affords us the opportunity to apply and then make changes should we need to).

ED Murphy spoke to the two things that affect cash flow at the end of the year, HST and hold back from the government. Don MacKay spoke to concerns over administrative costs, and stated that they should

not gobble up our budget or take away from programs. ED Murphy spoke to adding Social Media Manager and 10% overhead. Dan Feasby asked if any more hires are expected, ED Murphy replied that team stands at Executive Director, Communications Manager, Social Media Manager and office administration. ED Murphy would like to see motion to approve budget and plan as laid out.

**Motion:** Moved by Don MacKay to pass the presented 2013 – 2014 Initiative Descriptions and timelines, Schedule C and the 2013 – 2014 budget, Schedule D.

**Seconded:** Jerry Feltis

**Carried**

**Marketing Presentation/Update:**

Jackie Leung spoke to last board meetings presentation on initial numbers; final numbers are now available and posted, continued with Fall Campaign overview.

Jackie Leung spoke to tactical objective of the campaign, its key message (BLUE), use of contesting, media used to promote the program, and the use of the operator program Fuel & Fun. Discussed the radio spot (Michael Budman), use of Cineplex Office Network (ran 49 days, 426,337 impressions vs. the estimated 58,932) and Cineplex Theatre lobby display (ran 28 days, 31,072 repetitions versus the estimated 22,524) & digital pre-show (ran 21 days, 15 second spot ran 1 time prior to each film at 5 locations, each screen [50] played 4 films per day=200 spots airing per day, 4,200 spots airing over 21 day campaign).

Jackie Leung spoke to online advertising; total banner ad budget was \$30K. Overall campaign performance was:

- 13,130,701 ad impressions vs. an estimated 4,366,666
- Total clicks of 12,046 vs. plan of 11,773
- Click through rate (CTR) of 0.09% vs. plan of 0.25%
- Cost per click (CPC) of \$2.49 vs. plan of \$2.54
- \*\*while all sites underperformed in terms of CTR, they over-delivered in terms of ad impressions, meaning that the campaign over-delivered by 2%

Jackie Leung spoke to Explorers' Edge website traffic which averaged 456 visits per day during the campaign (compared to 100 per day in the month prior). This traffic accounted for 22,378 total visits, 18,196 unique visitors, and 50,186 page views; 25% of the visits came from people going directly to the site (entering the URL in their browser bar), with much of this traffic being a result of the radio advertising. In terms of Social Media, the Explorers' Edge Facebook page climbed to 31,241 likes with 4,666 new page likes generated, reached an average of 325,000 people per day, and posts on the Explorers' Edge wall reached 1.1 million unique Facebook users generating almost 2 million impressions; each post during the period generated 483 actions, clicks, likes or shares.

Jackie Leung spoke to the Fall Blue Facebook Contest which ran from September 4-October 22. Contest generated 1,164 entries with 98% requesting the Explorers' Edge email newsletter (significantly higher than in previous campaigns [71% in the summer], speaks to easier method of applying). Facebook advertising was overall spend of \$11,289; generated 64,596,474 total impressions, 17,082 total clicks, and CTR of 0.026% (50% higher than typically achieved).

Jackie Leung opened the floor to questions.

Andrew Ryeland asked how we know the efficacy of the ads coming down the tubes; Jackie responded that that information would need to come from operators. ED Murphy discussed the development of the operator database which would utilize forums, providing an opportunity to get feedback. Andrew Ryeland spoke to Google Analytics; how are people coming to the Explorers' Edge site, how much is being brought into Explorers' Edge, who is our number one referral, where are our hits coming from, and is it proportional to money spent? ED Murphy will provide feedback at the committee level regarding these questions and report back. Andy Vitich asked about the brand Explorers' Edge, our perception in the marketplace, is the brand recognizable? ED Murphy replied that 6 weeks into the winter campaign there is 6% brand recognition; spoke to strategy of changing perceptions, creating new audiences, engaging operators and the importance of research to track brand recognition.

Jackie Leung spoke to Winter Campaign; tactical objective to fill beds, key message "Winter Turns Up the Fun", promotion repurposed (videos and photos shot last season being utilized), media used to promote the program driving traffic to website and Facebook page, operator program Special Offers on EE website and Great Local Deals tab on Facebook page (operators can promote as they see fit). Jackie Leung spoke to flash banner ads, leaderboards and flash big boxes. ED Murphy to explore posting advertisements on RTO12.ca so operators can utilize (banner ads, flash ads and pre-roll ads).

Spring marketing was discussed, will there be any programs or plugs for the season. ED Murphy spoke to transacting committee meeting in last two weeks and limiting gaps; Fuel & Fun is planned on being back for the spring. Ken Turner asked about target advertising to drive business in certain seasons. Nicole Saulnier spoke of Explorers' Edge advertising pushing for an immediate call to action (advertising Fall in Fall, Winter in Winter, etc); would like to see seasonal tabs on the Explorers' Edge website so consumers can plan ahead.

Chair Froude calls for 15 minute break.

#### **Transacting Committee Presentation:**

Jerry Feltis spoke to preliminary results of Fall 2012 Fuel & Fun promotion; comparisons being generated between Fall and Spring, committee met last week and has direction for next year and programming moving forward. Preliminary data is as follows:

- 395 Bookings (minimum two night stays, some as many as 30)
- 448 Voucher Redemptions
- \$105,250 generated on accommodation (minimum baseline)

- \$11,200 in voucher redemptions (cash directly to operators)
- \$18,550 spent on gas cards

Jerry Feltis spoke to sub-regional bookings:

- 38.4% Muskoka
- 36.1% Parry Sound
- 24.6% Almaguin Highlands (of this 77.4% Almaguin Highlands, 22.4% Port Loring-Restoule)
- 0.9% Algonquin Park (plans to focus on accommodations based within the park more in future)

Feedback generated was positive. Operators are promoting the program through social media and their websites, recognize strengths of the program as tipping point for the consumer, marketing and promotion, and as RTO12 looking out for the operators (100% of operators would like Explorers' Edge to run the Fuel & Fun program again). When comparing the Spring to Fall Fuel & Fun promotions, Spring brought \$35,000 in economic impact (118 bookings) vs. \$105,250 in the Fall (395 bookings); Spring saw 300 vouchers redeemed with Fall at 448. Jerry Feltis discussed the challenges and recommendations as:

- Programming was running in conjunction with bookings
- Vouchers redeemed outside the region (at participating providers AGM)
- Defining a tourism operator (TOR committee to discuss)
- Deadline for booking (booking ends > overnight begins)
- Considerations for strengthening the program (additional nights = additional vouchers)
- Continue with Fuel & Fun as is (keeping in current format and not running with other transacting programs; continue in shoulder season)
- Create attractions-centric program (Explore the Edge)

Jerry Feltis discussed the attractions pilot project to address developing a tipping point program more accessible to "non-accommodations" operators and expanding the program's reach to include the VFR (getting them out of the cottage to take in an attraction) and the "day-tripper" segment to take in multiple attractions and book accommodations. The primary objective of the program would be to drive incremental transactions (prime the pump) at business operators across RTO12. "Explore the Edge" would allow Facebook fans to download a limited number of coupon packages with access to the coupon not being restricted to visitors who book accommodations (booking in advance). Jerry Feltis spoke to the proposed draft timeline as Spring (April, May, June) running Fuel & Fun, Summer (July, August) running Facebook "Explore the Edge" App, Fall (September, October, November) running Fuel & Fun, and Winter (December, January, February, March) running Facebook "Explore the Edge" App with left over funds (reconcile); programs then running continuously throughout the year.

Jerry Feltis opened the floor to questions.

Michelle Berry suggested that the handout list that comes along with the gas card and vouchers to the guest (of Experience Providers) be less overwhelming; is currently split up by region, but perhaps could be split into restaurants, retail outlets, attractions, etc (just the business name does not necessarily tell someone what something is).

### **Round Table/Other Business:**

Jim Murphy: decent season so far both at Arrowhead and Algonquin, ice trail being utilized at Arrowhead, this past weekend weather created a downturn in skiing; Winter in the Wild festival on Family Day.

Ken Turner: closed this winter, but has had many inquiries, people already booking into September for 2013; spoke to increase of 5% across the board.

Andrew Ryeland: does not know what to expect for his 2013 season, spoke to his pricing, what to do (increase, keep the same), wants to know what others are doing.

Mike Laba: in a transition with the move to new facility, only aspect left downtown is the retail store, closing retail store location in March and everything will move to the new location, build up the attraction factor (tours, tastings) at the new facility. Feels encouraged from results of Explorers' Edge in 2012.

Dan Feasby: increased prices by 5%, no increase last year. Their summer is shaping up nicely, winter for them very weather dependent.

Diane Wiber: increased their prices in 2012, as a seasonal business closed at the moment.

Laura Hernando: spoke to Celebrate Ontario applications, close to 20, most are very strong contenders, over 400 applications in total, will be a further update at the next board meeting.

Nicole Saulnier: is seasonal and currently closed. Had a great season with gift certificates, is optimistic about this season, strong gift card sales usually indicate a strong season. Inquiries are starting to come in now for summer and bookings are rolling in.

Michelle Berry: started taking reservations last week, is feeling optimistic and already has 321 nights booked for the season, feels fortunate for that. Michelle is seeing lots of groups booking right off the start, people are realizing if they want to have a large group they must book early. No fall reservations yet, but optimistic with this start. Hopes for good weather, rates were increased 5% last year, this year just inflation 2%, always looks at Provincial Park rates as comparison, our rates are less than them for a lot more amenities, as well as no reservation fees, change fees, etc, but cannot compete with waterfront. Seasonal fees kept the same; didn't think they could weather an increase; any new seasonal campers went up \$150.

Jackie Leung: did not raise rates for the winter, but will for summer. Is having a great winter, best January ever. Already 70% over last year, anticipates doubling over last January. Customers watch her Facebook page for photos to gauge the weather, guests who stayed in January and enjoyed themselves will come back in February.

Andy Vitch: usually increases rates, in 2002 was \$1400 a week now at \$2000; will penalize new people over repeat guests. Plans to increase cost of boat rental (took boat out of inclusive rate, now costs \$150 to rent the boat. Did this due to price of gas, using a 20L tank instead of 24L tank, most people do not use full tank anyways).

Jerry Feltis: spoke to increasing shoulder season rates, and decreasing summer rates.

James Murphy: interviews for Social Media Manager position, working with marketing committee for feedback on programs, ensure engagement, operational planning budget approved, will work with the MTCS on Schedule C, committee meetings happening over next 6 weeks, next meeting will happen beginning of March, committees are rolling

**Motion to Adjourn:** Dan Feasby

**Approved**