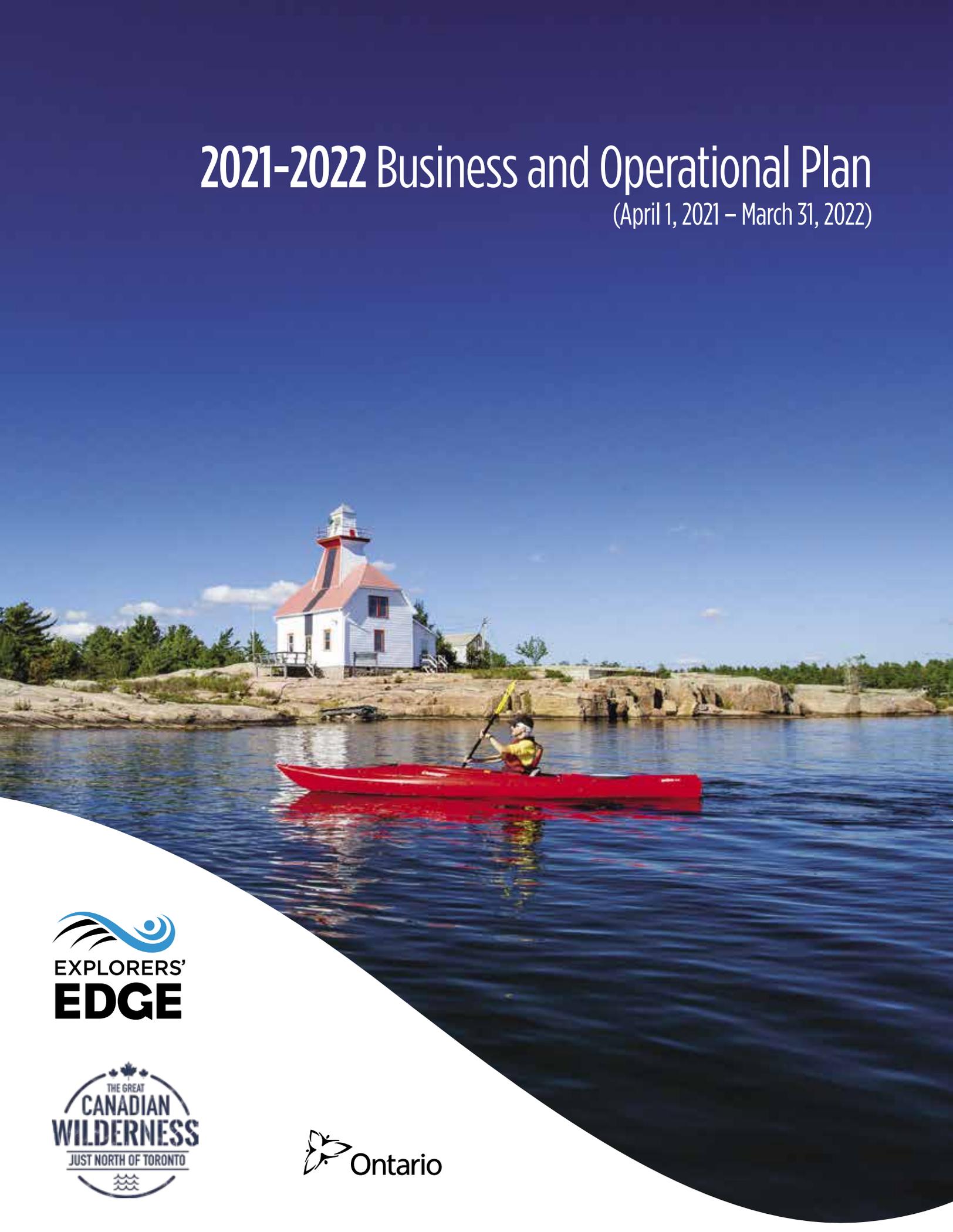


# 2021-2022 Business and Operational Plan

(April 1, 2021 – March 31, 2022)



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A glimmer of light for this region in the midst of all the challenges is that wilderness and outdoor adventure destinations are going to be more popular than ever for the foreseeable future, as visitors seek “space” as a primary consideration for travel.

## Executive Summary

Established in 2010, Explorers' Edge (EE) is one of thirteen Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) representing stakeholders in the geographic areas of Algonquin Park, the Almaguin Highlands, Loring-Restoule, Muskoka, Parry Sound and South Algonquin, Canada.

This Business and Operational Plan (BOP21-22) outlines the organization's annual strategy, provides a brief background on the status of the organization and the regional tourism industry in pandemic times, and specifies goals, activities, timelines, performance measures and budget. The BOP21-22 priorities were finalized by the Board of Directors during a regular meeting of the Board that was held online on February 24, 2021.

The previous fiscal year produced untold challenges for the global tourism industry, due to the severe impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Most regional tourism businesses were compelled to take on debt to survive and some, particularly in the retail sector, have now closed permanently. Of specific concern is that other tourism businesses have not been in operation for one year now, including event and live performance venues. In winter of 2021, winter-only operators saw their window to generate revenue significantly reduced as a result of the provincial lockdown that was implemented on Boxing Day 2020, and which lasted approximately seven weeks.

Until mass inoculation occurs, tourism operators everywhere will continue to be subject to provincially-ordered closures, depending on the current cases of Covid-19 in a particular region. This is anticipated to continue into the Fall of 2021 at least. (A recent report from the World Economic Forum noted that pre-pandemic global travel levels are not expected to recover before 2023 at the earliest.)

Overall, the industry faces Herculean challenges in rebuilding tourism as a main economic driver and employer. Tourism as a career choice has suffered a dive in positive perception (see *Tourism HR Canada Leger Survey December 2020*) and attracting workers — already a pre-pandemic challenge — is going to be more difficult than ever without innovative, value-added or incentivized workforce strategies.

Additionally, resident sentiment towards tourism as an economic driver has become more negative in the region (and elsewhere) since the pandemic began, with some citizens who are not directly connected to the industry expressing concerns about people traveling to the region, regardless of provincial orders (this negative resident sentiment is expressed readily on social media). A paradox observation is that the local population has been called upon to support regional tourism businesses, and to become the main consumer of intra-regional experiences and stays; the “hyper local

markets” or “backyard tourists” have been integral to the survival of many businesses since the pandemic began. This reliance on local residents to drive purchase will not disappear anytime soon, and in addition to the domestic and international markets that EE traditionally targets, the hyper local audience will now be a permanent target market for the organization and tourism stakeholders here.

A glimmer of light for this region in the midst of all the challenges is that wilderness and outdoor adventure destinations are going to be more popular than ever for the foreseeable future, as visitors seek “space” as a primary consideration for travel. Occupancy and RevPar surveys conducted by CBRE for regional and provincial results over the course of 2020 show that the EE region of Ontario was down in percentages and points far less than the provincial averages and, in particular, compared to urban destinations. For the foreseeable future, rural is where it’s at when it comes to domestic travel intentions. (And yet, regional stakeholders must also concern themselves with the potential for over-tourism in this regard, and the protection of natural assets that form the main product offering here; the exponential influx of travellers over the summer of 2020 also produced negative environmental impacts on many public landscapes, such as the Torrance Barrens Dark Sky Preserve and Algonquin Park campsites.)

Figure 1: CRBE Twelve Months Ended December 2020

**REPORT OF ROOMS OPERATIONS  
FOR RTO 12 AND THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO  
MONTH OF DECEMBER 2020**

Location	Occupancy Percentage **Point Change			Average Daily Rate			Revenue Per Available Room		
	2020	2019	Change	2020	2019	Variance	2020	2019	Variance
RTO 12	22.3%	32.3%	-10.0	\$149.24	\$161.93	-7.8%	\$33.27	\$52.31	-36.4%
ONTARIO	25.2%	52.3%	-27.1	\$104.77	\$148.19	-29.3%	\$26.39	\$77.48	-65.9%

\*\* Please note that the variance between current and previous year occupancy is reported as a point change and not as a percentage variance.

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**REPORT OF ROOMS OPERATIONS  
FOR RTO 12 AND THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO  
TWELVE MONTHS ENDED DECEMBER 2020**

Location	Occupancy Percentage **Point Change			Average Daily Rate			Revenue Per Available Room		
	2020	2019	Change	2020	2019	Variance	2020	2019	Variance
RTO 12	39.6%	52.8%	-13.2	\$186.73	\$183.43	1.8%	\$73.98	\$96.85	-23.6%
ONTARIO	34.8%	68.7%	-33.9	\$126.16	\$163.02	-22.6%	\$43.88	\$112.01	-60.8%

\*\* Please note that the variance between current and previous year occupancy is reported as a point change and not as a percentage variance.

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# In Crisis, Opportunities Arise: A New Strategy

In 2018, EE undertook a massive *Product Development Research & Framework* study, which determined that an ‘intangible gap’ for the organization, for the industry, and for the natural product (the region’s main draw) is sustainability. Since that study was released, sustainable development is no longer considered by mass populations as a niche or “environmental” concept, but instead it is now universally acknowledged as an important strategic approach that can help the region (and global industry) to recover and thrive. Therefore, by infusing sustainability principles with solid and innovative tourism business strategies, RTO12 will turn the ship once more to entrench “regenerative tourism development” as the primary organizational direction to ensure the survival, recovery and longevity of our regional industry.

The days of relying solely on “doubling receipts” or increasing visitation and spend as measurements for success are done. Instead, implementing the RTO’s new “region-centric approach,” our regenerative destination development strategy will feature additional KPIs relevant to industry and organizational sustainability.

In 2021 Explorers’ Edge will embark on a new mission to become a leading Destination Development Organization in Canada to create sustainability for all regional stakeholders (including tourism SMEs, employees and residents) by implementing initiatives that consider economic, social, cultural and environmental impact, in order to ensure our communities will thrive well into the future and regardless of economic or natural disasters (i.e. flooding, wildfires, etc.) that may occur.

Positioning ‘the business of tourism’ as a catalyst for recovery, rebuilding and renewed prosperity for all community stakeholders, Explorers’ Edge will seek to steward the regional industry towards greater empowerment and far better days, for the long-term benefit of all.



RT012 has maintained an open and transparent governance philosophy since its inception and has adopted an unwavering reliance on process to do so.

## Governance

RT012 has maintained an open and transparent governance philosophy since its inception and has adopted an unwavering reliance on process to do so. 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 March 2021 is as follows:

### **Michael Simonett, Chair**

[msimonett@clublink.ca](mailto:msimonett@clublink.ca) • (705) 571-2853

Sherwood Inn / Rocky Crest Resort, 20 Barnwood Drive, MacTier, ON

### **Hilary Chambers, Vice Chair**

[hilary@pinegroveresort.com](mailto:hilary@pinegroveresort.com) • (705) 757-2345

Lost Fox B&B, 32 Davis Dr B, Port Loring, ON

### **Angela Pollak, Secretary / Treasurer**

[workingmom@rogers.com](mailto:workingmom@rogers.com) • (519) 571-4584

Four Corners Algonquin Camping and Glamping, 29924 Highway 60 PO Box 420 Whitney, ON

### **Andrew Rusnyk**

[andrew@skihiddenvalleynesort.ca](mailto:andrew@skihiddenvalleynesort.ca)

Hidden Valley Highlands Ski Area Inc., 1655 Hidden Valley Rd. Huntsville, ON

### **Christine McRae (Luckasavitch)**

[christine@waaseyaaconsulting.ca](mailto:christine@waaseyaaconsulting.ca)

Waaseyaa Cultural Tours & Waaseyaa Consulting, P.O. Box 286, Whitney, ON

### **Darren Smith**

[darren@lakeofbaysbrewing.ca](mailto:darren@lakeofbaysbrewing.ca)

Lake of Bays Brewing Company, 2681 Muskoka Road 117, Baysville, ON

### **Dave Anderson**

[dave@huckleberrys.ca](mailto:dave@huckleberrys.ca)

30,000 Island Cruise Line Inc., 9 Bay Street, Parry Sound, ON

### **Don MacKay**

[dmackay@muskokahighlands.com](mailto:dmackay@muskokahighlands.com) • (705) 644-2017

Muskoka Highlands, 1040 South Monck Dr, Bracebridge, ON

### **Gail Burrows**

[gail@seguinvalley.com](mailto:gail@seguinvalley.com) • (705) 378-2555

Seguin Valley Golf Club, 173 Badger Road, Seguin, ON

### **Mike Strong**

[mike.ryan.strong@gmail.com](mailto:mike.ryan.strong@gmail.com)

Kee to Bala, 1012 Bala Falls Rd, Bala ON

### **Scott Doughty**

[sdoughty@hiddenvalleynesort.ca](mailto:sdoughty@hiddenvalleynesort.ca) • (705) 571-4290

Hidden Valley Resort, 389 Indian Trail, Huntsville, ON

### **Resource Members**

#### **Laura Ross, Regional Development Advisor**

[laura.ross@ontario.ca](mailto:laura.ross@ontario.ca) (705) 641-8349

Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, 1350 High Falls Road, Bracebridge, ON

Governance (continued)

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:

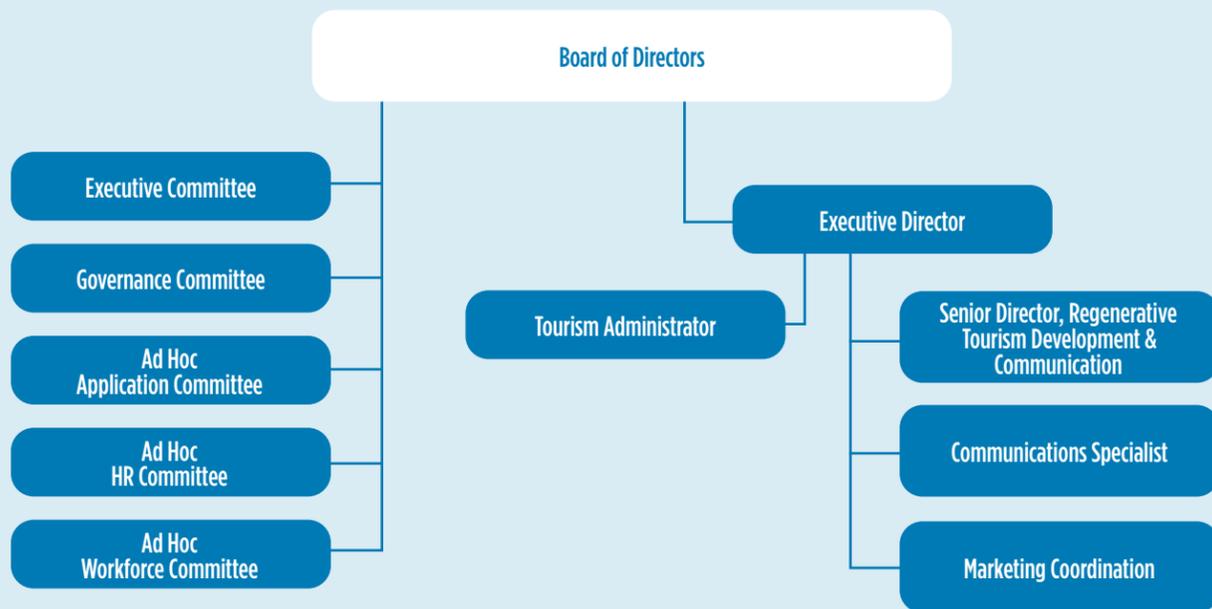
1. Executive Committee
2. Governance Committee
3. Ad hoc – Nomination Committee
4. Ad hoc – Workforce Development Committee
5. Ad hoc – Human Resources

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.

With an objective of keeping administrative costs as low as possible, a permanent staff of four (4) conducts the ongoing work of Explorers' Edge. In Fiscal 2021-2022, EE will also contract a Communications Specialist to assist the Senior Director, Regenerative Tourism Development & Communications with content development (hyper local/domestic/ international markets), media relations, lead nurturing and itinerary development.

Figure 2: 2021 - 2022 Organization Chart



Governance (continued)

**Chair: Michael Simonett**

Director of Revenue with Rocky Crest Golf Resort & Sherwood Inn, ClubLink with a demonstrated history of working in the leisure, travel & tourism industry. Strong community and social services professional skilled in Front Office, Customer Service, Customer Satisfaction, Marketing, Revenue, Sales and Training.

**Executive Director: James Murphy**

After completing a college diploma in Hotel & 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. He will lead the organization's shift to a Destination Development Organization.

**Senior Director, Regenerative Tourism Development & 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 innovative strategies and 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.



Prior to the pandemic, visitation and spend results from the Research Unit of the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries showed that domestic travel to the RTO12 region remained strong up until the last year reported (2018).

# Regional Overview & Assessment: March 2020 - April 2021+

## The Pandemic's Uncharted Waters

Prior to the pandemic, visitation and spend results from the Research Unit of the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries showed that domestic travel to the RTO12 region remained strong up until the last year reported (2018):

	RT012 Estimated Visits	RT012 Estimated Spending	RT012 Businesses
<b>2008</b>	3.5 million visits	\$662 million in spending	1,738 establishments
<b>2010</b>	3.8 million visits	\$513 million in spending	1,688 establishments
<b>2011</b>	4.8 million visits	\$598 million in spending	1,666 establishments
<b>2012</b>	4.1 million visits	\$596 million in spending	1,757 establishments
<b>2013</b>	4.3 million visits	\$614 million in spending	1,795 establishments
<b>2014</b>	4.3 million visits	\$589 million in spending	1,905 establishments
<b>2015</b>	4.4 million visits	\$699 million in spending	1,921 establishments
<b>2016</b>	4.7 million visits	\$778 million in spending	1,931 establishments
<b>2017</b>	4.5 million visits	\$650 million in spending	1,958 establishments
<b>2018</b>	3.7 million visits	\$884 million in spending	1,965 establishments

Additionally, in 2019, EE partnered with Porter Airlines and the District of Muskoka to introduce commercial air service and CATSA screening at the Muskoka Airport/CYQA. Having developed a substantial business strategy to attract and grow the service, EE's primary objective is to YOY increase international visitation to the region. In the first year of this seasonal service, one quarter of incoming passengers originated from the four Designated Marketing Areas (DMAs) that Explorers' Edge has targeted since 2018. The service did not run in 2020 because of the collapse of the aviation industry, and at the time of publication, it is not expected to run in 2021. EE will continue to build this targeted audience once the seasonal service returns (anticipated Summer 2022) and once international borders are opened for safe travel.

In March of 2020, the provincial lockdown of small businesses and travel restrictions of citizens began. Explorers' Edge staff pivoted quickly to implement a *Crisis Communications Plan* to help stakeholders navigate through the volume of information and programs, which came 'like rapid fire' out of municipal, provincial and federal government ministries. Seven priority audiences were established for communicating strategically and consistently to during the lockdown:

1. Small business owners / tourism operators
2. Their employees / workforce
3. Travellers/Consumers
4. Students
5. RT012 Board of Directors
6. RT012 staff
7. Government / Lobby representatives

In particular, a small business consultant was engaged by EE to help explain government programs and relevant implications to tourism operators, many of whom were unsure of what steps to take. Explorers' Edge staff conducted weekly webinars for these stakeholders to update and inform them of all developments. Over 60 webinars were conducted in fiscal 2020 / 2021 to this effect.

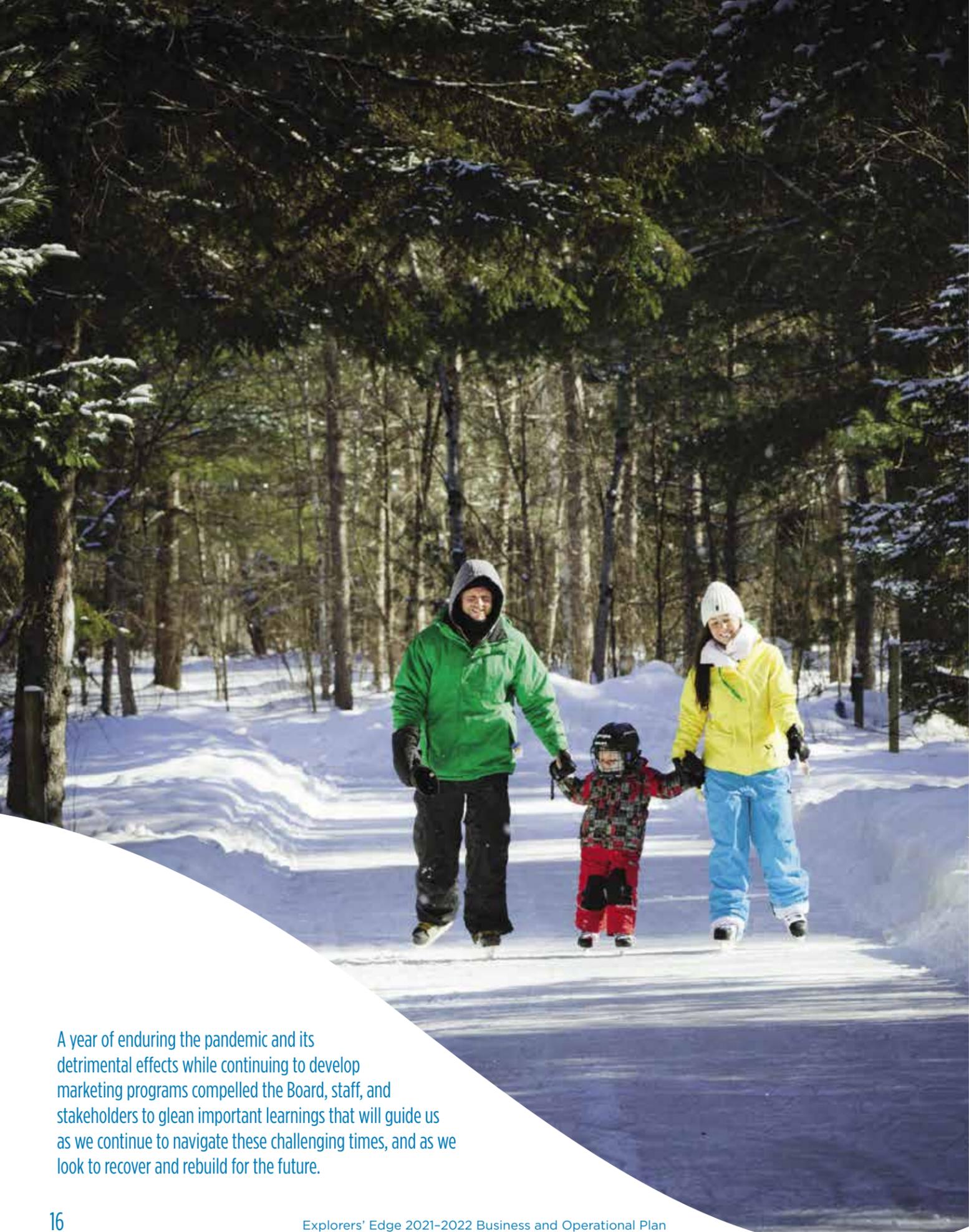
EE staff also conducted content and social media training sessions to assist businesses in retaining their audiences and patrons for future travel. The RTO's own strategy for doing so was shared (retaining audiences with captivating content that held no specific call to action).

With liquidity being the primary concern of SMEs during the pandemic, in the summer EE launched the "*Cottage Country Spirit Local Travel Package*," which targeted seasonal and permanent residents in the region, incentivizing them to make purchases at participating businesses. 3,000 packages containing \$50 in spending vouchers were distributed (and claimed within 5 days), and over 200 tourism businesses (shops, restaurants, accommodations) participated in the program. There was a 60% redemption rate (not surprising, as we know it takes a while for new audiences to accept there is "no catch" to such a program); and based on learnings from previous editions of vouchers programs such as *Fuel & Fun*, EE notes that voucher redemption can trigger up to 3Xs incremental spend at an establishment. Anecdotally, staff heard repeatedly that the vouchers brought in new customers to businesses, as package recipients were encouraged to get out and "explore your own backyard" and discover new experiences in the region.

The program was so important for generating revenue for tourism businesses (and in many cases helped them pay their commercial rent), that a second edition was launched for Winter 2021. 2500 packages were offered and claimed within a week. (Redemption results are still to be determined at the time of this document's publication.)

The *Cottage Country Spirit Local Travel Package* also served as an important community unifier at a time when tensions rose between permanent and seasonal residents who, in some cases, did not agree on the interpretation of provincial inter-regional travel orders. (EE staff were pleased to receive many unsolicited emails attesting to package holders' gratitude for the program.)

Additional programs were instigated to inspire hyper local travel and, in the case of the second lockdown that began on Boxing Day 2020, to keep all crisis communications audiences motivated for the second round of stay-at-home orders. These programs included "*The Boxing Day Resolution*" content marketing; "*Fat Bike Fun Wheel Fridays*" deployed via local radio stations; "*The Winter Arts Collective*" to highlight artists in our region (who have had a particularly hard time); the weekly "*EE Digital Campfire*" featuring operated-generated content; and the incredibly successful "*Howl At the Full Moon Zoom*" on January 28, 2021, which saw 2,200 viewers (now "leads") registered from all over North America to learn about Algonquin Park, to experience a guided virtual wolf howl, and to release the pent up stress that comes from living in a locked down world. (The guided wolf howl event was also a 'test run' to determine if these types of "product Zooms" would be well-received. The popularity of the event ensures that EE will present more moving forward.)



A year of enduring the pandemic and its detrimental effects while continuing to develop marketing programs compelled the Board, staff, and stakeholders to glean important learnings that will guide us as we continue to navigate these challenging times, and as we look to recover and rebuild for the future.

## Key Learnings: March 2020 - March 2021

A year of enduring the pandemic and its detrimental effects while continuing to develop marketing programs compelled the Board, staff, and stakeholders to glean important learnings that will guide us as we continue to navigate these challenging times, and as we look to recover and rebuild for the future. Most significant among the learnings are the following:

1. 'The Great Canadian Wilderness Just North of Toronto' will be a highly sought destination for local and domestic travelers for years to come, and the **regional brand** will serve us well for targeting hyper local, domestic, and international audiences.
2. **Regional data collection** by Explorers' Edge is required to set the benchmarks for the rebuild and recovery of regional stakeholders; government statistics often lag by years, and real-time intelligence is required to make sound business decisions for the industry and organization moving forward. This will mean resurrecting of EE's proprietary Business Index in a revised and digital format for regional intelligence gathering.
3. **Marketing** moving forward must be highly **agile and scalable, and transformable** depending on which audiences are being targeted (hyper local, domestic, or international), and what level of lockdown any target market is in.
4. With hyper local marketing being so dominant, there is now a significant amount of **duplication of efforts** by economic developers, municipalities, BIAs, Chambers of Commerce, DMOs and the province, all of which are messaging "shop local" to the same audiences using paid promotion.
5. **Workforce shortages** — already dire pre-pandemic — have increased exponentially as working in this industry is seen even more negatively due to unsafe interactions, low-wages, and lack of affordable housing for entry-level workers.
6. The exodus of wealthy urban dwellers to the region has created an **even greater housing challenge** for entry-level service workers. We will not be able to attract or retain staff long-term if we cannot help them get onto the regional housing continuum.
7. **Over-tourism and negative-impact tourism** are potential new problems for rural regions across Ontario, and (some) new visitors to the area need to be 'warmly-welcomed-and-educated' on respecting the natural landscape.
8. Positive **resident sentiment** needs to be developed with communication outreach, program development and buy-in from permanent and seasonal citizens, particularly since hyper local markets are going to be so integral to the recovery, rebuild and sustainability of the regional industry.
9. A **"Region-Centric" model** for rebuilding our industry and communities is needed. This means the transition of RTO12 to a bona fide **Destination Development Organization**, and the organization's new commitment to regenerative tourism development for all community stakeholders.



The “Covid pause” presents an opportunity for Explorers’ Edge to re-define its overall approach to destination development, to create a strong course of action for moving forward.

## Charting the New Course: The Region-Centric Approach

It is evident that the status quo of doing business — relying solely on visitation, spend and tourism operator profits as KPIs — are not going to ensure that the regional tourism industry will recover, rebuild, and thrive. This shift in thinking is important, since the Explorers’ Edge region relies on tourism for economic development more than any other region in Ontario (our economy is not diversified), and because the region relies heavily on the industry for employment opportunities (14%). Instead, the “Covid pause” presents an opportunity for Explorers’ Edge to re-define its overall approach to destination development, to create a strong course of action for moving forward.

In fact, over the years, Explorers’ Edge has revisited its strategic approach more than once, to refine and strengthen the organization’s successful programs and to compete in the global market.

Figure 3: RT012 Evolution of Competitive Strategy

### RT012 Evolution of Competitive Strategy

**Industry-Centric Approach: 2011-2014**  
(No cohesion or overall strategy)

**Consumer-Centric Approach: 2015-2020**  
(Increase visitation and spend)

**Region-Centric Approach (or Community-Centric Approach): 2021-Present**  
(Leverage the business of tourism to develop strong, resilient communities that thrive no matter the economic situation of the day)

# Building A Business Ecosystem: Regenerative Tourism Development

Rather than wait for catastrophes or unexpected challenges to befall the regional industry and then try to “build back”; and rather than continuing to concentrate solely on increasing visitation and spend; instead, Explorers’ Edge, acting as a Destination Development Organization, will leverage ‘the business of tourism’ (not to be confused with ‘tourism businesses’) to act as a catalyst to actively and constantly improve the economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability of the region, regardless of external influencing factors or the current state of the industry.

## Explorers’ Edge will become a leader in “region-centric regenerative tourism development.”

Whereas ecotourism is a niche product; and whereas sustainable tourism is somewhat perceived in mass populations to be predominantly associated with environmental impact (the phrase evoked, however limited, a “do less harm” ethos); Explorers’ Edge will instead implement a “regenerative tourism approach” in which business strategies will be applied to create innovative solutions for industry sustainability, wider community development, and organizational stability.

Figure 4: Region-Centric Regenerative Tourism Approach



## Key Pillars of the Region-Centric Regenerative Tourism Approach

1. Work to ensure the economic, social, cultural, and environmental resilience of the region through tourism development.
2. Consider and weigh the desires and needs of all community stakeholders — not just those involved directly in the tourism industry, nor only those in ownership positions.
3. Increase regional self-reliance to solve local challenges and increase revenue generation to stabilize and develop the tourism industry. Build membership program.
4. Seek and implement creative solutions, innovation, and strategic partnerships to solve community development and industry sustainability challenges. Develop timely research and attract digital and tech innovation for the industry.
5. Develop KPIs to reflect improvement of the tourism industry in relation to economic, social, cultural, and environmental objectives (a holistic measurement).
6. Concentrate on developing higher-yield visitation (spend more, stay longer in the region) rather than on mass tourism.
7. Build an extremely robust communications plan to promote the ongoing development of the regional tourism business ecosystem.
8. Position EE as a Destination Development Organization that champions ‘the business of tourism as a catalyst for thriving communities.’



RT012 is a Destination Development Organization that leads the Canadian tourism industry in regenerative development, ensuring that the region's communities and tourism stakeholders are resilient and able to thrive long-term.

## RT012 Vision, Mission and Mandate: REVISED

The impact of Covid-19 on the global tourism industry has meant the need to revisit and revise RT012's **Vision, Mission** and **Mandate** statements. The following summarizes the new priorities for the organization from an administrative and governance perspective:

### Vision

RT012 is a Destination Development Organization that leads the Canadian tourism industry in regenerative development, ensuring that the region's communities and tourism stakeholders are resilient and able to thrive long-term.

### Mission

RT012's mission is to steward the regional tourism industry's recovery, rebuild and renewal by developing innovative regenerative programs to ensure long-term sustainability and success for all stakeholders.

### Mandate

- Steward / Lead
- Research / Innovate
- Recover / Build
- Sustain
- Train
- Collaborate

### Explorers' Edge Guiding Principles

- Develop regenerative strategies, programs and products that are the result of "out of the box" thinking, innovation and strategic collaboration.
- Use strategy, process and "the business of tourism" as guiding beacons to ensure the sustainability of the organization, tourism stakeholders and connected communities.
- Prioritize industry, stakeholder and community communications.

### Explorers' Edge Operating Principles

- Lead the recovery and rebuild as the regional Destination Development Organization.
- Build programs and initiatives using the lens of regenerative business thinking.
- Leverage significant strategic partnerships.
- Engage various direct and indirect stakeholders to ensure wider sustainability and growth.
- Build revenue generation for the long-term sustainability of the organization and the regional industry.
- Level the playing field by engaging all stakeholders and multiple businesses in programs.



RT012 is a Destination Development Organization that leads the Canadian tourism industry in regenerative development, ensuring that the region's communities and tourism stakeholders are resilient and able to thrive long-term.

## RT012 2021-2022 Goals

The current and long-standing mandated pillars by Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism & Culture Industries for the RTO to work within 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.

As a result of pandemic learnings and keeping in mind the pillars of operation required by the Ministry, the following goals will shape the work of RT012 for the next 3 years.

### Marketing

- Leverage our successful content marketing program to target hyper local, domestic or international audiences, depending on the state of opening in the province and region.
- Leverage the flexibility of content marketing to “stop and go” our marketing thrust, depending on the state of opening and which particular audience is to be targeted (if at all, on any particular day). We are prepared to scale up or scale down at a moment’s notice.
- When not actively marketing, produce content to retain audiences for when travel bans are lifted, in order for the region to remain front of mind.
- Present multiple “travel Zoom” events targeting travellers and pertaining to demand generators.
- Market programs and initiatives to all community stakeholders, not just tourism operators and government.
- Continue to develop branded transacting programs to stimulate purchase and travel.
- Include packages and itineraries in all lead nurturing and content in order to move travellers down the purchase funnel to repeat conversion.
- Transition the Explorers’ Edge brand to the administrative identity, and position “The Great Canadian Wilderness Just North of Toronto” as the sole consumer brand, regardless of target market (hyper local, domestic, international). Promote new website.
- Include messaging to protect the natural product and to prevent any negative effects of “over tourism” as rural destinations increase exponentially in popularity (e.g. a “Leave No Trace” education campaign).
- Include message to promote safe visitation.
- Focusing on developing higher-yield customers rather than mass volume of visitors.
- Improve resident sentiment towards tourism as integral to regional economic development.
- Continue to offer marketing training workshops and instruction to operators.
- Conduct ongoing, timely and region-centric consumer research.

### Product Development

- Build relationships with existing Indigenous tourism operators and develop opportunities for new Indigenous operators.
- Develop packages related to strategic itineraries, with the intention of converting higher-yield customers.
- Develop branded travel packages such as “Fuel & Fun” or “Cottage Country Spirit Local Travel Package” to stimulate purchase (whether hyper local, domestic or international).
- Continue to promote and support product relevant to the “Key Tourism Activities”.
- Market Explorers’ Edge as a travel booking agency once final TICO accreditation is achieved (anticipated April 2021).
- Introduce package booking widget functionality to consumer website, content and promotional tactics.
- Build sustainability training programs for tourism operators/operations.
- Build regional field to fork culinary supply chains for local agri and dining sustainability.

### Product Development

- Build community and impact investing for the catalyst housing/training program.
- Build stakeholder and community membership contributions for “buffer” investing.
- Start to build a tourism business case for passenger rail service.
- Continue to invest in Great Lakes cruise ship programs with the Town of Parry Sound, including shuttle service for day trip dispersion (anticipated cruise ships return summer 2022).
- “Re-launch” commercial air service promotion and passenger programs including shuttle service for regional dispersion when air service returns (anticipated summer 2022).

### Workforce Development

- Continue to work with post-secondary and secondary institutions to build awareness of the region as a tourism career destination.
- Convert urban students to rural employees.
- Communicate with youth, return-to-work, immigrant, international student and “she-covery” audiences.
- Continue to host Zoom Job Recruitment events that include “sense of place” marketing.
- Build a “Neighbourhood Network” of police-checked volunteers who will welcome new workers to the region.
- Launch 3-year Catalyst Housing project with training development (Year 1); build strategy in Years 1 & 2 (with potential build(s) in Year 2 & 3); stakeholder investing outreach and buy-in Years 2 & 3.
- Conduct ongoing, timely and region-centric industry research.

### Partnership

- Ensure regional partners understand the Region-Centric approach and have opportunities to align strategies.
- Partner strategically with local agencies or individuals to deliver hyper local program.
- Develop extra-industry partnerships to move projects forward (including expertise).

### Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability

- Develop communication and relations with Indigenous communities throughout and beyond our RTO12 regional “borders”.
- Engage multiple operators when possible.
- Continue to strengthen outreach and communication with industry.
- Develop outreach and communication to non-industry stakeholders.
- Develop “regenerative tourism champions” across the region.
- Ensure the industry is well informed on all tourism related topics (marketing, research, product development, training, investment etc.).
- Deliver and receive diversity, inclusion and equity training.
- Determine regenerative tourism KPIs to track economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability and growth of the regional industry and community stakeholders.



It should be noted that Explorers' Edge has some experience in producing regenerative tourism programs.

## Transitioning to a Destination Development Organization

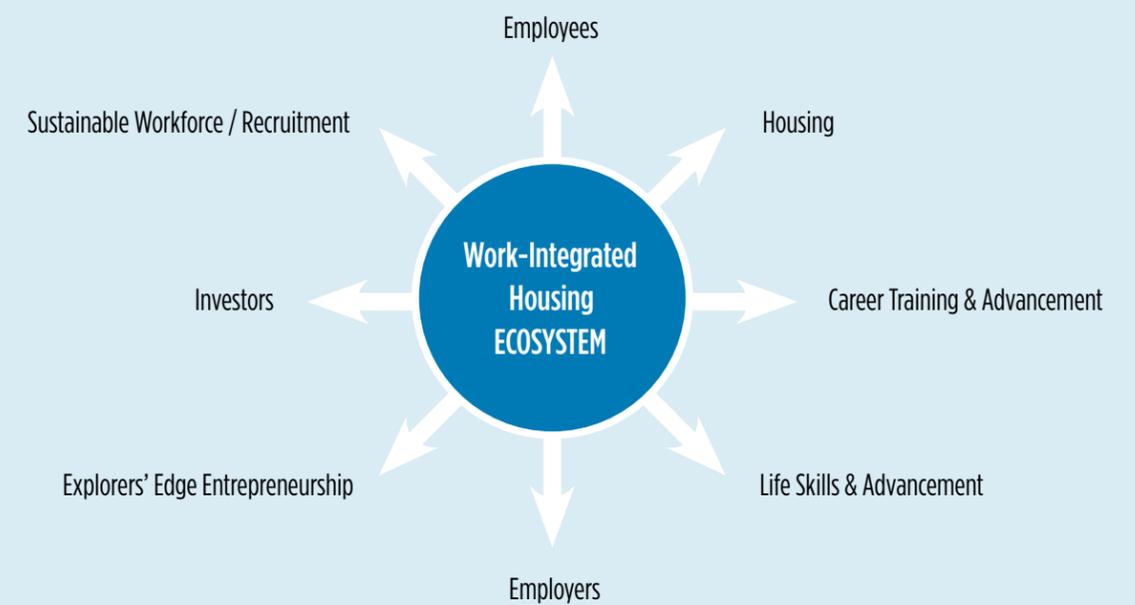
It should be noted that Explorers' Edge has some experience in producing regenerative tourism programs.

In particular, the *Cottage Country Spirit Local Travel Package* empowered local residents to support tourism businesses during the pandemic, while not requiring they spend their own money.

Additionally, the commercial air service with Porter Airlines and associated EE Shuttle Service to-and-from the Muskoka Airport is of benefit to permanent and seasonal residents and their visiting friends and relatives (VFR), as much as it is intended to attract and disperse tourists across the entire region.

Finally, the RTO's "workforce catalyst housing" project (in development) will benefit many different community stakeholders, while aiming to solve workforce shortages at tourism establishments ('Concept Research & Articulation' to be delivered April 2021).

Figure 5: RTO12 Catalyst Housing – Concept Research & Articulation



**“Attract workers, develop professionals”**

## Transitioning to a Destination Development Organization (continued)

From an organizational perspective, in order to achieve greater success in regenerative tourism development, Explorers' Edge must put considerably more emphasis on areas other than (but in addition to) marketing and product development. These include (with action items indicated):

### 1. Operator & Workforce Development

- Operator training.
- Enhance operator market and export-readiness.
- Offer tourism operators environmental stewardship training (in partnership with consultant).
- Foster strategic partnering between operators for knowledge exchange and package development.
- Assist with job recruitment opportunities and potential job-sharing coordination.
- Workforce development, training and housing.
- Continue to participate at secondary and post-secondary institutions to help deliver tourism curriculum and to attract students to the region.
- Deliver diversity, inclusion and equity (in partnership with consultant).

### 2. Infrastructure Development

- Airport(s) and Airline(s).
- Bus Transport (for visitors and workforce).
- Commence business case for tourism passenger train service.
- Great Lakes cruise arrival support (Parry Sound).
- Rural internet access.

### 3. Government Relations (at all three levels), Governance & Public Funding Opportunities

- Liaise, coordinate and partnership with municipal, provincial, and federal governments.
- Liaise, coordinate, and partner with municipal, provincial, and federal funding agencies.

### 4. Regenerative Community Development & Participation

- Catalyst Housing Project development and launch.
- Research regional/supplemented currency or loyalty program for low-wage earners.
- Development and promotion of sustainable tourism business practices (on-site) to protect the natural product.
- Local field to fork culinary supply chain development.
- Arts & Culture sector promoting “culture of place” and possible supply chain development with operators.
- Improve resident sentiment towards the industry.
- Improve Indigenous outreach, communication, and relations with Robinson Huron Treaty territory/RTO12 region stakeholders.
- Introduce scholarship and award programs for workforce and students.
- Create a “Neighbourhood Network” of local community ambassadors and champions to welcome tourists and employees (especially immigrant workers and international students who may have language barriers and cultural challenges).
- Foster and train in diversity, inclusion, and equity.

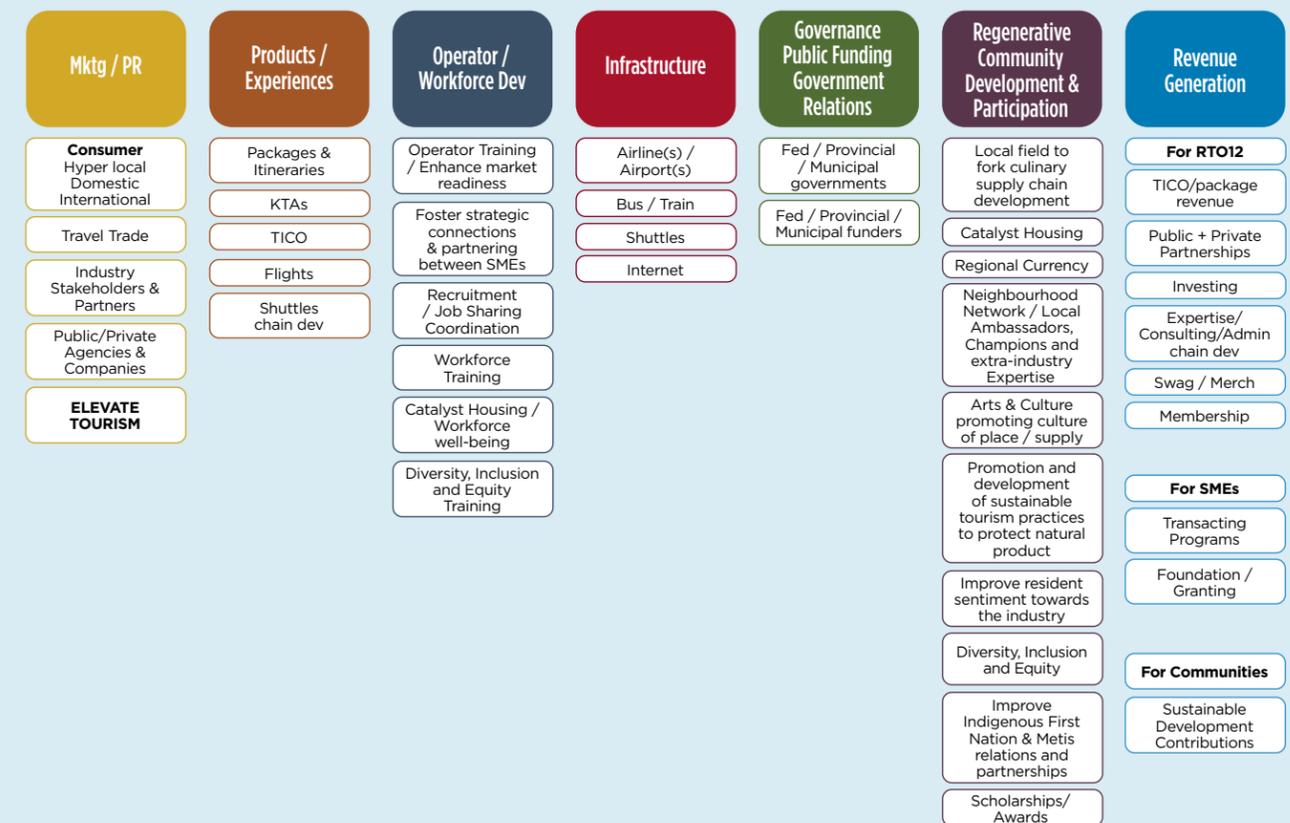
## Transitioning to a Destination Development Organization (continued)

### 5. Revenue Generation

- Introduce packages for purchase (TICO licensing of the RTO) and develop sales approach.
- Develop public and private partnerships (P3).
- Re-develop and expand Membership contributions for re-investment.
- Deliver consulting and expertise services.
- Develop branded merchandise sales.
- Continue transacting voucher programs to stimulate purchase at tourism businesses.
- Re-invest back into tourism industry and community development.

Figure 6: RTO12 – Destination Development Organization (Region-Centric Approach)

### RTO12 – Destination Development Organization (Region-Centric Approach)



Ongoing, timely and region-centric research and digital and tech innovation are also key to moving the destination forward and are applicable to all areas of operation when opportunities arise.

With the Ministry pillars forming the framework for its 2021-2022 strategy and deliverables, Explorers' Edge is also keen to develop additional 'goal lines' to foster industry sustainability and growth, as depicted in the re-stated pillars of organization pertaining to destination development.

What follows is a summary of the BOP21-22 implementation, as well as objectives, key activities, timelines, and performance measures for MHSTCITPA requirements.

# 2021-2022 Business and Operational Plan Summary



## Governance

246,500

Govern EE through effective leadership; strong equitable industry representation and following strategy, systems, policies, and procedures.

Online Crisis Management webinars to ensure industry health and communication.

Annual General Meeting.

Explore business awards and tourism employee awards.

Build stakeholder & community membership contributions.

Ensure organizational decisions meet the needs of both the tourism business community and the community of a whole to “float all boats” (including tourism SME’s, employees, and residents).



## Marketing

490,000

Promote the great Canadian wilderness brand.

Target hyper local, dom. & int’l markets depending on provincial/federal restrictions.

Publish exceptional content & launch promotion that is flexible, adaptable & scalable.

Sell product packages & itineraries (primary CTA).

Develop & promote incentivized travel packages, such as Fuel & Fun and the Cottage Country Spirit Local Travel Package.

Reboot lead nurturing.

Conduct ongoing and timely regional consumer research.



## Product Development

40,500

Build relationships with existing Indigenous tourism operators and develop opportunities for new Indigenous operators.

Develop packages & itinerary for purchase.

Commence development of local culinary supply chains.

Develop content to promote the KTAs to target audiences.

Nurture relationship with Porter Airlines while awaiting 2nd season of service as per the tri-party agreement.

Maintain product sites BikeCottageCountry.ca and CCBeerTrail.ca.

Build sustainability training programs for tourism operators / operations (e.g. property stewardship guides).



## Investment Attraction

20,000

Explore partnerships & investing that prioritizes regenerative tourism and workforce development.

Build community & impact investing for the catalyst housing/training program.

Start to build a tourism business case for passenger rail service.

Continue to liaise with regional economic development agencies to ensure that the tourism impact remains a top priority.

Continue as a member of the Great Lakes Cruise Coalition.



## Workforce

162,607

Work with schools to build region as career destination.

Convert urban post-secondary students to rural employees.

Communicate with youth, return-to-work, immigrant, international students & “she-covery” audiences.

Host Zoom Recruitments.

Build a “Neighbourhood Network” who will welcome new workers.

Conduct ongoing, timely and region-centric industry research.



## Partnership

188,500

Prioritize partnerships that support RTO12’s regenerative tourism and workforce development initiatives.

Continue to work with provincial colleges and universities on workforce integrated learning opportunities (e.g., familiarization tours).

# 2021-2022 BOP: Objectives, Key Activities and Timelines, Performance Measures

## Governance

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
<b>Governance</b>			
<p>Govern EE through effective leadership; strong equitable industry representation and following strategy, systems, policies, and procedures.</p> <p>To ensure organizational decisions meet the needs of both the tourism business community and the community of a whole to “float all boats” (including tourism SME’s, employees, and residents).</p>	<p>Introduce sustainability principals with solid &amp; innovative business strategies.</p> <p>Cultivate an organizational philosophy with the greater community to understand impacts of the RTOs role as a Destination Development Organization.</p> <p>Manage our assets and liabilities responsibly while delivering expected results on time.</p>	<p>Solicit community input / reaction on strategies and organizational approach (Region-Centric Regenerative Tourism Approach) via webinars and surveys.</p> <p>Report back on outcomes via follow-up communication.</p> <p>Deliver governance training and diversity, inclusion, and equity training.</p> <p>development of committee(s), when necessary, that is inclusive to the community.</p> <p>Board quarterly update, review, and input on annual BOP execution.</p> <p>Conduct board reviews via surveys of RTO plans and performance measures against stated objectives and targets; adjusting as required.</p> <p>Review succession plan, bylaws and policy documents.</p> <p>Complete a skills matrix to identify priority areas for board member recruitment.</p> <p>Regularly review activities, finances at board meetings.</p>	<p>Participation in community input sessions (target 600 participants) (target 12 webinars) (target 3 surveys).</p> <p>Effective board training participation (target 100% of board directors) (target – 70% of participation identify being satisfied / highly satisfied with training outcomes).</p> <p>Business plan participation, results of the financial audit and operational reporting (operating goals met, clean audit).</p> <p>Board satisfaction with governance updates and discussions at the board table regarding committee items (target – 70% of participation identify being satisfied / highly satisfied with governance outcomes).</p>

## **Operations**

<p>Introduce regenerative practices to the organization to benefit both internal and external stakeholders.</p>	<p>To steward the regional tourism recovery, rebuild and renewal.</p> <p>Develop an investment strategy for future operational, organization and industry resiliency.</p>	<p>Revenue generation via membership, activities include the development, communication, and solicitation of an updated membership model.</p> <p>Development of investment strategy, activities include outreach, research, and input.</p> <p>Development of tourism award(s) with activities that include communication and participation.</p> <p>RTO will presentation of organizational operational updates / direction via webinar, Zoom, WebEx meetings, Microsoft Teams etc.</p>	<p>Revenue generation via membership, activities include the development, communication, and solicitation of an updated membership model.</p>
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 **Governance (continued)**

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
<b>Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability</b>			
Ensuring the community understands the role the RTO plays in leading the recovery of both the regional economy and the community.	<p>Strengthen communications with industry and non-industry throughout RTO12.</p> <p>Ensure the industry is well informed of all tourism related topics.</p> <p>Make certain all three levels of government understand the impacts decisions at the municipal, provincial, and federal level impact our regional communities.</p>	<p>Foster outreach to operators, and facilitate information sharing while continuing to facilitate the development of industry capacity by providing relevant information.</p> <p>Strengthen communications with operators and ensure updates happen in a timely manner.</p> <p>Monitor Facebook business forum for feedback.</p> <p>Monitor Twitter for regional grievances, criticism, complaints etc.</p> <p>Explore joint investment, marketing, product development, and other initiatives that benefit operators.</p> <p>Strengthen outreach and communication with industry reviewing / updating internal CRM, mailing list etc.</p> <p>Facilitate presentations via webinars with RTO senior staff and guest speakers highlighting best practices, innovative tourism programs, COVID-19 related programs.</p>	<p>Participants on RTO webinar updates (35 per webinar).</p> <p>Number of new subscribers to organization Newsletter (target – 65).</p> <p>Identification of three stakeholder concerns to be communicated to the Board of Directors and levels of government (target – 6).</p>

 **Marketing**

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
<b>Content Development</b>			
Create promotional content for the destination brand, sub-regions, products/KTAs, and for package and itinerary sales.	<p>Convert “discoverers” to travellers by moving them down the purchase funnel (“awareness” to package “purchase”).</p> <p>Capture consumer email addresses in the lead nurturing program to move registrants down the purchase funnel.</p> <p>Increase website analytics, sessions, users, page views, pages/session &amp; average session duration (via content).</p>	<p>Development of regional content via researching story ideas, interviewing stakeholders, alignment with research (includes interviews, photography development and regional outreach).</p> <p>Assigning staff on a weekly basis to work with the lead nurturing third party to develop, deploy and monitor segmented emails.</p> <p>Assigning staff daily to update consumer website with new content, events, pictures, listings and packages by scanning regional and provincial partner sites and social accounts.</p>	<p>Regional Content developed (target – 6 sub-regional pieces, 10 product pieces, 10 itinerary pieces) .</p> <p>Consumer opt-in for the consumer e-mail database: (target - hyperlocal/500, domestic/1000, international/100).</p> <p>Website analytics (NOW MERGED) including: visits (target - 150,000), page views (target - 200k), pages/session (target - 1.40) &amp; average session duration (target - 1.20 minute).</p>
<b>Social Media Marketing</b>			
Introduce regional product to hyper local, 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.</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>Social media analytics (MERGED).</p> <p>Facebook Likes (target – 500 new). Twitter followers (target – 50 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>
<b>Media / PR Program</b>			
Participate media promotions to facilitate a positive media coverage of RTO12	<p>Continue brand/story awareness and produce unpaid, positive, and engaging editorial coverage in target markets.</p> <p>Continue media release outputs related to work being completed during fiscal year.</p>	<p>Regional outreach to gauge feedback on media opportunities.</p> <p>Engage industry partners (DO, sub regional partners, operators) on media opportunities.</p> <p>Meet with media representatives at key virtual marketplaces.</p> <p>Develop community outreach and membership communication plans.</p> <p>Develop robust hyper local, domestic, and international in-house Media List.</p> <p>Coordinate media tours – of note; will monitor COVID19 outbreaks to ensure safety of media, community, and operators.</p> <p>Track media engagement.</p>	<p>Inbound media visits (target – 1).</p> <p>Increase in unique visits to the RTO media communication page on new administrative site.</p> <p>Produce organization communication plan.</p> <p>Increase in the number of media contacts in the database (target – 50-75).</p> <p>Coordinated media tours (target – 1) .</p> <p>Deploy minimum one media release per quarter.</p>

 **Marketing (continued)**

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
<b>Transacting</b>			
To assist tourism SMEs with liquidity issues and stimulate travel during the pandemic through out the rebuild phase.	Ensure markets are dispersed throughout the region exploring tourism product via either hyper local or domestics depending on the current travel advisories.	<p>Develop hyper local voucher program (domestic program when applicable), agreements, and mechanisms associated with international voucher program.</p> <p>Coordinate with local chambers of commerce, BIA's and DMO's to identify local, regional, and provincial tourists.</p> <p>Communicate outcomes with the board of directors and stakeholders on the commencement of the program.</p> <p>Provide stakeholders with information related to transacting programs on a regular basis.</p> <p>Survey package recipients gathering feedback and presenting back to the industry.</p>	<p>Dispersion – continue traveller spending &amp; 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>
<b>Package Development</b>			
The development of packages to generate revenue filling an identified gap in the consumer purchase funnel.	Development of packages aligning with organizational KTAs.	<p>Work with the Travel Industry Council of Ontario to register the RTO as a travel agency.</p> <p>Outreach to tourism businesses to ascertain their interest in participation in RTO sourced packages.</p> <p>Organization of travel packages.</p> <p>Communication of RTO specific travel packages.</p> <p>Monitoring, follow-up and reporting on RTO packages.</p>	<p>During first year of TICO Licence benchmark revenue &amp; expenses.</p> <p>Targets associated with package development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 packages developed</li> <li>• 20 stakeholders participating</li> <li>• 50 packages sold</li> </ul>



## Product Development

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
<b>Indigenous</b>			
Gain an understanding of challenges associated with Indigenous tourism operators.	Understand the role that tourism can play in reciprocity with our Indigenous communities.	Develop outreach with Indigenous communities. Deploy Indigenous communication.	Track Indigenous outcomes and exchanges communicating lessons learned (benchmark year).
<b>Product Applicability</b>			
Review new segments to ensure alignment with KTAs / product.	Ensure 2 new priority segments (“Ontario Actives & Outdoors” and “Free & Fomo”) are targeted and that the content resonates (e.g., generates leads or package conversions).	Present findings to directors and identify next steps in the development of package development to target segments.	Documentation and communication of next steps related to the enhanced development of the KTAs.
<b>Self-Guided Mobile Tours Enhancement</b>			
Ensure self-guided mobile tours are operating optimally.	Current self-guided mobile tours have up-to-date content, mapping, and functionality.	Trouble shoot self-guided mobile tours for accuracy and applicability.  Develop content specific to each tour (in-house).  Engage tourism stakeholders to push out suite of self-guided tours.	Track web analytics and usage of self-guided mobile tours.  Tourism operators communicating the self-guided mobile tours (target – 10).
<b>Culinary Tourism</b>			
Revitalize sense of place associated with food.	Support the development of supply chains connecting farms and chefs, regenerative tourism via sharing feedback and exchange of information.	Outreach to regional farmers and chefs.  Ascertain and report on currently linkages and identify gaps.  Document willingness to work on collaborative community / tourism projects.	Number of chefs engaged (target – 12).  Number of farmers engaged (target – 8).  Collaborative opportunities identified (target – 4).
<b>Industry Statistics</b>			
Track the health of regional tourism industry.	Ensure industry and non-industry stakeholders have access to relevant tourism statistics.	Track monthly occupancy percentages, average daily rate & Revenue per available room via CRBE.  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.  Track and disseminate Ministry- generated consumer research, statistics, and tourism updates.	Number of views / downloads of the online research findings (target – 125).  Number of participants participating in the research dialogue via Regional Tourism Summit, quarterly stakeholder meetings and monthly webinars (target – 55).  Number of research presentations (target – 2).

 **Product Development (continued)**

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
<b>Sustainability Training</b>			
Take measures to preserve the industry safeguarding the tourism operators.	Implement tourism training programs aimed at sustainability.	Work with partners to develop scope of work.  Circulate a questionnaire and gather industry information related to sustainability programs.  Develop, build, and communicate findings, results of those findings.  Create a document outlining next steps and approach to expanding program to great breadth of tourism operators.	Number of Participating Tourism operators (target – 12).

 **Investment Attraction**

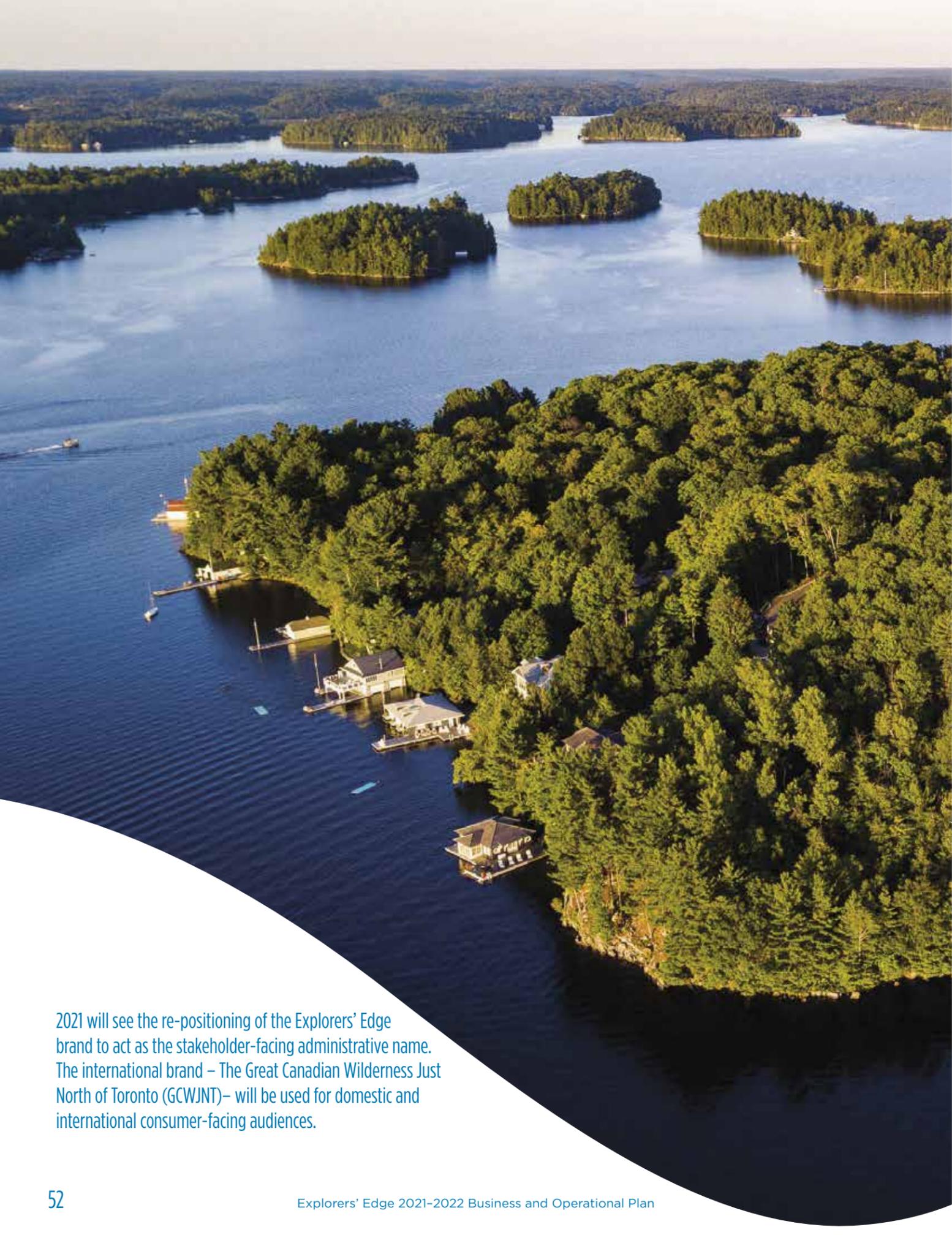
Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
<b>Communication</b>			
Make certain that Tourism is an investment priority across regional, provincial, and national networks.	Tourism investment bolsters the Workforce Thruster Strategy as it relates to the catalyst housing / training program.	<p>Explore partnerships &amp; investing that prioritizes workforce development.</p> <p>Additionally, conduct outreach, solicit feedback, and interview potential investment partners.</p> <p>Provide regional economic development partners with project outlines and applicable updates related to the progression of forthcoming investment projects in the region.</p> <p>Produce a foundational report outlining current activities, findings and future direction of the components related to the Workforce Thrusters Strategy.</p>	<p>Involvement in investment seminars, meetings, and workshop(s) (Target – 10).</p> <p>Regional outreach / update engagement sessions (Target – 5).</p>
<b>Transportation</b>			
Investigate and maintain travel infrastructure options throughout the region.	To ensure all options for travel to the destination is examined, researched, maintained, and developed (where deemed appropriate).	<p>Examine the necessary foundational work for the development of a tourism business case for passenger rail service. Additionally, conduct rail passenger interviews with key national and international experts.</p> <p>Support the Great Lakes Cruising Coalition (GLCC) with membership and input as it related to their efforts during the travel ban. Additionally, attend GLCC meetings, AGMs, industry zoom events adding input and advice.</p> <p>Continue dialogue with partners involved in the commercial air service program maintaining dialogue. Additionally, provide input into the relaunch and additional investment into the commercial air service program.</p>	<p>Passenger Rail Interviews (target – 6).</p> <p>Great Lakes Cruising Coalition Events (target – 6).</p> <p>Commercial Air Service Meetings (target – 4).</p>



Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
<b>Inspiration &amp; Intelligence Gathering</b>			
Endorse tourism as a career.	Showcase tourism as a desirable and applicable career choice showcasing RTO12 a premier tourism career destination.	<p>Work with high schools, colleges, and universities to inspire and gather intelligence related to student career sentiment towards tourism.</p> <p>Communication of career options via content, zoom recruitment and familiarization tours.</p> <p>Work with existing organizations to coordinate workforce development, opportunities in the region.</p>	<p>Number of educational institutions working with the RTO (target – 5).</p> <p>Students that the RTO engages with (target – 250).</p>
<b>Communication &amp; Research</b>			
Communicate the possibilities regional workforce opportunities.	Involve youth, return-to-work, immigrant, international students, and ‘she-covery” audiences via communication outreach.	<p>Develop communication plan for additional audiences. Additionally, capture contact information to continue dialogue while gauging feedback.</p> <p>Create content position the region as a career option related to tourism.</p>	<p>Leads captured related to interested individuals and audiences (target – 50).</p> <p># of pieces of content related to workforce development (target – 2).</p> <p># of content views (target – 250).</p>
<b>Recruitment &amp; Welcome</b>			
Convert Urban graduates to rural employees.	Introduce graduates to rural tourism opportunities.	<p>Build a “Neighbourhood Network” who will educate, welcome, and convert urban graduates.</p> <p>Assemble regional ambassadors, on board and brief on program objectives. Additionally, link the ambassadors with Urban graduates.</p>	<p>Ambassador to graduate network / relationships (target – 40 matches).</p> <p>Urban graduates working in RTO12 (benchmark target – 8).</p>

 **Partnership Allocation**

Priority / Strategic Focus	Objectives	Key Activities / Tactics	Performance Indicator
<b>Marketing &amp; Communication</b>			
Collaborate with partners that align communication and marketing with RTO priorities and objectives.	Work in partnership to ensure regional product, business liquidity, and travel receipts are stabilized during the pandemic.	<p>Using staff resources communicate organizational operational plans, strategies, objectives, and outcomes.</p> <p>Work with third party to establish work plan, key deliverables, and dates.</p> <p>Using staff resources communicate mid partnership progress and final report to stakeholders</p>	# of communication and marketing partnerships (goal and target – 4).
<b>Business Development</b>			
Supplement business development programs with partners that share a common concern in the health and well being of the regional economy.	Make certain RTO lead programs impact industry and non-industry stakeholders.	<p>Using staff resources communicate organizational operational plans, strategies, objectives, and outcomes.</p> <p>Identify public and private partners. Commence outreach, identifying shared business development interest.</p> <p>Work with third party to establish work plan, key deliverables, and dates.</p> <p>Using staff resources communicate mid partnership progress and final report to stakeholders.</p>	# of partnered business development programs (target – 3).
<b>Workforce</b>			
Enhance RTO workforce development programs with partners who share a keen interest in community development.	Commence private and public investment into the Force Thruster Strategy and our long-term catalyst housing endeavour.	<p>Using staff resources communicate organizational operational plans, strategies, objectives, and outcomes.</p> <p>Identify public and private partners. Commence outreach, identifying shared business development interest.</p> <p>Create shared outcomes and program components.</p> <p>Work with third party to establish work plan, key deliverables, and dates.</p> <p>Using staff resources communicate mid partnership progress and final report to stakeholders.</p>	<p># of partners support via partnership allocation workforce programs (target – 2).</p> <p># of impacted workforce stakeholders (target – 14 tourism SMES &amp; 40 identified potential workforce individuals).</p>



2021 will see the re-positioning of the Explorers' Edge brand to act as the stakeholder-facing administrative name. The international brand – The Great Canadian Wilderness Just North of Toronto (GCWJNT)– will be used for domestic and international consumer-facing audiences.

# Marketing Communications Plan

*(Note: as Explorers' Edge transitions further to a Destination Development Organization, industry and community stakeholders will also be considered primary target audiences for communication and outreach, and a robust plan will be developed for them, particularly with the objectives of building membership investment and program support.)*

## Context

In a regular year, the Fiscal 2021-22 Consumer Marketing Plan would be a continuation of what was established for deliverables in the 5-Year Regional Tourism Strategy (2018) and would have focused primarily on the attraction of international audiences to the region.

The 2018 Product Research & Framework study ([Click Here – Appendix 1](#)), which is the basis for the 5-Year Strategy pertaining to marketing, identified six “Key Tourism Activities” (KTAs) that were most likely to motivate high potential international travellers to the region. These include:

- Indigenous Cultural Tourism
- Being Lakeside
- Hiking
- Paddling
- Wildlife Viewing
- Guided Nature Tours

Because the pandemic has meant the ceasing of international travel for now, Explorers' Edge will nonetheless continue promotion of these key motivating activities to domestic audiences (and develop itineraries and packages to coincide), while focusing on additional outdoor activities that have increased in popularity because of the pandemic, including golf and cycling. Four season participation in all activities will be promoted (including golf, as simulators become more popular).

Additionally, as the organization embarks on destination development initiatives, the building of culinary field-to-fork experiences (supply chains) will commence (“sense of culinary place”), and Explorers' Edge will also work to rebuild the arts and culture sector, which has hit particularly hard in the last year.

## What's New

### Repositioning Explorers' Edge and Great Canadian Wilderness Brands / Website & Social Asset Mergers

2021 will see the re-positioning of the Explorers' Edge brand to act as the stakeholder-facing administrative name. The international brand – The Great Canadian Wilderness Just North of Toronto (GCWJNT) – will be used for domestic and international consumer-facing audiences. To that end, a re-designed website featuring the GCWJNT branding will be launched, and the Explorers' Edge branding will be featured on a re-designed administrative website. These site re-designs will launch in Q1. Social assets will be revised/merged, to reflect this re-positioning as well.

### Package Sales

A key deliverable the re-designed consumer site is to feature and promote package sales on interior pages and in content (main CTA). This is part of the organization’s commitment to increase higher-yield travel conversions, and to increase organizational revenue.

### New Segments in a Covid World

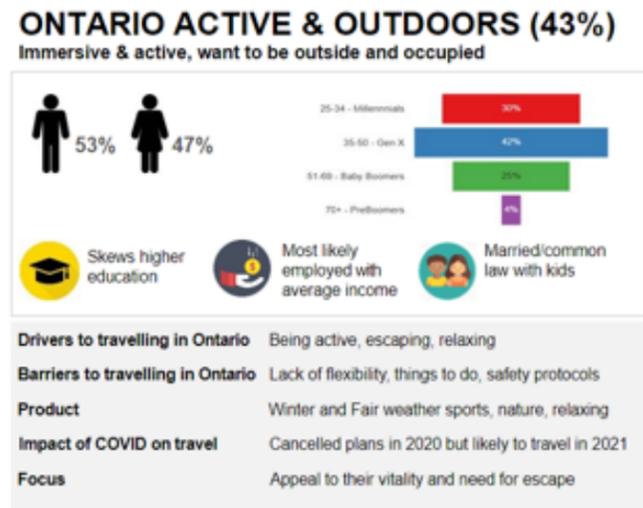
In the summer 2020, Explorers’ Edge undertook a substantial region-centric consumer research study (Click Here – Appendix 2) to determine macro and micro travel intentions in pandemic/post-pandemic times.

The results indicated that the regional brand – “The Great Canadian Wilderness Just North of Toronto” – will resonate extremely well with domestic and international travellers for years to come and act as a catalyst to book (in contrast to provincial urban destinations, where travel intentions are lower).

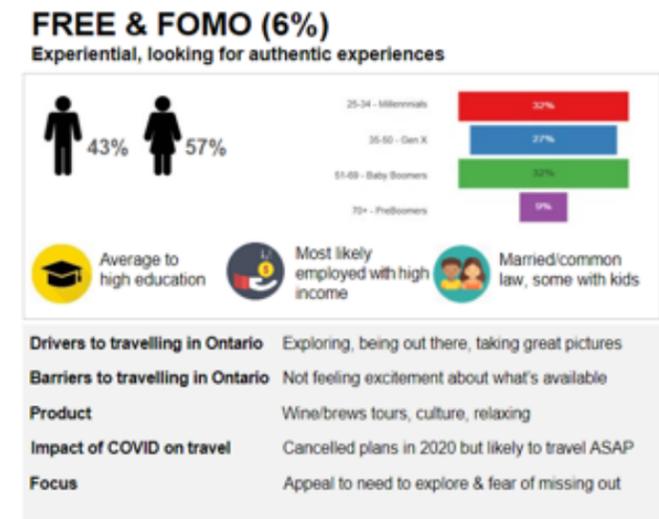
Domestic travellers are most likely to return to former travel patterns/habits first, and Millennials most likely to travel first, of all domestic audiences. Of primary concern for all travellers now is a desire for a “safe” destination (in terms of pandemic protocols) and access to “space”.

As a result of the study, which included factor analysis of the primary research, Explorers’ Edge created four new traveller segments, two of which will become the primary audiences for targeting in 2021-2022.

## Top Priority Segment 1: Excellent alignment with brand, regional offerings, and KTAs



## Top Priority Segment 2: Highest % of most-likely-to-travel/Millennials



### Hyper Local Travel: Here to Stay

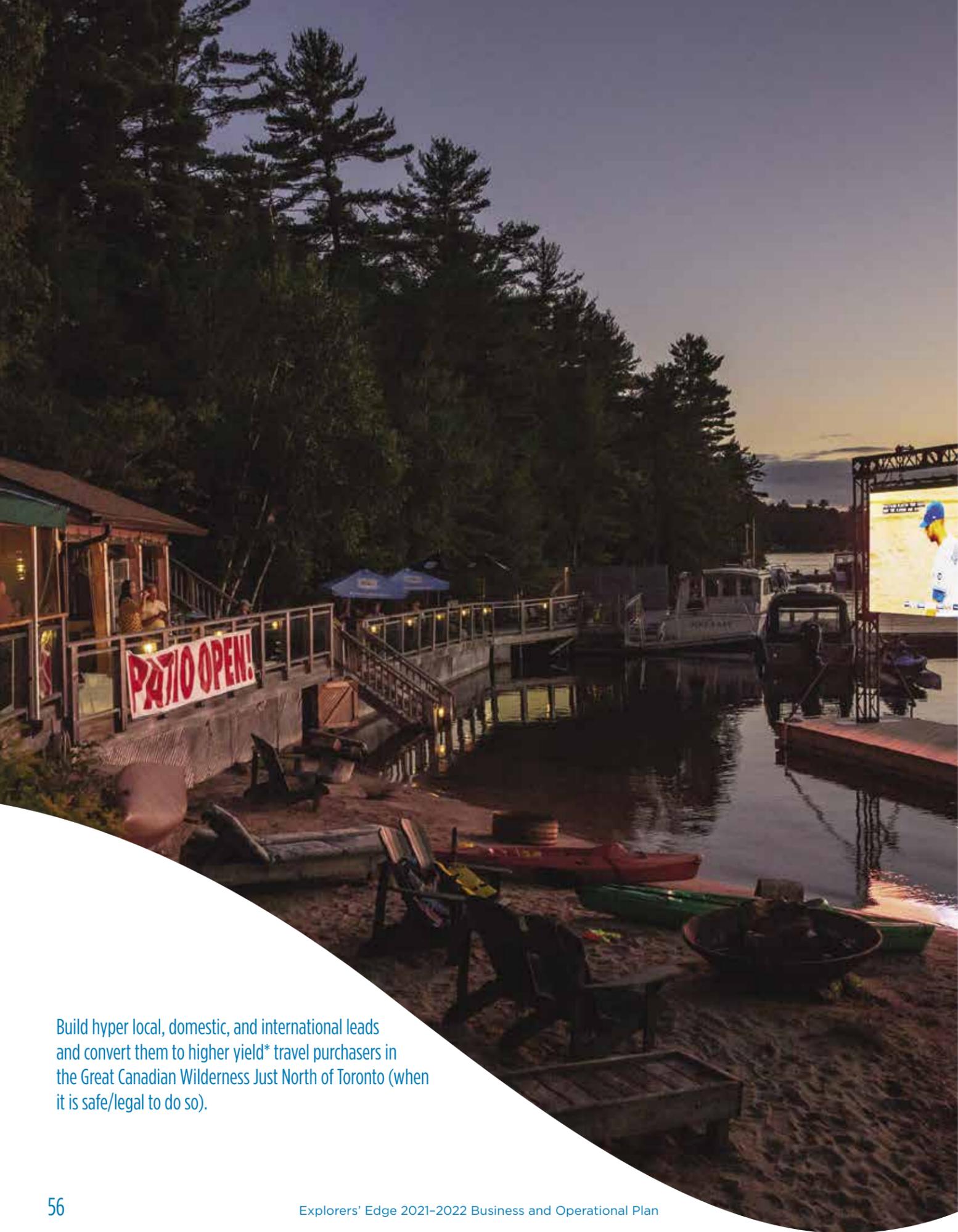
The pandemic saw the exponential rise of hyper local travel to sustain regional businesses. Marketing to ‘backyard tourists’ is now a staple strategy of any destination and will remain so for a long time to come. Explorers’ Edge will continue to build this audience to promote intra-regional travel and make particular use of incentivized local travel packages to do so.

Of note: this is a much smaller audience than that of domestic or international markets, which make stimulus packaging more important (as the audience is called upon to support local again and again, and by multiple agencies). It also means that the targeting on social media is very general (e.g., everyone over 18 years of age in specific areas of the region, and within in a 10 km radius etc.) to reach a decent volume of potential customers.

### “Stop & Go” Marketing

Our long-standing content marketing program has served us well during the pandemic when, depending on orders from the provincial or federal governments, we could be open or closed at a moment’s notice. Internally, we call this “Stop & Go” marketing. One week we could be in a holding pattern and only publishing scenic content with no call-to-action (CTA); the next we could be targeting regions of Ontario not under travel bans or lock down orders to book a getaway or to sign-up for a local travel package.

To that end, though this plan entails producing and promoting a specific amount of strategic content, Explorers’ Edge recognizes that our approach moving forward must continue to be flexible, adaptable and scalable as long as external pandemic influences exist.



Build hyper local, domestic, and international leads and convert them to higher yield\* travel purchasers in the Great Canadian Wilderness Just North of Toronto (when it is safe/legal to do so).

## Marketing Priorities 2021-2022

- Continue to promote the long-standing GCWNT brand and brand voice (“earnest, approachable, informed and most of all, Canadian”).
- Target hyper local, domestic, and international markets depending on provincial and federal travel restrictions.
- Publish exceptional content (“educate, entertain, convince”) and launch promotion that is flexible, adaptable, and scalable.
- Use successful social, mobile content promotion tactics (primarily Facebook) while testing additional platforms to reach up-and-coming travellers/younger audiences.
- Sell product packages and itineraries (primary CTA).
- Develop and promote incentivized travel packages, such as Fuel & Fun and the Cottage Country Spirit Local Travel Package.
- Reboot lead nurturing marketing, which was halted during the pandemic.
- Maintain/develop content on [BikeCottageCountry.ca](http://BikeCottageCountry.ca), [CottageCountryBeerTrail.ca](http://CottageCountryBeerTrail.ca) and [GolfMuskoka.com](http://GolfMuskoka.com)

### Overall Goal

Build hyper local, domestic, and international leads and convert them to higher yield\* travel purchasers in the Great Canadian Wilderness Just North of Toronto (when it is safe/legal to do so).

*\*Higher yield does not connote luxury travel segments only. Rather it is travellers who stay longer and spend more, regardless of their travel budget and intentions. The aim is to attract more of these visitors, instead of mass volumes of lower-yield visitors.*

## Overall Strategy

Use proven social content marketing program to promote itineraries and packages to attract and convert higher-yield travellers, whether originating from hyper local, domestic, or international markets.

### Tactics

- Content Development (note: not all content will be boosted with spend as the budget is considerably less than other years).
- Facebook Marketing (promoted posts and ads).
- Display Advertising (for package promotion).
- Potential Retargeting with Display.
- Lead Nurturing (database and email marketing, which includes segmenting hyper local, domestic, and international leads for better quality interaction and better chance of conversion).
- Earned Media: develop robust hyper local, domestic, and international media databases and promote products and packages.
- Product Zooms: develop product-related “Branded Travel Zooms”.
- Repurpose content when fitting.

### Measurable Objectives

- Re-design website launch and promotion.
- 6 sub-regionally themed pieces of content (1 per sub region).
- 10 product/KTA themed pieces of content.
- 10 itinerary themed pieces of content.
- 2 sustainable practices themed content (promote respect for the landscape).
- Benchmark leads to the re-designed Great Canadian Wilderness website (this will be necessary as current YOY comparisons are irrelevant).
- Create a substantial hyper local, domestic, and international media database.
- Deploy minimum one media release per quarter.
- Host minimum of 4 product-related “Branded Travel Zooms”.
- Increase hyper local leads: 500 new entries.
- Increase domestic leads: 1000 new entries.
- Increase international leads: 100 new entries from targeted Designated Marketing Areas (no spend).
- Deploy one e-newsletter per fiscal quarter to each segment (hyper local, domestic, international).
- Sell 50 packages (benchmark year — this is an estimate of potential).

## Strategic Partnerships

As always, Explorers’ Edge will consider marketing partnerships with agencies (e.g. Destination Ontario, Chambers, DMOs, etc.) and entities (private businesses, etc.) whose strategies and objectives align with our own. (A caveat to partnership availability in 2021-2022 is that the priority of the Partnership Program will be regenerative development programs, including workforce projects.)

### Activity Timeline

See BOP Activity Chart Above (Pages 34-51).

### Budget

See BOP Budget Below (Page 65).

Note: Due to the inability to anticipate when provincial or federal travel restrictions will be implemented or rescinded at any given time, the applied budgets are anticipated for Fiscal 2021-2022 but may be impacted depending on the state of travel over the coming year.



As Explorers' Edge adopts a "Region-Centric Regenerative Tourism Approach," priority will be to projects that help Explorers' Edge move towards its newly stated Destination Development 'goal posts.'

## The Partnership Program

The Partnership Program will once again be an opportunity for industry and community partners to collaborate with Explorers' Edge on mutually beneficial and strategic initiatives. As Explorers' Edge adopts a "Region-Centric Regenerative Tourism Approach," priority will be to projects that help Explorers' Edge move towards its newly stated Destination Development 'goal posts.'

Staff will actively seek out significant, innovative, and strategic partnerships to further develop the organization's goals, and intake of proposals from the industry or community stakeholders will commence in September 2021 while at the same time continuing supporting regional level communication programs where applicable.



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.

## Risk Identification, Assessment, and Mitigation

While there are no identified barriers or possible risks to successfully delivering on BOP2021-2022, 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.

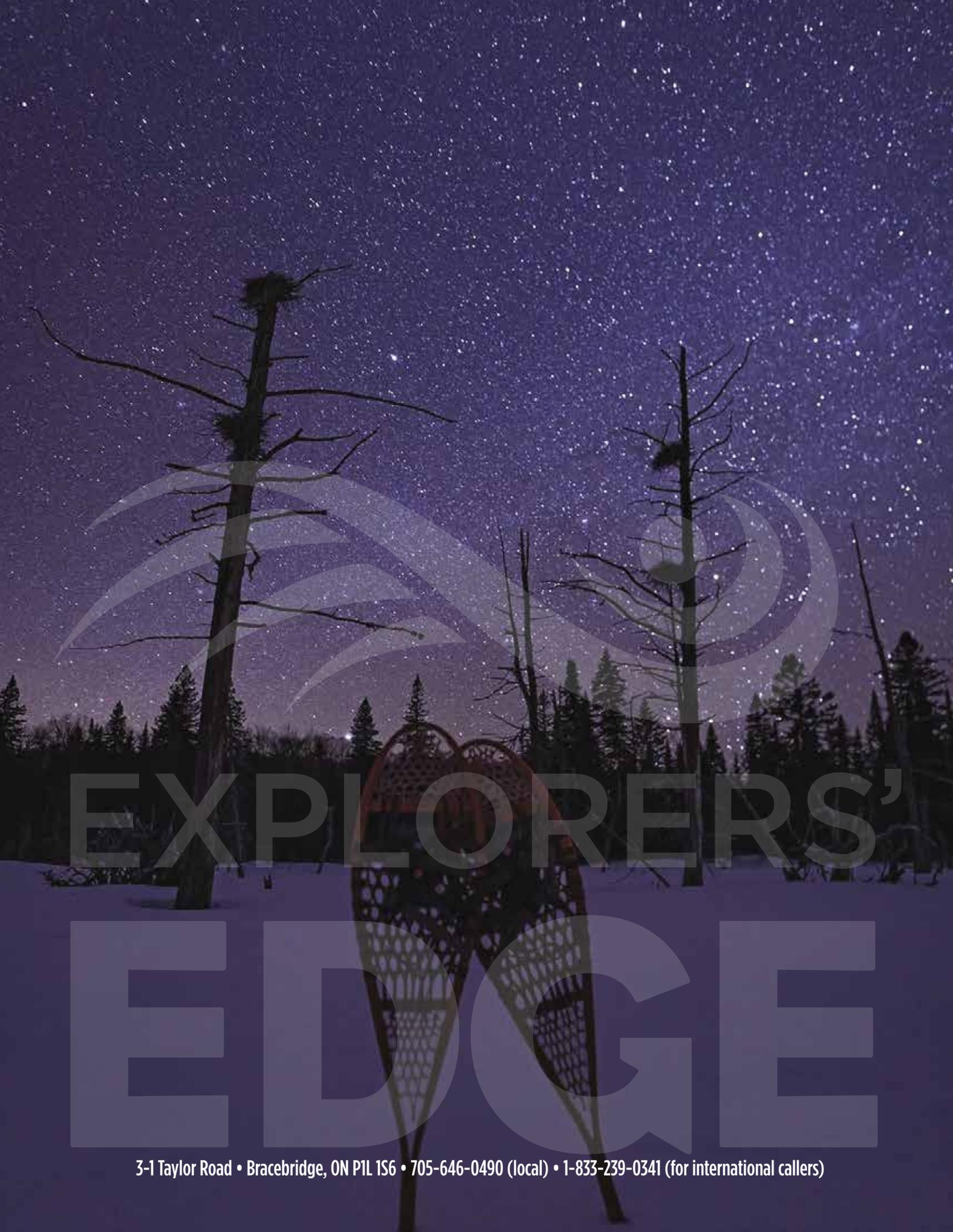
### The following Best Practices are implemented by the RTO to mitigate risk:

- Identify Early — identify risks as early as possible in the project lifestyle.
- 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.
- Work with other RTOs on mutually beneficial programs to further drive efficiencies and reduce duplication efforts.

# 2021-2022 Budget

Budget Items	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL
<b>Governance and Administration</b>					
Salaries & Benefits	28,750	28,750	28,750	28,750	115,000
Governance	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	8,000
Overhead / Facilities	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	60,000
Finance and Administration (Accounting, Audit, Legal)	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	20,000
Travel	8,750	8,750	8,750	8,750	35,000
Industry Relations / Stakeholder Engagement	875	875	875	875	3,500
Information Technology	2,500	0	0	2,500	5,000
				<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>246,500</b>
<b>Product Development</b>					
Salaries & Benefits	8,250	8,250	8,250	8,250	33,000
Regional Product Dispersion	0	2,000	500	0	2,500
Research	0	3,000	2,000	0	5,000
				<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>40,500</b>
<b>Marketing and Promotion</b>					
Salaries and Benefits	22,500	22,500	22,500	22,500	90,000
Communications Coordinator	16,250	16,250	16,250	16,250	65,000
Marketing/Communication/Advertising	40,000	15,000	15,000	10,000	80,000
Content Development / Guest Authors / FAM Tours	1,000	250	250	500	2,000
Promotions/Contests/Incentives	2,000	3,000	1,000	4,000	10,000
Creative Development	1,250	1,250	1,250	1,250	5,000
Project Mgmt. Ad Trafficking	8,000	5,000	5,000	2,000	20,000
Strategist (Retainer)	7,500	7,500	7,500	7,500	30,000
Newsletter	1,000	1,000	500	500	3,000
Reservation Platform	1,250	1,250	1,250	1,250	5,000
Transacting / Dispersion / Tracking	90,000	0	55,000	35,000	180,000
				<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>490,000</b>
<b>Investment Attraction</b>					
Salaries & Benefits	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	20,000
				<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>20,000</b>
<b>Workforce Development</b>					
Salaries & Benefits	23,235	23,235	23,235	23,237	92,942
Workforce Recruitment	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	8,000
Workforce Research & Development	20,000	20,000	10,000	11,665	61,665
				<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>162,607</b>





EXPLORERS'

EDGE

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