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**Explorers' Edge Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Monday, September 13, 2021
Webinar**

Present: Michael Simonett, Mike Strong, Don MacKay, Darren Smith, Hilary Chambers, Angela Pollak, Andrew Rusynyk

Resource: Laura Ross

Regrets: Christine McRae, Scott Doughty, Gail Burrows, Dave Anderson

Staff: James Murphy, Kate Monk, Erin Smit (taking minutes)

Call to Order and Chair Remarks: Chair Michael Simonett called the meeting to order at 9:05am.

Conflict of Interest: n/a

Approval of Agenda – September 13, 2021

Motion: Don MacKay

Seconded: Darren Smith

Discussion:

Carried.

Approval of Minutes – July 8, 2021

Motion: Darren Smith

Seconded: Angela Pollak

Discussion:

Carried.

Financial Update – Don MacKay & James Murphy

Don MacKay is now the treasurer – will be finalized at the bank on Wednesday, September 15, 2021.

Motion to Accept Audited Financial Statements

Motion: Don MacKay

Seconded: Darren Smith

Discussion: n/a

Carried

As noted on the balance sheet the RTO has cash on hand. It was noted that the board would convene for a financial focused board meeting in the coming weeks. Budget changes are anticipated as we close in on our six month point of the fiscal year.

Business Plan Status Update – James Murphy and Kate Monk

Reporting Contracts

Four reporting contracts are currently being managed, including two TPAS, the include our BOP TPA, Workforce Development TPA, DO/DC partnership, & FedNor Partnership. The BOP is underway, being noted that the RTO had a two-month delay. As such, new KPIs are in development with key areas include marketing, workforce development (short / long term goals), revenue generation and environmental sustainability. Monk spoke to areas of work under the staff status document; an internal assessment of recovery for this region to thrive. Continues to refer to the BOP, with status document reflective of the projects ongoing.

Marketing Update

GCW branding has launched, and social assets have merged. EE is redirecting for now as GCW becomes the consumer facing brand. This brand resonates with hyperlocal, domestic, and international consumers based on research; Explorers' Edge to become the corporate website for RTO12.ca. Noted the overall reaction to this has been positive. Content marketing machine has been rebooted; editorial content with paid promotion began in August. Monk has been working with authors to produce new content as well as refreshing content that has been successful in the past. Lead nurturing will also begin again to introduce new branding and work to continue placing website visitors into segments to reach them with content of interest and push them down the purchase funnel. The development of additional social assets including TikTok, Pinterest and Snapchat will commence this fall. Also discussed the real time dashboard that has been developed by Kuration which tracks marketing spending to optimize posts and ensure best results.

August results of content with the DO/DC funding saw five promoted posts with 1.5 million impressions, 16k post engagement, 14k link clicks and a CPC of \$0.66. 89% of traffic was new visitors and resulted in 7k referrals.

Voucher Programs

Cottage Country Spirit is wrapping up on September 30, 2021. Murphy referenced income statement money moved to accrued liability for voucher redemption. Program continues to be well received by both businesses and consumers.

The HMAT Sweater Weather partnership is underway; content started on September 3rd with 200k impressions and 2.5k engagements. 100 registrations have been received to date of 500 packages available. Don MacKay asked when voucher programs run their lifespan. CCS was developed for liquidity during COVID, Fuel & Fun used to prime the pump; the programs are something that can be modified or evolved based on need. Discussed TICO and once finalized vouchers could be added on as an incentive when booking a package.

BOP Workforce Deliverables – short term

Short Term 1: Regional Tourism Job Bank is being developed. Operators will load jobs onto site with approval for postings by RTO12 staff. The job bank will be promoted on social channels (paid) with content and job postings will be deleted after a month if not renewed by operator (user generated) – Angela Pollak asked that data entered by operators be stored in a profile so if they are renewing the posting it doesn't need to be reentered by the operator, can just be republished. This will be available shortly for operators; plugin is loaded, associated content is upcoming.

Short Term 2: Another short-term workforce project involves the TikTok recruitment test with leads to the job bank database; this will take place this fall or winter – working through Humber students scheduling challenges.

Short Term 3. The RTO12 Rural Tourism Certificate & Experiential Learning program (MHSTCI funded training)

Step One: Online Video Training & Certificate of Completion

Step Two: FAM Trip (upon certificate completion)

Step Three: Zoom Recruitment Event

The program will begin with developing the syllabus (this has been done by RTO12 staff in the past for Georgian College). Proposed syllabus would include eight sections:

- Introduction to the Great Canadian Wilderness North of Toronto
- The Rural Tourism Renaissance: How is it different from urban tourism?
- The Case for Tourism as a Career: Transferable Skills Will Serve You Well
- Regenerative Tourism: New Thinking for Building Resilience in Rural Destinations
- Indigenous Culture: The Traditional Lands & Waterways
- Introduction to Tourism Marketing: Content, Dispersion and the New Hyper Local Reality
- Developing Tourism Products & Experiences: Rural Examples

For this program online training aids will be utilized with a short video lesson complemented by a PDF document and then a quiz following each section. The incentive to take part in the training will be the follow-up of a FAM trip to the region hoping to inspire participants desire to work in this region. Reality must find the low lying fruit – regional high school outreach including course participation (work integrated guest speakers), utilize co-op programs at this level and develop potential awards or scholarships (medium term goals). The Duke of Edinburgh program was broached as an example, RTO is currently examining a proprietary program for the RTO.

The board will reconvene later to discuss specifics related to the catalyst housing project draft plan.

Social Media Strategies

A social media webinar will be hosted by our team of Kate Monk and Peter Coish. Will discuss changes in strategy due to increase costs for SMEs, safety for business pages (encouraged board to ensure social pages have double opt in), RTO12 content reboot and third part content, a general Q&A for businesses, and social/digital asset audits for individual businesses. This will be help in late October or early November with more details available to operators shortly.

The Business Case for Eco-Sustainability

The RTO team will host another webinar on the business case for eco-sustainability working with GreenStep Solutions. Would like to bring forward a professor she engaged with during her own

sustainability training. The GreenStep Sustainable Tourism program includes assessments, certifications, tools and support to help organizations and destinations measure and improve their sustainability performance. The assessment that comes from the program will help to communicate to and educate operators on the demand for sustainable business and explain the business case that can be made for adopting more sustainable practices; properties will receive a scorecard and certification for select properties. Funding for this comes from FedNor – one of four buckets is business development. The webinar to kick off the program will be held on October 20, 2021.

Revenue Generation

A working group will be developed in the near future to discuss revenue generation opportunities including package sales, an updated membership model, merchandise sales, attracting investors and program administration and consultancy work.

TICO update; paperwork has been completed in order to register the RTO with the bank and then with TICO – we are now 4 weeks away from registration application submission (with a goal of being able to sell packages by December 2021). The registration includes a \$3,000 application fee and a \$10,000 security deposit that must remain in the account for two years. Directors will be contacted in order to have each of their background checks completed.

Data Tracking & New KPIs

A new Regional Tourism Data Hub is being developed (FedNor partnership funding). With the uncertainty of information, this will help to understand KPIs; what information do we need as an RTO to move forward with our programs, setting benchmarks for recovery and tracking year over year changes. There is no data currently available that is relevant; the main data for workforce is Tourism HR Canada – this is high level, they do track per riding but it relies on the census making the most recent data from 2016. Particular issues pertinent to each facet of the industry is not necessarily available. We need data to tell us where the problems are so we can develop programs to solve them and inform the development of new KPIs. Employees (current, departed and potential) and employers (staffing needs, business in the region, HST, loss of revenue relevant to staff shortages) need to be surveyed; must understand visitor satisfaction, resident sentiment, the environmental impact of the regional tourism industry and the higher yield visitor - this data can be used to bring to Ministers. Business barometer is not sufficient – this will provide more in depth intel. Employee and employer surveys are the current priority.

FedNor Update

Funding has been approved from June 2021 - August 2022. A follow up board meeting will be set to discuss what budgets will allow to move the selected projects forward, including research for the Regional Tourism Data Hub, business development for fiscal 2021-2022, marketing and communication for spring and summer of fiscal 2022, and website development for fiscal 2021-2022.

Additional Updates

Discussed was the appointment of a new Regional Tourism and Research Manager with MHSTCI, Darryl Soshycki. Also discussed the upcoming meeting set for September 23, 2021 which will include representatives from each RTO Executive Director, TIAO and MHSTCI; notes were taken from today's

meeting which will inform questions to be sent prior to the meeting in an attempt to gather more answers for operators during that meeting.

RTO12 representatives are also working with the District of Muskoka, Georgian College, Destination Ontario, Parry Sound BIA, Seguin Township and Ontario Northland. Explorers' Edge has also been invited to be a member of the Muskoka Watershed Council with a letter of request, Kate Monk will be representing the organization at the meetings. Monk and Smit continue to work towards TICO counselor certification, Murphy is completing his professional certificate in sustainable tourism while both Murphy and Monk are beginning their 20-week Mohawk language lesson course.

Next Steps

A board meeting will be scheduled for late September to update financials and discuss budget changes. A director planning session will be held in mid-October. Director training is also upcoming and will include a governance NFP overview and cultivating diversity, equity, and inclusion training. The year will close with a board meeting in December.

MacKay asked how the board role evolves with these projects rolling out. It was noted that working groups and ad hoc committees will be developed, will start to articulate what this looks like. There will be more commitment moving forward, still don't have a full board on calls and this will have to be addressed as well. Working groups are noted in the BOP, a need to develop a sounding board that can be used to hash out big project ideas as well as commitment to communicate these projects out into the community. MacKay asked about non-director active members to fill these roles.

Governance Update

Policies have been circulated via Dropbox. Angela Pollak asked to move this to the agenda for the next meeting; would like to ask board to read through and highlight areas where they see board may not be doing what is stated and then can discuss ways for improvement – focusing on section 1. JM will circulate again with the TICO details.

Meeting went in camera at 11:12am with ED

Motion: Don MacKay

Seconded: Hilary Chambers

Discussion: n/a

Meeting went in camera at 11.30am without ED

Motion: Angela Pollak

Seconded: Mike Strong

Discussion: n/a