



3 Taylor Road, Bracebridge, ON P1L 1S6
1-800-835-7303
Algonquin Park, Almaguin Highlands, Loring-Restoule, Muskoka,
Parry Sound & South Algonquin
www.explorersedge.ca



**Explorers' Edge Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, March 20, 2024
Hybrid Meeting – Jolly Roger & Zoom**

Present: Hilary Chambers, Angela Pollak, Jackie Leung, Dave Anderson, Darren Smith, Didier Dolivet, Gabriela Hairabedian, Michael Martyn

Resource: Laura Ross

Regrets: Anubandu Lakhera, James Roberts

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

Call to Order and Chair Remarks: Hilary Chambers called the meeting to order at 9:45am.

Round Table

Director round table updates included:

- Festival of the Sounds dates of July 19-August 3, 2024 set for the year. James Campbell is also celebrating his 40th anniversary as artistic director.
- Four Seasons Algonquin Cabins in Madawaska note that they have been in operation for 6 years; this past was the most challenging in history of the property.
- Island Queen bookings looking good; looking forward to new Henry's restaurant on the waterfront in Parry Sound.
- Ministry expecting announcements for Experience Ontario sooner than later so festival and events can plan accordingly. Summer Experience Opportunities program also launched earlier this year with feedback coming soon. Business plan is still in review with the Ministry.

Approval of Agenda – March 20, 2024

Motion: Michael Martyn
Seconded: Angela Pollack
Discussion: n/a
Carried.

Approval of Minutes – August 22, 2023

Motion: Jackie Leung
Seconded: Angela Pollack
Discussion: n/a
Carried.

Approval of Minutes – January 20, 2024

Motion: Dave Anderson

Seconded: Jackie Leung

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

Business and Operational Plan Status

The BOP has been submitted to the MTCS and is currently in review.

Virtual Meetings with RTO's (organized by EE) included updates on:

- Research Project (Southern ON RTO's with FedDev)
- Auditor Report
- Collection & Keeping of Interest via transfer payments (how we invest money)
- Municipal Accommodation Tax: Muskoka is heavily funded with their MAT tax
RTO(s) Fee for Service: strategy to be developed

Discussed the Ministry RTU introduction of TIAO's new President, CEO Andrew Siegwart. Murphy spoke of their discussion including push for multi-year TPAs, as well as role of TIAO acting as lobbying arm to the industry and members.

Monk spoke to Southern Ontario regions, FedDev and their relationships; TIAO taking an interest in FedNor funding of RTO13. An information session for operators was requested from FedNor in the same way RTO13 has; the region's rep, Ron Begin, opted to provide one on one information sessions to interested properties / entities.

Core Marketing Promotion Fiscal 2023-2024

- 11 million reached
- 19 million impressions
- 1.2 million pageviews of content
- 105,000 referrals
- Engagement 5% (excellent)
- Core spend \$60K (still running)
- .24 cents per link click (TBC)

Monk spoke to results with:

- DO Spring 2023 Outdoor Spotlight – Domestic Paid
- DO Winter 2024 Outdoor Spotlight – Domestic Paid
- DO Motorcycle Content Winter 2024 USA (no cost)
- DO Motorcycle Content Winter 2024 (USA)
- DO Paddling Content USA April 2024 (no cost)
- DO Upcoming: US Drive Markets Spring 2024 and Domestic Culinary Fall 2024

Marketing discussion noted that we started content marketing in 2013, DO is now getting heavily involved creating market saturation. We are limited in the categories we can market in when partnering with them, and discussed duplication in the marketplace. Another domestic program will happen in the fall with DO; will not focus on outdoor adventure anticipating many other regions will be highlighting this; we will focus on culinary opportunities and highlight local restaurants and dining experiences.

Discussed the motorcycle content that began promotion in February testing into the US; dynamics in the dashboard show this is a top performing piece of content. Discussed display ads and quality of engagement of users. This niche motorcycle content did what it should have done, by bringing engaged readers for better conversions. Also discussed leveraging the programs with little to no investment; testing this with the Explorers’ Edge Vroom Zoom – Ride the Edge check writer Martin Lortz will be online to discuss state of the roads in the region and top touring roads. Kate discussed opportunity to then replicate this format with DO focusing on paddling.

US drive markets will be promoted for spring 2024, and domestic audiences will be targeted for the culinary content in Fall 2024. James discussed a \$50k spend with Muskoka Tourism; their partner summary and operator spotlights. When we speak to the success of this, RTO content drove 200k leads and MTMA drove 160k leads – push to move operators throughout the whole region a success.

Partnership Update (Reconcile 2023 / 2024 – Update 2024 / 2025)

While the final invoices and expenses are still being reconciled the board was updated on the outcomes to partnership funding.

Fiscal 2023/2024 Final Overview

Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve	Product Development	\$1,352.00
Tall Pines Music Festival	Marketing	\$6,438.00
Jaynes Cottages International Marketing	Marketing	\$1,641.00
Toronto Metropolitan University Work Integrated Learning	Workforce Development	\$12,272.00
Township of Muskoka Lakes Signage Program	Product Development	\$1,500.00
BlackFly Music Festival Marketing	Marketing	\$2,884.00
Howl Photography Conference Marketing	Marketing	\$3,325.00
Muskoka Tourism Marketing Agency Fall Spotlight Program	Marketing	\$12,500.00
JW Marriott Resort & Spa The Rosseau Muskoka Breakfast Television	Marketing	\$5,000.00
Town of Bracebridge, Ontario by Bike Product Development	Marketing	\$1,000.00
Resorts of Ontario Regional Members, International Collaborative Program	Marketing	\$1,200.00

Town of Parry Sound Cruise Ship Development and Dispersion	Marketing	\$8,236.00
Muskoka Arts and Crafts Marketing	Marketing	\$1,974.00
Festival of the Sound Marketing	Marketing	\$5,000.00
Muskoka Tourism Marketing Agency, Muskoka Brand Perception Report	Product Development	\$26,598.50
Muskoka Tourism Marketing Agency Winter Spotlight Program	Marketing	\$12,500.00
Town of Huntsville, Labour Shortage Gap Research	Workforce Development	\$15,000.00
Muskoka Chautauqua Marketing Program	Marketing	\$2,016.00
Muskoka Discovery Centre (Misko-Aki) Marketing Launch	Marketing	\$17,117.00
Almaguin Community Economic Development Fall and Winter Marketing	Product Development	\$5,000.00
Outdoor Adventure ATV Marketing Launch	Marketing	\$956.00
Parry Sound - Downtown Business Association Event Marketing	Marketing	\$884.37
Muskoka Chambers of Commerce - Muskoka Oktoberfest	Marketing	\$561.28
Georgian College Work Integrated Learning	Workforce Development	\$11,000.00
Bracebridge BIA, Bracebridge Fire and Ice Marketing	Marketing	\$5,000.00
South Algonquin Business Alliance - Trail Signage Program	Product Development	\$5,000.00
Holly Matrimony - Shoulder Season Product Development	Marketing	\$1,200.00
Bracebridge BIA Holiday Light Festival	Marketing	\$300.00
Total		\$167,455.15

Fiscal 2024/2025

10 applications have already been submitted for fiscal 2024/2025. They were noted as:

- South Algonquin Business Alliance
- Howl Photography Convention
- Muskoka Tourism
- The Huntsville Theatre Company
- Whitney Black Fly Festival
- Parry Sound Chamber of Commerce Info Kiosk (May-October)
- Tall Pines Music Festival
- Gurd and Area Historical Corporation (Commanda Museum)
- Annual Traditional Powwow Annie Williams Park Bracebridge, Ontario.

Directors were provided updates that included:

- Industry Networking via the International Indigenous Tourism Conference and the Southern Ontario Tourism Conference, Sarnia, ON along with attendance at the Wahta FN Language Presentation.
- Outreach and Meetings that included our town halls (In person – Huntsville, Gravenhurst, Parry Sound, Magnetawan and Virtual – South Algonquin & Loring Restoule) Discussions and dialogue were good with guests who attended, but general engagement and attendance was low. What came out of this was looking at a smaller group discussion format moving forward to encourage more robust conversation and ideas that inform the work.
- Women in Tourism Social Club with the haven taken place after the AGM. The follow-up session included Inn at the Falls Bracebridge, ON March 5, 2024 and Di Salvo's Bella Cucina, Parry Sound ON March 7, 2024 (supported this event that was run by the Parry Sound Downtown Business Association for International Women's Day)

Senior staff discussed the strategy that came out of BOP development; the business of tourism, a plan outside of what is reported to the Ministry. When discussion of the corporate strategy takes place the focus will be on revenue generation and developing assets through the brand to become a self-reliant not-for-profit.

Additional Items that have taken place related to the organization:

- Privacy Policy - Educating Computing Network of Ontario (ECNO) reviewed the Rural Tourism Certificate program related to our privacy policy as due diligence. Resulting in the pprivacy policy being updated on both consumer and corporate website.
- CIBC Banking - Additional Banking Portal required related to payments for government fees and expenses i.e. WSIB
- TICO - Finals Stages of completing the process. Delays due to name change – RTO12 to Explorers' Edge.
- Staff Training continues with staff working toward completion of Sage / Simply Accounting Training and Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto - MBA Essentials.
- Staff Speaking / Outreach via IMPACT Travel, Tourism, Sustainability Conference (guest speaker), Travel and Tourism Research Association Conference Vermont (guest speaker), Ontario Snow Resorts Association Conference RTO Panel Discussion (guest speaker), Conestoga College, Cambridge ON (guest speaker)
- Expression of Interest Process (14 EOIs Submitted) with meetings taking place for a) Corporate Communications Week of April 2, 2024 b) Training Development Week of April 8, 2024 c) Marketing Strategy Dev & Execution Mid-April. Staggered start rolling out each of the three projects; confident this new strategy will yield better quality results.

Directors were provided with a current income statement and balance sheet for information purposes, staff noted that no motions were required. Staff noted that meetings were taking place to reconcile the

statements as the year-end approaches. Several expenses still needed to be recorded in the accounting software. Some include:

- CRBE Accommodation
- US DO Drive Market Spring 2024
- Sustainability Specialist – Rebecca Francis
- Staff Travel Expenses
- WSIB

Discussed was a 2019 invoice that was recorded and related to the launch of commercial air service. The work was not completed and then delayed due to the pandemic, it has been brought back onto the books this fiscal.

Directors noted that additional lead time would be required to review financials if motions were required. Additionally for motions in general, directors require time to review and digest information allowing for a Q/A period before approving.

Directors were briefed on fiscal year end cash flow. As the organization awaits updates to the TPA it is proposed that Explorers' Edge applies for bridge financing. The financing will come in the form of a loan from Muskoka Community Futures, the proposed requested amount is \$100,000.00. It is noted that this is something that many RTO's embark on and is deemed a problematic issue related to the funding model.

This loan will serve as essential bridge financing to address immediate financial needs and sustain our operations during the challenging period that is the changeover between fiscal Transfer Agreements. It will enable us to bridge the gap in our cash flow, ensuring the continuity of our programs and services (specifically early spring partnership projects).

Motion to Apply for Bridge Financing Loan from Muskoka Community Futures in the amount of \$100,000.00

Motion: Angela Pollak

Second: Michael Martyn

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

Motion to Adjourn

Motion: Gabriella Hairabedian

Discussion: n/a

Carried.