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## 2025 – 2026 Business and Operational Plan Executive Summary

Established in 2010 by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Gaming (MTC&G), Explorers' Edge (EE) is one of eleven Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) in the province. Representing stakeholders in the geographic areas of Algonquin Park, the Almaguin Highlands, Loring-Restoule, Muskoka, west Parry Sound district and South Algonquin, Ontario, Canada, the company is governed by an independent Board of Directors. The region is located on the traditional lands and waterways of the Anishinabek, Algonquin, Métis and Mohawk peoples, and is part of the Robinson Huron (1850) and Williams (1923) Treaties territory, as well as the unceded territory of the Algonquins.

This Business & Operational Plan (BOP25-26) provides a brief background on the status of the organization and the state of the regional tourism industry. It also identifies specific goals, activities, timelines, performance measures and budget that have been developed to meet the requirements of the annual Transfer Payment Agreement (TPA) with the MTC&G for the upcoming fiscal year. BOP25-26 priorities were finalized by the Board of Directors during a Zoom meeting that was held on January 16, 2025.

This BOP continues work established in the Regenerative Tourism Strategy (see BOP21-22) that positioned EE as a destination development organization within the Canadian tourism industry. Just as the previous BOP24-25 served as the roadmap for the foundational work of many key regenerative initiatives, including the innovative niche online travel agency, as a natural progression, Fiscal 2025-2026 will serve as the roadmap for the operationalization of these projects. Though this year is not a “reset”, per se, it does mark the beginning of EE launching some of the most significant programs in the organization's history.

Given the significant challenges consumers continue to face apropos negative macro-economic factors (inflation, high cost of living, housing scarcity/affordability), and given global economic and geopolitical upheaval (now exacerbated by the recent U.S. election), a fitting overall theme for the upcoming year from EE's perspective is “Anticipated Uncertainty.” Undeniably, there are a lot of unknowns in the industry as consumers retrench, as borders tighten and as digital platforms (the most popular media for content marketing) alienate audiences. Fortunately, because EE has built its castle on regenerative development (and the building of business ecosystems) and not on the unpredictable sands of external influences, the organization anticipates one of its most innovative and impacting years yet in terms of

outcomes. The ability to be strategic and agile to adapt to changing circumstances is part of EE's DNA, and it's hoped that this will serve the industry well.

Key areas for BOP25-26 consideration are:

- Operationalize and piloting the niche Online Travel Agency (OTA).
- Increased revenue generation for multiple streams, and OTA purchase conversions in particular, resulting in greater sustainability for the organization, tourism stakeholders, and communities.
- Differentiated marketing to distinguish the region, tourism stakeholders, and EE programs in the marketplace
- Attracting transportation partners to increase accessibility of the region.
- Creating the pipeline for developing local human capital and initiating innovative training projects as part of the greater "Catalyst Housing" strategy.
- Firing up the Co-Creation Lab to build strong networks of partners working together for mutually beneficial outcomes.

Additionally, the Board and CEO will establish a new Budget & Finance Committee that will assist with financial oversight, strategic planning and resource allocation, mainly because the OTA and revenue generation initiatives will require additional and novel considerations.

Finally, in a year of anticipated uncertainty, EE will rely on building "affinity" in all areas of operations, in order to create consumer and corporate ecosystems that will allow the stakeholders, communities and the organization to thrive for many years to come.