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# EXPLORER'S EDGE: **DESKTOP ASSESSMENT**

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## Disclaimer

The purpose of this report is to produce a Desktop Assessment of the Region's Indigenous Communities. This assessment has been prepared with input from the staff at RTO 12. Any recommendations made in this report have been made with the goals of supporting meaningful, collaborative, and thoughtful relationship building aligned with RTO 12 values and priorities as identified in the Business and Operations Plan.

As an initial phase in relationship building, this report acknowledges that true relationship building involves Indigenous consultation, conversation, trust building, and time. This report is meant as a general overview as a first step to building relationships, with involvement and in conversation with the communities in the region.

For the purposes of this report, the term "Indigenous" refers to First Nation, Metis, and Inuit—three distinct people with unique history, languages, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs.

## Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the region we call "the Great Canadian wilderness just north of Toronto" catchment is founded on the traditional lands and waterways of the Anishinabek, Algonquin, Mohawk, and Métis peoples, and part of the Robinson Huron (1850) and Williams (1923) Treaties territory. We further acknowledge that as Canadians, we are all treaty people. RTO12/Explorers' Edge staff are committed to the ongoing truth and reconciliation process and will work diligently to listen, to learn, to take action, and to be respectful towards all First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

## Methodology

Explorer's Edge hired Kyra Lyn Branding & Consulting (KLB) to support the development of a desktop assessment between January and March 2022. KLB took a research-based which included:

1. **Personal and professional** experience working in multiple Indigenous communities, organizations, and businesses across Ontario;
2. **A review of Indigenous-led research** from organizations such as the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians (AIAI), the Anishinabek Nation, Indigenous Tourism Ontario, Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada;



3. **Research** of each community website, news releases, citizen-owned business online resources and the Government of Canada;
4. **An independent review of findings** from Indigenous consultant Stan Scott consulting- former member of Council for Caldwell First Nation

KLB recommends that the next step in this process are to engage:

1. **A review of the documents from Indigenous Tourism Ontario** for recommendations, additions, or omissions;
2. **Review of the documents from regional citizens** whom the RTO may have existing established relationships with;
3. **Outreach to Chief & Council at each regional FN;** to introduce EE, explain its organizational focus of tourism with an economic development lens, validate and elaborate on findings;
4. **A logic modeling session** with administration in each interested community to develop the implementation plan based on the desktop assessment;<sup>1</sup> and
5. **Engaging citizens from each community as tourism ambassadors;** to support relationship building, determine individual community proprieties and assess ways that the RTO may be able to support community tourism development

## 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.

In 2021, EE released its 2021-2022 Business and Operational Plan, which challenged a long-held belief that successful tourism was reliant on transactional relationships, "doubling receipts," and solely profit-driven. Instead, EE has embarked on a mission to become a leading Destination Development Organization in Canada. Its goals are to create sustainability for all regional stakeholders (including tourism SMEs, employees and residents) by implementing initiatives that consider economic, social, cultural and environmental impact. RTO12 has committed to entrenching "regenerative tourism development" as the primary organizational direction to ensure the survival, recovery and longevity of the regional industry.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/overview/models-for-community-health-and-development/logic-model-development/main> A logic model presents a picture of how EE's effort or initiative is supposed to work. It explains why the strategy is a good solution to the problem at hand. Effective logic models make an explicit, often visual, statement of the activities that will bring about change and the results you expect to see for the community and its people. A logic model keeps participants in the effort moving in the same direction by providing a common language and point of reference. More than an observer's tool, logic models become part of the work itself. They energize and rally support for an initiative by declaring precisely what you're trying to accomplish and how.

In essence, building communities that thrive regardless of the economic situation of the day. Of particular importance for RTO 12 is understanding and supporting Indigenous community economic development in the region in ways that are appropriate to the region's Indigenous and Metis communities. As the original stewards of the land sustainable tourism development and regenerative development are fundamentally entrenched in Indigenous ways of being. EE firmly believes that the increased capacity and ability of Indigenous peoples to steward their lands and waters are critical for the future of healthy communities and the environment. By ensuring that EE's regenerative tourism approach involves meaningful consultation and co-development with Indigenous communities will result in more effective and sustainable management over time. Additionally, it puts into action the respect that the organization has for the original stewards of the land that have preserved and protected the region since time immemorial.



One of the steps towards relationship building (which is outlined later in this document) is respect. A sign of respect for the communities in the region is to thoroughly research the communities the RTO wants to work with.<sup>2</sup> Understanding the communities, their worldviews, governance structure, culture, traditions, and economy indicates care. The devotion of time and resources into developing a genuine understanding of the community puts into action the strategic goals of relationship building. While this understanding is only one element of relationship building, it is a key component of understanding the regional landscape.

This report serves as a preliminary form of regional data collection. It is meant solely as an initial scan of the information that is available to the public of the Indigenous communities in RTO 12. It is understood that many community development documents are not available to the general public, and it is not meant to be a fulsome analysis of the economic and community development initiatives in the region, but rather, what information the communities choose to share with the general public, a general understanding of some of the socioeconomic information available to the public, and as a first step towards community and organizational relationship building.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/7-tips-on-building-relationships-with-indigenous-peoples>

It also serves to give an understanding of the programs and supports that are available through various Indigenous organizations, such as Indigenous Tourism Ontario (ITO), Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC), the regional Aboriginal Financial Institutions (AFI), and community-owned or band-owned businesses that may help EE as they work towards meaningful relationship building.

## Overview

### INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

First Nations community economic development does not stand on its own: it is recognized as one important step in building a vibrant community. It is part of what the Anishinaabeg call Mino bimaadzewin, or “the good life.”<sup>3</sup>

While each community will choose its own path of economic development (if it is even identified as a community priority) one framework to understand First Nation economic development is the First Nations Progression Model developed by Membertou First Nation (Nova Scotia).

This model outlines three stages of development:



<sup>3</sup> First Nations Guide to Community Economic Development, [Province of Ontario](#), 2018, p5.

Further, the Anishinabek Nation – a political advocacy organization for 39 member First Nations across Ontario—developed its economic blueprint building off on the three stages of the Progression Model. This process and its associated implementation are helpful to EE as it understands where along its economic development process (if at all) it can support the Nations in its region.<sup>4</sup>

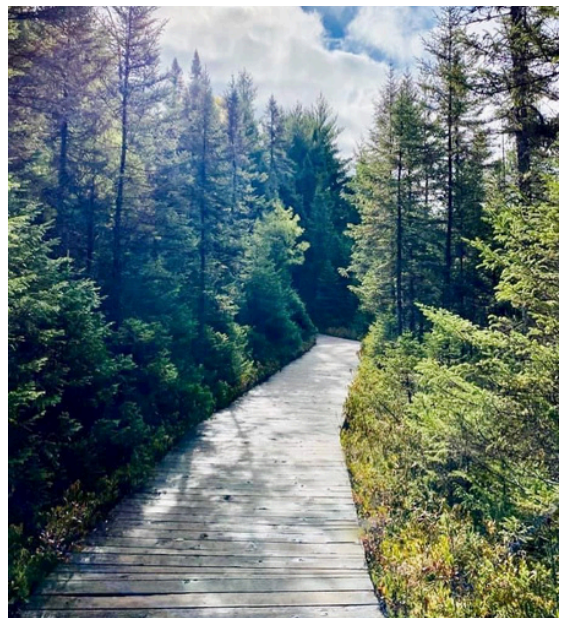
There is also evidence to support that there is a stage before the capacity-building phase of development. This includes a general interest among elected representatives, Nation administration, or citizens of communities that may be curious about economic development or believe that it is important to engage in but are seeking out ways in which it may fit with their community, governance, and administrative structure, or community resources.

Each community's approach to economic development will be different and built to fit the specific Economic needs of its citizens and Nation but Economic development businesses or tourism operators in FN's typically fall under three different categories:

1. Band-Owned-and-Operated Plans and Businesses
2. Economic development corporation-operated businesses (where economic activities and business operations are at an arm's length from Nation governance and administration)
3. Citizen-owned businesses

The relationship between any and all of these areas requires an individualized approach dependent upon the community's goals and dynamics.

For the purposes of this study, a high-level community overview has been completed to better understand, at a preliminary level, the communities in the region. Of note—this is only information that was gathered from a desktop analysis and that is available to the public. It may not reflect the full realities of the communities, particularly in terms of documents developed.



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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 8.

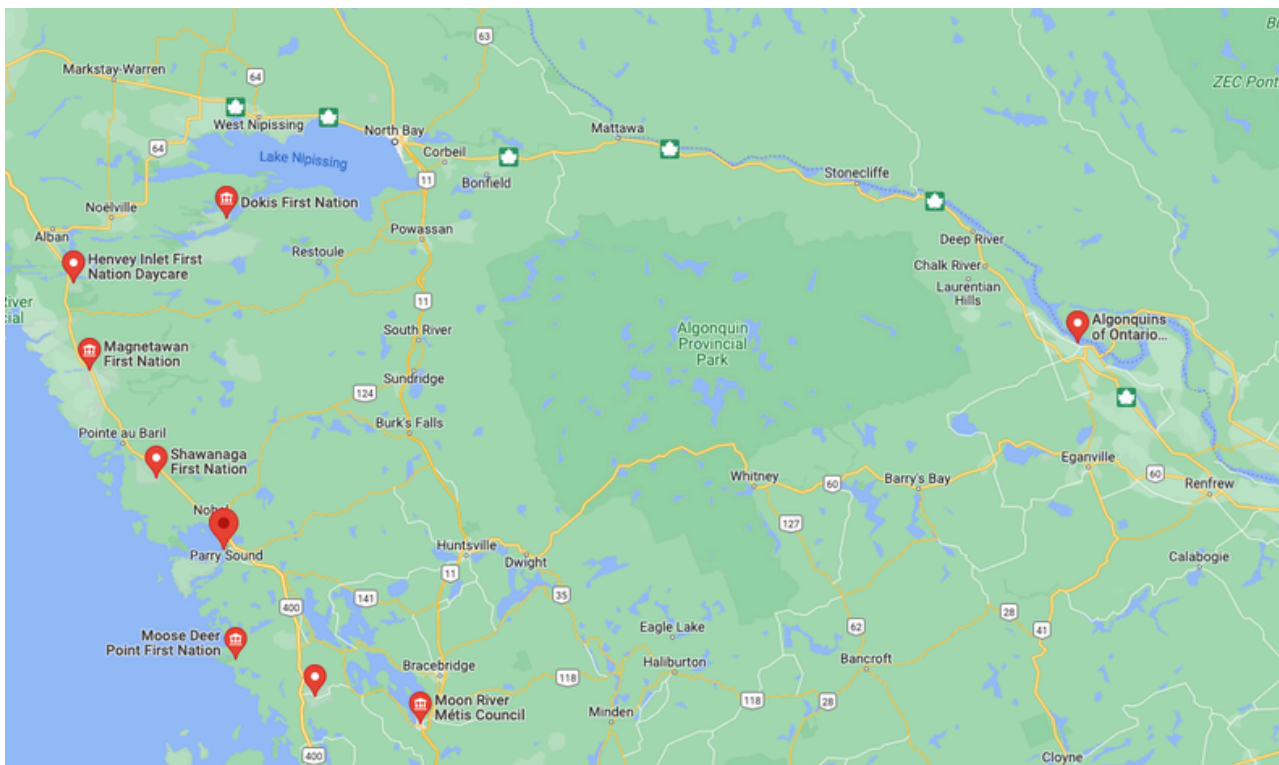
In addition, EE's focus is *tourism with an economic development lens*. Though the document refers to Economic Development as a whole, the outreach and work completed through EE as well as the meaning of economic development in this document are more accurately described as such.

## COMMUNITY DESKTOP OVERVIEW

RTO 12 is located in the traditional territory of 9 Indigenous communities:

1. Algonquins of Ontario (Whitney)
2. Dokis First Nation
3. Henvey Inlet First Nation
4. Magnetawan First Nation
5. Moon River Metis Council
6. Moose Deer Point First Nation
7. Shawanaga First Nation
8. Wahta Mohawks First Nation
9. Wasauksing First Nation

Image: Community Boundaries in RTO 12<sup>5</sup>



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<sup>5</sup> [Aboriginal Lands of Canada Legislative Boundaries](#), Government of Canada



There are four distinct official languages spoken in these communities, respectively -- 6 communities identify Anishinaabemowin as their language, 1 Mohawk, 1 Michif, and 1 a distinct Algonquian language.

The communities identify as a broad intersection of Ojibwe/Anishinaabe, Mohawk, Algonquin, and Metis.

This contextual data can act as a base level for learning opportunities at EE. This includes cultural celebrations, traditions, and traditional learning opportunities to better understand the communities and engage in cultural competency activities.

## Next Steps

This section serves as a map to building relationships with the Indigenous communities in RTO 12. The development of this section is gathered from Indigenous-created research and recommendations. RTO 12 has identified and acknowledged the importance of building meaningful relationships with communities in the region and is taking care to ensure that these relationships are formed on foundations of trust, support, and in ways that support each communities' distinct goals as they relate to economic and tourism development.

Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. identifies 7 tips on building relationships with Indigenous people:<sup>6</sup>

### 1. Be Trustworthy

Indigenous history is replete with broken promises that date back to the early days of colonization. Trust is the single most important element of building relationships with communities. The trust extends to the trust in communities to determine their own economic development priorities. The RTO's role as an industry organization is to support community development where appropriate and that role needs to be co-defined and co-developed with the communities.

**1** BE TRUST WORTHY

**2** BE TRANSPARENT

**3** BE RESPECTFUL

**4** BE INVESTED

**5** BE INVOLVED

**6** BE PATIENT

**7** CHOOSE YOUR TEAM CAREFULLY

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/7-tips-on-building-relationships-with-indigenous-peoples>

## **2. Be Transparent**

Transparency and trust are intertwined. It is important that communications with communities is earnest, that EE is explicit about its goals and plans, and that if problems arise that they are dealt with immediately and transparently.

EE will need to continue to listen to community feedback and expert feedback about its processes and protocols and how or if they need to be adjusted.

Establish at the beginning of relationship building that EE is committed to learning and growth and incorporate this approach when receiving information and feedback from communities. All feedback, negative or positive, is an opportunity to learn, reflect and grow.

## **3. Be Respectful**

One form of respect is developing an understanding of the communities in the region. Understand their community, culture, strategic goals, language, and history. Devoting the time, resources, and energy to understanding the community shows respect for the community as a sovereign Nation and an understanding that relationship building must be individualized.

## **4. Be Invested**

Indigenous Corporate Training Inc states, “It takes time and resources to build a relationship with an Indigenous community. You’re looking at many visits, meetings, and phone calls over a long space of time. Write this extra activity into your budget.” EE has already put this step into action and brought on resources and invested in relationship building with communities. Further investment is identified later in this report.

## **5. Be Involved**

Get involved in the community, not simply with the Chief & Council and Nation administration. This includes attending community events that are open to the public, visiting tourism operators, supporting Indigenous-owned businesses in the region, and supporting ways in which EE can incorporate Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous values, and reconciliation at every touchpoint.

Relationship building should not be transactional. Community relationship building cannot be measured in KPIs and will develop at the speed and on the timeline appropriate to the communities.

## 6. Be Patient

Decisions made in Indigenous communities are usually determined by the community as a collective. Chief and Council and administration are likely to build their plans, projects, and goals with extensive community input and feedback. Further, economic development strategies are more likely to be based upon ideas of Community Economic development. Community Economic development (CED), for the purposes of this report, is defined as an approach that recognizes that economic, environmental, and social challenges are interdependent, complex and ever-changing.

To be effective, solutions must be rooted in local knowledge and led by community members. CED promotes holistic approaches, addressing individual, community, and regional levels, recognizing that these levels are interconnected.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, conversations, strategies, and projects should build in an appropriate time and resources for community engagement, conversations with youth and elders, and be prepared to report on how citizen feedback has been put into action.

Of note: The Chief and Council are often part-time roles yet hold the responsibility for the strategic direction of the community. Further, many communities are in two-year election cycles which could mean considerable turnover in governance. Particularly in the midst of a pandemic, the Chief and council are very busy with community concerns and events – EE's requests are another demand on their time and resources, which in a smaller community can be a considerable burden.<sup>9</sup>

## 7. Choose Your Team Carefully

EE will continue to ensure that the correct people in the organization are attending meetings in communities and that there is continuity in who attends meetings and is responsible for relationship building. James Murphy will continue to be the primary contact within the organization. Should organization turnover happen, it must be the responsibility of EE to bring new staff up to speed with the relationship-building process—that requirement should not be on the community.

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<sup>8</sup> The Canadian Community Economic development Network.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

The team at RTO 12 has the opportunity to continue their path towards relationship building in a meaningful and profound way, leading to a more inclusive, sustainable, and equitable tourism industry in the region. It can put into action its commitments to Indigenous engagement and support economic reconciliation in the region and in the tourism landscape.

## **SPECIFIC WAYS IN WHICH EXPLORER'S EDGE CAN OFFER SUPPORT**

### **1 CULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAINING**

### **2 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

### **3 INITIAL COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

### **4 COMMUNITY TOURISM CHAMPIONS**

### **5 INCLUSION, DIVERSITY, EQUITY & ACCESSIBILITY**

### **6 EE EXPENDITURES & INDIGENOUS PARTNERS**

#### **1. Cultural Competency Training**

All EE staff should take Indigenous Cultural Competency Training. This training is available in the region through [RAISE: Indigenous Cultural Awareness and Competency Training](#). This training should be updated regularly.

#### **2. Community Participation**

- Opportunities for Participation in community events, tourism experiences, and Community learning
- EE can participate in community events as a learning opportunity and to build relationships.
- Support Indigenous businesses in the area by participating in EE team building at Indigenous-owned tourism businesses (example: A canoeing experience at Algonquin park in partnership with the Algonquins of Whitney)



- Maintain a database of Indigenous-owned tourism businesses and tourism-related businesses and, potentially, dedicate a portion of EE annual corporate spending at those businesses, where possible (in alignment with Federal Indigenous procurement guidelines)
- While in attendance, find ways to support through existing RTO or tourism organization projects, where appropriate (event photography, ITO IBA recommendations, funding through Indigenous tourism partners)

### 3. Initial Community Outreach

- Outreach to Chief & Council and Administration with a formal engagement letter and subsequent follow up. The purpose of this letter should be to sit down with the aforementioned as a means of introductions and understanding the goals of the community. At this meeting EE can determine a potential primary point of contact, should that be of interest to the community
- Attending community-hosted public events and participating in tourism business offerings in each community. EE should ask to be put on the public community outreach list for each community if one exists. Further EE can ask if there is a role it can play in promoting public community events through its database

### 4. Community Tourism Champions

EE has the opportunity to have a broad network of community champions/tourism ambassadors in the region. It is possible that this can be a potential partnership with ITO. Community champions would be hired by EE on a part-time basis to do tourism related outreach in their home communities. EE can then offer individualized support to communities, citizens, or organizations looking to develop tourism services, plans, products, or businesses. This ensures that any tourism developed at a community level and with Indigenous representation. This also supports capacity building, job creation, strategic planning, and tourism development at a community-level and that does not come at the expense of the Nation.



## **5. Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility**

Embed the in-development Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) policy at EE: A diversity of perspectives and lived experiences (all ways of knowing and learning) is essential to achieving organizational excellence. A strong commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) promotes and diversifies talents in the organization.

To attract and retain a diversity of employees, everyone needs to feel welcomed, valued, supported and included. This policy, once completed, should be posted prominently on EE's website and in job advertisements.<sup>10</sup>

## **6. EE Expenditures and Indigenous Partners**

A minimum of 10% of all EE expenditures should be earmarked for Indigenous partners where possible. These partners can include communities, businesses, consultants, or tourism operators. Working with Indigenous partners, these investments can make strides in closing gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, support healthy, safe, and prosperous Indigenous communities, and advance meaningful reconciliation with communities.

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<sup>10</sup> Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility: Good Practices for Researchers. Canadian Commission for Unesco. Jocelyn Baker and Liette Vasseur.