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DRAFT - Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, June 25, 2025
Zoom

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by the Chair at 10:04 AM.

2. Attendance

Present: Gabriela Hairabedian, Tristan Berry, Sarah North Harris, Jackie Leung, Didier Dolivet, Dave Anderson

Regrets: Anubandu Lakhera

Approval of Agenda June 25, 2025

Moved by: Jackie

Seconded by: Sarah

Carried

4. Approval of Minutes April 16, 2025

Moved by: Jackie

Seconded by: Sarah

Carried

Conflict of Interest Declaration

No conflicts of interest declared.

6. Operational Update - Q1 2025/2026

Presented by James (CEO):

- Funding received May 12, 2025.
- \$150,000 invested in GIC; bridge financing repaid.
- Approx. \$250,000 in expenditures to date.
 - Payroll: \$93,000

- Admin/Overhead: \$34,000
- Program/Marketing/Product Dev: Balance
- Final report for 2024-2025 submitted (90+ pages).
- Key outcomes: Regenerative Travel Agency business plan, sub-regional product development, Women in Tourism, visitor market testing.

7. RTO Internal Review

- Led by consultant Richard Innes (noted past performance concerns).
- Explorers' Edge final report submitted as part of provincial evaluation.

8. Partnership Program

- 88 inquiries, 64 formal applications.
- Strong representation across sub-regions and sectors.
- Categories include: Product Dev, Wayfinding, Social Media, Trade Shows.
- \$20,000 in early approvals:
 - Theatre Muskoka
 - Town of Parry Sound (Cruise/Shuttle)
 - Tall Pines Festival (final year)
 - Burk's Falls (signage)
 - Muskoka Arts & Crafts
 - Bracebridge Pow Wow (reduced funding)
- Discussion around funding equity, gradual weaning from 50/50 partnerships, and emphasis on collaborative development over grants.

9. Indigenous Youth Tourism Strategy

- Proposed budget: \$120,000 (FedNor: \$60K / EE: \$60K).
- Six proposals under review; strategy not yet finalized.
- Steering committee formed (including Shawanaga, Wasauksing, Wahta reps).
- Timeline challenge flagged (FedNor fiscal deadline March 31, 2026).
- Sarah to serve as board liaison on project.

10. HR & Staffing

- Partnership Manager Position:

- 27 applications, 3 interviews.
- Successful candidate: Jennifer Montpetit (starts July 28).
- Brings strong background in regenerative/community development.
- HR agency continues to support staff onboarding and employment protocols.

11. Regenerative Travel Agency

- Business plan completed; 3-year strategic roadmap initiated.
- Focus: Test packages, build loyalty program, expand travel lounge.
- Discussion on succession planning: Kate pursuing TICO certification; Erin identified for potential training.
- Example of pilot package shared (e.g. True by Hilton + events + attractions).

12. Product Development & Marketing

- Learn to Fish program (MNR partnership) launched successfully.
- Ron James influencer campaign deployed to boost exposure outside Muskoka.
- Marketing spend update shared, including impressions and engagement stats.

13. Industry and Government Relations

- MTCGRP internal review ongoing.
- Ministry rep Laura Ross remains on leave; Explorers' Edge is engaging Anthony as alternate.
- RTO audit expected in coming months.

14. Future Planning

- Financial audit and Annual General Meeting moved to mid-September 2025.
- Recruitment for Board Directors to be posted.
- Upcoming Regional Tourism Summit site visit scheduled with Tristan (KOA property).
- Discussion around advocacy to include campgrounds in RTO funding model.

15. In-Camera Session

Topic: Confidential HR Update

16. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 11:59 AM.

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Explorers' Edge Regional Tourism Organization

Date: Wednesday, June 25, 2025

Time: 10:04 AM – 11:59 AM

Location: Virtual Meeting

The meeting was called to order at 10:04 AM by the Chair. Directors in attendance included Gabriella (Chair), James (CEO), Sarah, Jackie, Tristan, and others. The agenda was approved on a motion by Jackie, seconded by Sarah, and the minutes from the April 16, 2025 meeting were also approved by the same. No conflicts of interest were declared.

James provided an operational update for Q1 2025/2026. The RTO received funding on May 12, and promptly invested \$150,000 in a GIC while repaying the bridge financing. Year-to-date expenditures total approximately \$250,000, including \$93,000 in payroll and \$34,000 in administrative overhead. Marketing, product development, and other program costs have also been incurred. A final report for the 2024–2025 fiscal year was submitted and signed off by the Executive, highlighting achievements in launching the Regenerative Travel Agency, expanding sub-regional product development, enhancing workforce initiatives like Women in Tourism, and conducting visitor market testing.

James addressed the Ministry's internal review of the RTO model, led by consultant Richard Innes. While some concerns were noted about Innes' past deliverables, it was clarified that the current review appears to be a standard information-gathering exercise. Explorers' Edge's robust final report will be part of the review process.

A detailed overview of the Partnership Program was presented. This year's intake resulted in 88 inquiries and 64 formal applications. Projects were well distributed across sub-regions and focus areas, including product development, wayfinding, content creation, and trade shows. To date, \$20,000 has been approved for six initiatives, including Theatre Muskoka, the Town of Parry Sound, Tall Pines Festival, Burk's Falls signage, Muskoka Arts & Crafts, and the Bracebridge Pow Wow. Discussion emphasized the importance of equitable distribution, long-term impact, and a staged funding approach—starting with a 50/50 split and gradually reducing support over three years.

James updated the Board on the proposed Indigenous Youth Tourism Entrepreneurship Strategy. A \$120,000 initiative co-funded with FedNor (\$60K each), the strategy is still in development and under review by a steering committee with representation from Shawanaga, Wasauksing, and Wahta First Nations. Sarah will act as board liaison. The timeline is tight, with FedNor requiring completion by March 31, 2026, necessitating careful coordination with Indigenous communities.

The successful recruitment of a new Partnership Manager was shared. Jennifer Montpetit will start on July 28. Sarah, who participated in the hiring process, noted Jennifer's strong background in regenerative strategies, community partnerships, and multi-sector development. The HR agency will continue to support onboarding, employment agreements, and training processes including the rollout of Ceridian for tracking time off.

James shared the completed business plan and roadmap for the Regenerative Travel Agency, highlighting a three-year strategy that includes testing visitor packages, developing a loyalty platform, and launching the Travel Lounge. Succession planning was discussed, particularly around the need for more staff to

hold TICO certification. Kate has expressed willingness to pursue it, and Erin may also be considered as part of her evolving role. James is also exploring a part-time sales position to support customer service for package bookings.

Marketing and product development updates included a successful Learn to Fish program partnership with MNR, which sold out via Eventbrite, and influencer campaigns led by Ron James to promote rural destinations outside of Muskoka. A summary of recent marketing spend and outcomes was provided, showing strong engagement and reach.

The board was informed that the regional representative from the Ministry, Laura Ross, remains on leave. Gabriella and James have reached out to Anthony as an interim contact for ministry communications. The RTO's upcoming audit and funding model review remain priorities, with advocacy for campground inclusion in the funding formula flagged as a future board initiative.

The Annual General Meeting has been moved to mid-September 2025, with additional meetings and director recruitment to be scheduled accordingly. A fall site visit is planned at the Parry Sound KOA to explore campground packaging for the Regenerative Travel Agency. Discussion around the importance of advocating for campground inclusion in heads-and-beds funding was supported, with potential collaboration with Camping In Ontario.

An in-camera session followed.

The meeting adjourned at 11:59 AM. The next meeting is scheduled for September 2025.