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Draft - Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Wednesday February 18, 2026

Zoom

Call to Order - The meeting was called to order at 9:35 AM by the Chair. The Chair welcomed attendees and confirmed quorum. The purpose of the meeting was to review and approve the Fiscal 2026–2027 Business and Operational Plan, including budget allocations, strategic priorities, and organizational updates.

Attendance

Present: Gabriela Hairabedian (Chair), Tristan Berry, Sarah North-Harris (Vice Chair), James Murphy (CEO) Didier Dolivet, Darren Smith, Jackie Leung

Regrets: Dave Anderson,

Approval of Agenda

A motion was made to approve the agenda as circulated.

Motion: Approved.

Moved by: Berry

Seconded by: Smith

Carried.

Approval of Previous Minutes

The minutes of the February 4, 2026 Board meeting were reviewed.

Motion: That the minutes of February 4, 2026 be approved as presented.

Moved by: Smith

Seconded by: North- Harris

Carried.

CEO's Report and Organizational Context - The CEO provided an overview of the organization's current position, noting that Explorers' Edge is emerging from a significant transition year that included staff restructuring, operational realignment, and the establishment of new financial and governance systems. The organization is now focused on stabilizing operations, strengthening internal controls, and optimizing program delivery while advancing its strategic mandate as a destination development organization.

It was noted that Explorers' Edge continues to operate within a constrained funding environment relative to its regional tourism impact and geographic scope. As a result, the organization is prioritizing efficiency, accountability, and strategic investment to ensure long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

BOP 2026 – 2027 Governance and Financial Oversight Enhancements - The Board reviewed increased investments in governance, administration, and financial management, which were identified as essential to maintaining organizational integrity and supporting future growth. The CEO explained that these enhancements include transitioning to a professional accounting firm to provide controller-level oversight, monthly financial reporting, audit preparation, and investment management guidance.

These changes reflect the organization's evolving financial complexity, particularly with the introduction of revenue-generating activities through the Regenerative Travel Agency. The Board acknowledged that these investments strengthen financial accountability, reduce organizational risk, and protect both the organization and its volunteer directors.

Additional governance improvements include updating employee manuals, strengthening HR policies, and ensuring compliance with modern workplace standards and nonprofit regulatory requirements.

BOP 2026 – 2027 Strategic Program and Product Development Investments - The Board reviewed the allocation of resources toward product development initiatives aligned with Explorers' Edge's regenerative tourism strategy. Priority investments include Indigenous tourism development, youth tourism entrepreneurship programming, Women in Tourism initiatives, and 2SLGBTQ+ destination readiness and inclusion programs.

These initiatives were identified as critical to maintaining the region's competitiveness, responding to evolving traveler expectations, and strengthening community-based tourism. Sustainability programming, including continued participation in the GreenStep certification program and stakeholder education, remains a core organizational priority.

The Board acknowledged that these investments support both economic development and long-term destination resilience.

BOP 2026 – 2027 Workforce Development and Industry Support - The CEO provided an overview of workforce development initiatives, including partnerships with Lakehead University and Parks Canada, tourism career pathway programming for secondary schools, and professional development resources for tourism operators.

These efforts are intended to strengthen the regional tourism workforce, improve retention, and enhance service quality. The Board noted the importance of workforce development in sustaining industry growth and ensuring that tourism businesses remain competitive.

BOP 2026 – 2027 Marketing Strategy and Economic Impact Focus - The Board reviewed adjustments to the marketing budget and strategic approach. Marketing investments have been reallocated to prioritize economic impact, visitor conversions, and measurable return on investment rather than solely focusing on website traffic and awareness metrics.

The CEO emphasized that significant tourism marketing investment already exists within the region through municipal accommodation tax programs and partner organizations. Explorers' Edge's strategy is to leverage these investments while focusing its own resources on initiatives that drive direct visitation, overnight stays, and tourism revenue.

Earned media, public relations, and strategic partnerships were identified as key components of the organization's marketing approach moving forward.

BOP 2026 – 2027 Partnership Program and Stakeholder Investment - The Board reviewed the Partnership Program, which remains a cornerstone initiative supporting tourism development across the region. The program provides co-investment opportunities for tourism operators, municipalities, and organizations to develop experiences, marketing initiatives, and workforce programs aligned with regional priorities.

The CEO noted that funding allocations will be evaluated strategically to maximize regional benefit and ensure alignment with organizational objectives, including regenerative tourism, inclusivity, and bookable product development.

The Board acknowledged the importance of the Partnership Program in supporting tourism growth and fostering regional collaboration.

BOP 2026 – 2027 Regenerative Travel Agency Update and Revenue Diversification - The CEO provided an update on the newly launched Regenerative Travel Agency, which represents a significant strategic milestone for the organization. The agency has launched its first overnight package and is actively developing additional travel experiences designed to generate revenue and support regional tourism operators.

Financial projections indicate that the travel agency has the potential to generate meaningful new revenue while supporting broader tourism development goals. The Board recognized that this initiative strengthens Explorers' Edge's financial sustainability and positions the organization as an innovative leader in destination development.

The Board also acknowledged that revenue diversification reduces reliance on government funding and enhances long-term organizational stability.

Fiscal 2026–2027 Budget Approval - The Board reviewed the Fiscal 2026–2027 operating budget, totaling approximately \$1.1 million. The budget reflects strategic allocation across governance, product development, workforce development, marketing, partnerships, and sustainability initiatives.

The Board confirmed that the budget aligns with the organization's strategic priorities, strengthens operational capacity, and supports future growth.

A motion was made and carried to approve the Fiscal 2026–2027 Business and Operational Plan and Budget as presented.

BOP 2026 – 2027 Future Planning and Board Engagement - The CEO advised that an in-person Board meeting is planned for late March 2026. This meeting will provide an opportunity for directors to meet staff, review financial and investment strategies, and further strengthen governance and strategic alignment.

The Board expressed support for continued engagement and strategic planning to ensure organizational success.

Motion: Approval to submit to the Ministry of Tourism Culture and Gaming the presented 2026 - 2027 Business and Operational Plan.

Moved by: Berry

Seconded by: North- Harris

Carried.

12. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:38 AM.
