

***Travel Manitoba
RTAs & DMOs
Facilitated Session Summary
November 19, 2013***

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Background

Travel Manitoba commissioned Probe Research, Inc. to facilitate a planning session among Manitoba Regional Tourism Associations and Destination Marketing Organizations (RTAs and DMOs) on November 19, 2013 at the CanadInns in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. Six RTAs and four DMOs were present at the session. Travel Manitoba representatives included Laurenda Madill, Linda Whitfield, Brigitte Sandron, Lilian Tankard, Rick Gaunt, Colin Ferguson and Mark Clarke. Terry Goertzen, Deputy Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection, along with Michelle Wallace and Darryl Villeneuve of the Tourism Secretariat participated in the summit. A number of key topics pertinent to the various functions and planning processes of RTAs and DMOs were discussed.

The daylong session was facilitated by Lloyd Fridfinnson, Vice President, Probe Research Inc. and followed a guide prepared in consultation with Travel Manitoba.

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Introduction & Objectives

During Colin Ferguson's opening remarks, establishing the tone for the day's discussion, note was made of the positive relations that Travel Manitoba has enjoyed with the various RTAs and DMOs, with the "temperature in the room" having improved relative to last year's session. The Travel Manitoba CEO also stated that the provincial government has made tourism a much higher priority than has been the case in the past.

Terry Goertzen addressed the gathering in response to a question concerning the provincial government's position on tourism. The Deputy Minister indicated that there has been a realignment of strategic planning under the leadership of the Tourism Secretariat and provided an overview of the department's priorities for tourism.

Subsequently, participants were provided with the following objectives for the day long facilitated session:

- *Continue to strengthen relationships with key regional stakeholders.*
- *Identify collaborative opportunities for advocating tourism and increasing investment in tourism.*
- *Identify joint working priorities for Travel Manitoba, RTAs and DMOs for the upcoming year.*

Opening Exercise

As an opening exercise, participants were placed in groups of approximately six individuals and were asked to discuss possible answers to two group questions:

- *What do you expect to achieve today?*
- *How are you feeling one year after the last summit? Is anything different?*

Participants were also asked to provide, on an individual basis, a brief synopsis of their own RTA or DMO key successes for 2013.

Anticipated Achievements

- The further development of a strategy for achieving enhanced recognition of the value of tourism was identified as a key anticipated outcome for the day.
- Participants stated that they expect to add to and build upon established networking opportunities from previous interactions, including last year's summit session. A key desired outcome of networking is to understand what practices and approaches are working most effectively for others. Specifically, there is interest in learning about revenue models that would allow communities to more effectively support tourism marketing efforts.
- Related to the point above, there is a desire to enhance communication and collaboration opportunities with Travel Manitoba. Indeed, it was suggested that the current summit gatherings would be enhanced by further one-on-one meetings between various RTAs, DMOs and Travel Manitoba.
- The establishment and development of partnerships was also a consistent theme among session participants. Indeed, there was a willingness among participants to seek a means by which to work in unison to allow Travel Manitoba to more effectively market

the province as a travel and tourism destination. This desire for a shared marketing effort stems from the belief that enhancing visitation to Manitoba is the first step in bringing a greater number of visitors to various regions of the province.

- There was also a desire to have an update with respect to the development of the Travel Manitoba brand and to determine how to best achieve brand alignment across the various regions.
- At least some representatives of DMOs wish to have some clarification as to the distinct role of these organizations within the context of Travel Manitoba and RTAs.

Specific comments offered by participants concerning anticipated outcomes for the day are detailed below.

Reporting for Table 1: Gail – Interlake Tourism Association

Joined by Georges – Eastman, Lilian – TM, Kent – Central Plains/Pembina Valley, Tanya – Central Plains Pembina Valley, Tyler – Central Plains Pembina Valley Tourism Board

- *To get educated and do lots of networking*
- *Increase communications with Travel Manitoba*
- *Ideas for new initiatives: regional/local*
- *Who are the stakeholders? How do you create partnerships? Who are the people at the table?*
- *To get a sense of the RTAs – Travel Manitoba should meet with more on a one-on-one basis*
- *Value of tourism needs better recognition*

Reporting for Table 2: Sylvie CDEM

Joined by Jenny – Eastman, Cynthia – Assessippi-Russell, Linda – TM, Camille—CDEM, Brigitte – TM

- *Want to continue with networking*
- *Want to market Manitoba as a whole, keep communication going*
- *Learn what's working/not working among various RTAs*
- *Want to know where DMOs fit in and contribute as distinct from RTAs*
- *Broader coverage of the province desired*

Reporting for Table 3: Lois – Brandon Tourism

Joined by Rachelle – Brandon Tourism, Jim – Central Plains Pembina Valley, Mark – TM, Terry – Deputy Minister, Colin – TM

- *More collaboration desired*
- *Bringing people to Manitoba as first step to visiting regions*

Reporting for Table 4 – Laurenda – TM

Joined by Suzanne – Westman, Darryl – Manitoba Tourism Secretariat, Kathy – Parkland Tourism, Michelle – Tourism Secretariat; Lesley – RM of Ritchot, Melisa – Tourism Dauphin

- *Learning*
- *New revenue models and how communities can support tourism*
- *Maintain engagement on plans, provide support*
- *Brand alignment*
- *Get updates*

Reporting for Table 5: Charlene – Tourism North (Left rear)

Joined by Rick – Travel Manitoba, Jill – Eastman Tourism, Michelle – Tourism Westman, Liza – Tourism Westman

- *Share ideas with RTAs*
- *Meet with Travel Manitoba*

One Year On

- In the 12 months following the initial RTA/DMO summit, participants feel "closer" to Travel Manitoba, as well as to one another through improved communications and networking. With this heightened mood comes "higher levels of trust" between Travel Manitoba and the regions, as well as among the regions. Nevertheless, additional strides can still be made with respect to fully maximizing inter-organizational relationships, with one participant stating that RTAs and DMOs have only "moved towards sharing" without establishing an actual process.
- A number of DMO's were not at last year's summit and did voice concerns that they felt out of the loop and not part of key Travel Manitoba updates and meetings.
- Some organizations indicated that they continue to struggle as entities, with one individual noting that changes in leadership and staff have necessitated an organizational reevaluation. This participant also voiced concerns about the viability of their existing action plan. Another stated that they are still not meeting membership growth objectives.

Canada's 150th Celebration

Travel Manitoba Plan Update

During lunch Mark Clarke presented an update of the Canadian Tourism Commission's plans for Canada's 150th celebration, highlighting the focus on student and youth travel and the opportunities for provincial marketing organizations to become involved.

Advocacy/Revenue Generation

Local View of Tourism

- Similar to last year's summit, participants lamented the reluctance or inability of municipal leaders to grasp or acknowledge the importance of tourism, with some participants commenting that elected officials are most likely to feel municipal regions "really don't benefit from tourism". This was characterized as being part of a larger pattern whereby municipal leadership is most often unable to equate tourism with economic development. Compounding this situation is the view that "tourism takes care of itself" and is restricted to the summer months. This attitude limits the ability of officials to grasp the importance of the work undertaken by RTAs in particular. It was suggested that this mindset is rooted in that municipal leaders "don't realize how their own backyard can be interesting to anyone".
- Furthermore, to the extent that there is support for tourism initiatives, municipal leadership is not discerning with respect to the projects and initiatives that are worthy of support. In the words of one participant: "They throw money at anything, or the first person that comes in the door. Then they get nothing from it, and feel that there is no value."

Value of Tourism to Region

- Participants shared the conviction that tourism is of significant value to their respective regions. Some were heartened by their perception of a growing recognition among their tourism association membership as to the value of the role being played by regional associations. In the words of one participant: “It was a hard sell at the beginning, but members are starting to see the value of tourism.” Specifically, the “ripple effect” throughout the entire region of visitors purchasing food and gas is being more deeply appreciated by some segments of the business community.
- RTA and DMO organizations also appear to have a better grasp of the economic impact of specific events and general patterns of visitation, with more than one stating that they have calculated revenues in the range of \$300 per vehicle being generated by tourism attractions. One hotelier noted that a specific event had resulted in a doubling of typical revenues. Further, it was noted that new money tends to circulate in the community for some time, resulting in broader economic benefits for residents of the region. “There is a real opportunity to increase the value, as people don’t recognize the value.”

Enhancing the Value of Regional Tourism

- Travel Manitoba indicated that it has developed Regional Tourism Profiles for all six regions. By using the latest (2011) Statistics Canada information and putting it through an economic model, a clear picture emerges of tourism related visits, trip characteristics top markets and economic benefits for each region. Having this resource available to RTAs and DMOs allows them to more convincingly present a case to their membership, tourism industry partners, elected officials and other stakeholders on the value and importance of tourism.
- One participant suggested that they have been able to enhance the value of tourism by engaging RTA board members in groundwork which would have otherwise been left to staff and may not have necessarily involved personal contact. It was believed that this effort led to greater levels of engagement, comprehension and commitment on the part of existing and new members.
- Regional Chambers of Commerce were also identified as constructive partners in advancing tourism objectives. These types of relationships were seen as minimizing the extent to which separate organizations may potentially be working on similar projects and consequently reduce redundancy or potential conflicts.
- The Association of Manitoba Municipalities was also cited as an important ally due to a perceived increase in the scope of functions of municipalities over the past 20 years and a heightened awareness of the importance of tourism in some corners of the province.

Revenue Models

Two speakers addressed the gathering and related their experience with their respective revenue models. Kathy Swan from Parkland provided an explanation of a tier funding model. The second speaker, Tyler King from Central Plains Pembina Valley, discussed per capita funding. The essence of their presentations is described below.

<u>Kathy</u>	<u>Tyler</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>There were fewer than nine member municipalities prior to the implementation of the model.</i> • <i>In response to complaints by businesses that they were not receiving the level of publicity that other communities were achieving, the RTA instructed callers to raise the issue with their council and request that the municipality join the regional tourism association.</i> • <i>Through this process Parkland now has 30 out of 34 municipalities as members, as well as 15 organizations – e.g., Assessippi Tourism, Swan Valley Tourism, and local chambers of commerce.</i> • <i>The Parkland RTA has established a very low entry fee for small organizations in order to have them on board. The actual cost was established following internal discussions pertaining to most and least that can be charged. The current membership fee scale is on assessed revenues.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Using a per capita funding model, rates charged for Central Planes Pembina Valley RTA membership are:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ <i>towns/cities – 50 cents per capita;</i> ➢ <i>rural areas – 30 cents per capita.</i> • <i>Per capita amount has no cap and no minimum – lowest is about \$90.</i> • <i>This approach has presented challenges, but also provided opportunities. By going into communities and being more open with communications, there has been a greater degree of buy-in. Consequently, RTA meetings are typically well attended.</i>

Advocacy Approaches & Outcomes

Building upon a theme which emerged at the previous year's summit, participants were led through a discussion intended to enhance RTA and DMO advocacy capacity and strategies.

- Early in the discussion there was acknowledgment that, for the most part, RTAs and DMOs have not developed the capacity to effectively advocate on behalf of tourism. In the words of one participant: "We can only pay a half-time person to advocate for an area the size of Portugal."
- The issue of difficulty in maintaining a long-term, stable board within some regions was also noted as a hindrance to the development and delivery of a consistent advocacy message.
- It was suggested that a single advocacy message may be inadequate to the purpose and that there is a need to develop "relevant language for the different stakeholder groups". This led to the request that a "song sheet" outlining the benefits of tourism be developed for specific economic sectors.
- In the absence of having additional resources to support an advocacy role, participants requested that Travel Manitoba provide a document or information package outlining an

advocacy message. Such a template would provide a consistent message across RTAs and DMOs when speaking to government, businesses or other potential stakeholders. It was noted that, as in the past, Travel Manitoba has recently shared with the regions statistical information concerning the economic impact and revenues generated by tourism. Despite the inability to track tourism figures for individual communities, the big picture provided by this statistical information is regarded by Travel Manitoba as a powerful tool for conveying the importance of tourism.

- One participant suggested developing a sign or sticker that could be placed in the windows of member businesses indicating their affiliation with the RTA or DMO. This recommendation was supported by another participant in the session who indicated that they had successfully used such a practice in the past.
- It was also suggested that there may be a need to identify a specific messenger, either an individual or organization, in order to ensure consistency of advocacy efforts. It was later suggested that an advocacy group be developed that would address the needs of RTAs and DMOs but would advocate beyond a local level.
- Travel Manitoba noted that the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce, under the leadership of Chuck Davidson, has recently identified tourism as a priority for the organization. As a result of this leadership, the MCC has been instrumental in aligning the hoteliers in the promotion of Manitoba tourism.
- In terms of potential targets for an advocacy message, one participant cautioned against focusing exclusively at the municipal level when advocating to government and suggested that MLAs and MPs also be potential target of advocacy efforts.

Advocacy Outcomes

- It is hoped that successful advocacy efforts would result in an increased understanding among stakeholders of the economic impact of tourism. This was seen as having a secondary benefit of perhaps increasing membership levels.
- It was also suggested that effective advocacy should result in the "better exploitation of tourism dollars" and a greater understanding by businesses of how to successfully provide tourism products.
- Having the qualities of both an approach and an outcome, one participant also suggested that efforts be made to recognize the many hours that volunteers spend supporting fairs, festivals and other events.
- Further to the point above, it was suggested that it is indeed possible and necessary to assign a dollar value to volunteer efforts in order that this figure may be cited when completing governmental funding proposals.
- It was also felt that advocacy would lead to increased investment in tourism by governments and businesses by means of enhanced infrastructure and expanded product offerings.

Advocacy Audience

- When asked to generate a list of organizations or individuals to whom advocacy efforts should be directed, participants suggested the following:
 - *Our own local communities*
 - *Municipal governments*
 - *Business community*
 - *Attractions*
 - *Own membership / Potential members*
 - *MLAs*
 - *MPs*
 - *Advocacy to government and administration at the provincial level*
 - *Parks Canada staff*
 - *Schools*

- Most, if not all, of these potential audience members were also regarded as having the potential to increase RTA and DMO revenues, primarily through memberships and paid advertising, in the event that they are won over by the advocacy message.
- At least some session members regarded Members of Parliament as being potentially challenging due to frequent absences from Manitoba and the physical distance to Ottawa.
- One participant cautioned that the audience for an advocacy message, particularly MLAs and MPs, is unlikely to welcome a plea for financial support. Instead, it was suggested that the message be one of how and to what extent increased tourism can make a difference to a specific audience stakeholder group.
- Although it was suggested that the community at large is already supportive of tourism, this was not regarded as having significant tangible benefits for RTAs and DMOs.
- Although there were a few tourism adversaries identified by participants, circumstantial challenges are viewed as significant. In terms of attracting provincial government investment, participants are aware that they are competing for dollars that might otherwise be used for health and education or other high priority areas.
- One participant also noted that many residents of rural areas are "not cosmopolitan" and have openly questioned the value and reasoning of tourism marketing efforts directed toward Asian markets. This participant speculated that there are racial undertones to this marketing resistance and that this constitutes a significant and unfortunate obstacle to marketing efforts.

Key Advocacy Messages

- Participants identified several key messages that potential stakeholders and community leaders need to hear in order to more meaningfully support tourism. Almost all of these messages were in some way or another related to the financial benefits derived by the community and government.
- One nonfinancial message identified by a participant concerned how tourism should be positioned attitudinally. One individual argued that tourism can capitalize upon positive feelings generated by travel and tourism activities, attractions and events. This suggestion was disputed by another participant who stated that this attitude towards

tourism constitutes a significant liability. It was suggested that tourism is not taken seriously by some potential stakeholders and advocates due to the perception of it as being "all about fun, not a real business".

- Other key messages included the importance of the legacy that is left by the construction of tourism facilities, as well as the job creation aspect of the industry. In regard to this latter point, it was suggested that the role of tourism and youth employment is likely to be a message that would be well received by government.
- A detailed list of key advocacy messages identified by participants is listed below.
 - *Tourism is a significant source of community revenue*
 - *Tourists can be anyone – local, out of province, from another country*
 - *Revenue comes in for anyone who provides services to that industry – retail, food, etc. Governments collect sales tax.*
 - *RMs collect business taxes, and rely on business taxes to keep personal taxes lower.*
 - *Tourists stay in hotels, eat out, take in attractions, rent cars – economic impact creates bigger pie for all sectors.*
 - *Tourism is a no-regret business – fun, enriching. *(Disputed – see next point.) Can be enriching for business owners as well.*
 - **Downside is that people figure it's all about fun, not a real business. Tourism is not seen as a serious business because it's seen as being all about fun.*
 - *Tourism is growing worldwide.*
 - *When you build something like an MTS Centre, it leaves a legacy for future generations.*
 - *Need to advocate that it creates jobs.*
 - *A lot of the jobs in the tourism industry are for the young – they take that work experience into the rest of their life, no matter where they go.*

Brand Alignment

Presentation/ Q&A

Linda Whitfield lead participants through a presentation outlining how existing RTA and DMO creative materials can be adapted to maintain their unique identity, while at the same time reflecting a unified tourism brand throughout the province.

- Reaction to the concept and execution of the creative materials was positive. Participants did, however, raise concerns that the existing webpage format requires "too many clicks" before the user is able to access a regional link. Some participants objected to the layout which required viewers to make their way to the bottom of the page before being able to access regional sites.

Government Action Plan Update

Tourism Secretariat Update

Michelle Wallace of the Tourism Secretariat provided an update of the provincial government's intentions with respect to supporting tourism products.

Terry Goertzen, Deputy Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection, also addressed the gathering explaining his own personal association with the tourism sector and the desire of the provincial government, and specifically his department, to address the challenges facing the tourism sector.

Challenges for 2014

Group Discussion

Session participants discussed issue areas that they regard as being most significant in the coming year. At the outset of this portion of the discussion, participants were asked to consider five specific issue areas worthy of further thought and discussion.

- *Revenue generation*
- *Increasing the value of tourism*
- *Advocacy*
- *Brand alignment*
- *RTA/DMO collaboration*

- Several participants stated that communication is at the crux of existing and emerging challenges. Travel Manitoba cautioned that efforts to enhance communication will require a level of collaboration and buy-in from regional representatives. Past attempts at regional meetings, instituted as a means by which to enhance communication, were poorly attended.
- Some participants stated that they were unaware such regional meetings had occurred and said that existing practices with e-mail may not be ideal for announcing such events. A direct phone call was regarded as the most effective means of organizing a meeting. Alternatively, if e-mails are to be the notification vehicle, they need to be very brief and focus on the meeting outcome in order to distinguish meeting notices from the many other e-mails generated by Travel Manitoba. By way of example, one participant indicated that they might actively avoid attending a meeting at which Travel Manitoba is attempting to generate interest in purchasing advertisements.
- One participant requested that Travel Manitoba attend monthly or quarterly board meetings to increase membership engagement. After being reminded that Travel Manitoba currently attends AGMs, this participant implied that fewer meaningful decisions or interactions are accomplished at these gatherings.
- The suggestion that comprehensive RTA and DMO contact information be compiled and circulated was welcomed by participants. Such a tool would allow these tourism and marketing organizations to more effectively collaborate on the specific projects that might be of benefit to both organizations. The use of such a list would also relieve Travel Manitoba from the responsibility of "middleman" in facilitating relationships between RTAs and DMOs.

Wrap-up

Revisiting Objectives

- To conclude the discussion, objectives identified by session participants at the outset of the day were reviewed and participants were asked whether any of their stated objectives were unmet. There was a consensus that none of the topic areas have been neglected and that all objectives had been met.