

Diagnostic Assessment Report and Action Plan

Discovery
UNESCO
Geopark

DIAGNOSTIC
ASSESSMENT

DISCOVERY
GLOBAL **GEO**PARK

HALF A BILLION YEARS IN THE MAKING



CONACH

5/14/2024

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Context

The Discovery Geopark has struggled with developing a well functioning organizational and management structure to support its Mission. A key factor in this was the global covid pandemic which manifested itself in March 2020. Discovery Geopark suffered disproportionately during the pandemic since it did not have key policies and practices in place regarding Board Decision making, workforce development, and information and records management. During this period, Board members who represented other organizations and businesses were dealing with their own survivability issues that impacted how much time and vision was available to move the organization forward. Issues that seemed important and critical were superseded by the need to navigate a new landscape filled with uncertainty and fear.

The impact of the global covid pandemic on Discovery Geopark should not be underestimated. It fragmented the focus of the organization, reduced the amount of time that volunteer leaders could devote to it and resulted in a stopgap approach to the development and growth of the organization.

Discovery Geopark went through three Managers during this period – each with their own vision of the organization with little direction or course correction from the Board of Directors. It is important to note however that it was the effort of these individuals that enabled the organization to continue functioning during very challenging times.

As Discovery Geopark emerged from the pandemic the legacy of these impacts has continued to affect the overall health and functioning of the organization. The tools that would ordinarily facilitate positive Board and staff relationships remained underdeveloped, intra-board communication took place primarily by email exchange, relationships among Board members moved from pan-regional to more localized groupings, distributed leadership became more centralized in the position of Chair, and communication suffered from lack of clarity and transparency. This also contributed to dysfunctional dynamics within the Board and between Board and Staff.

This Diagnostic Assessment is a high-level view of the structural aspects of the organization that require development and improvement. The needs of the organization are significant and, in some ways, existentially threatening if not addressed in a comprehensive manner.

For Discovery Geopark to successfully move forward in achieving its Vision and Mission, it will require that the Board and Staff have a clear and mutually shared understanding of the challenges that the organization is facing and make a collaborative commitment to undertaking the changes that are necessary. This will require Discovery Geopark to prioritize the activities needed to improve its organizational structure and focus on board, workforce development and

capacity issues, while concurrently reviewing the requirements of the Validation Report and aligning the workplan activities with the resources it currently has negotiated.

The capacity of the organization to make and manage the changes required for its success is limited. The Board has been reduced to three members – all of whom are actively involved in the tourism industry and are engaged in their peak season. Despite this, the current Board members have devoted a great deal of time and energy to this process and demonstrated a strong commitment to renewal with a focus on a strategic planning and organizational development.

Over the next six months the Board has committed to strengthening the governance operations of the Geopark and building a strong foundation of policies, procedures and tools. These efforts will make a significant contribution to the UNESCO Management Plan due at the end of this year. The Diagnostic Assessment provides a High-Level Action Plan that reflects the priorities of the Board however the organization will require assistance to further develop and implement the action plan.

Methodology

As part of the contract, Conach initiated Key Informant Interviews and an Online Survey with the Board of Discovery Geopark. Immediately prior to the launch of these activities several Board members stepped down during a period of conflict regarding Board-Staff relations, Board member disagreements and concerns over leadership. This reduced the Board membership from seven members to three and a new interim chair was put in place.

A Survey link was sent to the remaining Board members and those who had stepped down. The survey received five (5) responses – three (3) from the remaining members of the Board, one (1) from a Board member who had stepped down and response from a Board member who had stepped away previously and was recommended for contact by the interim Board Chair.

Conach conducted four (4) interviews with Board members, two (2) interviews with current employees and an interview with a former employee. All interviews were conducted through the Zoom platform.

Conach also reviewed the following documents:

- Discovery Aspiring Geopark Application Dossier
- Constitution and By-Laws
- Discovery Governance Policies
- Current and Proposed Board of Directors Composition
- Project Manager Reflection to Discovery Board

- Ignite Exit Letter to Discovery Board
- Final Report Cyndy Stead
- Evaluation Mission Discovery Report
- UNESCO Global Geopark Self Evaluation
- Revalidation Documents

Conach also prepared two PowerPoint presentations – Results of Survey Analysis and an overall Discovery Geopark Findings Presentation. Both were presented to the Board and Manager at a Findings Session in Trinity.

Feedback from the Findings Session was incorporated into this report and attached Action Plan.

Key Findings

➤ **Organizational Structure Challenges**

- Operating Model is unclear among members – feedback varies from a Management Board to Community Advisory Board to a Governance Board. The Management Plan envisioned the transition from a Working Management Board to a Traditional Board in 2019-19.
- The type of Board directly influences its composition and who sits at the table. The Canadian Geopark Network has specific recommendations on membership of Management bodies.
- The composition of the Board – involving individuals who represent private businesses and non-profit organizations – often with significant cross-over, pose some challenges with recognizing and managing potential conflicts of interest.
- The Global Pandemic impacted the development of organizational policies and procedures.
- The Board used to have a sub-committee structure however sub-committees are no longer used.
- Staffing Model needs to be reflective of resources plus UNESCO requirements and reflect the evolution and innovation of new workforce communication technologies.

➤ **Leadership Challenges**

- The absence of formalized, or adherence to, governance and operational practices has been chaotic for Board and Employee relations.
- The responsibilities of the Officers of the Board have not been consistently observed – Board meetings have occurred where minutes are not available and some members feel that decisions have been made without organized documentation or full discussion by

the Board. The By-Laws of the organization do not permit decisions to be made independently by the Board Chair or Chairs of Committees.

- Several people interviewed have raised the issue of training that may be required for Board members around Governance, Leadership, Board/Staff Relations.

➤ **Communication Challenges Within Board**

- Over reliance on email and email threads for sharing information and decision making. Email can facilitate communication within Discovery Geopark by keeping all parties informed on key issues and by serving as a chain of communication to document key decisions. When it becomes the only tool however it has a propensity to result in communication overload where key elements of discussion become lost in continuous threads and where important documents provided as attachments become difficult to find. Email communication is also subject to miscommunication since it is easy for tone and meaning to be misinterpreted, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts within the organization.
- There are significant issues with using email as the primary method of communication and decision making. A formal, centralized and accessible repository for communication records, historical documents, operating plans and governance documents does not exist.
- Board-Staff communication around conflict requires a more inclusive approach. There is a current process for 'Appeals for Conflict Resolution' in the Governance Policy Manual (S.4.8-4.18) however it concerns only process and does not define what constitutes conflict or harassment.
- The Board does not appear willing to address difficult situations and there is a tendency for conflict avoidance. Issues need to be addressed as they come up, no matter how awkward or uncomfortable it may be.
- There is public and institutional awareness of the governance and management issues within the Board. Post Diagnostic Assessment with a Path Forward, the Board will need to engage in external communications with the community and stakeholders on issues of transparency, trust, and professional governance, and present some early 'wins' as a demonstrated commitment to change.

➤ **Employee Engagement**

- Effective On-Boarding is critical to ensuring that employees understand the history and evolution of the Geopark, develop a clear appreciation of their role, responsibilities and employer expectations, and become successfully integrated into the organization.
- Professional Development and Progress Reviews are an essential tool for engaging employees in a constructive review and discussion of how well the organization is achieving its goals and objectives, the employee's role in that process, measuring progress against the management plan's priorities and identifying opportunities for improvement or professional development.

- The Human Resources Sub-Committee needs to be re-established with clear parameters for the supervision and performance management of employee.

➤ **Team Dynamics**

- Organizations on the Bonavista Peninsula, like many other rural areas of Newfoundland, draw upon a small group of volunteers to populate its Board. In some cases, the same individuals sit upon multiple boards – blurring the lines between the operations of each organization.
- When individuals sit together on multiple boards, they also tend to gravitate to each other and form personal connections that move from Board to Board. This can have an impact on the objectivity of Board members when dealing with conflict.
- Relying on the same people to populate multiple Boards has the effect of creating a phenomenon referred to as Overboarding, where despite good intentions, these Board members do not have the time to deal with challenging or complex issues.
- There is no clear hierarchical structure within the staff group. The Manager does not have line, or program authority, over the finance/admin contractual position. It does provide direction to the social media position. To further muddle the water there is no evidence that there are clearly defined job descriptions and employment contracts in place.

➤ **Risk Management**

- The Survey of Board members reveal a relatively low level of confidence in the ability of the Board to identify and assess risks within the Geopark environment.

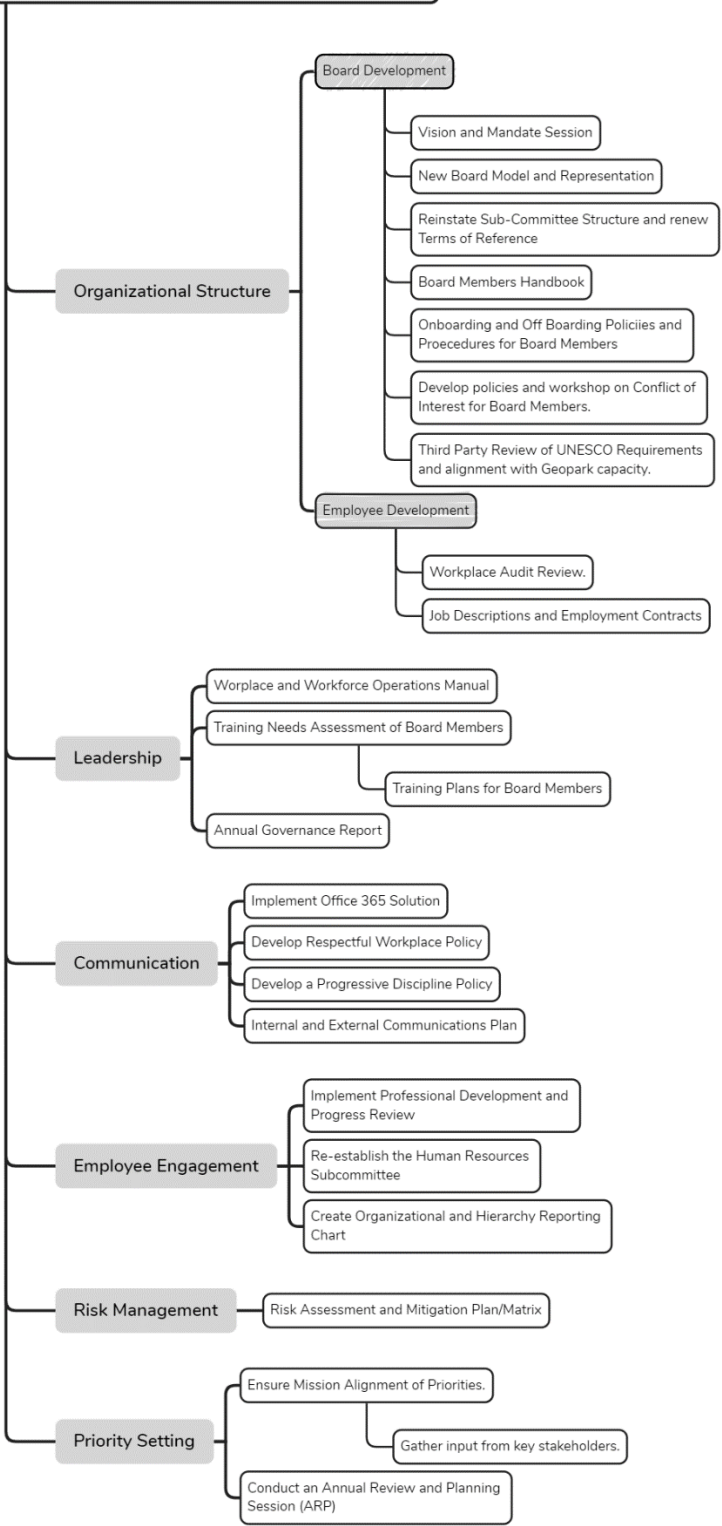
➤ **Priority Setting**

- The survey of Board members revealed a relatively low level of confidence in the current prioritization process. This is mitigated to an extent by priority identification provided by Evaluators in the latest Validation Assessment and Report. Discovery Geopark will still need to review priorities annually and provide direction to employees.
- Discovery Geopark will be tasked with multiple initiatives over the next three years to facilitate the ongoing implementation of priorities. It will be important for the Geopark to regularly review its progress on these priorities and adjust in response to changes in the internal environment and external environment.

The enclosed Action Plan contains the identification of each **Issue**, a preliminary **Recommendation** corresponding to each issue, and a series of **Actions** to support each recommendation.

The next activity of the Board of Directors is to review the Action Plan, identify any additional areas that it feels that the Diagnostic Assessment may have missed and prioritize its next steps.

Discovery Geopark Action Items



Presented with xmind

Discovery UNESCO Geopark Action Plan

Organizational Structure

Issue(s)	Recommendation(s)	Action(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operating Model is unclear among members – feedback varies from a Management Board to Community Advisory Board to a Governance Board. The Management Plan envisioned the transition from a Working Management Board to a Traditional Board in 2019-19. The Board used to have a sub-committee structure however sub-committees are no longer used. 	<p>Clarify the Status of the Board and identify appropriate model.</p>	<p>Review report on Governance Training from independent facilitator.</p> <p>Facilitated session with Board and Staff on Vision and Mission.</p> <p>Decision on whether Standing Sub-Committee structure are to be reinstated. If so, revisit Terms of Reference for each Committee.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The type of Board directly influences its composition and who sits at the table. The Canadian Geopark Network has specific recommendations on membership of Management and Advisory bodies. 	<p>Reconstitute Structure of Board Representation</p>	<p>Consult Canada Geopark Network recommendations and review proposed change to By-law 6.0 Board of Directors.</p> <p>Make necessary changes at Discovery Geopark AGM.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orientation and Onboarding practices are not fully standardized. This has the potential to result in uneven integration of new employees and new Board members to the Geopark organization. 	<p>Develop and implement a comprehensive Orientation, Onboarding and Offboarding program including checklists that identify the tasks and personnel associated with each process. The processes should manage the new employee and Board member/ experience from the date of hire/appointment until the</p>	<p>Develop a Board Member’s Handbook that contains all relevant information from the By-Laws and Governance Policies translated into plain language.</p> <p>Develop an Onboarding Policy with Procedures and Practices for Board Members and Employees that is consistent with what is happening at the national level.</p>

	probationary period has concluded.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The composition of the Board – involving individuals who represent private businesses and non-profit organizations – often with significant cross-over, pose some challenges with recognizing and managing potential conflicts of interest (COI). 	Provide the Board with comprehensive policies and training that would assist members in recognizing and managing potential conflicts of interest.	<p>The Human Resources Committee will review Sections 3.7-3.16 of the Governance Policies (2019) regarding conflict of interest to determine sufficiency and identify areas of improvement.</p> <p>Revise policies to reflect findings of the review and develop a half-day workshop where policies are presented to the Board with a facilitated discussion to ensure members have a fulsome understanding of how COI arise, examples of COI and how to deal with COI.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Global Pandemic impacted the development of organizational policies and procedures. 	Build a strong organizational foundation for Discovery Geopark through a systematic review of workplace policies and procedures to identify gaps and priorities.	Ask staff to complete a Workplace Audit Review. (Strategic Planning, Recruitment and Orientation, Compensation and Employment Benefits, Employee Development and Retention, Safety and Well-Being). Identify Gaps, Assess Relative Importance and set Priorities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staffing Model needs to be reflective of resources plus UNESCO requirements. There are questions of capacity of the Organization to fully implement the requirements of UNESCO. 	Align and adapt operational structure and staffing model considering UNESCO requirements, funding resources and new technology.	<p>Discuss requirements with UNESCO to identify minimum level of compliance to retain designation.</p> <p>Identify where technology can be utilized to achieve the same outcomes and deliverables in a different format. Review and adapt funding and staffing model to achieve compliance.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of challenges and conflicts have arisen between Board members and employees, and amongst employees, due to unclear 	Ensure that Employment Contracts and Job Descriptions have appropriate	Board, or Sub-committee, to draft initial scope of work for positions that is believed

reporting relationships and confusion over job duties.	scope of work that meets the needs of the organization.	to be necessary to achieve Vision and Mission. Review scope of work in collaboration with affected employees and amend. Finalize scope of work, clearly articulate expectations and duties, and sign Employment Contracts with individuals.
Leadership		
Issue(s)	Recommendation(s)	Action(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The absence of formalized, or adherence to, governance and operational practices has been chaotic for Board and Employee relations. 	Codify existing, and acceptable, operational practices into an Operations Policy and Procedures Manual for Workplace and Workforce Development.	<p>Review Governance Policy Manual and identify any operation related policies.</p> <p>Incorporate the priorities of the Workplace Audit Review into the Table of Contents for the Workplace and Workforce Development Policies.</p> <p>Create a Manual for sharing and collaboration in MS Office 365 Sharepoint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The responsibilities of the Secretary of the Board have not been observed – Board meetings have occurred where minutes are not kept. The Board has also not designated a staff person to fill this role. The By-Laws of the organization do not permit decisions to made independently by the Board Chair or Chairs of Committees. 	Improve Board understanding of the responsibilities of Executive Roles and Governance.	Create a Role Description of each Executive position on the Board and require that the incumbent or new Board member sign/acknowledge that they understand and accept the responsibilities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Several people interviewed have raised the issue of training that may be required for Board members around Governance, Leadership, Board/Staff Relations. 	Improve Board functioning by building the skills of Board members.	Undertake a Training Needs Assessment of Board Members.

		Develop an individualized training plan for each Board member and source training to build the required skills.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizations on the Bonavista Peninsula, like many other rural areas of Newfoundland, draw upon a small group of volunteers to populate its Board. In some cases, the same individuals sit upon multiple boards – blurring the lines between the operations of each organization. When individuals sit together on multiple boards, they also tend to gravitate to each other and form personal connections that move from Board to Board. This can have an impact on the objectivity of Board members when dealing with conflict. 	Conduct an Annual Refresh of Governance responsibilities at AGM.	Prepare a brief Governance Report on the previous year’s operations identifying areas of challenges and success in relation to effective Governance.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relying on the same people to populate multiple Boards has the effect of creating a phenomenon referred to as Overboarding, where despite good intentions, these Board members do not have the time to deal with challenging or complex issues. 	Reduce the expectations on permanent Board members by creating opportunities for ad-hoc volunteerism on Sub-Committees to address specific issues and challenges.	<p>Provide Sub-committee Chairs with the authority to recruit community volunteers with specific expertise to address issues without having to become a permanent member of the Board.</p> <p>Articulate these opportunities as being time-limited with a clear focus, and beginning and end dates, to make them more attractive to volunteers.</p>
Communication		
Issue(s)	Recommendation(s)	Action(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are significant issues with using email as the primary method of communication and decision making. A formal, centralized and accessible repository for communication records, historical documents, operating plans and governance documents does not exist. 	Utilize an email and collaboration software solution to ensure decisions are made in a timely manner based on easily accessible and shared information.	Implement Microsoft Office 365 (it offers a free subscription to eligible not-for-profit organizations).

		Train Board and Staff on the use of Outlook, Teams Meetings (with Decisions), OneDrive, OneNote, and Sharepoint.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board-Staff communication around conflict requires a more inclusive approach. There is a current process for 'Appeals for Conflict Resolution' in the Governance Policy Manual (S.4.8-4.18) however it concerns only process and does not define what constitutes conflict or harassment. 	Improve the process for Board and Staff Conflict Resolution.	Develop a Respectful Workplace Policy that clearly articulates expectations of Board and Employees in maintaining a respectful workplace, free of harassment and discrimination, outlines the reporting and complaint process and establishes the process and responsibilities for investigating and resolving complaints.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board does not appear willing to address difficult situation and there is a tendency for conflict avoidance. Issues need to be addressed as they come up, no matter how awkward or uncomfortable it may be. 	Remove uncertainty about how to deal with staff behaviour and performance by introducing a Progressive Discipline Policy.	Develop a Progressive Discipline Policy that articulates the performance and work expectations of the Geopark and clearly establishes steps in the progressive discipline process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is public and institutional awareness of the governance and management issues within the Board. Post Diagnostic Assessment with a Path Forward, the Board will need to engage in external communications with the community and stakeholders on issues of transparency, trust, and professional governance, and present some early 'wins' as a demonstrated commitment to change 	Overcome community and institutional stakeholder skepticism about a relaunched Discovery Geopark Model by developing and implementing an internal and external communications and engagement plan.	<p>Develop an Internal and External Communications Plan that is commensurate with the capacity of the Geopark to implement.</p> <p>Identify Key Messaging, Target Groups, Tools and Delivery Mediums (including social media platforms).</p> <p>Utilize ongoing and planned community engagement projects as a platform for communication of key messages.</p>