

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



**EXPLORE  
EDMONTON**

# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

EXPLORE EDMONTON respectfully acknowledges that we are located within Treaty 6 territory, and Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4. We acknowledge this land as the traditional home for many Indigenous Peoples including the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Dene, Saulteaux, Anishinaabe, Inuit and many others whose histories, languages, and cultures continue to influence our vibrant community.







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# MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



2023 was quite a year! As a proud Edmontonian, it was a privilege to watch our city thrive and reconnect with each other through various activations, festivals and conferences in all seasons.

In my role as the Chair of the Board of Directors for Explore Edmonton Corporation, I have witnessed firsthand the remarkable efforts of our dedicated team and our valued partners in promoting Edmonton and nurturing its visitor economy. This annual report attests to the substantial, meaningful, and enduring impact that Explore Edmonton has had on our city and its community.

Edmonton is a city brimming with a rich tapestry of artists, sports legends, entrepreneurs, and industry leaders. Beyond that, Edmonton is a city characterized by the kindness, warmth, and hospitality of its people. At Explore Edmonton, we are honoured to spotlight the vibrancy of our community, our diverse culture, and our outstanding facilities, all nestled within the beauty of Edmonton. In 2023, this was exemplified through the hosting of world-class events such as the 2023 JUNO Awards, The Style Experience FIS Snowboard Big Air World Cup, the Canadian Hydrogen Convention, FarmFair International, and, of course, an iconic Edmonton tradition, KDays.

All these events bring in new visitors to our city, spending money in our hotels, restaurants, retail stores and tourism businesses.

In 2023, Explore Edmonton generated a total economic impact of \$329 million from events it attracted and produced, as well as events hosted in Edmonton EXPO Centre and Edmonton Convention Centre. These dollars create and sustain thousands of jobs and contribute to our tax base, helping to build a thriving, culturally enriching city for Edmontonians.

This year showed us once again the power of the visitor economy and its potential to continue growing with the right investments and focus.

I would like to express gratitude to our shareholder, Edmonton City Council, as well as our valued partners and stakeholders such as Travel Alberta, Edmonton Destination Marketing Hotels and Prairies Economic Development Canada for their commitment to making Edmonton a premier destination for global travellers who experience Edmonton in a variety of ways from attracted events, to business conferences. Our team feels incredibly fortunate to collaborate with such skilled individuals who dedicate themselves to the work of providing unparalleled experiences in our city.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the entire Explore Edmonton team, I extend our heartfelt gratitude for your unwavering collaboration and support. As we look ahead, we are enthusiastic about building upon the successes of 2023 and are eager to embrace the many exciting opportunities in 2024.

Karen Oshry, Board Chair

To learn more about Explore Edmonton's Board of Directors, please visit: [exploredmonton.com/industry/about-us/board-of-directors](https://exploredmonton.com/industry/about-us/board-of-directors)



# MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

I am delighted to reflect upon the remarkable journey we have undertaken together in the past year. I am proud to be a part of an innovative team that is wholeheartedly working to further Edmonton's visitor economy on the global stage.

One overarching theme that emerges from this report is the transformative power of connection. At Explore Edmonton, we recognize that we are not just curators of events or promoters of our city, we are architects of connections that shape the very fabric of our community. The relationships that we foster with our partners extend far beyond the economic impact; they delve into the heart of what makes Edmonton special – our people.

Our city is not merely a destination, it is a living, breathing entity fuelled by the passion and diversity of its residents. From artists and sports enthusiasts to entrepreneurs and industry leaders, Edmonton is a mosaic of talent and ambition.





This year, Explore Edmonton had the privilege of showcasing our city on a global stage, hosting and amplifying world-class events that celebrated our unique culture, such as the FIBA 3x3 World Tour & Women's Series and the 2023 JUNO Awards. Attracting the 2023 JUNO Awards was a multi-year process, highlighting the importance of consistent, dedicated efforts to draw events to Edmonton.

Additionally, our team was able to help secure the return of the Canadian Finals Rodeo (CFR) in 2024 to where it all started. Our stellar venues hosted a variety of world-class business events and conferences like the Canadian Hydrogen Convention, Amii's Upper Bound, and Carbon Capture Canada. This success is the result of the hard work of thousands of small businesses and front-line workers that consistently deliver one-of-a-kind experiences to visitors and Edmontonians alike.

Each one of these experiences and events adds up to big dollars for our visitor economy and the thousands of jobs it supports. For example, the 2023 JUNO Awards spurred a total economic impact of \$19.1 million for our city's economy.

Combined, Explore Edmonton's signature events of KDays, Edmonton Pro Rodeo and Farmfair International generated a total economic impact of \$33 million. The total projected economic impact of bringing the CFR back to Edmonton in 2024 is \$30.4 million, supporting more than 5,578 jobs. The four-day event will draw in an estimated 45,000 spectators, creating demand for over 12,000 hotel rooms.

The impactful collaboration within the network of Edmonton's visitor economy has been evident, underscoring the immense value that emerges when we work together. I am eagerly anticipating the achievements we will collectively attain in 2024, building on the foundation of our shared commitment and collaboration.

Traci Bednard, CEO  
Explore Edmonton

# MISSION & VISION

Connection. With it we thrive. Without it, we cannot grow. At Explore Edmonton, we're all about fostering meaningful connections in our community and beyond. We take pride in crafting a distinctive identity for Edmonton, earning a strong global reputation. Through cultivating relationships with partners and stakeholders, we not only showcase our city's capabilities but also enhance our global ties, creating diverse opportunities for local industry investment. And, most importantly, we infuse enjoyment into every endeavor!

Our commitment to bringing in major events has a ripple effect that goes beyond mere entertainment. It translates into tourism dollars that bolster local businesses, enhances the city's vibrancy, making it more attractive for talent acquisition, and builds a compelling case for upgrading city infrastructure – a win-win for everyone. Iconic events managed by our experienced teams such as KDays, FarmFair International and the Edmonton Pro Rodeo serve as community unifiers, captivating audiences of all ages year after year.

We connect people who want to hold events to our award-winning venues. Our Edmonton Convention Centre is recognized as one of the five best venues in North America and the Edmonton EXPO Centre is the largest venue of its kind in Western Canada. The size and versatility of our venues allows for world-class events, unlimited opportunity and more profitability for our partners.



# PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

To measure the impact of our efforts throughout 2023, we turn to our four pillars of excellence and the implementation of the Explore Edmonton Tourism Master Plan. Our pillars give us a direction to rally around, and they offer a set of shared goals that highlight what we must do extremely well to achieve our aspirations for the future. Together with the Tourism Master Plan we are guided at the highest level on what is most important to our shareholder, Indigenous partners, stakeholders and clients.

## 1 MARKETING & SALES

Our sales and marketing decisions drive demand for Edmonton experiences, support stakeholders' business performance and build ambassadors for Edmonton across local, domestic and international markets.

## 2 OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

We operate with a continuous improvement mindset, leaning into our creative strengths in all aspects of our operations. Scalability is key in all operations and flexibility in our support services is essential to serving our shareholder needs.

## 3 SUSTAINABILITY

We invest in environmental and social sustainability as it benefits us all today and into the future.

## 4 TOURISM MASTER PLAN

When solidifying our identity as a destination management and marketing organization, it was clear we needed to establish guidance around future tourism development. In 2021, in collaboration with industry and community, we created our 10-year Tourism Master Plan.

## 5 SOCIAL PROSPERITY

We contribute to the social prosperity of Edmonton by supporting local producers, partners and community groups as well as providing a workplace of choice for our own employees.

# MARKETING & SALES

By attracting sought-after sport, culture and business events, as well as spotlighting local attractions, our dedicated teams at Explore Edmonton play a pivotal role in enhancing the city's experiences and tourism offerings. Our teams attract events domestically, nationally and internationally, driving significant economic impact to the destination. Through strategic marketing campaigns and platforms, our efforts result in increased year-round visitation, creating a substantial economic impact that resonates throughout the visitor economy.

Through an always-on marketing strategy, the Explore Edmonton marketing team delivers emotionally engaging content to Edmontonians and visitors alike.

Connecting with our audience is important, which is why we are proud that by Q4 of 2023, our team surpassed our social media follower growth goal by nearly 30,000 followers. Additionally, our team expanded online reach by launching Explore Edmonton on TikTok, with immense consumer engagement taking place on the platform. The Edmonton Pro Rodeo social media channels have organically garnered over 9,000 followers and over 150,000 likes on the page.





# EDMONTON HAS INCREDIBLE STORIES WORTH TELLING AND IT'S UP TO US TO SHOUT THEM FROM THE ROOFTOPS.

## TRAVEL MEDIA

Our relentless commitment to storytelling is woven into every facet of our approach, extending its transformative power to both earned media and influencer initiatives.

Explore Edmonton stands as the first and only Destination Management and Marketing Organization (DMMO) in Alberta using allowlisting, showcasing groundbreaking success in amplifying influencer initiatives. By the end of Q3, we exceeded our allowlisting impressions goal, achieving 8.8 million against the targeted 5.7 million. Allowlisting involves influencers granting advertising permissions to brands, allowing them to use the influencers' handles, content and audience targeting for a new media and acquisition channel. Additionally, we have achieved over 197 million earned media impressions by the end of Q4, surpassing the ambitious goal of 150 million.

Our Travel Media team pitched (and hosted) freelance writer Vanessa Chaisson in December 2022. 11 Amazing Things to Do in Canada's Gateway to the North was published on March 18, 2023, with the outlet, Travel Awaits, seeing more than two million unique visitors a month.

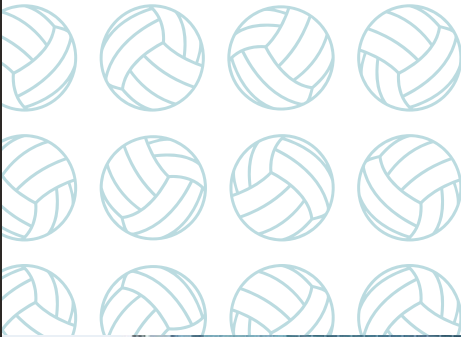
This article received a media quality score of 10/10. In June of 2023, the Travel Media team joined forces with Tourism Calgary to host an Unexpected Cities familiarization tour with a range of journalists from the United States. So far, two articles have been published: 7 Things To Do In Edmonton, Alberta's Quirky Capital (forbes.com) with 29.5 million impressions and a media quality score of 10/10. The second article, Meet Siu To, Edmonton's Legendary Green Onion Cake Man, was published in Paste Magazine online.

# BRINGING EVENTS TO YEG

Our team was able to secure several major events and conferences that showcased Edmonton on a global stage. Here are some notables:

## *2023 Volleyball World Beach Pro Tour*

Teaming up with partners Do North Events, Oilers Entertainment Group, the City of Edmonton, Volleyball World, Volleyball Canada, Volleyball Alberta and Edmonton Destination Marketing Hotels, the downtown Fan Park transformed into a sandy arena for the FIVB Volleyball Beach Pro Tour Challenge on July 20-23, 2023. There were 96 teams in attendance with over 192 athletes worldwide battling for glory, with Portugal's João Pedrosa and Hugo Campos clinching a historic gold on the men's side and Brazilians Bárbara Seixas and Carol Salgado won the women's gold. The event brought an estimated \$3.8 million in total economic impact and 832 jobs were supported.





### **2023 FIBA 3X3 World Tour & Women's Series**

In 1915, our city's love for basketball began with the Edmonton Grads, our iconic women's championship basketball team. We continue to build on this rich history with the explosive growth of the 3x3 game. Inside ICE District's Fan Park, July 28-30 witnessed the takeover of hoops with Hoop City 3x3 and FIBA 3x3. In collaboration with various partners, this unique event showcased intense matchups with over 25 international teams totaling over 150 players and staff from outside of Canada. The Alberta Basketball Association's Hoop City tournament and 3x3 Provincial Championships saw 92 teams compete across diverse age categories.

More than 3,000 spectators attended the FIBA 3x3 World Tour & Women's Series to watch Edmonton's Plouffe sisters dazzle, leading Canada to an unbeaten record and finals victory against China. The event generated an impressive \$3.3 million in total economic impact and supported 1,217 total jobs.

Beyond attracting and securing this event, Explore Edmonton worked with event organizers on providing local vendor and supplier recommendations, promoted the event through social networks and experiential marketing tactics, provided beach-themed and basketball-themed elements to the event site, connected rightsholders with local partners and facilitated an introduction to local Indigenous artist, Dusty LeGrande.

We eagerly are anticipating the return of FIBA 3x3 World Tour and Women's Series to the ICE District in 2024 alongside the continued mass participation growth of Hoop City – successfully securing Edmonton as the home of 3x3 basketball in Canada while always paying homage to our Edmonton Grads roots.



### **Sport Tourism Canada Prestige Awards**

The Style Experience FIS Snowboard Big Air World Cup, hosted at Commonwealth Stadium on Dec. 10, 2022, won the Sport Tourism Canada (STC) Canadian Sport Event Sponsorship Initiative of the Year presented by Tourism Richmond at this year's Sport Event's Congress.

The Prestige Awards, standing for Program Recognizing Exceptional Sport Tourism Initiatives, Games & Events, are presented annually at Canada's largest sport tourism conference. STC's criteria for Canadian Sport Event Sponsorship Initiative of the Year Award recognizes the best use of a partnership between a company, organization, agency or individual that contributed to the overall success of a national or international sport event held in Canada.

# THE JUNO AWARDS



The 2023 JUNO Awards, held in Edmonton on March 13, 2023, showcased the city's spectacular assets and attractions and provided a stage for local musicians to shine leading up to and during the celebration of Canada's best music.

The economic impact (EI) of the JUNO Awards was significant, with a total EI of \$19.1 million and an estimated demand of 12,818 room nights. Sponsorship and partnership played a crucial role in the success of the JUNO Awards. Record labels, special partners and music organizations supported the event by recommending venues for ancillary events and providing funding. Local suppliers, restaurants, and food and beverage providers were also involved, ensuring a memorable experience for attendees.

Explore Edmonton took an active role in promoting the JUNO Awards through guerilla marketing, warm welcomes at the airport and the creation of a JUNO-specific visitor guide. Various social and community benefits were provided, including JUNO ambassadors, community hot chocolate events and the donation of tickets to Kids Up Front. Additionally, our team was proud to support the Road to the JUNOS Concert Series.

This 10-show series collaboration between the JUNOS 2023 Edmonton Host Committee, which included CBC Music and Explore Edmonton, showcased several local and provincial acts through five different venues for the bargain price of \$10 per show, connecting Edmontonians to local Canadian talent.

In late December 2022 to March 2023, Explore Edmonton launched a campaign targeted to visitors across Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Alberta with the goal of driving visitation to Edmonton during JUNO Week and leveraging the JUNOS as an opportunity to highlight Edmonton's great tourist attractions, experiences, and culture. This campaign saw over 6.1 million impressions, drove over 58,000 website sessions and referred more than 8,700 users to our partners' sites. Additionally, our team used influencers and the creator community to engage visitors and spread the word about the JUNO Awards. Our influencer strategy saw a reach of over 1.2 million impressions, more than 709,000 engagements and 322,000 unique link clicks.

The total number of tickets sold to the event was 10,250, with 30 per cent of those ticket sales coming from outside of the Edmonton region. ADARA tracking results determined that 40 hotel room nights and 19 flights were booked as a result of this campaign.



Not only were we fortunate enough to see these events through in 2023, but we were also able to secure new business and ensure events will be hosted in our city for the coming years.

In 2023, we also secured the following events:

- 2023, 2024 & 2025 FIBA 3x3
- 2023, 2024 & 2025 Volleyball Events, including:
  - 2023 Men's Final 6 Pan Am
  - 2024 and 2025 Volleyball Canada National Championships
- 2023 ACAC Soccer Championships
- 2023 Canadian Championships in Trampoline Gymnastics
- 2023 Americas Triathlon Cup
- 2023 Canadian Ninja League National Finals
- 2023 CNPL Pickleball
- 2024 UIAA Ice Climbing World Championships
- 2024 CCMA Country Music Week and Awards
- 2024 U SPORTS Women's Basketball Championship
- 2025 Canadian Wrestling Championships (Senior, U20-Junior, U17-Cadet)



# DID YOU KNOW?

THE AVERAGE ATTRACTED EVENT WILL SUPPORT

**11** LOCAL BUSINESSES

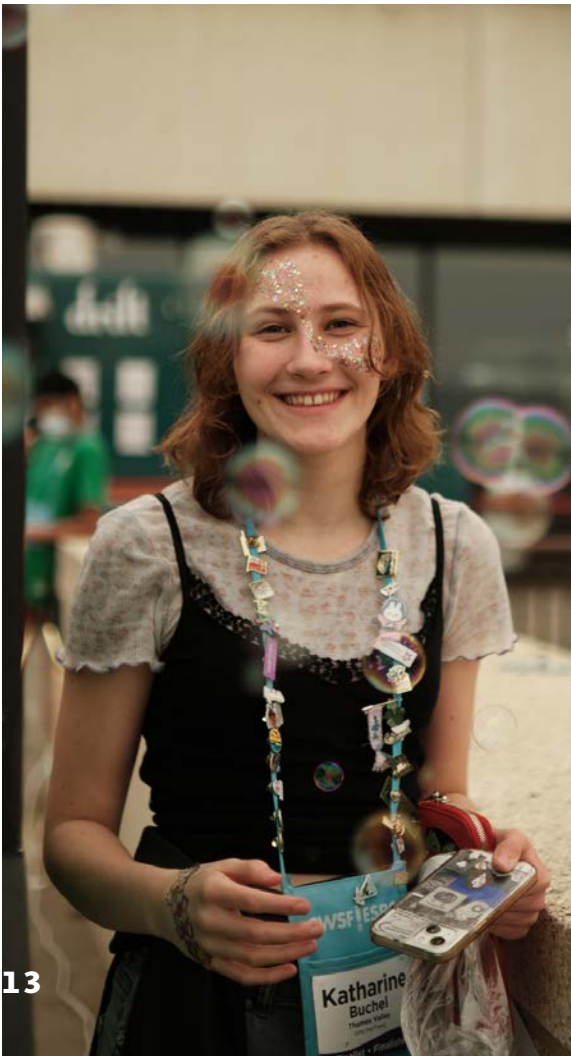
THROUGHOUT 2023, ATTRACTED SPORT AND CULTURE EVENTS HAVE SUPPORTED

**97** LOCAL BUSINESSES

ATTRACTED BUSINESS/PROFESSIONAL EVENTS HAVE SUPPORTED

**173** LOCAL EDMONTON BUSINESSES

# BUSINESS EVENTS ARE A **VITAL COMPONENT OF EDMONTON'S VISITOR ECONOMY, DRIVING ROOM NIGHT OPPORTUNITIES AND DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT WITH ONE OF THE HIGHEST SPENDING GROUPS OF VISITORS.**



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In addition to the sport and culture events that our teams secure, Explore Edmonton is proud to attract numerous business events, meetings and conferences.

Here are some of the business events our team was proud to host in 2023:

- Jehovah's Witnesses Convention
- Canadian Hydrogen Convention
- National Gathering of Elders
- Canada Wide Science Fair
- Canadian Tire Dealers Association Annual Convention
- Carbon Capture Canada
- Association of Alberta Municipalities & Trade Show
- Amii's Upper Bound
- Alberta Esports Relaunch Event



For the first time, our Business Events team, exhibited the stand-alone Explore Edmonton pavillion at the IMEX America show in Las Vegas on Oct. 17-19, 2023. The team showcased our city, its convention venues and hotel partners, aiming to boost business prospects in Edmonton for the years ahead. Our Explore Edmonton booth attracted over 500 visitors, resulting in major business event lead opportunities of up to 1,000 delegates each. The event concluded with over 12 leads generated for our city.



## THE BUSINESS EVENTS LEGACY COUNCIL

The Business Events Legacy Council is a prestigious platform for our city's renowned innovators and thought leaders. These individuals contribute to Edmonton's ongoing economic growth and reinforce our reputation for excellence in academic research and business. While the Explore Edmonton team is made up of experts in attracting and organizing events, we work with members of our Legacy Council to enhance events in our key economic sectors. Events may also come to Edmonton through our ambassadors, so we are here to support with complimentary services throughout the entire process. From researching the viability of an event, to being there on the day of, we will do the heavy lifting so ambassadors can focus on what they do best – making Edmonton a great place to live and work. In 2023 our team, with the support of the council and local ambassadors, secured 10 leads with an economic impact of \$6,622,370.



## THE BEST DAYS ARE K DAYS

In 2023 our team undertook a complete rebrand of the K-Days platform, developing a new brand story and brand pillars. The team worked hard to launch a completely reskinned and rebranded website on a new content management system, including new functionality and a ChatGPT-enabled chat bot, which helped us gain a 21 per cent increase in website traffic over 2022. In addition, the team also refreshed the brand (logo, brand identity, online/on-site) presence for K-Days within a three-month timeframe while simultaneously planning and executing the 2023 ticketing campaign.

The 2023 KDays ticketing campaign delivered 125,178,074 impressions and drove \$1.49 million (a 22 per cent increase over 2022) in website revenue throughout the campaign period. We also saw a 21 per cent increase of advanced Ride All Day tickets and a 74 per cent increase in advanced gate admission tickets over 2022. Additionally, our strategic partnerships with influencers formed a cornerstone of our KDays social media strategy, yielding an exceptional 4.4 per cent organic engagement rate and an impressive 34 per cent engagement rate with allowlisting, showcasing the impact of this approach.

Our team also launched a variety of digital engagement initiatives, including Instagram filters, a campaign landing page, interactive online gaming experiences (Whack-A-Mole) and on-site augmented reality experiences.

In the spirit of a more interactive guest approach, KDays launched its first-ever design competition in collaboration with MADE and the industrial design community. The winner was Onetwosix Design, with their innovative and playful POP-UPSICLE Benches.

After KDays wrapped up, our sustainability team published a post-event impact report detailing the environmental and community impacts that KDays has on our community. In addition, our team conducted a waste composition study that showed an average increase of waste diversion in the public-facing bins by around 15-20 percent compared to 2022.

### *Innovation at KDays*

In 2023, we launched an Innovation program at KDays, which honed strong industry support. The zone aimed to celebrate all aspects of technology and innovation in the field. With over 90 different industry partners participating, this unique experience gave visitors an elevated look into local innovations that help better the world.

KDays also saw over 300 local artists participate in providing entertainment at the fair in 2023. Between circus and burlesque performers, musicians, roving entertainers, designers, muralists, dancers, theatre technicians and storytellers, KDays showcased the best of the local arts community. Additionally, the Edmonton EXPO Centre stepped up to bring the iconic Cristal Palace Spiegel tent to the midway grounds during KDays, as well as acting as the venue host for the 2023 Freewill Shakespeare Festival.



### *GR Curated Experiences*

KDays is a major asset that requires employee, government and community support as we continue to reimagine and grow the event. To celebrate, broaden awareness and understanding, and garner excitement for the event, we hosted a VIP Reception for sponsors and community and industry partners. This event was a major success; the satisfaction rating from attendees was the highest that we have ever seen on a corporate event produced by our team.

To elevate the KDays experience even more, our teams collaborated to curate private tours and experiences for eight influential community leaders. We received extremely positive feedback from those who were able to attend, many stating that the behind-the-scenes experience gave them a newfound appreciation for the iconic fair.



# CANADIAN FINALS RODEO

Explore Edmonton was thrilled to have secured the Canadian Finals Rodeo (CFR) for three years: 2024, 2025 and 2026. The CFR is a world-class event which sees 45,000 spectators through the four-day event, driving visitation to the city as around 64 per cent of those spectators are guests to the city.

CFR brings with it a week-long celebration of western culture featuring the nation's very best rodeo athletes with dozens of additional events at a variety of sites.

Explore Edmonton will be activating the city with Rodeo Week celebrations leading up to the CFR which runs Oct. 2-5, 2024, at Rogers Place.





# FARMFAIR INTERNATIONAL

For over 45 years, Farmfair International has been one of Canada's top agricultural shows and is Alberta's largest beef cattle show. Farmfair sees exhibitors from across Western Canada gather to showcase their top livestock genetics to purebred producers, local ranchers and international buyers, and is a critical touchpoint for the beef industry. The 2023 event, produced by our Community Initiatives and Agriculture (CIA) team, saw amazing growth in attendance and double the number of international guests, with 70 delegates representing 17 countries.

Our team worked hard to relaunch the Farmfair school classroom learning program. The 2023 Farmfair Fieldtrip program saw close to 1,000 students and their families attend the event, with the intention of learning more about Farmfair and its participants.

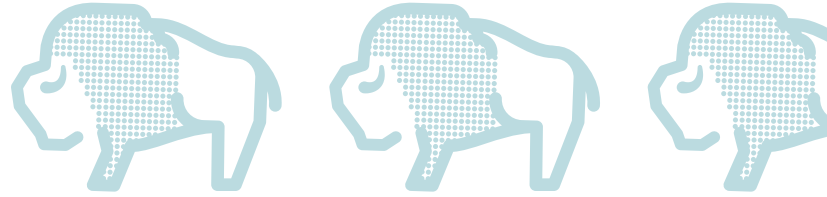


# STRATEGIC PLANNING





# WALKING FORWARD TOGETHER



In September 2023, led by our Indigenous partners and communities in the Edmonton region, our team launched a first-of-its-kind Indigenous Tourism Development Strategy. This is an important step in the tourism landscape for Edmonton and Treaty 6 as Indigenous tourism is an avenue for Indigenous peoples to share their truth and culture in an authentic and meaningful way.

The strategy is based on five interconnected elements, with the goal of building a thriving community of Indigenous tourism operators, entrepreneurs and events:

- Relationships: which includes the creation of a network of Indigenous tourism operators and entrepreneurs.
- Storytelling: which will be centered around building the presence of Indigenous tourism in marketing, as well as building understanding and knowledge by sharing Indigenous stories.
- Empowerment & Learning: create a tourism incubator workshop and Explore Edmonton will commit to building a hub of resources on its website.
- Shared leadership: this strategy should be Indigenous led and the Advisory Circle, which was involved in development of the strategy, must be sustained and supported by all partners.
- Gathering: including bringing Indigenous tourism experiences into Explore Edmonton events and bidding on major Indigenous events.

While Explore Edmonton has collaborated in the development of this strategy, it has been led, developed and produced by the Indigenous community and Indigenous tourism operators to ensure our Indigenous partners define what is authentic and the best cultural representation for their communities.





# A FLOURISHING FUTURE

Explore Edmonton was thrilled to introduce a bold and innovative tourism strategy that endeavours to rethink and reshape the tourism industry's future in the greater Edmonton area. Developed from Explore Edmonton's Tourism Master Plan, A Flourishing Future is the city's regenerative tourism strategy. This strategy goes beyond sustainability, which aspires to minimize the negative impacts of the visitor economy. A regenerative approach to tourism aims to completely rethink and reshape how we do tourism development.





The vision is that the visitor economy in Edmonton will be regenerative and resilient by the year 2050. A Flourishing Future identifies 15 goals that will help us reach that vision. Goals include:

- Transforming mobility so visitors and residents have access to safe, reliable and low-carbon travel options.
- Investment in people and communities to celebrate and promote culture, diversity and equity.
- Grow tourism and events in a purposeful and innovative way that enhances business opportunities, drives wealth for the community and stewards growth of the visitor economy within ecological and social limits.
- Decarbonize the visitor economy and restore nature.
- Integrate sustainable practices and innovations into all events.

The work has already begun and partners in the visitor economy and beyond are keen to be a part of it. Research during the development of the strategy shows that 59 per cent of tourism representatives believe that integrating sustainability into plans is important. Another 51 per cent of tourism representatives have already started their sustainability actions.

# PUTTING EDMONTON ON CENTRE STAGE

## *A Song Comes to Life*

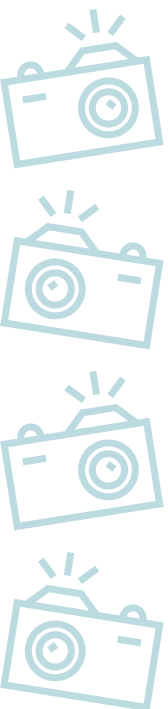
This campaign, titled, “A Song Comes to Life,” which was a project in partnership with Indigenous Tourism Alberta and the Globe and Mail, got the spotlight at the OMMA Awards, snagging the Single Execution award in Content Marketing. Our team also took home Bronze in the Best Integrated Campaign - Budget Under \$250,000 category for the Media Innovation Awards.

Our venues stand as integral pillars within the community, offering substantial value to both Edmontonians and visitors. Events held at the Edmonton Convention Centre and Edmonton EXPO Centre not only attract visitors but also elevate our city’s brand and reputation. Beyond that, these venues serve as spaces where people converge to celebrate, sing, dance and partake in unique experiences. It is these shared moments and the sense of community that contribute to making Edmonton a truly exceptional place to live, work and play.



Photography: Noella Steinhauer

**IT IS THESE SHARED MOMENTS  
AND THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY  
THAT CONTRIBUTE TO MAKING  
EDMONTON A TRULY EXCEPTIONAL  
PLACE TO LIVE, WORK AND PLAY.**



### ***Explore Edmonton Presents***

In collaboration with Prairies Economic Development Canada, who provided funding for asset development, our team created and produced a dynamic collection of short stories celebrating the vibrant spirit found only in Alberta’s capital. The series showcased the beating heart of Edmonton through extraordinary encounters, featuring Edmonton’s arts and culture scene, nightlife, iconic attractions and festivals, as well as our city’s Indigenous and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.

The Explore Edmonton Presents video series was an instrumental step in redefining the organization’s content strategy, emphasizing the power of storytelling and authentic connections within our local community. The series has received over one million impressions across TikTok and YouTube. The total watch time from the entire series is currently over 2,400 hours, helping drive a 164 per cent growth in followers on TikTok, averaging one million views, 35,000 likes and more than 4,000 shares via social media platforms.

In addition to all the amazing work that was put into this series, the “Art In Motion” video from the series won “Best Corporate Production Over \$30K” (AMPIA 2023) in October of 2023.

# VENUE SPOTLIGHT: THE EDMONTON CONVENTION CENTRE



Recognized as one of North America’s five top performing venues, the Edmonton Convention Centre acts as a space that brings people together to learn, innovate, trade and celebrate. The team is committed to creating connections to the community, to the land, to local culture and to others.

Sales for new business surpassed 2023 targets, reaching an impressive \$2.13 million compared to the set goal of \$1.4 million. This remarkable achievement can be attributed to the relentless efforts of dedicated team members who hustled to achieve a phenomenal revenue growth of 40 per cent year-over-year.

Looking to expand revenue opportunities beyond our footprint, our team focused great efforts to prepare The Art Gallery of Alberta for an expanded catering operation, achieving a remarkable feat within a short timeframe. The activation of this new venture resulted in an almost immediate increase in the sales lead funnel, with a noteworthy \$53,000 in new business generated within just four weeks.



# EXPLORE EDMONTON AND ART GALLERY OF ALBERTA ANNOUNCE EXCITING PARTNERSHIP

On Sept. 18, 2023, The Art Gallery of Alberta (AGA) and Edmonton Convention Centre (ECC) announced a new partnership stating that the ECC will be the exclusive provider of events, catering and facility booking services at the nationally renowned AGA.

This partnership celebrates a strong community alliance and civic pride. The ECC's team of trusted professionals have taken on the task of managing events and catering services in the AGA's architecturally unique and dynamic building.

"When we were approached by the Art Gallery of Alberta, we were excited at the potential to share our exceptional culinary expertise with new guests at the AGA," said Arlindo Gomes, vice president of business development and venues for Explore Edmonton. "There is a lot of benefit from these two important civic assets teaming up, notably we at Explore Edmonton are proud to be able to support additional revenue generation for the Art Gallery of Alberta."



## STAFF SPOTLIGHT:

# CHEF SERGE BELAIR

Executive Chef Serge Belair added to the ECC's culinary successes by achieving a bronze medal in the National Canadian Culinary Championship as part of Canada's Great Kitchen Party competition held in Ottawa. The ECC is the first convention centre to win the award in 15 years.

Additionally, Chef Belair was invited to present at the prestigious Christmas in November event at Jasper Park Lodge. Chef Belair was featured alongside Food Network celebrities, inspiring local chefs, décor experts, and wine and cocktail connoisseurs, as they inspire unique styles of perfecting guests' holiday entertaining repertoire.

Chef Belair credits his success to his ECC kitchen team, or "the kids" as he likes to refer to them as.

"Our team shares a purpose and common goal that everyone is willing to put in the time and effort to achieve. We act as a unit, taking on challenges together," Belair states. "I am proud to be a part of an organization that continues to challenge my skills and inspires me to always be looking at how I can elevate our food offerings."

Chef Belair, as well as Chef Jiju Paul and their teams serve guests at the Edmonton Convention Centre and the Edmonton EXPO Centre, respectively. Both venues and their award-winning culinary teams are committed to bringing innovative and high-quality culinary experiences to Edmonton.

# VENUE SPOTLIGHT: THE EDMONTON EXPO CENTRE



Hosting more than 376 events and one million yearly visitors, the Edmonton EXPO Centre is the largest exhibition space in Western Canada. Designed for adaptability and grand scale, the opportunities for unique events are endless—from the biggest trade shows, live entertainment, sporting events, conferences and more, you can experience it all at the Edmonton EXPO Centre.

In 2023, the Edmonton EXPO Centre once again made EXHIBITOR Magazine's 2024 Centers of Excellence list, naming North America's top 30 venues for trade shows and events. This award recognizes EXPO's ability to host events of all shapes and sizes while providing world-class service and state-of-the-art accommodations for event planners.

EXPO staff utilized a time-sensitive Prairies Economic Development grant to install six large-scale indoor digital features along our main corridor, offering stunning visual advertising in partnership with Blackflag Projects Inc. This upgrade gives clients the opportunity to create brand awareness and advertise events and products to a wide variety of EXPO attendees, including multi-hall trade shows, live entertainment, sporting events and meetings.





# THE EDMONTON EXPO CENTRE'S FIRE EVACUATION RESPONSE

In May of 2023, the Edmonton EXPO Centre was designated as an evacuation site for those displaced by the Alberta wildfires. The first call came between 1:30 a.m. and 2 a.m. and without hesitation select Edmonton EXPO Centre staff and many amazing partners arrived on site between 3:00 a.m. and 4 a.m.

They had a lot of work to do to get ready for hundreds of people. Staff and partners had to tear down and clean from a recently completed event, crates of supplies had to be unloaded from trucks and food had to be prepared for an unknown number of people.

The first evacuees arrived at 4 a.m. and within the hour the first line of breakfast snacks and beverages was on the floor for weary and scared evacuees. Our staff and partners had all the conference rooms activated by 8 a.m., just six hours after the first call came in. This included: a reception area, sleeping areas, lounge/food and beverage set up, and a command and distribution centre for the City's Emergency Support Response Team.

In total, the EXPO team hosted evacuees at the Centre for 50 days with over 32,000 meals served.





# CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITY

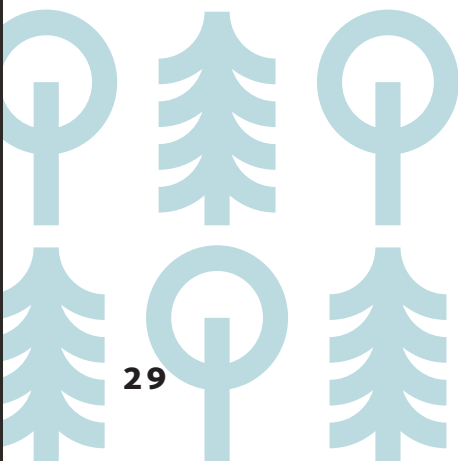
No matter the season, industry or venue, events hosted in Edmonton bring value to our community.

The Responsible Events Program (REP) is just one way Explore Edmonton helps ensure that event clients and our community can take part in socially and environmentally responsible choices that help give back. In 2023, there have been over 25 events that have used the REP, with eight events going carbon neutral. Additionally, our REP program was proud to be shortlisted for the Destination Sustainability Movement's Innovation Award.

## THE EDMONTON URBAN FARM

The Edmonton Urban Farm is a two-acre community hub for urban agriculture, education, and sustainability. Established in 2014, the Urban Farm connects people to food and farming within the city limits. Over 300 people from 20 different organizations, such as Multicultural Health Brokers and Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, use the Edmonton Urban Farm.

Positioning itself as a record year, the farm in 2023 welcomed over 10,000 visitors, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. Offering diverse programming suitable for all ages, the farm also featured a weekly kids club, informative sessions on food and farming, and engaging arts and culture activities.





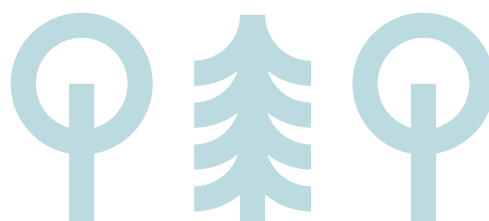
# RESPONSIBLE EVENTS PROGRAM: URBAN FARM EXPERIENCE

The Urban Farm REP offering gives event planners the chance to allocate funds for groups from schools or non-profit organizations to learn about Edmonton agriculture, eat a sustainable boxed lunch and provide transportation to and from Edmonton's Urban Farm.

In 2023, our team partnered with Capital Care – McConnell Place North through the REP program to bring seniors with mid-stage dementia to the Urban Farm. Residents were able to get a private tour of the farm while learning about local agriculture. Many residents were able to relate, citing memories of their own farms and gardens that they had in the past.

This program served to be an important memory made for Explore Edmonton employee Josef Legaspi, whose grandpa (Lolo) was part of the pilot tour at the Urban Farm.

“I often show him photos of farms, vegetables and animals and it always brings up a story from his time in the Philippines. To have these sensations and familiarity for all these residents in such a unique location is an incredible way to help give back to the people that helped shaped Edmonton to what it is today.”



# TOURISM WEEK 2023



In honour of the nationally led initiative by the Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC) and provincially by the Tourism Industry Association of Alberta (TIAA), Explore Edmonton celebrated Tourism Week in style. Tourism Week is about building awareness amongst local businesses, elected officials and residents about the value and impact of the visitor economy. By building a greater understanding of how tourism contributes to Edmonton, we create more advocates for our city, which drives more visitation and leads to bigger and better outcomes.

Throughout Tourism Week, the Strategic Communications & Partnerships team organized a free webinar called “Mentorship Moment: Sustainability in Tourism.” This online panel discussion served as a learning opportunity for individuals interested in gaining a deeper understanding about sustainability in tourism.

Additionally, the team executed the “Tourism Week Townhall,” an event aimed to connect Explore Edmonton’s valued partners to celebrate their success and align our community around the shared understanding that Edmonton is a place people want to visit. With the expansion of programming, the 2023 Tourism Townhall saw growth in attendance by over 100 people compared to 2022.

In addition to the events, our team also created a Tourism Week toolkit, which included key messages, social media posts, and more for stakeholders, partners and staff to use throughout the week.



# EDVENTURE DAYS

Our Destination Development team pioneered the inaugural Edmonton Edventure Days, a three-day event designed to showcase and foster community spirit. By urging Edmontonians to explore our city and patronize local businesses, attractions and experiences, this initiative aimed to instill 'pride of place' within the community. Edmonton Edventure Days offered a platform to highlight the city's iconic attractions, culinary scene and diverse experiences, creating excitement among residents and locals. In 2023, 17 partner businesses across Edmonton participated in this event, providing Edmontonians with exclusive discounted rates, free experiences and the chance to win a free helicopter tour valued at \$570.



# SUBSECTION ROUNDTABLES

In 2023, our Strategic Communications & Partnerships team created a new formula for engaging with our partners in the tourism industry in a way that is relevant and meaningful for them and helpful for Explore Edmonton's planning purposes.

The subsection roundtables helped Explore Edmonton to develop and strengthen relationships with our valued partners and members of the community. This past year, our team met and facilitated meaningful conversation with various partners, including attractions, experience providers, Business Improvement Areas and festivals.



# OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

At Explore Edmonton, we operate with a continuous improvement mindset, ensuring that our team has the best practices in place for all aspects of our operations.

## NOTABLE IMPROVEMENTS

- Our Marketing team transitioned from NetX to Crowdriff for an improved user experience, making our digital assets more accessible for partners and staff.
- ECC required all banquet staff and supervisors to undergo operational service excellence training. This initiative is aligned with our commitment to providing top-notch service, ensuring that our team is well-equipped to deliver an outstanding experience to our clients and guests.
- Our Strategic Communications and Partnerships team launched the Explore Edmonton Job Swap, a quarterly video that aims to educate staff on the various departments at Explore Edmonton.
- Both the EXPO Centre and ECC's health and safety programs attained a certificate of recognition from the Alberta Association of Safety Partners. This certificate stands as tangible evidence of both venues' dedication to safeguarding the well-being of both staff and guests associated with our venues.
- An Occupational Health and Safety Governance framework was established in 2023 to support co-ordinated program oversight and elevated organizational focus with respect to the work of the health and safety committees at our three locations.
- Our Shared Services team worked to launch an upgraded finance system (NetSuite) for the organization with the goal of further streamlining organizational processes
- Edmonton EXPO Centre completed an extensive seat/bleacher project in the Flair Airlines Hangar, providing guests with a more comfortable event experience.
- The EXPO Centre completed the Halls A/B roofing and HVAC rehabilitation project.
- The Strategic Communications and Partnerships team organized a monthly spot on Global television that takes place the third Friday of every month at 7:20 a.m.. The goal of each spot is to educate Edmontonians about Explore Edmonton and the amazing events and initiatives that take place in our city.
- Explore Edmonton's venues, the ECC and EXPO Centre, continued its Leader of Tomorrow Scholarship program, in honour of former employees Michael Fitzpatrick and Nathan Richuk. The Leader of Tomorrow Scholarship is designed to support post-secondary students who have demonstrated excellence in leadership and outstanding community involvement.



## DEVELOPING MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS

Over the year, the Destination Development team supported the creation of six new tourism experiences in Edmonton, including Rig Hand Craft Distillery, which just won a national tourism award. Over the past two years, the Destination Development team has provided Rig Hand Distillery with experience development support in the form of experience pilots and one-to-one coaching. In 2023, Explore Edmonton supported the nomination of Rig Hand Craft Distillery for the Canadian Tourism Awards (Tourism Employer of the Year), presented by TIAC. Rig Hand won the Tourism Employer of the Year Award, which is presented to a business who has made a commitment to foster equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging.

## EXPLORE EDMONTON VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

In 1879, community members came together and put on the first exhibition, which grew from an agricultural fair to what we now know as KDays. Since then, every year, the community has joined forces to put on events, have fun and work in tandem to make the city better. Contributing to Edmonton's vibrancy is an amazing feeling, and volunteers play a key role in KDays, Farmfair International and at the Edmonton Urban Farm. These activities are only possible because of the effort of hundreds of volunteers.

Our volunteers are a diverse group of community members with a wide range of dedicated skills and length of service. From ambassadors to assistants, drivers to data entry, youth tour guides to hosts and everything in-between, our team of volunteers gives thousands of hours of their time to create memorable experiences for our community and visitors to our beautiful city.

**10,952** 2023 VOLUNTEER HOURS

**628** 20  
ACTIVE STATUS VOLUNTEERS EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS REACHED OUT TO ACCESS VOLUNTEERS FROM OUR POOL

# EXPLORE EDMONTON'S EDI COUNCIL

At Explore Edmonton, we prioritize ensuring that every individual can experience a sense of safety and inclusion in their interactions, whether at events, in the workplace or within our city. Through purposeful action, Explore Edmonton's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) council is actively working to bring about meaningful impact and positive transformation for both our teams and our city.







As we reflect on the third year of operation, our EDI Council takes pride in the following accomplishments:

- Introduced a variety of diverse training and development opportunities for staff to partake in including disability awareness training and cultural awareness training in collaboration with Indigenous Tourism Alberta.
- Launched an ever-evolving inclusive language guide for staff and partners to utilize.
- Brought in speakers to staff meetings to give presentations and keynote addresses on various EDI topics including disability, the 2SLGBTQI+ community and inclusivity in the workplace.



## EXPLORE EDMONTON IS RAINBOW REGISTERED!

Explore Edmonton has been accredited as a Rainbow Registered organization.

This is a national accreditation for 2SLGBTQI+ friendly businesses and organizations. Accreditation is awarded after a rigorous assessment to meet standards around policies and practices, training, leadership and commitment, and inclusion. The work is done in partnership with Canada's 2SLGBTQI+ Chamber of Commerce.

Edmonton is the second destination management organization in Alberta, behind just Jasper, to be accredited.

“We are proud to be Rainbow Registered,” said Kaleena Mootoo, people business partner with Explore Edmonton and co-chair of the staff-led EDI council. “To be clear, this isn’t something we wanted to just achieve and announce. We will continue our efforts to ensure that our workplace as well as our venues, the Edmonton Convention Centre and Edmonton EXPO Centre, are safe spaces for all members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community.”



# **SUSTAINABILITY: CONTRIBUTING TO A REGENERATIVE VISITOR ECONOMY**



Contemporary tourists are becoming more mindful of the influence their travels exert on both the communities they explore and the environments they encounter. The surge in environmentally conscious travel is a trend we actively embrace, championing tourism policies and business approaches that safeguard the distinctive character of our community. Our commitment extends beyond mere preservation; we strive to enhance and mutually benefit from our natural and cultural treasures. Edmonton stands at the forefront of fostering a sustainable tourism industry, setting the stage to distinguish itself in the global arena.

As a part of Explore Edmonton's commitment to sustainability, nearly all single-use cups and food containers have been replaced with compostable alternatives at our venues, the Edmonton Convention Centre, and Edmonton EXPO Centre. These compostable items, instead of ending up in landfills, are now diverted as organics and sent for composting. This initiative not only reduces the amount of waste generated but also contributes to supporting local agriculture by producing nutrient-rich compost. Additionally, 5,782.89 kg of event and operational materials were donated within the community through our Community Donation Program. In a separate initiative, the Edmonton Convention Centre generously donated around 2,594 kg of food products to support the Edmonton Food Bank and its efforts.



In addition to the shift towards compostable items, reusable cups were also introduced at the ECC for water stations. At the conclusion of 2023, both Edmonton EXPO Centre and ECC are On the Road to Zero Waste Recognized Facilities, in partnership with Zero Waste Canada.

With the well-being of both the community and our clients in mind, Explore Edmonton has pledged to annually track, monitor and decrease our emissions. We have incorporated greenhouse gas emissions into our key performance indicators, aiming to enhance the quality of life for Edmonton's residents and secure the sustainability of our operations and the planet. This commitment is underscored by the publication of Explore Edmonton's Carbon Reduction Plan 2023, a comprehensive report outlining our strides toward achieving a 30 per cent reduction in corporate emissions by 2035.

# FINANCIALS



# EXPLORE EDMONTON CORPORATION

## ANNUAL REPORT TABLES

### DECEMBER 31, 2023

#### Summary Financial Results for the Year ended December 31, 2023

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS	2023 Actual	2023 Budget	2022 Actual
City of Edmonton	16,743,000	16,743,000	18,843,000
External Revenues	67,602,773	69,747,000	52,679,661
	<b>84,345,773</b>	<b>86,490,000</b>	<b>71,522,661</b>
Operating & Program Expenses	85,750,200	91,689,682	68,933,611
Operating surplus before amortization & interest	<b>(1,404,427)</b>	<b>(5,199,682)</b>	<b>2,589,050</b>
Net Amortization	599,525	404,342	803,264
Non-opex : Loss on Disposal	1,712,824	-	-
Interest on long-term debt	138,081	-	149,028
Interest expense	1,562,365	-	-
	<b>4,012,795</b>	<b>404,342</b>	<b>952,292</b>
Net surplus (deficit) for the year	<b>(5,417,222)</b>	<b>(5,604,024)</b>	<b>1,636,758</b>

## EXPLORE EDMONTON CORPORATION ANNUAL REPORT TABLES DECEMBER 31, 2023

DIVISIONAL RESULTS	Edmonton Convention Centre	EXPO Centre	Destination Development & Marketing	Venue Management & Sustainability	Community Initiatives & Agriculture	Edmonton Research Park	Shared Services	2023 Total
City of Edmonton	430,049	-	9,319,410	813,463	(556,320)	26,301	6,710,097	16,743,000
External Revenues	15,309,580	20,212,351	8,450,178	1,247	21,964,666	33,522	1,631,229	67,602,773
	15,739,630	20,212,351	17,769,588	814,710	21,408,346	59,823	8,341,326	84,345,773
Operating & Program Expenses	15,739,630	19,728,004	17,769,588	814,710	21,408,346	59,823	10,230,099	85,750,200
Operating surplus before amortization & interest	-	484,346	-	-	-	-	(1,888,774)	(1,404,427)
Net Amortization	95,690	449,984	-	-	6,391	-	47,461	599,525
Interest on long-term debt	-	-	-	-	-	-	138,081	138,081
Non-opex : Loss on disposal	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,712,824	1,712,824
Interest expense	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,562,365	1,562,365
	95,690	449,984	-	-	6,391	-	3,460,730	4,012,795
Net surplus (deficit) for the year	(95,690)	34,363	-	-	(6,391)	-	(5,349,504)	(5,417,222)

# EXPLORE EDMONTON CORPORATION

## ANNUAL REPORT TABLES

### DECEMBER 31, 2023

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION	2023	2022
<b>ASSETS</b>		
Current Assets	26,619,435	25,252,970
Long-term Assets	6,907,218	5,966,713
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>33,526,653</b>	<b>31,219,683</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
Current Liabilities	26,004,344	20,369,132
Long-term Liabilities	5,794,659	3,705,679
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>31,799,003</b>	<b>24,074,811</b>
Share Capital and Net Assets		
<b>Share Capital</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>1,727,550</b>	<b>7,144,772</b>
<b>Total Liabilities, Share Capital and Net Assets</b>	<b>33,526,653</b>	<b>31,219,683</b>



**EXPLORE  
EDMONTON**