



MEMBERS MEETING

Tuesday, January 14, 2024

3:00 PM

Location: Virtual

<https://zoom.us/j/99822411314>

MINUTES

Attendees :	Chair Brett Walker, Vice-President David Green, Executive Director Jean Hébert, Andre Albi Netto, Christian Wolters, Conor Duffy, Elvi Cal, Hugo Rocha, Howard Herman, Ines Almeida Garrett, Laura Nesteanu, Leanne Melissa Haus, Lisa Lau, Lynda Falcone, Almeras Marine, Paul-hus Melanie, Maurizio Mazzola, Oliver Weibel, Paola Briata, Peter Lacy, Robert Cole, Swagat Pandya, Susan Sanderson, Tony Saunders Tony,
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1. Chair opening remarks.

Brett Walker opened the meeting by welcoming all and appreciating everyone attending. He referred to the material and the numerous topics that must be covered today. Among them, the 2025 Business Plan, a required approval to move forward with an update of an economic impact analysis, that will follow the ones we did in 2021 and 2023, so every two years. USTOA is doing the same and just released their 2024 analysis with just over \$24 billion worth of revenue. The executive committee has put forth a proposal to hire a third party with a budget of \$15K to conduct the survey and the analysis. This analysis is critical to any advocacy we do.

The Chair also reported on the great success this past year of our first out-of-country meeting in the beautiful countryside of Alentejo, Portugal, and with the amazing work by Ines Almeida Garrett from Tourism Portugal. He added that out-of-country meeting is a great opportunity to discover beautiful part of the world but also for our relationship and networking between members. He mentioned that we are currently planning the 2025 out-of-country symposium, which will be hosted by Tourism Switzerland, and invited Oliver Oliver Weibel, Director Canada and Head of Trade Relations North America for Switzerland Tourism. Oliver said he is working and negotiating with three destinations, one in the French part being Geneva, with Interlaken and Zurich. I will include cultural sites, snowy village to visit, mountain areas where we will have the meetings with partners. The dates would be from 7th of December to the 12th, departing the 13th. It's a period for Christmas markets, ski, etc.

The Chair concluded, that's a work in progress, but put those dates in your calendar.

2. Agenda approval.

Unanimously approved.

3. Minutes from previous meeting approval.

Approval of the last meeting's minutes couldn't be provided for technical problem and the approval is deferred to the next meeting.

4. Reports:

a. Chair's report – Please refer to his opening remarks.

b. Treasurer's report –

The Treasurer was not able to attend the meeting, so no financial update or report were presented. The Executive Director provided a draft of the 2025 Budget Forecast for information, which is attached to these minutes.

c. Executive Director's report

The Executive Director, Jean Hébert, provided a brief review of the past year, accomplishments, activities, and progress made to build a stronger Association, more dynamic, more visible and more efficient for its members. Events like the out-of-country symposium in Alentejo provided an opportunity to build relationship and become a strong voice in the travel industry.

He mentioned four newsletters, several press releases, and information material provided to members on issues related to regulations in Ontario and regarding the lack of progress following the recommendation by the Auditor General to the government of Ontario to proceed with a comprehensive review of the Travel Industry Act.

He reported on the interest of many tourist offices from several countries who are considering joining CATO. Six executive meetings held, one full day strategic planning session, two members' meetings. He thanked the executive committee members, Brett, David, and Rick for their dedication, support, and guidance to his work, which is sometime more than part time.

A social gathering was well attended in August, and we plan to replicate it in June 2025. He also mentioned his participation at the TICO's AGM and attended two meetings of the new TICO Industry Advisory Council of Ontario (IAC). This IAC still must demonstrate its efficiency, considering it mainly comprises individuals with a considerable learning curve before understanding the bigger picture of the whole industry. To overcome this problem, apart from IAC, he agreed to a quarterly meeting with the TICO's CEO, ACTA and OMCA to address any specific issues and concerns from the three associations.

We have had very collaborative meetings with ACTA, met with government representatives in the ministry and minister's office, and developed avenues of partnership with USTOA. We have held meetings and organized a webinar on sustainability and animal welfare protection. We have also worked on some issues one about advertising compliance with laws and regulations that will be presented later. The last thing he mentioned is the website, for which some work has been done, but even more is to be done next year.

David Green appreciated the knowledge and expertise of the executive director representing CATO's interest with stakeholders, especially with TICO and government.

5. 2025 Business Plan and Activities.

The Executive Director presented a summary of the 2025 Business Plan and activities, which had been sent in advance. The document is also attached to the minutes. He stressed CATO's advocacy role.

In the document he referred to the mission and vision of CATO, which are to be formally approved at a next meeting.

He enumerated some activities that are planned and for which more details will follow shortly with dates. As part of the 2025 Plan, he mentioned the following: social and educational partnership events, offering partnership in road shows, the economic impact analysis (EIA) in the Fall, the out-of-country meeting, the social event in June, the advocacy work, support to members on sustainability tourism development, improve visibility and networking, CATO's visibility strategy to be present on LinkedIn for information purposes and the promotion of our members' company, a newsletter to members every two month, professional development based on identified needs and members' requests.

About the administrative side of the plan, he mentioned the goal to increase membership, the improvement of some internal documents and policies, and a survey to members to get feedback and input on their expectations.

The Executive Director reinforced the need to proceed every two years with the EIA with the members' approval given it's one of the most significant expenses in the 2025 budget. He reiterated the need to be more active in our advocacy role to promote efficient legislation and regulations to reduce red tape and cost for the industry. The reference to a long-term goal about a certification program in sustainability, will have to be revisited and approved by the members.

In conclusion, he invited the members to share with him any comments, ideas, suggestions, or concerns at any time and about what your association can do for you.

David Green noted that during the executive committee's meeting to review the 2025 Plan, a primary focus was on enhancing how we serve our members. The goal is to increase CATO's appeal and establish it as a trusted and endorsed organization. Based on this initiative, efforts will be made to refresh the CATO brand. Members are encouraged to get more involved, as we anticipate an exciting year ahead.

The Chair reminded us that in 2023, based on the EIA of CATO members, we generated \$9 billion in revenue and economic impact. Compared with USTOA, which is 10 times our population, they show \$24 billion in revenue in 2024.

Brett Walker moved a motion to proceed with the economic impact analysis for the year end of 2025, seconded by David Green.

The motion is carried unanimously.

6. Membership renewal

The Executive Director presented the new fee structure for 2025, which includes a slight increase in fees in all categories. He informed that the renewals will be sent out next week. A new category has

been added to encourage start-up companies to join CATO, with a fee of \$250 in their first two years in business.

It was mentioned by the executive members, David and Brett, that the fees going up a little bit, are still significantly lower than what they were pre-pandemic, and we do more.

7. Revised Bylaws

A revised version of the bylaws was sent in advance and tabled for further review by the members before being submitted for approval at the next meeting. The objective is to provide more time for the review and comments. A final version will then follow.

The current changes are considering modernization but also in regards of the new membership structure including a new category for start-up businesses. There is some fine tuning before approval and more time to provide any comments to the Executive Director before approval.

8. Code of Ethics Proposal

For members' approval, a new code of ethics was proposed and tabled by the executive committee that each member could be asked to sign up for becoming a CATO member. The reason is simple: showing more professionalism as we strive to build our reputation. The code has been submitted for review and questions and each member can provide comments to the executive director.

The executive committee strongly believed that a code of ethics is needed and that we all stand behind it. If we want to improve our association brand with “endorsed and trusted”, we need to stand behind something, and that’s where a code of ethics gets its reason.

9. Advertising-related breach

The Chair Brett Walker introduced the issue saying we all agreed for years on a certain set of rules that we all need to play by. There should be a fair level playing field regarding how we all operate within a very competitive market. A copy of a letter regarding a breach under the Competition Act and TICO Regulations has been provided for your reference and your understanding of the situation. The letter is a culmination of a lot of conversation by the Executive Committee. The letter has been prepared by our law firm Stikeman Elliott who strongly supported our action in that matter.

David Green added the fact that this situation is well known in our industry and constantly raised by BDMS in their conversation.

The letter signed the Executive Director and shared with the members speak by itself and represent a fair process in acting and asking the company for immediate corrections, instead of submitting a formal complaint to the Competition Bureau and to TICO. We have been fair and reasonable in terms of bringing that matter to the attention of the head of the company across North America. A deadline has been set for their response to our request, and we’ll take it further in we do not receive satisfaction by the 24th of January. It is hoped that CATO’s action will be sufficient to correct this situation.

The Executive Director mentioned this matter has also been discussed with ACTA CEO.

No matter what will happen, although it's not part of our role to police the activities in the industry, CATO with your support will continue to monitor the situation.

10. Other matters: Open for discussion

Melanie Paul-Hus from Atout, France, introduced herself as a new member. This was her first participation in the CATO members' meeting. She commented on the revised bylaw well written and appreciated the new code of ethics integrated into our business. She also appreciated the invitation to members to work on specific partnerships. The information provided about the advertising-related breach is relevant to us she said, and asked to be informed of the answer from the company.

Following Oliver's announcement that Switzerland will host the next CATO out-of-country symposium, she said it maybe a possibility to host in France in the future. She finally informed of a roadshow in February where CATO is welcomed to participate.

Someone praised CATO's code of ethics and its actions promoting fairness in the industry, noting that many other companies engage in unfair practices. The Executive Director responded that while CATO can investigate specific situations, our primary role is not to police the industry. CATO VP concluded that there are serious and obvious situations where we couldn't do anything. We followed a rigorous process, documented it, and, after deep analysis, decided to act. This is about protecting the sector and making sure that we, as an industry, aren't impacted by practices that are not fair. Others also provided support to CATO's action about blatant issues like the one reported today.

The issue of visas in the EU was discussed, but no serious concerns were raised at this time. The process appears to be quite smooth. Andre Netto from Visit Brasil also reminded that the visa for Canadian citizens to travel to Brasil will be in effect again as of 10th April, postponed from last year. He added that they are making pressure to extend the visa waiver, but so far it comes back for Canada, US and Australia on April 10th.

The executive director ended the meeting, encouraging everyone to keep in touch and share any important matters with him.

11. Adjournment.

The Chair expressed gratitude to everyone for attending and officially adjourned the meeting at 1:15 PM.