



# ONTARIO NONPROFIT NETWORK

## **Governance of the Ontario Nonprofit Network**

*November 23, 2009*

The Ontario Nonprofit Network is a network of networks that helps to build communication and collaboration among nonprofit organizations working for the public benefit in Ontario. ONN is seeking to **build a coordinated voice that is better able to advocate for the needs of the sector**. We believe that when the sector is better connected (the Network), we will start to discover the opportunities for collaboration (in constellations) that will lead to the sector being able to take action to effect changes that will benefit nonprofits in Ontario.

### **ONN works to:**

- **Build communications across sectors through such vehicles as our website and e- news.**
- **Encourage cross-sector relationships by hosting sector-wide meetings and preparing reports on sector trends.**
- **Create the conditions for emergence by encouraging leadership and building sector ownership in the Network.**
- **Move to action by facilitating constellations or issue-focused working groups.**

Groups become involved with ONN because they share a common goal to foster a more resilient public benefit (NPO) sector that is able to respond to issues and strategically move them forward in order to better serve the needs of Ontario's citizens.

## **Strategic Plan and Policy Priorities**

The ONN strategic directions and work plans will provide a high level course of action to guide the work of the ONN. The Steering Committee will facilitate, through the convening of a sector-wide consultation process, the broad involvement of the sector in priority setting. This process will result in more clearly defined priorities. ONN will engage with Network Partners, Advisory Council members, constellation participants and others on an ongoing basis to ensure ONN remains responsive to emerging issues.

## **ONN and Sector Policy Positions**

ONN works to build as broad a consensus as possible among various parts of the sector and communicates across and between sectors to build mutual understanding.

ONN constellations will prepare expert materials that reflect a broad consensus on issues and share them broadly with the sector for their use.

Constellations bring together a cross section of participants and specialized experts who work together to formulate positions on issues. These positions can be tested with Advisory Council members and others to ensure the varying perspectives of the sector have been considered. ONN will strive to find broad consensus on policy issues and where differences of perspectives are significant ONN documents will identify the variety of opinions.

ONN policy documents and advisories will be circulated to the sector to enable as many public benefit organizations as possible to comment and actively participate in shaping the regulatory and policy environment in which they work. When submitted to government and others, ONN policy documents will be identified as the best thinking of the ONN constellation and the ONN collaborative process.

## **. Governance Structure**

### **The Network**

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The Network is a cross-sectoral, affiliation of nonprofit organizations (NPOs), umbrella organizations, and those supporting public benefit in Ontario. The Network is first and foremost a conceptual and electronic embodiment of connections that enable communication and coordination across sectors — a network of networks working for the “public good”.

Elements of the Network that plan and take action are the constellations (action groups), the Steering Committee and the Secretariat- all of which connect across the range of nonprofits in the province.

## The Steering Committee

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The Steering Committee is the coordinating body that supports the overall Network by providing communications and developing a shared and coordinated vision and voice. It also 'holds' the model and plays a role in incubating the work of the constellations - building a stronger voice for the nonprofit sector in Ontario.

The Steering Committee is responsible for setting strategic directions, monitoring the overall health of the Network, and aligning constellations to effectively and efficiently meet the Network's goals. Members of the Steering Committee are stewards of the public benefit sector and the work that is being undertaken in relation to the sector. It is not representative of their organization's or sub-sector's particular interests.

- Potential Steering Committee members are identified in one of two ways:
  1. People are invited to sit on the Steering Committee when they have demonstrated an interest and commitment to the work of organizing the sector, when they are respected thought leaders in their field, and when they are willing to dedicate time to serving in this capacity.
  2. People have expressed an interest in sitting on the Steering Committee, and they also meet the criteria above.
- The existing Steering Committee decides whether to invite a new member to join.
- It is anticipated that the Steering Committee membership will rotate over time bringing in new leadership on a regular basis. Terms are for three years, and are renewable. For ease of coordination, the Steering Committee will ideally have approximately 12 members.
- The Steering Committee is responsible for making decisions regarding the work, direction and development of the Network as a whole, maintaining primary responsibility for the broad spectrum of projects and activities. It approves but does not direct the work of the constellations.
- The Steering Committee will be responsible for the approval of new constellations, ensuring they have their terms of reference and meet the objectives and mission of ONN. The Steering Committee will ensure there is ongoing communication among constellations, and to ensure efficiency and coordination among constellations. If there is any need for support from the Secretariat, those terms shall be clarified as well.
- The Steering Committee will have a subcommittee that oversees the work of the Secretariat.

## Network Partners

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Network Partners include any public benefit nonprofit group or umbrella group, as well as others with similar goals (government, consultants, and other individuals in the sector). All are committed to, and participate in, the shared goals of building a more coordinated and resilient nonprofit sector in Ontario. Network Partners share three characteristics:

1. They have chosen to join the Network by listing their names and organizations on the ONN web site.
2. They receive ONN's e-newsletter that keeps the sector informed of cross-cutting issues.
3. They share the common value of wanting to strengthen and improve the sector.

Constellation members will be recruited from ONN's Network Partners.

## ONN Advisory Council

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- The Advisory Council is composed of 50-150 individuals with strong strategic skills and a keen interest in the well-being of the nonprofit sector. They will be from inside or outside of the NPO sector.
- The Council will be composed of regional participants (large urban, small cities, rural, northern) and sectoral leaders (arts, social services, environmental, cultural...) from a range of organizational sizes (small, medium and large groups), as well as individuals who have demonstrated a keen and consistent interest in the betterment of the nonprofit sector in Ontario.
- ONN will strive to integrate diverse perspectives within the Advisory Council. The intention is not to create a representative model, but rather, a diverse and energetic one.
- The Council's purpose is multi-faceted: to identify key issues to bring to ONN's attention; to provide an online 'early response' group to test and evolve ONN and its constellations' policy positions; and to move issues forward locally and provincially where there is no existing ONN policy clarity.
- The Council will be, primarily, an online e-mail list that is able to provide feedback and commentary in response to the work of the constellations.
- Council members will, when it makes sense, take action to move issues forward at a policy level, and will be a first line of engagement for advocacy on behalf of the sector through the constellations and in their work as individuals.
- Council members will link their own network into ONN and act as a feedback loop to ONN.

- ONN, resources permitting, will seek to convene this group on a regular basis (not more than once per year) for the purposes of building social capital in the sector and in order to strategize the work of the sector.
- A Council member is not obligated to be active on every issue, but it is hoped that the issues being presented by the constellations will be of sufficient interest to engage the Council.
- Councilors are expected to serve a 3-year term renewable upon invitation from the Steering Committee

## Constellations

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ONN is applying an innovative approach to organizing itself. Inspired by complexity theory, social networking and open systems thinking, the model emphasizes the role of small, self-organizing action teams of members working together on a particular task or issue. These issues or ideas beg action and create a driving energy.

Constellations can be formal projects, emergent initiatives, or working groups that drive particular aspects of the Network.

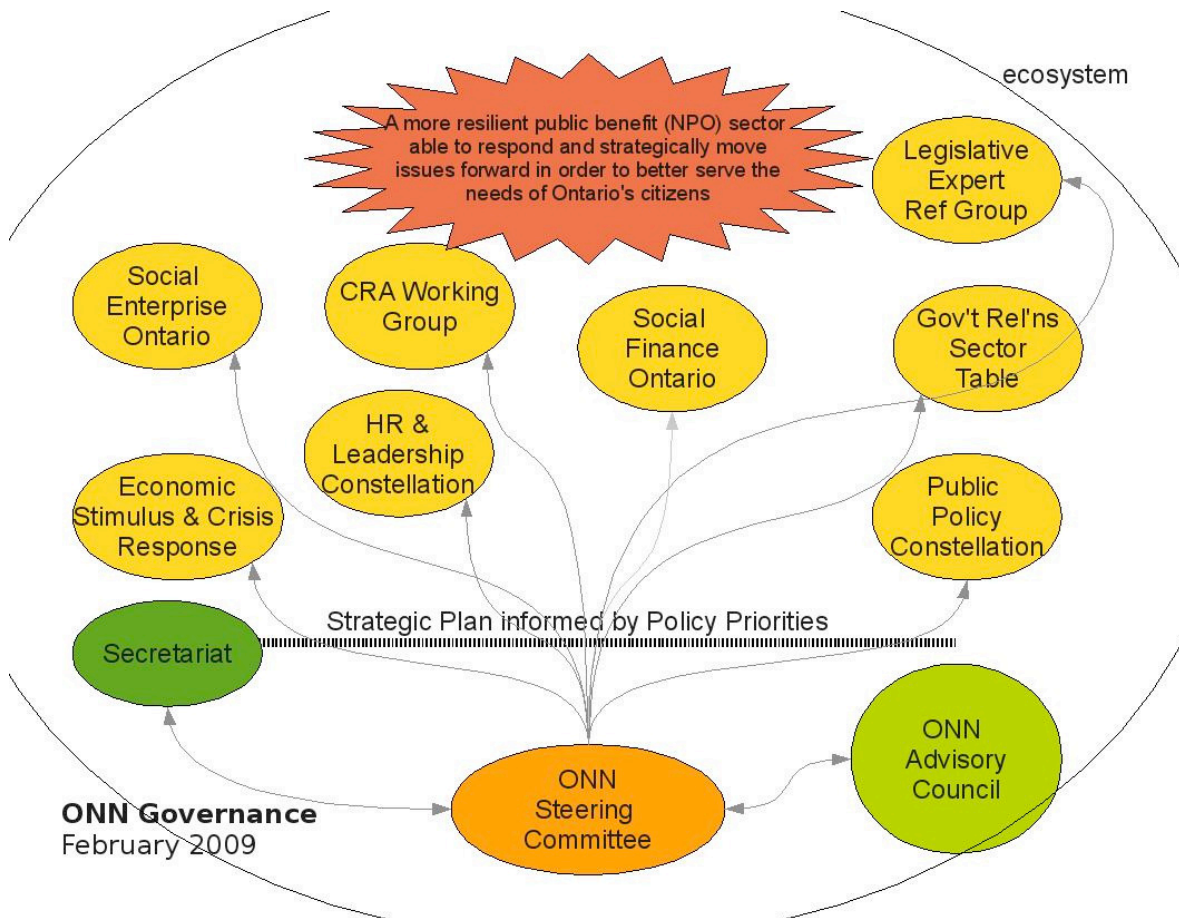
Members come together based on their own interests and assets, which usually ensures that it's the 'right' partners at the table. This element of self-interest ensures high levels of contribution and participation by the partners. The model is designed explicitly to harness this energy and self-interest.

Constellations:

- Encourage insightful responsiveness and initiative;
- Provide a permeable way for groups to engage and disengage based on their interests and assets;
- Facilitate work that is relevant to the needs of the community. Collaborations employ an activity-led approach where work is “action-focused,” as the model flexibly responds to the energy of the group. If there is no energy to work on a project, the project will end;
- Have leadership that is determined by who has the energy, fit and initiative to undertake the work;
- Builds on competencies and assets of the members, and harnesses that capacity on behalf of the larger sector; and,
- Where possible, constellations will work to provide the resources for their own efforts.

The biggest strengths of this model are that it is built around the natural energy flow of a group, and that it self-regulates – when an issues ceases to be current or worth working on, the constellation will stop without distracting or taking energy from the overall Network.

The following is an image of the current composition of ONN:



### Formation of a constellation

The operations of constellations:

- Will be initiated by the Steering Committee to address an identified cross sectoral priority, or
- A Network Partner initiative can come from the Network Partners or broader community and has cross-sectoral relevance. It must be approved by the Steering Committee to be an ONN constellation.

### Relationship of Constellation to ONN and Network Partners

- Each constellation will develop terms of reference for its group which must be approved by the Steering Committee.
- A constellation is responsible for reporting their activities to the Steering Committee and Secretariat on a regular basis so that the Steering Committee can play a coordinating role and work to leverage the skills, assets and expertise of the Network

for the constellation's benefit. Each constellation will identify at least one liaison person in the group to coordinate with the Steering Committee.

- Each constellation must keep minutes of its meetings and share these minutes openly with others through ONN's website.
- Regularly share relevant information/updates with the sector via the ONN website, the e-newsletter and possibly position papers (if appropriate).
- Be open to new members.

### **Operation of Constellation**

- Be self-governing and make its own decisions about how to work together (possible models are a coalition, a caucus or a separate organization).
- Self-directing as it relates to objectives, deliverables, budgets, contracts and administration of various projects.
- Able to utilize the time and expertise of the Secretariat, as negotiated with the Steering Committee.
- Self-driven and self-sustaining, with leadership from the sector.
- Compliant with ONN goals, values and operating procedures.
- Constellations with a policy or position-taking focus would be required to adhere to the decision-making process described under ONN Policy. Such initiatives would collaborate closely with the Secretariat to ensure that messaging from ONN is consistent and in alignment with the Network's overall strategic plans and values.

## **ONN Trustee**

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ONN is not incorporated and does not have charitable status. As such it requires an incorporated organization to act as trustee for grants and donations.

ONN's Steering Committee will negotiate with an organization to be the administering body for the work of ONN or on a project by project basis. The Trustee will be legally responsible for the administration of grants and donations, and will provide financial management for the earned revenues and other activities of ONN.

Reporting to the Steering Committee, the Trustee will provide administrative support and direction to the Secretariat and general support to ONN as a project of the administering agency, until such time that a decision is made to incorporate.

ONN will have a written agreement with the Trustee, including a method of resolving disagreements between ONN and the administering agency.

## The Secretariat

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The Steering Committee will engage staff for the Secretariat to attend to the affairs of the Network. The Secretariat supports the processes of the Network and will strike a balance between driving the group process forward and nurturing leaders from the partner organizations.

- The Secretariat is charged with providing network/governance support to the Steering Committee and with providing assistance (where requested) to keep constellation initiatives on track, including supporting stakeholders to follow-through on their various commitments, to the extent that resources allow.
- The Secretariat will be engaged by the Trustee to work for the Network.
- Financial management of ONN will be handled by the Secretariat in consultation with the Trustee and the Steering Committee subcommittee.

### **Consensus and Conflict Resolution**

The Steering Committee and the constellations will work to consensus; consensus being “a collaborative process where a decision has been developed in ways that seek to meet the needs and interests of all the group members.” In other words, the point where everyone can live with the final agreement without compromising issues of fundamental importance.

- If consensus cannot be reached, the Steering Committee and constellations will use standard Roberts Rules of Order.
- Members need not agree on all issues. The constellation model enables members to “opt-out” of a project or process at any time without offense.
- In light of the nature of collaboration and fiscal responsibility, the lead organization for the constellation will retain financial and legal control associated with any grant administration, if applicable. This organization will most often be the constellation leader.
- If a discrepancy or disagreement exists between any of the constellation members, a meeting will be held with the affected parties and the Secretariat, or other individual designated by the Steering Committee, in hopes of reaching a consensus on the issue. If funding is involved, the funding leader is responsible for financial and legal decisions, and will have veto power over such concerns affecting the project. If a solution cannot be negotiated the Steering Committee will ultimately make a decision for the benefit of the Network.