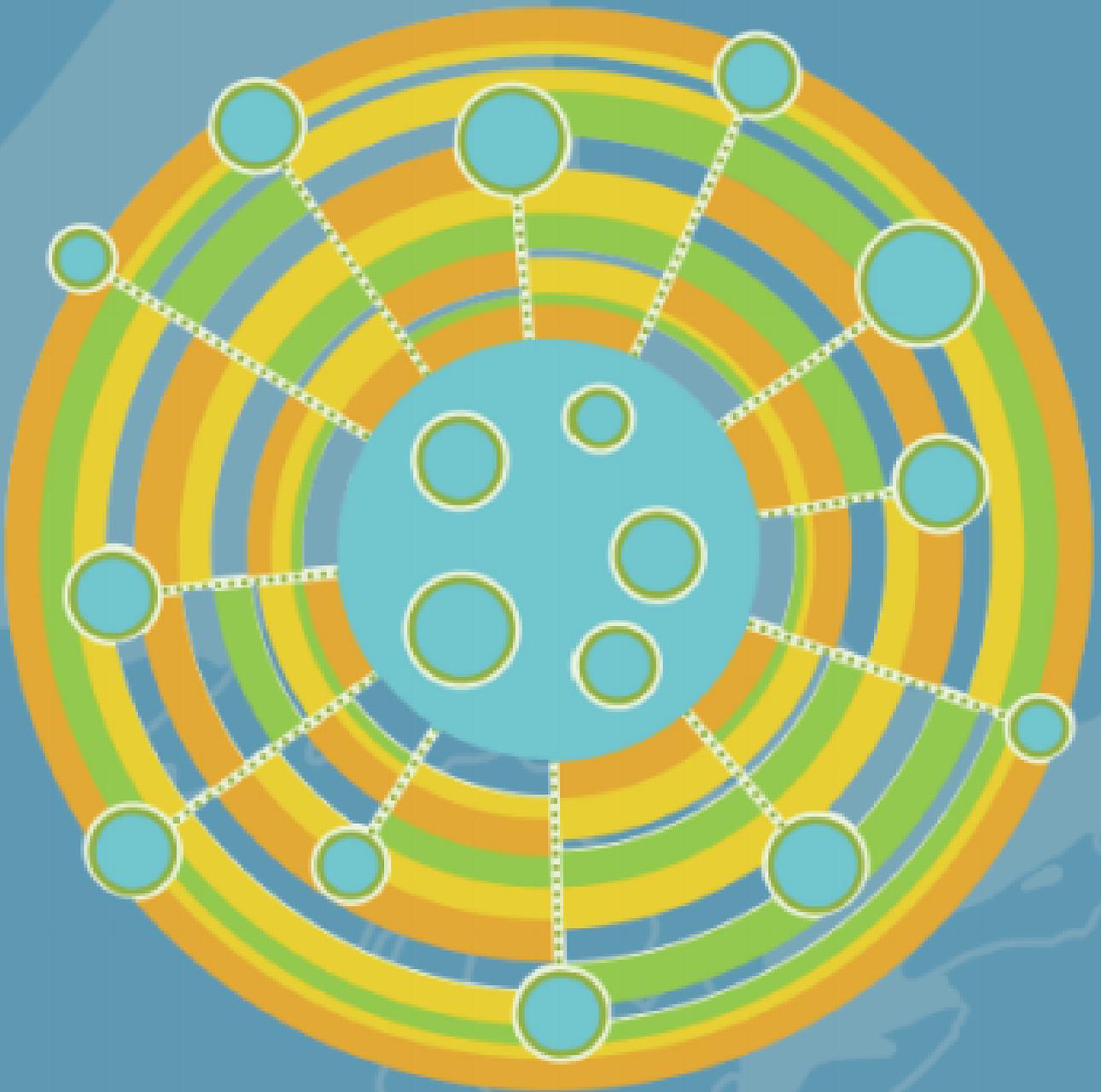


SHARED PLATFORMS: AN INTRODUCTION HELPING COMMUNITIES BUILD BACK BETTER



About ONN

ONN is the independent nonprofit network, with a reach of over 20,000, for the 55,000 nonprofits and charities in Ontario, focused on policy, advocacy, and services to strengthen Ontario's nonprofit sector as a key pillar of our society and economy.

ONN works to create a public policy environment that allows nonprofits and charities to thrive. We engage our network of diverse nonprofit organizations across Ontario to work together on issues affecting the sector and channel the voices of our network to government, funders, and other stakeholders.

Our vision

A Strong and Resilient Nonprofit Sector. Thriving Communities. A Dynamic Province.

Our mission

To engage, advocate, and lead with—and for—nonprofit and charitable organizations that work for the public benefit in Ontario.

Our values

Courage to take risks and do things differently. **Diversity** of perspectives, creativity and expertise to get stuff done. **Optimism** and **determination**. Solutions created by the sector, with the sector, for the sector. **Celebrating** our successes and **learning** from our experiences. **Strength** that comes from working **together**.

Introduction to shared platforms: Helping communities build back better

Almost every nonprofit got started when a community identified a need and did something about it. But it has become harder to start, operate and sustain an organization over time. This is why it is so important for established nonprofits and charities to support emerging grassroots projects through shared platforms. Some of these projects will grow into new organizations, while others will remain small and project-based. All will enrich our communities and allow for innovation and emergence of new ideas and new ways of doing things in our communities.

Four success stories that got their start on shared platforms:

- Pathways to Education was originally supported by Regent Park Community Health Center as a project to test a new approach to significantly increase high school completion rates for youth at risk.
- A coalition of Canadian churches, with the United Church of Canada as the shared platform, developed the private sponsorship program for refugees. It is a shining example of a community-driven initiative and enabled thousands of Canadians to sponsor and support Syrian and other refugees as they settled in Canada.
- Not Far From The Tree began by harnessing volunteers to pick fruit off urban trees, sharing the fruit three ways between the tree owner, the harvesters and food security organizations. It is now expanding into tree maintenance and pruning - caring for the urban orchard. It remains a project of the Makeway shared platform.
- Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN) began as an emerging network hosted by the Centre for Innovation (CSI) as a shared platform during its early years. CSI support was invaluable to ONN, allowing it to focus on building its provincial network.

In a shared platform, a more established organization “adopts” a new project, leveraging its existing governance and administrative infrastructure to free up the project leaders to concentrate on developing the initiative. The shared platform model offers an alternative for groups undertaking charitable and nonprofit activities that is more accessible, and is more time- and cost-effective than incorporating and registering as a new charity.

Shared Platforms: Making it easier for grassroots community projects and new leadership to emerge

Shared platforms are needed now more than ever. During COVID-19, grassroots networks have sprung up to support vulnerable neighbours and, with the increased recognition of systemic racism in our institutions and communities, shared platforms can play a role in supporting emerging Black and Indigenous leadership. Shared platforms can support a wide range of projects, community-led initiatives and new leadership to grow. For example:

- [Black Women in Motion](#) is a Toronto-based, youth-led project that empowers and supports the advancement of Black womxn and survivors of sexual violence. It works within an anti-racist, intersectional feminist, trauma-informed and survivor-centred framework to create culturally-relevant content, educational tools, healing spaces and economic opportunities for black woman. It is supported on The Neighbourhood Group shared platform.
- [Butterfly](#) is also on The Neighbourhood Group's shared platform. It was formed by sex workers, social workers, and legal and health professionals. It provides support to, and advocates for, the rights of Asian and migrant sex workers. The project is founded upon the belief that sex workers are entitled to respect and basic human rights. Butterfly asserts that, regardless of their immigration status, Asian and migrant sex workers should be treated like all other workers.
- [Earthling Art Collective](#) is working to deliver professional development and mentorship opportunities from people with lived experience for youth leaving care and the justice system in Thunder Bay. Programs take place in a safe space, enabling youth to develop healthy relationships, confidence and learn new skill sets. Shared platform support is provided by the Thunder Bay Art Gallery.
- [AAoodsokawin Aki](#) aims to strengthen Indigenous youth connection to their identity and culture through workshops, summer camps, and mentorships providing Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people living in Simcoe County, Beausoleil First Nation, Moraviantwon, AAmjiwnaang and surrounding communities. Shared platform support is provided by Children's Peace Theatre.

- Association Des Couturiers Immigrants Francophone d'Ottawa provides entrepreneurship training for low income immigrant parents and newcomers to allow them to become self-employed. It is based in Vanier, a neighbourhood in Ottawa's east end. Shared platform support is provided by Centre Des Services Communautaires Vanier.

Shared platforms are a key way charities support and nurture the next generation of sector leaders. It is not a growth strategy; indeed it is the opposite, as charities invest time and money to facilitate the renewal of the nonprofit sector and contribute to communities.

Build back better: Shared Platforms are a critical tool for rebuilding communities

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on communities. It has exposed systemic weaknesses in our economy, leaving millions unemployed or underemployed. Most at risk are youth, women and people at the low end of the wage scale or in the gig economy. Urban Indigenous, Black, and immigrant communities have been particularly affected by the pandemic. New social programs had to be introduced or re-tooled quickly because the social safety net has been frayed and lacking.

During the pandemic, the challenges faced by racialized and low income communities have become more prominent. In these communities, local leaders and groups are stepping up. However, many of these leaders will be new to navigating the complex process of grant funding. Traditional funders are nervous investing in new and inexperienced grantees who have the dual challenge of developing an organization while getting a new community program up and running. Shared platforms are a ready solution.

The ability and willingness of nonprofits to pivot and step up in times of need has never been so evident as during the pandemic. The June 2020 survey on the state of Ontario's nonprofits three months into the pandemic by the Ontario Nonprofit Network and the Assemblée de La Francophonie de l'Ontario found 45 per cent of respondents were actively engaged with mutual aid networks in their communities. These networks were sharing resources and information, providing mutual aid and programs to meet food security and supply challenges, as well as supporting vulnerable populations.

During the crisis, there have been major disruptions in nonprofit programs as seniors make up the majority of volunteers in many organizations- and are also the demographic most at risk of COVID-related health impacts. As a result, many organizations have experienced volunteer shortages. At the same time, thousands of volunteers, who did not see themselves as volunteers but rather “neighbours” or “community members”, stepped forward to form mutual aid networks. These networks were rapidly organized to deliver food and medicine to seniors and other vulnerable households, to create community gardens and address food insecurity, and to check in on neighbours who would otherwise be socially isolated.

In the short term, mutual aid groups have stepped up to assist their communities. Longer term, however, it is unclear whether these mutual aid networks will be sustained without the ability of charities to provide shared platforms. The shared platform model can help ensure these networks can be supported with small grants and inter-network resources like online platforms and learning tools, while limiting onerous reporting requirements.

In addition, the growing awareness of systemic racism and inequity faced by Black and Indigenous communities has highlighted the urgent need for support. Shared platforms provide a ready way for community leaders to receive help in accessing grant funds for their communities.

Building back better is of critical importance for the arts sector and sport and recreation organizations that have been brought to a halt during the pandemic. These organizations have suffered devastating losses of income and infrastructure. While across the nonprofit sector almost a quarter of organizations expect their situation to worsen, in the sport and recreation sector 40 per cent expect things to get worse, and 31 per cent of arts, culture and heritage organizations expect the same. As COVID-19 restrictions loosen, the arts and sports and recreation sectors will re-emerge and re-invent- they are essential to healthy communities. However, they will need the infrastructure support of shared platforms to rebuild their programs and services to meet community needs.

With attention turning to helping communities recover, the nonprofit sector is going to continue to play a key role on the ground. Nonprofits went into the COVID-19 crisis with their characteristic determination and optimism, but in many cases found they were ill equipped to deal with a multi-layered crisis that now threatens to last for years, counting not only the pandemic but the accompanying economic downturn and mental health crises expected. Nonprofits have responded with flexibility, ingenuity and perseverance as they meet unprecedented demands from their communities and they will need additional resources and tools to continue.

Nonprofits have proven themselves to be determined, resilient and creative in responding to impacts on communities and equity issues being further exposed. If they are to keep doing their work, nonprofits need a more enabling policy environment. Shared platforms are an essential building block in creating a more supportive environment for nonprofits and community members to lead the way and assist their neighbours and communities in the post-pandemic era.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Shared Platforms in the Public Benefit Sector: A Case for Support

It might seem like common sense for established charities to support and nurture emerging community initiatives, but current charity regulations make it extremely difficult and risky for charities. ONN has been advocating for shared platforms for a number of years because the benefits far outweigh the risks.

Nothing frustrates people more than encountering roadblock after roadblock of bureaucracy and administration when they are focused on addressing challenges or creating opportunities in their communities. The structures and processes to access funding, a myriad of accountability requirements, and the many restrictions involved with charitable registration and regulation are often opaque and counterintuitive.

For example, to become a charity, prospective applicants are now presented with 39 policy and guidance documents to prepare a charitable registration application. It can take applicants significant time to assemble the application material and a year or more to receive approval.

Shared platforms – An essential tool helping communities recover

Shared platforms leverage existing administrative capacity and governance to support new and emerging initiatives. They meet community, funder, and regulator needs.

Five reasons why charities should be enabled to provide shared platforms:

1. Maximize community efforts and donor impact and lower risk for funders. Funders and donors are reassured that the new and experimental project they want to fund will have sound management practices and regulatory compliance if they are part of a shared platform. Moreover, the new project can concentrate on developing the program. Everyone wins.

2. Maximize time and money by building on existing sector expertise. Many emerging leaders and innovative projects struggle because of the time, money, and expertise required to navigate funding and charitable regulation while trying to develop a new initiative.

3. Support innovation and experimentation for public benefit. Beginning as a shared platform means new programs can be field tested and later if the program is successful people can decide to establish it as a charity. The capacity for innovation and experimentation is greatly enhanced through lower opportunity cost.

4. Reduce the pressure on regulators and save them time. Registering charities and ensuring charities are compliant with regulation is very time consuming especially considering they are often very small (almost half of charities have annual budgets under \$30,000). Shared platforms are a great alternative to charitable registration and many programs may not ever need their own charitable registration.

5. Increase opportunities for equity and inclusion. Applying for grants and understanding all the complexities of charitable regulation is often incomprehensible to leaders from marginalized communities. Shared platforms have been very successful in allowing youth and local community innovators learn how to understand and work in the nonprofit sector.

Shared platforms effectively use existing community expertise and capacity to build the sector's ability to respond to community needs. The shared platform has demonstrated significant benefits to volunteers, funders, governments and communities as it has been developed and improved over the years.

Read more: [Shared Platforms in the Public Benefit Sector- A Case for Support.](#)

Appendix B

ONN policy recommendations for the federal government:

1. Modernize the legislative framework governing the charitable sector
2. Create a Guidance on demonstrating direction and control that supports modern methods of undertaking work.
3. Provide formal recognition of shared platforms

The objectives of such a guidance would be to include:

- Reducing unnecessary regulatory obligations: Balancing regulation with the ability to work in community.
- Ensuring substantive abuse of model does not take place: Focusing on learning and clarity, while providing consistent enforcement where necessary.
- Enabling the sector to do its work efficiently and in tune with modern ways of working: Supporting collaboration, co-creating and less hierarchical approaches which require new ways of keeping projects true to purpose. Hierarchical approaches that focus on control do not work in communities.

The guidance should also recognize the following:

- That an employer as a matter of law has direction and control over its employees and CRA will not attempt to look behind an employment relationship or try to determine whether the chain of supervisory command creates “direction and control”.

(This guidance may need to be modified if changes are made to the overall regulation of charities as per recommendation 1.)

Read more: [Shared Platforms: Towards an enabling policy and regulatory environment in Canada.](#)