

**Ontario Association
of
Youth Employment Centres
(OAYEC)**

Strategic Communications Plan

**Prepared by
Highwater Mark Strategy and Communications**

DRAFT 1.5

July 26, 2006

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Contents

1. OAYEC MISSION, VISION AND CORE FUNCTIONS REVIEW	3
2. COMMUNICATIONS GOALS.....	3
3. COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVES	3
4. KEY STAKEHOLDERS.....	4
5. COMMUNICATIONS SWOT ANALYSIS	4
6. GEOPOLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS	5
6.1 <i>Selecting Three Regions</i>	5
6.2 <i>Strategic Communications Map</i>	5
7. STRATEGIES AND TACTICS	5
7.1 <i>Recruit, train and organize key OAYEC Members</i>	6
7.2 <i>Empower OAYEC Business Clients</i>	6
7.3 <i>Create a rapid response team to work on LMDA issues</i>	9
7.4 <i>Key communications opportunities</i>	10
7.5 <i>Strategic Communications Survey</i>	12
7.6 <i>Localize the Political Engagement Process</i>	13
8.0 MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS	13
9. NEXT STEPS	14
10. EVALUATION	14
APPENDIX A: MESSAGES.....	16
<i>Key Messages</i>	16
APPENDIX B: CABINET MINISTERS IN GREATER TORONTO AREA.....	18
APPENDIX C: FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS	19
1) <i>Electronic Network Development</i>	19
2) <i>Develop internal OAYEC communications capacity</i>	19
APPENDIX D: RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS	20
1) <i>Human Resources</i>	20
2) <i>Training</i>	20
3) <i>Tools</i>	21
APPENDIX E: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS MAP	22

1. OAYEC Mission, Vision and Core Functions Review

Because this Strategic Communications Plan flows from OAYEC's Strategic Plan for 2004-2008, we begin with a review of OAYEC's top level vision, mission and core functions.

OAYEC Community Vision: Young people will have access to holistic services that assist them to reach their employment and life goals.

OAYEC Organizational Vision: OAYEC will be the "go-to" organisation for youth employment deliverers, media, and policy makers.

OAYEC Mission: OAYEC supports and advocates for a sustainable youth employment delivery network.

Strategic Communications is one of OAYEC's four Core Functions The organisation is dedicated to building and maintaining stakeholder relations through strategic communications focused on youth employment. These relations in turn support youth in reaching their employment and life goals through the development and support of a sustainable youth employment delivery network.

In response to these aspirations, this Strategic Communications Plan is designed to answer the questions of what to do, and how to do it within the context of current negotiations between the federal government and the province of Ontario on the transfer of resources and responsibilities for employment services as part of the Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs). OAYEC's interest is to ensure that youth employment programs remain a high priority during this transfer.

2. Communications Goals

To support and advocate for a sustainable youth employment delivery network in the context of the new Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs), this Plan recommends that:

- 1) **OAYEC becomes an opinion leader for developing and implementing youth employment programs and policies during the transition to the LMDAs.**
- 2) **The government adopts the best youth employment policies as defined by OAYEC** during the transition to the LMDAs and thereafter, and that those policies translate into programs that provide youth with the services they need to reach their employment and life goals.
- 3) **OAYEC members are supported in their efforts to implement youth employment programs post-LMDA implementation.**

3. Communications Objectives

To accomplish these communications goals, this Plan recommends that OAYEC:

- 1) **Develop and implement a consistent message** in all its communications about the role and ability of OAYEC members to shape and implement policies and programs for youth employment;
- 2) **Coordinate contact between OAYEC members and decision-makers** at local, provincial and federal levels to ensure that the best policies and programs for youth employment are implemented during the transition to LMDAs;
- 3) **Inspire business leaders served by OAYEC members and OAYEC members themselves** to engage with decision-makers at local, provincial and federal levels to ensure that the best youth employment policies and programs are implemented during the transition to LMDAs; and
- 4) **Build communications capacity in OAYEC members** so they can have a long-term influence on federal and provincial youth employment policies and youth employment programs.

4. Key Stakeholders

Who	Why
Hon. Chris Bentley, Ontario minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, MPP for London West	Primary Ontario decision-maker on this issue
Hon. Diane Finley, federal minister of Human Resources and Social Development, MP for Finley Haldimand–Norfolk.	Primary federal minister advising the minister of Finance and the Prime Minister on the progress and success of the program
Senior civil servants on the transition team	They recommend which practices are to be adopted under the LRMD
OAYEC Members	OAYEC members can provide on-the-ground support for the OAYEC position
Youth	Youth, in particular in the three key demographic regions, can provide important testimonials as to the success of youth employment programs
Members of the Public in London, in Haldimand-Norfolk riding, and in Toronto.	Finding a way to interest the public in this will be challenging, but even tacit support will be valuable.

5. Communications SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70 member organisations in all Ontario regions • Central office well-connected to members • Good access to clients success stories • A province-wide deliverer of youth services • Experienced in federal program delivery • Provincial government favours OAYEC programs • Access to Civil Servants • Effective leadership in Matt Wood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low public profile • Limited professional resources • Executive Director has limited time • Low office bench strength • Disjointed federal issue network • No media experience • No decision-making power • New to working at the political level • Lack of time by staff and volunteers
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LMDA negotiations open up new options • Large network with energetic human resources • Provincial election likely within 15 months • Federal election likely within 18 months • Provincial Shadow cabinet open to suggestions • High-profile issues such as apprenticeship and gang violence addressed by OAYEC success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial election could undermine OAYEC priorities • Federal program delivery competition • Private sector competition to OAYEC members • Some civil servants job losses a possibility • Some agencies may oppose OAYEC proposals for LMDA transfer

6. Geopolitical Considerations

Ontario is a major province and with 70 members, OAYEC is a significant organisation. But with limited resources at its disposal, OAYEC must focus its communications efforts to achieve the greatest results. This focus will be partly message-driven. Who delivers the message, how do they deliver it, and to whom are answered in **Section 7 Strategy and Tactics** and **Section 8 Key Messages** of this Plan. Where the message is delivered is also an important consideration. One of OAYEC's greatest strengths is its geographic diversity. If OAYEC chooses, it can use this strength to its advantage by concentrating its efforts between summer 2006 and fall 2007 on those Ontario regions that make the most political sense.

6.1 Selecting Three Regions

Region	Why Important	OAYEC Strategic Advantage
London Region	The provincial riding of London West is held by The Hon. Chris Bentley, minister responsible for the LMDA process and transition.	Board member Steve Cordes is based in London, and has a strong relationship with the minister.
Haldimand – Norfolk region on Lake Erie	This federal riding is held by The Hon. Dianne Finley, federal minister of Human Resources and Skills Development.	Several member organisations are located in and serve youth in this region.
Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and area code 905 region	The high concentration of federal and provincial seats, ten of which are currently held by provincial cabinet ministers, makes this an important region for OAYEC.	Many member organisations serve this region and head office is based in Toronto, giving OAYEC plenty of opportunity to communicate its message to decision-makers.

6.2 Strategic Communications Map

This map outlines where OAYEC should put its first priority for strategic communications, subject to acceptance by relevant OAYEC members. This does not mean that the rest of Ontario is not important, only that should a decision need to be made about where to allocate human or financial resources, priority be given to opportunities that fall within this region. The selection of these regions is iterative as the political landscape changes (i.e. elections, cabinet shuffles, OAYEC's key regions for communications will also change. **See Appendix D for the Strategic Communications Map.**

7. Strategies and Tactics

A variety of strategic communications options are available to OAYEC. **Section 7** outlines five main opportunities, detailing the day-to-day tactics required to execute these strategies. **Section 9** outlines the resources needed to operationally achieve these strategies.

The five main strategies are:

- 1) Recruit, train and organize key OAYEC members
- 2) Empower OAYEC business clients
- 3) Create a Rapid Response Team to work on LMDA issues
- 4) Seize key communications opportunities
- 5) Consider strategic communications in regular member surveys
- 6) Localize the political engagement process

7.1. Recruit, train and organize key OAYEC Members

A member-driven organisation, OAYEC must identify its key affiliates and work with them to refine and deliver to the identified decision-makers its central messages about the LMDA process. The Strategic Communications Map shows the location of OAYEC members within its key political region. OAYEC should solicit these members to determine the level of interest they have in participating in OAYEC's communications strategy. OAYEC should meet with those interested in participating to determine the details of how they will participate in the strategic communications plan (laid out below, sections 7.2-4), and the advantages of participating should be clearly communicated to them.

7.1.1 Elements of Training

Training could consist of:

- **Media training** – writing news releases, using earned media, writing letters to the editor, talking with the press etc.
- **How to work with elected officials and senior civil servants** – a government relations firm can be retained to do a half-day workshop on how to lobby, what the current rules are regarding lobby registration, and its implications on charitable budgets.

In this work, OAYEC MUST conform to federal and provincial lobbying regulations.

7.1.2. Organizing

To undertake this strategic communicants plan, OAYEC will require some basic organizing rules:

- **Clear, open communications between participating members and among OAYEC.** The development of a political correspondence protocol is required. Correspondence should be based on previously agreed key messages (see Section 8), and should be circulated for sign off by OAYEC members previous to delivery to decision makers.
- **Clear ground rules on OAYEC positions on issues and well established talking points** (See Section 8), and OAYEC's ask for "best possible programs for youth employment." and
- **Clear protocols for how OAYEC and its members share resources, profile, and credit** for policy and program "wins." One of the goals of this plan is for OAYEC to become an "opinion leader." To do that, it will require profile, built on quality communications attributed to the organization and its representatives. Where possible, OAYEC should share by-lines, profile and credit for media and policy victories with its regional members.

7.2. Empower OAYEC Business Clients

One of OAYEC's greatest assets is its members' relationships with local businesses who benefit from their services. These business clients could be encouraged to become powerful, effective spokespeople for the best possible policies for youth employment under the LMDA transition. There are two main subcategories for how OAYEC can work with its members' business clients. In both instances, OAYEC can play a convening, organizing and resourceing role, with the member organisations bring the needed social capital – the relationships – to the strategy. The two categories are:

- General Information and awareness, and
- Empowering businesses to take action.

7.2.1. General Information and awareness

OAYEC must rely on its members for access to their business clients, focusing on the key communications regions outlined above, for the circulation of material, survey's and requests for action. OAYEC's first priority for use for member databases should be to conduct an **online survey of business owners** about their knowledge of:

- OAYEC member priorities
- the LMDA process, services that members provide, and

- their willingness to become engaged in OAYEC business where it serves their mutual interest.

The advantages of this undertaking are:

Group	Advantages
Businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take responsibility and gain some control over programs that governments are developing to help meet critical employment challenges, such as apprenticeships.
OAYEC Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage the community social capital with decision-makers of business owners, and the pooled financial capital resources that OAYEC can provide. • Do together what cannot be done alone.
OAYEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage the community social capital with decision-makers of businesses and OAYEC members.

Survey results can be used to determine the level of interest in OAYEC’s strategic communications efforts, and to tailor future communications. OAYEC will work with its members to interpret the results of this survey.

To develop trust between OAYEC, its members and businesses, clear rules on how this list will be used will be necessary. Members will control access to their lists, and access will only be given by request.

Note: it is anticipated that even after the advantages are explained, some OAYEC members will be reluctant to provide controlled access to their business partners. This must not be allowed to become an obstacle. The goal is not 100% acceptance. Start with those member organisations that are willing to be “early adaptors” and let the others see the advantages of the program.

7.2.2 Empowering Business to Take Action

Regardless of the success of the efforts outlined above to inform businesses, OAYEC should also reach out to businesses in the key communications areas to find those owners and principals who share OAYEC’s concerns, and who are willing to partner with OAYEC to ensure its goals are met. Different strategies are needed for the London/Haldimand-Norfolk region and for the Greater Toronto Area.

7.2.2.1 London and Haldimand-Norfolk

A pool of key businesses in London (and some in London West if possible) and in Haldimand-Norfolk who have benefited from OAYEC members services should be identified. Their value to OAYEC’s strategic communications goals can then be evaluated on the following criteria:

- Benefits to the business of OAYEC members services (apprentice placement, wage subsidies)
- Relationship between OAYEC member and the owners or principals of the business
- Visibility of the business in its community
- Estimated receptiveness of the owners/principals to OAYEC’s strategic communications goals

An OAYEC member organisation with the best working relationship can approach the top-ranked businesses in each region to discuss OAYEC’s goals (see Section 8 - Possible Messages of this Plan). If the business owner or principal is receptive, he or she can be invited to a training session where OAYEC staff, member staff and other receptive local businesses can explain the program.

OAYEC can set up and support through its members a meeting between these business leaders and any provincial and federal ministers in their riding. The business owners should have a very clear idea of what to ask the Minister at these meetings, based on OAYEC’s view of best possible policies. An OAYEC representative should attend to provide support, and answer any specific questions of policy.

After the meeting, the business leaders should draft a letter to the minister and possibly a letter to the editor of relevant newspapers, thanking the minister for his or her attendance, briefly outlining what was said in the meeting, and describing actions to follow.

7.2.2.2. Greater Toronto Area

The GTA and Area Code (905) region requires a different approach than London and Haldimand-Norfolk. With ten MPPs cabinet ministers in the current government (see Appendix B), Toronto and its immediate surroundings provide a unique opportunity for OAYEC to connect with the government’s inner circle. This chart compares the GTA region with the London and Haldimand-Norfolk regions.

London and Haldimand-Norfolk	Greater Toronto Area
Are most likely interested in how OAYEC proposals impact provincial and/or federal programs first and foremost, and constituents secondly.	Will have less interest in the details of the program. They will be more interested in how their constituents will be served, and how it effects their own portfolio (see also Appendix B);
Are best approached by a combination of local representatives, with support from provincial body, such as OAYEC.	Are best approached by high profile members of their constituency, either from OAYEC member organisations, or from local businesses;
Interest in issue will be high	Generally will have a lower level of interest in this issue
Can have a high impact	Can have moderate to considerable impact (Appendix B) through the cabinet process, either by supporting a decision favourable to OAYEC’s interests or by not opposing that same decision.

As in the London and Haldimand-Norfolk regions, careful selection of five to seven high-profile, willing business owners who, along with member organisations, OAYEC board members and senior staff, could arrange a presentation to the Toronto caucus of the Liberal Party of Ontario, which will include members of the current cabinet. A request for this meeting should be made as possible after business leaders have indicated their willingness, as it will take three to four months to arrange. Follow-up contact should be made with each politician after this meeting.

7.2.2.3 General Approach to Business

An information package on how the LMDAs will change businesses’ relationships with apprentices and potential employees could be created by OAYEC for distribution through its member organisations to the 7,000 businesses they collectively serve. The package should include a “What You Can Do” section that will help business owners and principals to take action. These actions might include;

- Sending a post card, letter, fax or email to their MPP
- Calling by telephone or meeting face-to-face with their MPP
- Writing a Letter to the Editor of the local and regional newspapers
- Telling their friends about OAYEC members’ services

7.2.3 Working with the Opposition

Current (June 2006) polling shows that the current Liberal government enjoys a seven-point lead over the provincial Conservatives, and a 19-point lead over the NDP.¹ With just over a year to go before a

¹ SES Research poll, March 23, 2006. http://www.sesresearch.com/library/polls/POL_ONT-Feb06-T7.pdf. 500 Ontarians polled between March 5th and 8th, with survey results accurate +/- 4.5% 19 times out of 20.

provincial election, the closeness of the parties in support cannot be ignored. OAYEC should inform the Ontario Conservatives of their concerns about and priorities for the LMDA transition. The Ontario Conservative party likely will share many of OAYEC member's business client's concerns about shortages of skilled workers, and apprenticeship programs.

OAYEC need not dedicate the same level of resources to this effort as they to the meetings with government members, but the two Opposition parties should not be ignored. For example, the NDP can provide useful exposure in the Legislature should that be required. OAYEC should:

Review the current Conservative shadow cabinet (http://www.ontariopc.com/party_mpps.asp) to assess who might play a role on youth employment should the Conservatives form government; and

Request meetings with these MPPs and with the Training, Colleges and University critic (Cam Jackson, MPP for Burlington). As with members of the government, credible members of the business community should be invited to join OAYEC in these information sessions.

Contact with these MPPs should be encouraged In any OAYEC correspondence with businesses.

7.2.3 Contingency Planning

OAYEC has its ear to the ground on the LMDA transition process. At present, the situation is not a crisis. However, as the election approaches, if concerns are raised that OAYEC priorities for the LMDA transition are not being fulfilled, there may be a need for OAYEC to ramp up its contact with businesses to ensure that its voice continues to be heard. A second round of meetings, with a more urgent tone, should be considered if this situation occurs. Careful monitoring will ensure that OAYEC priorities are adopted during this process.

7.3. Create a rapid response team to work on LMDA issues

Whereas Section 7.2 of this Plan addresses how OAYEC can influence decision-makers in the political realm, Section 3 targets key stakeholders in the civil service. According to OAYEC staff and board members, as the Ontario and Canadian governments move towards implementation of the LMDAs, more opportunities exist for influence than OAYEC presently has the capacity to address. Additional human resources are needed, and a Rapid Response Team has been suggested to handle this.

The purpose of the Rapid Response Team would be to:

- 1) Take advantage of opportunities for input into the LMDA transition process that might otherwise be missed;
- 2) Influence the LMDA transition process to meet OAYEC member goals and objectives; and
- 3) Build a deeper pool of talent available to OAYEC as it undertakes its strategic communications.

The Rapid Response Team could be composed of four or five OAYEC members who have time, resources, interpersonal skills and interest in communications and media. These members should be drawn from regions that do not impede travel, to facilitate attendance at meetings with key civil servants. At least one or two should be from the key communications region. The team's mandate would be:

To proactively and reactively evaluate opportunities for input into various elements of the LMDA transition, and to serve as representatives of OAYEC and its members on teams, committees and processes to advance OAYEC's strategic communication goals and objectives.

Operational considerations necessitate that OAYEC ensure that:

- 1) Its Executive Director chair the team and OAYEC office provide support for team members;
- 2) A one-day team training session to cover key messages, the content of this Plan, a review of basic communication skills, and guidance as to what to expect in meetings with senior civil servants (this could be done in conjunction with other media training opportunities); and
- 3) Regular telephone conference calls with team members to scope new opportunities and report on the process of existing undertakings.

7.4. Key communications opportunities

A wide variety of key communications opportunities are available to OAYEC. Prioritising these opportunities should be based on the criteria that they:

- Advance OAYEC's strategic communications goals and objectives;
- Support OAYEC's members in the development of their communications skills;
- Are duplicable throughout the province, and for other future OAYEC undertakings; and
- Are affordable.

Five key communications opportunities are outlined in this section:

- 1) Grassroots media development
- 2) Youth Employment recognition awards
- 3) Earned media
- 4) Electronic network development
- 5) Regional and annual meetings

7.4.1. Grassroots media development

A grassroots media development program will:

- Support messages delivered by businesses to key decision-makers
- Support OAYEC priorities for the LMDA transition
- Be low cost to implement
- Be reproducible for other priorities at other times and across the province

More than 200 Ontario community newspapers enjoy broad circulation and high readership, and are always seeking local content. OAYEC can take advantage of this by connecting their members with local media, particular in the key communications region. This will ensure that the public in the regions outlined in Section 6 is aware of the importance of youth employment programs and the current transition to LMDAs, and that decision-makers are aware that their constituents care about this issue.

The simplest approach to take is to supply OAYEC members across the province with lists of daily and weekly community newspapers, and ask that they write Letters to the Editor of those papers incorporating the messages developed in this plan at a strategic time, or example when the papers carry a news item of a development on the LMDA front, or when OAYEC itself creates a news story.

The second part of this effort, which would greatly improve its impact, is if a local business that uses OAYEC member services could be coached to write a response extolling the virtues of OAYEC member's efforts, or the value of OAYEC strategic plan's goals and objectives.

Another opportunity for media development is for OAYEC members, business leaders and OAYEC staff to request editorial board meetings to position youth employment as an important issue in the run up to a provincial election.

A second option for this program is to purchase software that links a user with their local community newspaper through an online action centre. This software is available through Advocacy Online (www.AdvocasyOnline.ca) and can serve all OAYEC members, partner businesses and even youth in the effort to use grassroots media relations to OAYEC's advantage.

7.4.2 Youth Employment Recognition Awards

This strategy directly supports the work outlined in Sections 7.1 and 7.2 of this Plan. A Youth Employment Recognition Award would:

- **Provide a stage to recognize the efforts** of business, community organisations, OAYEC members and elected decision-makers;
- **Provide a powerful hook for local and provincial media** to cover OAYEC's goals and objectives;

- **Raise awareness of OAYEC** by its key stakeholders; and
- **Contribute to developing OAYEC** as an opinion leader.

Award programs have potential pitfalls of which OAYEC must be aware:

- **Presenting awards to businesses and elected decision-makers can be controversial** when there is not unanimity of agreement on their contribution towards achieving OAYEC goals;
- **Award programs can be expensive** to operate and to host; and
- **OAYEC must be impartial, transparent and non-partisan** when presenting awards.

A Youth Employment Recognition Award Program can be structured as follows:

- A committee of OAYEC members is formed to manage the awards, and select recipients
- **A call for nominations is made in which OAYEC members will be encouraged to participate**

The committee might consider nominations in the following categories:

- government agency
- elected official (federal)
- elected official (provincial)
- elected official (regional/local)
- community organisation
- OAYEC member
- business (large)
- business (small)
- individual, and
- lifetime achievement.

OAYEC coordinates media for the nominations, the award event, and follow-up, focussing on:

- Generating earned media for the nominations by linking the call for nominations to OAYEC's key messages for the current LMDA process, and future communications priorities;
- Feature coverage of nominees and winners by TV, radio, print media and electronic media

Award recipients should be briefed on OAYEC priority messages and encouraged to deliver them (this pertains to business, individual, community and OAYEC members only). OAYEC can participate in local awards, or host its own provincial awards program. This chart outlines some of the pros and cons of each:

Local	Provincial
<p><u>Pros</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support OAYEC members • Good support from local media • Opportunity to target local MPPs and MPs at the constituency level 	<p><u>Pros</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds OAYEC profile provincially • Opportunity to target key provincial and federal cabinet ministers, as well as local MPP and MPs • Good chance of getting provincial level media
<p><u>Cons</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlikely to attract Cabinet level attention • Does not build OAYEC profile 	<p><u>Cons</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be seen as undercutting local OAYEC member programs

7.4.3. Earned Media

Earned media is media that is that which is obtained free of charge through the press, on TV, and through electronic media. (Paid media, by contrast, is generally advertising or other purchased promotions.)

OAYEC has modest opportunities for earned media. Here are some tactics that OAYEC can employ to gain a reputation as a “go-to” source on youth employment issues:

- **OAYEC should develop a media list of** key media organisations and interested reporters interested in OAYEC’s issue. This list should be kept current, and when new OAYEC promotional material becomes available in any format, this media network should be notified;
- **Key media sources should be fostered** by providing access for reporters to OAYEC advisors, members, key businesses and researchers in the form of exclusive interviews;
- **OAYEC should set a 2006 target media goal** of having on hand several feature stories on the progress of the LMDA incorporating statements from prominent OAYEC members. Major media includes the large-circulation dailies (*Globe, Star, Post*) or major TV and radio stations. OAYEC could request editorial board meetings as a first step towards winning coverage of youth employment issues.
- **OAYEC should set a 2006 target of two to five stories** in community newspapers featuring OAYEC members. This should be pursued by developing the capacity of OAYEC’s members to advance stories to their local media markets using OAYEC’s research, findings, and materials. Here it is less important for OAYEC to be seen, than for OAYEC priorities to be disseminated.

7.5 Strategic Communications Survey

Each year OAYEC undertakes a survey of its member organizations. In 2006, OAYEC will focus on strategic communications. There are six areas of knowledge that OAYEC can query to evaluate its members ability to undertake elements of this strategic communications plan, and to gauge what its members require in order to build their communications capacity in the future. For each area of knowledge, suggested questions are provided.

Area of Knowledge	Suggested Questions
Political	<p>Do you have contact with your Member of Parliament or Member of Provincial Parliament on a regular basis?</p> <p>Have you attended an event when your MP or MPP has been present?</p> <p>How many times a year have you requested a meeting with your elected representatives to discuss youth employment issues?</p> <p>How aware is the senior leadership of, and supportive of, OAYEC’s government relations work (prompt with a series of sub questions on what OAYEC does, awareness of and support of)</p>
Business	<p>How many businesses, in addition to those who benefit from youth employment programs, are supporting your organization (i.e., on your board of directors, sponsors, donors etc)</p> <p>Would you feel comfortable asking business leaders in your region to help you deliver important messages about youth employment to decision makers in the provincial and federal government?</p> <p>What information and tools would you like from OAYEC to develop your relationship with businesses in your region (facilitation? Communications?)</p>
Message Development and Delivery	<p>OAYEC is considering developing a set of key messages around youth employment to be delivered to decision makers during the transition to the</p>

	<p>LMDAs. Would you be willing to help in the development of these messages?</p> <p>What do you think are the most important messages? (Provide 7-10 and ask for ranking)</p>
Awards	<p>Do you run a youth employment awards program?</p> <p>What connection does it have with local, provincial or federal politicians?</p>
Technical	<p>Do you have an electronic newsletter that is delivered to businesses in your region?</p> <p>Do you consider the development of contacts with businesses through electronic methods important? Why or why not?</p> <p>OAYEC would like to piggy-back on your efforts, while providing you with additional material to provide to your business constituents. Would you be willing to let OAYEC speak to your business community, through you, on occasion?</p>
Operational	<p>Do you have in house communications expertise? If so, what is that expertise? Media, online communications, editorial, message development, technical writing or other?</p>

What to do with the results? The answers to these questions can become a baseline for future evaluation of OAYEC’s success, in particular as it pertains to its fourth objective, to develop the communications capacity of its members. For 2006, the results of this survey can be used to provide important information regarding where OAYEC turns for assistance in implementing this communications plan. Those members who are politically active, know their business community, are keen to help develop and deliver messages, and have technical and operational capacity are high priorities for OAYEC.

7.6 Localize the Political Engagement Process

All politics is local. OAYEC is well situated to create influence at the local political level through this plan. OAYEC’s most important role is to ensure that those members who are willing to participate in the execution of this plan are well supported. The process of localizing the political engagement process is as follows:

- Gain knowledge of the local area, its politics and its people
- Evaluate the member capacity (see 7.5)
- Determine the availability of OAYEC support (i.e., how much of the Executive Director, or other staff time is available? Are there resources available?)
- Working with the local member, create a set of goals and objectives, based on those in this plan, for the member to work towards
- Ensure that the member has access to this plan and the resources that are mentioned herein
- Encourage the member to take ownership of the plan, and its results
- **Use the evaluation criteria in section 10 to measure process.**

It is important to remember that the businesses that OAYEC members serve are the most powerful delivery tool for OAYEC messages. While OAYEC members should not be discouraged from meeting with elected decision makers, businesses are by far the best method to deliver OAYEC’s message.

8.0 Message Development Process

How OAYEC develops its messages is almost as important as the message itself. A list of key messages for the LMDA process is outlined in the Appendices. OAYEC is willing to take a leadership role in the

development to these messages, balancing speed and responsiveness with engagement and consensus building. Below is a simple process for OAYEC to follow for developing messages on any provincial level policy.

- **Recruitment of a message development/communications team.** This could be as many as seven to ten people from OAYEC member organizations around the province. Given the above, at least two members of the business community that OAYEC serves be included in this group. These people will work with OAYEC staff to identify opportunities for proactively developing key messages for delivery through the OAYEC strategic communications plan.
- **Creation of a set of guidelines for message development.** These guidelines would be based on OAYEC vision, goals and objectives, along with the objectives of this plan. Message development will focus on the creation of short, simple, effective, positive and solution focused messages.

For each opportunity, messages will need to be based on existing and new OAYEC policies. If a communications opportunity arises, and OAYEC doesn't have a policy on the issue, then OAYEC staff and board and directors must work to develop one. OAYEC recognizes, however, that it cannot have a message for every opportunity. Its focus is based on the organizations goals and objectives.

Where required, use of an online survey tool (such as *Survey Monkey* or *Zoomerang*) could be employed to help members rank message priority and provide ideas for message development.

A writing team (which could overlap with the LMDA rapid response team) is then assigned to develop a draft of the key messages for each opportunity or issue. This team should be limited to three people.

Once satisfied, the communications team will circulate the draft messages to the OAYEC membership for reflection and comment.

OAYEC is moving towards the production of a "Key Messages Bulletin" that will be circulated internally throughout the organization's membership. Members will be invited to comment and discuss these messages on an internal e-bulletin board.

OAYEC views message development as an iterative process, where messages will evolve with its membership.

9. Next Steps

- 1) **Adopting this plan:** after feedback to the consultant has been incorporated to its satisfaction, the Board of the Ontario Association of Youth Employment Centres should formally adopt this plan.
- 2) **Prioritisation:** OAYEC's Executive Director, with assistance from the consultant and/or the communications team, must prioritize the elements of this Plan, based on available financial and human resources.
- 3) **Operationalisation:** depending on whether it retains a communications person on staff, OAYEC must integrate the strategies and tactics in this Plan into appropriate work plans.
- 4) **Developing OAYEC best possible policies for the LMDA transfer** should provide cogent arguments that can be used by all participating OAYEC members to explain the advantages of the best possible youth employment programs.
- 5) **Review and make mid-course corrections:** Highwater Mark is committed to a nine-month review of this Plan with OAYEC's Executive Director and communications team. Mid course corrections can be made at any time during the execution of this Plan, but especially following the nine-month review.

10. Evaluation

Evaluation of this plan is ongoing and iterative. It takes place at various levels throughout the plan. OAYEC has developed communications goals and objectives for itself. At least once a year, OAYEC staff

should measure its progress by assessing its progress against its goals, using some of the included questions:

- 1) **OAYEC becomes an opinion leader for developing and implementing youth employment programs and policies during the transition to the LMDAs.** Are the media turning to OAYEC for comment on youth employment stories? Do government decision makers routinely seek out OAYEC's input into youth employment related issues? Do others in the employment community turn to OAYEC for ideas, leadership or advice on youth employment issues?
- 2) **The government adopts the best youth employment policies as defined by OAYEC during the transition to the LMDAs and thereafter,** and that those policies translate into programs that provide youth with the services they need to reach their employment and life goals. Over the course of the transition to the LMDA's, was OAYEC satisfied with the level of attention given to youth employment? Were provincial agencies distracted by adult employment programs?
- 3) **OAYEC members are supported in their efforts to implement youth employment programs post-LMDA implementation.** To what degree are OAYEC members playing a role in communications in their communities post LMDA implementation?

For each objective, questions are included:

- 1) **Develop and implement a consistent message in all its communications** about the role and ability of OAYEC members to shape and implement policies and programs for youth employment: was there message consistency between OAYEC members and OAYEC staff?
- 2) **Coordinate contact between OAYEC members and decision-makers at local, provincial and federal levels** to ensure that the best policies and programs for youth employment are implemented during the transition to LMDAs: to what degree were OAYEC members able to meet with and influence decision makers on LMDA, and youth employment issues?
- 3) **Inspire business leaders served by OAYEC members and OAYEC members themselves** to engage with decision-makers at local, provincial and federal levels to ensure that the best youth employment policies and programs are implemented during the transition to LMDAs; was OAYEC able to recruit 5-7 business leaders in its three target communications regions to under take these tasks?
- 4) **Build communications capacity in OAYEC members** so they can have a long-term influence on federal and provincial youth employment policies and youth employment programs: compared to August 2006, what is OAYEC members communications capacity? See survey questions for examples of how to answer this question.

Appendix A: Messages

OAYEC's message development work through the Job Connect Coalition is heavily weighted towards supporting the Job Connect program. However, this Job Connect message set does not fully reflect the direction suggested in Sections 2 and 3 of this Plan. To better reflect OAYEC's need to speak to the best possible polices and programs for youth employment, Job Connect Coalition messages have been adjusted in subtle but important ways. These will allow OAYEC messaging to include the best of the Job Connect message set, but not be limited to it.

Key Messages

a) *“Build on the Job Connect platform to build a world-class system of labour force development.”*

- Under Job Connect, no client is turned away
- Supports program integration
- Three tiers of service
- Add to Job Connect to make the program even better for Ontario's labour market.

b) *“OAYEC Member agencies deliver excellent results for all Ontarians.”*

- Real results measured and verified
- Job connect is highly accountable
- Demonstrated continuous improvement over seven years
- OAYEC and its members can help build on this success for the LMDAs.

c) *“Business needs the best possible programs to ensure consistent, effective labour force development during the LMDA transition.”*

- 7000 business across Ontario regularly use OAYEC services
- They have been well served through Job Connect
- OAYEC members will continue to improve their services to build on Job Connect success

d) *“Ontario has invested millions in Job Connects capacity and infrastructure. Build on this base for the LMDA.”*

- Proven infrastructure already in place
- Service Canada and Ontario Works connections
- Job Connect can grow
- Job Connect adapts to government priorities
- Creating community-based hubs
- Capacity and willingness to grow and improve

e) *“OAYEC members respond to local conditions. They are a part of the communities that they serve, with many strong relationships with stakeholders.”*

- 7000 employers engaged each year
- Rooted in the community
- Boards of directors from community leaders
- Community-based all across Ontario

f) “OAYEC and its members are willing to take leadership roles in the planning process.”

- OAYEC wants to see the best policies and programs in place as the province transitions to the LMDA.
- OAYEC is willing to set forward to help ensure Ontario maintains the best of Job Connect, while ensuring its programs meet the needs of businesses and youth seeking work in the future

g) “Losing sight of youth employment by focusing on adult programs could forfeit an important political tool for MPPs”

- The federal government shouldn't be allowed to monopolize youth employment.
- If we focus entirely on high skilled youth, we will lose opportunities to help at-risk youth find work and life opportunities
- Youth need unique programs to suit their needs, not just repackaged versions of adult programs.

Appendix B: Cabinet ministers in Greater Toronto area

Maps for each electoral district can be found at

http://www.electionsontario.on.ca/fyed/en/ed_map_page_en.jsp

Minister	Portfolio	Riding	Importance to OAYEC
Michael Bryant	Attorney General	St. Paul's	While a high profile position in government, little influence on the youth file, except as it applies to preventative measures for reducing crime through employment.
Mary Ann Chambers	Children and Youth Services	Scarborough East	Moderate influence due to role in youth activities.
Mike Colle	Citizenship and Immigration	Eglinton-Lawrence	Little influence.
Monte Kwinter	Community Safety and Correctional Services	York Centre	Little influence, except as it applies to preventative measures for reducing crime through employment.
Joe Cordiano	Economic Development and Trade	York South-Weston	Moderate influence, given that without skilled workers, there will be slowdowns in economic development.
Laurel Broten	Environment	Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Little influence.
Greg Sorbara	Finance	Vaughn-King-Aurora	High influence. Besides the Premier, Sorbara is the most important person in government.
Gerry Phillips	Government Services	Scarborough-Agincourt	Little influence.
George Smitherman	Health and Long Term Care	Toronto Centre-Rosedale	Little influence, expect that he is OAYEC's MPP, and should be approached in that context.
David Caplan	Public Infrastructure and Renewal	Don Valley East	Moderate influence, given that without skilled workers, Ontario's infrastructure needs will go unmet

Appendix C: Future Developments

1) Electronic Network Development

To date, communicating with the general public has not been a priority for OAYEC. However, businesses that use OAYEC member group services are now a high priority for strategic communications. The day may come when OAYEC wishes to engage certain segments of the public more actively in the work of the organisation. These segments each have its own advantages:

Segment	Advantage
Non OAYEC-serviced businesses	Build a more diverse market for future OAYEC programs and services Educate business community to expand existing market opportunities
Parents, grandparents or guardians of youth in OAYEC target age bracket	Provide opportunities for referrals of young people to OAYEC member programs
Youth in OAYEC target age bracket	Provide direct access to existing, and future OAYEC programs Offer low-cost opportunities to provide continued service
High School Teachers, councillors and administrators	Provide opportunities for referrals of young people to OAYEC member programs
The public in areas affected by high unemployment, or by youth driven crime	Provide opportunities for communities to use OAYEC and its members' services to solve complex community problems

This Plan recommends that OAYEC develop an electronic network to serve these and other segments of the public, to anticipate its future communications needs. This might include:

- **Developing a monthly newsletter tailored to the interests of each segment.** Web-based services are widely available through Got Marketing, Advocacy Online, PHP list and others;
- **Using other new media such as podcasts** to promote OAYEC member programs or services, for example containing employment counselling information and tips;
- **Setting up a recruitment program** focused on participating OAYEC members with in-house advertising and key segment referral materials, and earned media opportunities.

2) Develop internal OAYEC communications capacity

For OAYEC to become an opinion leader, it must combine well-researched, thoughtful opinions with a compelling delivery. In Sections 7.1. through 7.4 of this Plan we discuss various ways OAYEC can deliver its messaging. OAYEC also can develop its internal communications capacity.

Media Training

As outlined above, OAYEC should undertake media training for its members in the key communications regions. A half- or full-day workshop to prepare OAYEC members and businesses for working with the media will be invaluable. Highwater Mark can advise OAYEC further on this program.

Brand Development

OAYEC's brand could use further development. While its mission, vision, goals and objectives are clear and compelling, its delivery is weak. The name OAYEC does not communicate what the organisation does, and its tag line – *community insights advancing youth employment* – isn't as strong as the mission deserves. This is not a high priority, but as OAYEC advances towards becoming an opinion leader, the issue of brand development will come sharper into focus.

Diversified voice

OAYEC must diversify its voice. It has been noted in the SWOT analysis in this Plan that the OAYEC Executive Director shoulders much of the responsibility for the success of the organisation. If OAYEC is to successfully implement this strategy and continue to make strategic communications a priority in the future, this area of its work must be properly resourced. It is recommended that OAYEC:

- **Train other members of its team** to implement sections of this plan germane to their work, and
- **Hire or contract a part- or full-time Communications Director** who can take responsibility for executing this plan, and for the development of post-LMDA implementation strategies. Without this person in place, it is likely that OAYEC will not fully implement this Plan.

Appendix D: Resource Considerations

1) Human Resources

- A commitment by OAYEC's Board and its Executive Director to make Strategic Communications a priority.
- A determination that OAYEC's message is best delivered by its members and the businesses it serves.
- A part- or (ideally) full-time Communications Director retained on contract of to execute this Plan and to prepare and execute future communications strategies.

2) Training

Communications technology is evolving quickly. Today, there are more ways of reaching an audience than ever before. Tomorrow, there will be even more! In the last decade, entirely new media have evolved, catapulting the Web ahead of radio and print in terms of global audience. In the next few years, the Web will overtake television in terms of total advertising dollars. Keeping pace with both delivery mechanisms and how to craft messages will require an investment in:

People – recruiting and holding onto the best people to craft and deliver messages.

Ideas – exposing OAYEC to new ways of thinking about communications by its leadership and key communications personnel attending ground-breaking events such as the Web of Change (www.webofchange.com) and the Social Change Institute (www.hollyhockleadership.org).

Training – OAYEC should invest in training its communications team. This should include:

- **How to work with the media** – give good interviews and develop relationships with the press. The Institute for Media, Public Policy and Civil Society provides good half day and day long custom workshops in this area. www.impacs.org.
- **Government relations** – OAYEC should consider meeting with a government relations firm, at least once or twice a year for a briefing on the current situations within and how best to communicate with both federal and provincial governments.
- **New media** – Keeping on top of new delivery mechanisms is critical. Consultants such as Phillip Smith at Community Bandwidth can provide insight into new opportunities to best use emerging technology. www.communitybandwidth.ca.

3) Tools

Short-term tools

A simple, free Web-based software tool such as *PHP List* (<http://tincan.co.uk/phplist>) can be acquired immediately. OAYEC can migrate this list to a more advanced system when is ready. *PHP List* is free, open source software that will take a webmaster no more than two to four hours to install.

Long-term tools

OAYEC may want to budget next year for a technical review of its software programs to better assess which tools could serve the organisation's growing requirements.

Appendix E: Strategic Communications Map

Note: The selection of these regions is iterative as the political landscape changes (i.e. elections, cabinet shuffles, OAYEC's key regions for communications will also change).

