

# FIRST WORK

## Strategic Plan 2011-2014

Developed May 18-19, 2011



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## Introduction

First Work (FW) supports and advocates for a sustainable youth employment delivery network in Ontario. Since 1988, First Work: the Ontario Association of Youth Employment Centres (OAYEC) and its network of over 70 youth employment agencies has been committed to delivering accessible, high quality, outcomes-based employment services to young people to assist them in reaching their employment and life goals.

The transformation of Employment Ontario's (EO) shift to an 'all ages' model of service delivery has challenged First Work to confirm its commitment to youth in this new context. And so the Board has launched a strategic planning process to consider the implications of the key trends and forces in this changing environment.

Following a stakeholder consultation and information gathering process, the report "Context 2011" (under separate cover) identified key factors in the external environment that may impact FW's decisions and included a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of FW's internal environment. The information in "Context 2011" informed the Board and Management's planning discussions.

First Work's Board, ED and General Manager met on May 18-19, 2011 to:

- Celebrate successes and renew First Work's commitment to youth
- Consider the current environment and identify strategic issues
- Update First Work's Strategic Plan 2004-2008
- Identify the next 'campaign' for First Work
- Identify key messages for members and other stakeholders.

First Work has accomplished a lot since its last plan so it was easy for participants to identify successes (see Appendix A). As part of this discussion the group identified successful approaches that should be sustained going forward. It became clear from the discussion that the organization is on the right track and needs to build on its successes. Four Strategic Directions are identified in this plan:

- 1. Growth and Development**
- 2. Communities of Practice**
- 3. Supportive Public Policy**
- 4. Strong Infrastructure – Governance and Operations**

After reflecting on achievements and identifying future directions, participants agreed that it is time to review and update FW's Vision, Mission and Core Functions. This Strategic Plan, which was developed at the retreat and documented by VISION Management Services, outlines the strategic directions, outcomes, goals and possible strategies First Work will pursue over the next three years.

### Vision, Mission and Core Functions

First Work's Vision, Mission and Core Functions were reviewed at the retreat – they are the foundation of the strategic planning process. Participants agreed to several changes – such as replacing the OAYEC name with 'First Work' and incorporating key words (e.g. communities of practice) that reflect First Work's role and future. The Core Functions will be reframed to better reflect the Strategic Plan.

The Board established a Working Group\* to review and draft updated statements for the Board to consider. This Group will present its recommendations to the Board in September. The Board will refine and finalize the statements so they can be introduced at First Work's 2011 Annual General Meeting (AGM).

### First Work Vision (current)

First Work will be the go-to organization for media, policy makers and youth employment deliverers.

### Community Vision (current)

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

### Mission (current)

First Work supports and advocates for a sustainable youth employment delivery network.

#### **First Work has four integrated Core Functions\*\*:**

##### **Knowledge Transfer**

First Work members benefit from a multidirectional exchange of information and expertise between communities, governments, organizations, academics, and individuals.

##### **Public Policy**

First Work members benefit from information and action on provincial and federal policies that affect the youth employment sector.

##### **Professional Development**

First Work members benefit from youth employment sector training and networking opportunities, including Canada's largest annual conference for youth employment sector professional development.

##### **Strategic Communications**

First Work members benefit from our ability to go beyond simple information dissemination. First Work strives to build and maintain strong public relations focused on youth employment.

\*Working Group members include: Michael (lead), John, Darlene and Roy.

\*\*Re-thinking Core Functions: consider three integrated functions: Building communities of practice; Leading and innovating in employment solutions; Advocating for public policy.

## Implications of the Current Environment

First Work's stakeholder consultation and information gathering process led to the identification of four key trends and forces in the current environment (for a more detailed description, please see "Context 2011" under separate cover). These trends and forces have implications for the work carried out by First Work and its members.

- **Employment Sector Transformation**
- **Demographics**
- **Accountability**
- **Policy-making Environment**

Participants had an opportunity at the retreat to discuss the nature and implications of these and other factors in the external environment. Factors explored in more depth included:

### **OUR COMMITMENT TO YOUTH AND OUR MISSION**

- During EO transformation pressures in 2010, youth fell off most agendas... apart from First Work's
  - o Some of the changes employment agencies have made in order to serve all ages have driven youth away (numbers have dropped, particularly for marginalized youth) – *We could help members find and re-engage youth who have drifted away*
  - o With the loss of dedicated youth employment centres, it's critical to ensure all organizations providing employment services to youth do so with an understanding of unique youth employment issues. *We need to secure resources to do this work.*
  - o Youth stories are starting to resurface in the media. *We can be the go-to organization for media* (e.g. sharing success stories related to keeping youth in school)
- Finding and articulating a niche related to youth continues to be important. *We need to think creatively about our role and sustain our core.*
  - o *We could position ourselves as a part of the overall continuum of employment;*
  - o *We could continue to expand our youth niche holistically (e.g. integrating youth employment needs with education, health and other youth-related areas)*
- Members' needs are evolving and extend beyond our mission
  - o As youth numbers drop... not all centres will survive
  - o *We could be strategic in bringing groups (e.g. members and organizations from the broader employment sector) together to discuss specific issues.*

### **PROLIFERATION OF UMBRELLA GROUPS**

- Because there are many umbrella groups trying to influence government, the government would like to see a consolidation of groups and messages. On the other hand, it may be useful to have a variety of voices representing different niches.

**Implications of the Current Environment**

- First Work and OneStep are good examples of diversity: First Work has established a niche in youth employment while OneStep is more of a multi-service (all ages) provider. *See Appendix B for a discussion of OneStep's current situation which may represent an opportunity for First Work.*

**BLURRING OF BOUNDARIES BETWEEN NON-PROFIT AND FOR-PROFIT SECTORS**

- Operating as a non-profit organization has shaped First Work and has informed our holistic perspective. With the transformation of the employment sector the association is working more closely with Employment Ontario (EO) and businesses, big institutions and colleges. These organizations have very different business models, needs, interests and approaches. *FW will need to collaborate differently with these players. And FW could help others look at youth employment from a more holistic perspective* (Oxford Region has tried to do this as part of a labour force development strategic plan that aims to cultivate entrepreneurs and attract new Canadian).
- Decision-making in a non-profit environment differs from decision-making in for-profit organizations – this is evident in Tom Zizys' Report: "Working Better – Creating a High-Performance Labour Market in Ontario" (Metcalf Foundation, May 2011).

The discussion captured above informed the evolution of First Work's Strategic Directions.

### Strategic Directions

The ED provided a progress report on the last strategic plan (under separate cover). **There was general agreement that First Work should continue to do more of what it does well.** As a result, the essence of the Strategic Directions endured, while two Directions were reframed:

1. **Growth and Development** (*updated*)
2. **Communities of Practice** (*new*)
3. **Supportive Public Policy**
4. **Strong Infrastructure – Governance and Operations**

**Enabler: Strategic Communications**

Strategic Communications (previously defined as both a Core Function and Strategic Direction) remains important. It was reframed as an enabling strategy. Resources and effort must be invested to build First Work’s brand, reframe issues and engage members. In addition, communication vehicles have changed significantly and First Work is learning how best to communicate with bureaucrats and politicians. **Strategic communication strategies have been identified in relation to each of the Strategic Directions.**

Outcomes, goals, and possible strategies were developed for each of the Directions. The timeline and responsibilities related to the strategies will be identified in an implementation plan following the approval of the Strategic Plan.

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1: GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Grow and develop First Work’s: membership, member services, alliances and funding to ensure First Work can achieve its vision for youth employment in partnership with others.

**Membership**

*Outcomes:*

- *First Work’s membership is well-defined*
- *Members are well-informed, engaged and committed to working alongside First Work. This contributes to members’ delivery of quality services and support for unemployed youth.*

Goals	Possible Strategies
1.1 Grow and deepen member engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Define membership criteria                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Consider diversification and expansion of membership</li> <li>o Review and, if appropriate, update fee structures/categories</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Develop a clearer memorandum of understanding (MOU) re: definition of membership and expectations</li> </ul>

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1: GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

#### Membership – cont’d.

<p>1.2 Members understand and value our work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Survey members to assess their understanding of and the value they place on First Work</li> <li>- Invite board members to share perspectives from the field with First Work</li> </ul> <p>Strategic communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Frame growth and development in a non-threatening way by focusing on the related benefits to members (see goals 1.3 and 1.4)</li> <li>- Provide comparisons with other associations’ fees to help members recognize the value they receive</li> </ul>
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#### Member Services

##### Outcomes:

- *Members use more of our services*
- *Members indicate they are satisfied with the level of support they receive*
- *More members engage as ‘champions’*

Goals	Possible Strategies
<p>1.3 Enhance members services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue to survey members re: service needs; then develop responsive services</li> <li>- Continue to expand professional development offerings</li> <li>- Offer conference discounts for members</li> <li>- Offer members privileged access to FW’s different areas of expertise – e.g. Evidence, Green Skills Network</li> <li>- Balance activities/programs/services that directly serve members (e.g. professional development) with those that indirectly serve them (e.g. Evidence, Policy work)</li> <li>- Strengthen our policy voice by making it easy for members to engage with us – provide tools and support (see also SD3)</li> </ul>
<p>1.4 Promote member services</p>	<p>Strategic communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue to develop First Work’s brands (GreenSkills, Job Developer Institute (JDI), Evidence, etc.) to enhance profile, visibility and uptake</li> <li>- Update First Work’s Features and Benefits tool to increase awareness and appreciation of different services (e.g. help members understand how some services like Evidence indirectly serve them)</li> <li>- Reframe and reinforce the value members receive (e.g. compared to fees paid to other associations)</li> </ul>

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1: GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

**Alliances**

*Outcomes:*

- *Common goals are achieved by working with like-minded stakeholders*
- *Collaborative culture results in productive alliances*

<b>Goals</b>	<b>Possible Strategies</b>
1.5 Strengthen and/or develop relationships with key stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue to nurture personal relationships with the Ministry and Service Canada</li> <li>- Continue to play a leadership role in convening discussions with key stakeholders when opportunities arise</li> </ul>
1.6 Develop strategic alliances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Articulate principles for alliances – e.g. compatibility of values, transparency, mutual benefit, etc. (see 4.4)</li> <li>- Identify and assess potential alliances – e.g. with MOHLTC re: youth mental health; with other umbrella groups (e.g. OneStep – see Appendix B)</li> <li>- Explore opportunities for back office integration and other forms of collaborative actions</li> </ul> <p>Strategic communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communicate FW’s interest in collaboration/alliances through a variety of communication strategies</li> </ul>

**Funding**

*Outcomes:*

- *Balanced budgets*
- *Increased discretionary funds (e.g. from Social Enterprises)*
- *Long-term business plans support decisions to develop and sustain new projects*

<b>Goals</b>	<b>Possible Strategies</b>
1.7 Grow and/or maintain revenues to ensure sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify and implement strategies to grow and/or retain members (see goal 1.1 and 1.2)</li> <li>- Seek support from other sources (e.g. different ministries and alliances – see goal 1.5)</li> </ul>
1.8 Increase discretionary funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review and consider how to increase revenues from membership fees (see Strategic Communications related to goal 1.4)</li> <li>- Review social enterprise projects and assess opportunities to generate or increase surpluses</li> </ul>

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2: COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Nurture communities of practice among those working in youth employment by providing a variety of opportunities for members and others to network with a view to facilitating knowledge exchange and professional development.

*Outcomes:*

- *First Work career college program offerings*
- *Expanded conference with national offerings*
- *Forums facilitate knowledge exchange*
- *Best practices are captured and shared*
- *Members have access to the skills and knowledge to support youth seeking employment*
- *Membership retention and growth – members participate in and value the opportunities to connect in communities of practice*

Goals	Possible Strategies
2.1 Develop career college program offerings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Build on JDI - develop specializations that respond to needs of members and others in the field (e.g. a comprehensive approach to the employment counselling process)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Partner with or co-create curriculum with others who offer workshops</li> <li>o Consider forming a professional development cooperative to ensure relevance of training</li> <li>o Continue to deliver workshops at Futures Conference (see goal 2.2)</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Partner with colleges to enhance credibility of programs</li> <li>- Fulfill requirements to become a career college (this may take ~2 years) or buy out a college that is going out of business</li> </ul> <p>Strategic communications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seek input from members re: their development needs</li> <li>- Promote FW's expertise in professional development (e.g. JDI, Futures Conference)</li> </ul>
2.2 Expand Futures Conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue building toward a national conference</li> <li>- Expand professional development offerings at conference (see goals 1.3 and 2.1)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Offer best practice sessions</li> <li>o Consider how webinars might be used to extend our reach</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
2.3 Facilitate knowledge exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Host forums where members and others can come together to explore issues and exchange knowledge</li> <li>- Identify, document and disseminate best practices</li> </ul>

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3: SUPPORTIVE PUBLIC POLICY

Continue to build relationships with politicians and policy makers to positively influence policies related to youth employment by building on successes and lessons learned to date.

*Outcomes:*

- *First Work is recognized as a credible voice by policy makers*
- *Marginalized populations (including youth and people with disabilities) are back on the radar of major employment funders and policy makers*

<b>Goals</b>	<b>Possible Strategies</b>
3.1 Build on the Summer Jobs Strategy (SJS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Define FW's advocacy approach/strategy and apply it to SJS and future campaigns (see page 12)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Key success factors: resources and tools for members; employers as spokespeople; meetings with various politicians (Minister's office, opposition, local MPPs)</li> <li>o Continue to aggregate and communicate statistics (e.g. youth demographics and employment numbers)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
3.2 Build political capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ED and board members meet with politicians regularly</li> <li>- Invite Ministry to attend Futures Conference</li> <li>- Run a mini campaign to remind political parties of youth employment issues prior to October 6, 2011 provincial election (see page 12)</li> <li>- Consider engaging a public relations consultant again</li> <li>- Ask MTCU to endorse Job Developer's Institute to enhance its credibility and sense of value</li> </ul>
3.3 Allocate more resources to this work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Determine what portion of membership fees could be allocated to support this work</li> </ul>

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4: STRONG INFRASTRUCTURE

Continue developing First Work’s infrastructure at the governance and operational levels so the organization has the capacity to deliver on its Core Functions.

*Outcomes:*

- *Infrastructure is aligned with strategic directions*
- *First Work has the required skills and expertise to execute its Mission and Core Functions*

**Governance** This direction is Board-led, so the Board will develop its own workplan. The Chair will take a lead role in establishing a Working Group for this task.

Goals	Possible Strategies
4.1 Update First Work’s by-laws to ensure compliance with legislative changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establish a Working Group to outline a process for the Board to consider – this might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Reviewing a few by-laws each month and updating as needed</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Get a legal opinion on compliance e.g. Charities Act, health and safety standards</li> </ul>
4.2 Update First Work’s Governance Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify gaps and develop new policies as required (e.g. succession planning, risk management; and membership categories)</li> </ul>
4.3 Continue to build Board capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Follow up on annual Board evaluation at a board meeting to identify strategies for continuous improvement</li> <li>- Identify gaps in the Board’s collective expertise for recruiting purposes</li> </ul>
4.4 Review values and beliefs from the last plan and update if appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review values and beliefs to determine if they are still valid and modify if necessary</li> <li>- Articulate principles related to alliances and influencing policy</li> </ul>

### Operational

Goals	Possible Strategies
4.5 Document First Work’s methodology/ operational principles to facilitate succession planning and continuity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ED to draft for Board review (<i>e.g. FW’s relationship to members/their work; FW’s approach to Core Functions, communications</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Chair and other board members to share examples from their own agencies</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Board to confirm these principles ensuring their consistency with FW’s broader values and beliefs</li> </ul>
4.6 Align staff structure with projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assess staff requirements related to different projects and evolve FW’s staffing structure as required</li> <li>- Access outside expertise as needed – e.g. establish advisory committees for different projects to extend</li> </ul>

	FW's operational capacity
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**STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4: STRONG INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Operational**

<b>Goals</b>	<b>Possible Strategies</b>
<p>4.7 Promote First Work’s value to increase member commitment and engagement</p>	<p>Strategic communications (related to goal 1.4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communicate updated Strategic Plan to members</li> <li>- Determine how to ‘market’ First Work’s Mission, Vision and updated Core Functions               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Re-frame Core Functions (see page 2)</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Clearly articulate the value of membership               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Clarify how some of First Work’s activities indirectly serve members</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Communicate opportunities for members to engage with FW in ambassadorial and other work</li> <li>- Continue to participate in and demonstrate leadership at Regional meetings</li> </ul>

## The Next Campaign

In 2010 First Work collaborated with members to advocate for the Summer Jobs Strategy (SJS). This ‘campaign’ provided a focal point for a advocacy work and the campaign was successful on two levels. First Work’s staff and Board learned a great deal about what is required in terms of time, resources, and supports. Secondly, the approach, which included: a letter-writing initiative; meetings with targeted MPPs; and strategies to engage employers, represents a multi-strategy approach that can be used for future campaigns.

Participants explored and identified what their next campaign should be:

1. **The Provincial Election** – take advantage of this window of opportunity
2. **Summer Jobs Strategy** – sustain this campaign... it’s not over yet.

## Provincial Election Campaign

### Rationale and Proposed Change

- The upcoming election represents an opportunity to educate candidates about youth employment issues and seek system changes that would better serve youth
  - o The current system has significant flaws – excessive red tape and unmet targets
- Proposed system change: a service delivery model innovation that could help rebuild the system involves providing each employment centre with \$80,000 (~\$6 million total investment) to hire a youth-outreach worker. This would increase the number of youth served by the system.

### Structure

- **Pre-election:** conduct a short-term campaign to raise awareness about youth employment issues and request \$6 million investment in the service delivery model
- **Post-election:** repeat the ‘ask’ and begin advocating for other service delivery model innovations

### Messaging

Frame basic messages around key facts, concerns and successes. The ED will simplify the key messages and share them broadly in the next few weeks.

- **Share facts:** youth numbers are down by half compared to one year ago; the EO service delivery process is very time-consuming for staff
- **Appeal on an emotional level:** use our passion for youth employment to help people connect with the issue on an emotional and/or personal level
- **Offer solutions:** make suggestions based on the successful Job Connect experience/ model
- **Clearly articulate the ask:** ask for a \$6 million investment to implement the service delivery model and communicate the anticipated outcomes
- **Articulate mutual benefits:** articulate how First Work supports the government in its problem solving, and conversely how the government directly or indirectly supports our work

## The Next Campaign

### Engagement Strategies

- **Pre-election letter:** send to all candidates and party leaders in August/September
- **Relationship building:** sustain an ongoing effort by the ED and board members in the regions. Strengthen relationships with Regional Directors who play a big role in how systems are rolled out. **Engage Regional Directors, politicians and others:**
  - o Pre-election: board members invite them to regional meetings and/or to board meetings where First Work and partners can set the agenda and deliver key messages
  - o Post-election: board members invite them to attend First Work's Annual General Meeting (AGM)
- **Ministry of Training Colleges and University Working Group:** FW Chair to encourage 'allies' on the Group to continue raising youth employment issues

### Communication to Members

Regional board representatives will promote Provincial Election campaign strategies in June: reinforce and remind members of successes in SJS campaign; communicate the desire to capitalize on successes and transfer lessons learned into the next ask.

### Tools and Supports

Provide members with an election campaign briefing package to encourage uptake. Key elements include:

- An all-candidates letter
- Tips for meetings with MPPs (refresh and re-circulate existing document)
- Lists of candidates in different ridings

## Next Steps and Conclusion

### Next steps

#### OneStep

- ED and Executive Committee continue the conversation with OneStep in accordance with identified principles (see Appendix B)

#### Report

- Board discusses, refines and approves the Strategic Plan 2011-2014 report at the June board meeting

#### Strategic communications

- Member communication: use an attention-getting format to provide an update on the Board's planning. Key messages:
  - First Work has reaffirmed its focus on youth
  - The next 'campaign' will be timed with Provincial Election: First Work will focus on SJS and increased funding for youth employment. Materials will be provided to facilitate member participation.
  - First Work's mission, vision and values will be updated and introduced at the AGM
- Other stakeholders: key elements of the Strategic Plan will be communicated to others.

### Conclusion

The retreat provided an opportunity for First Work's Board, Executive Director and General Manager to reflect on the current environment; celebrate successes; identify strengths and opportunities; and develop a plan for the next three years. Participants engaged actively in discussing the issues and challenges related to youth employment and First Work's role within an uncertain environment. Board members' understanding of youth employment issues and passion for youth was evident throughout.

This Strategic Plan reaffirms First Work's commitment to youth and its members. It builds on the association's strengths and communicates a desire to continue growing and developing on a variety of levels. Participants found it helpful to reconsider First Work's Vision, Mission and Core Functions. Updating these key messages will acknowledge progress made and the association's evolving role; it will also serve to reinforce First Work's niche when communicating with staff, members, prospective members, and policy makers.

This Plan outlines broad directions for the future. Execution has been one of First Work's strengths in the past, and translating these ideas into action will again depend on the continued commitment and collaboration of staff and board members.

### Appendix A – Celebrating Success

Participants were asked to identify First Work's accomplishments. The group subsequently identified some of the 'keys' to First Work's success... approaches that should be sustained as the organization moves forward.

#### Successes

These successes have helped First Work maintain and attract new members in difficult times.

- **Futures Conference:** the largest youth-focused employment conference in Canada. First Work has developed event management expertise by hosting the conference and other forums
  - o Expanding the scope of the Conference offerings to include professional development for front-line and other non-managerial staff led to an explosion of participant numbers
  - o A national stream is in development and FW may collaborate with other groups to host professional development workshops beyond Ontario
- **Reputation for quality work:** members recognize that whatever FW does, it is done well... they receive value for money
- **Positive profile and positioning:** FW has achieved great profile among providers and is considered a valuable resource
  - o FW has developed a variety of networks: members call for advice, information and referrals; even with the Employment Ontario transition, MTCU continues to see the organization as a resource
  - o FW facilitated an information-sharing system for Ontario that is seen as a valuable resource in the field
- **Funding diversification:** this was achieved in part by taking a social enterprise approach to projects; the diversification has helped FW remain independent
- **Advocacy work:** this has become a network-wide initiative
  - o 65-70 letters were written province-wide by 12 members re: Summer Jobs Initiative
  - o Meetings were held with MPPs on youth employment
- **Rebranding and logos:** although the name has taken time to catch on, awareness has grown and it is gaining traction
- **Regional meetings:** there has been good participation in these meetings

#### Keys to Success

- **Conference:** we communicate effectively about we do and we are open to evolving the format and content
- **Quality work:** we deliver high quality products/services

**Appendix A – Celebrating Success**

- **Professional development offerings:** we've gradually expanded access to these offerings for members and others
- **Exposure:** regional workshops offered under MTCU also carry the First Work banner, which is good exposure as the workshops are well attended; the ED welcomes participants and increases our exposure
- **Profile and networks**
  - o First Work has handled logistics for Job Connect Managers Forum for 13 years: because FW does the registration, attendees get to know us; and our JDI program was attached to that
  - o As we become more connected with the field we're able to realize our ambition to be the go-to organization
- **Member engagement via Regional meetings**
  - o Members and non-members bring ideas/priorities to four Regional meetings (held every 2 months in different locations), there's good attendance and this helps keep the association informed of emerging issues in the sector
- **Advocacy:** it's still early days, but we're learning what works
  - o Board members and the ED's efforts to reach out to senior bureaucrats and the Ministry have helped us keep youth employment on the radar; connections at the elected official level could be strengthened

**Appendix B – OneStep Discussion**

OneStep is another umbrella organization serving the Ontario Employment Sector; their membership is slightly larger than First Work's and a number of members belong to both associations. The organization is in some distress following a significant loss of funding and the departure of their Executive Director. As a result, their Board is temporarily assuming a more active operational role. In a discussion a few days before the retreat they updated First Step on their situation, but did not disclose some important information (e.g. the extent of their liabilities). There are many unknowns and the future of the organization appears uncertain. Their Board indicated they would follow up with First Work the week after the retreat.

Over the last few months First Work and OneStep have engaged in conversations to explore how to work more strategically together. These discussions led to a decision to submit a joint application to the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) to fund consultation with the two boards and the associations' members to identify areas for strategic collaboration. OneStep is acting as the lead on the application. OTF suggested that it might be a viable 1-year project (as opposed to the 3-year timeline initially proposed). The future of this application which is due June 1<sup>st</sup> is also uncertain. Recent developments suggest the application would need to be re-worked for submission to OTF for the November deadline.

**Principles to guide the discussions**

The Board agreed that it would be important to monitor the situation and for the ED and Executive Committee to continue the conversation with OneStep in accordance with the following principles:

- Stay focused on the big picture: i.e. sustainable employment services and membership services
- Get informed: gather information to support discussions (e.g. dual membership numbers)
- Ensure collaboration will not negatively affect First Work's credibility (e.g. with OTF) or result in a financial liability
- Ensure there is full disclosure on both sides re: finances, staffing, lease term, board commitment, etc.
- Ensure decision-making process is appropriate to the level of decisions: some decisions will need to go to the Board and/or members; others may be more operational in nature (e.g. the OTF application)
- Align collaborative activities with First Work's vision, mission and values
- Act in the spirit of good will

**Non-negotiables**

- First Work will not support questionable behaviours (e.g. double-dipping with funding)
- Any collaborative activity must not harm First Work

