# *Around the Circle in 365 days*

## *An Investigation into Governance Structures for Regional Nonprofit Endeavours*

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**The Land Between**

## Executive Summary

A search for an autonomous legal structure for The Land Between began as a reaction to the risks involved in Collaboration- the ultimate authority resting with one fiscal lead agency- which stood to compromise aspects of transparency, equality, and democracy. The investigation could be likened to a form of restructuring, as a large and dynamic program with partners and constituents had already been achieved.

This goal was to choose a governance structure that embodied those operations that already existed and were proven effective, and not to create a new regime.

Restructuring in the nonprofit sector is becoming a common phenomenon. The growing awareness of socio-political and environmental issues has resulted in an increase in the number of nonprofit organizations -- placing high demands on a limited supply of resources.

However, there are common obstacles to restructuring: Self-interest, pride and attachment to an organizational identity is exacerbated by competition for resources. Yet, for organizations to survive and be effective, the nonprofit market necessitates more cooperation and coordination.

Specifically, the conservation movement calls for a new and holistic approach that places humans back in the landscape: An organization must become a microcosm of its community for effective decisions and actions—and for legitimacy.

The culture of an organization is ultimately reflected in its governance.

An appropriate model was one that did not impose a singular authority on pluralistic issues within a region; would not duplicate efforts demanding more of limited resources; would empower and afford participation.

Funding for these investigations was provided by the Ontario Trillium Foundation for a term of one (1) year.

*"Governance is a journey not a destination" (Ledwell, 2008).*

In collaboration with a representative group of individuals, experts and agencies, deliberations and decisions were based on research using various methods: Three potential models were chosen and their attributes outlined as a basis for comparison, and extensive interviews with analogous groups as well as literature research was conducted.

The information collected revealed marked trends: In almost all cases, the level of participation and collaboration within an organization was related to its governance structure and style-- in turn affecting the sustainability of organizations.

Research was useful for a deeper understanding of how underlying factors of governance affect viability and sustainability or nonprofits. However, it was the process of the Talking Circle-of democracy in action- that the solution was found.

Considerations of governance, the conservation movement and nonprofit market provide an orientation to the decisions made, but also reveal how an organization, to be effective, must attend to the external market environment.

## Introduction

The Land Between began as an intuitive "seeing"-- as a concept that there existed a landscape that was different, unique and unidentified. Peter Alley, a long-time cottager at Muldrew Lake in Gravenhurst, first surmised that this place held special attributes and deserved attention. In 2005, after 10 years of studying various aspects of ecology and pursuing the collective interest of landowners, agencies and governments, a collaborative group was formed. Two local land trusts, an informal and dedicated group of individuals, and Peter accessed funding to hire a manager and initiated 8 foundational research projects. The goals of these early projects were to:
1. Define the ecological boundary of the region
2. Qualify and Quantify the coarse ecological characteristics of TLB
3. Engage a network of interested parties
4. Provide input into planning documents

Thus the landscape would be qualified as a distinct region, increasing interest and the potential for committed attention or involvement.

A defensible foundation was laid, however a cohesive and overarching concept was lacking. Rather, it was thought as form follows function, the identification of ecological features would lead to the prioritization of areas for conservation. From that would flow the recognition of the region; a measure of protection by planning officials; and protection of key sites by conservancies.

In 2006, Peter Alley passed on, leaving the Collaborative and new leader with a foundation for advancement. Leora Berman, Program Manager, imagined and communicated a vision to "instill as sense of place and pride in the landscape"; and established the premise for a regional movement. The Land Between should move beyond landscape planning into an animated and sustainable venture.

The goals of the program were broadened, made integrative and attuned to the vision: To conserve and enhance not only the ecological features, but also cultural, social, and economic attributes of the region. Beyond empowering actions through information, sharing The Land Between story created many opportunities for connection. It provided individuals and agencies with the opportunities to both identify and align themselves within the story; a natural progression towards engagement in the goals and actions of the program.

The framework of a Collaborative was an open and casual arrangement, with no centralized authority, providing ample room to maneuver. The casual organizational arrangement provided a sense of inclusivity, and did not impose ownership or authority. It was attractive to participants who were allowed to join as equal contributors. Both the vision and the structure nurtured the regional concept, placing people in the land and honoring their relationships with the land. Broad awareness and participation ensued.

However, as the program burgeoned the weaknesses inherent in Collaboratives were amplified and the platform proved brittle and insubstantial.

This report describes the processes and investigations that have combined to reveal the organizational structure of The Land Between.

> *A shared sense of identity is a form of social capital that can enable group action on common needs and aspirations (Centre for the Study of Cooperatives, 2009).*

> *The objectives (culture, nature, economy and society) reinforce one-another and suggest a natural progression from knowledge to adoption/action and governance (Curtis, 2007).*

# SECTION 1.0 - ORIENTATION

## The Governance Environment

Governance is a current and widespread issue of interest. Whether national, public or corporate, governments are stained with cases of misconduct, growing scandals, greed, duplicity, conflict of interest and corruption spurring both public distrust and vigilance. Therefore, attention has shifted from government, which assumes a fixed state and authority, to the practice of governance (Wiskere, 2003; Plumptre, 2004; Ledwell, 2008).

Jodi Bruhn (2009) for the Institute on Governance indicates that "governance principles of indigenous peoples present an attractive alternative as more institutions are becoming indigenized."

 "Styles, motivations, focus, locations, and capabilities of governance are changing evidenced by many governments pursuing reforms of diversity, transparency, and more participation of citizens and by changes in the relations between state, market and civil society. Negotiations and consensus-building to gain consent of the public and private actors needed for successful policy implementation and resolution of societal problems is being achieved through decentralization and transmission horizontally to private and semi-private institutions with new agreements and procedures. New participatory governance is taking place (Wiskerke, 2003)."

## The Nonprofit Market

Awareness of environmental issues has increased due to the recognition of climate change, a rise and intensity of natural catastrophes, a dramatic increase in numbers of species being lost, and a pandemic degradation to our environment. Combined, these factors all affect the global balance and the provision of ecological goods and services.

Arguably related are food and water scarcities, economic disparity, and corporate and institutional reactions of survival and self interest, all fuelling a response within the grassroots movement: "As many as 30,000 nonprofit agencies are created each year in the U.S. alone (LaPiana, 1998)." In North America, the market for nonprofits within the social economy is flooded. Funding has increased for many sectors, however, it is a limited resource and the supply cannot meet the demand.

Furthermore, funders prefer to support projects rather than core operations but expect sustainable organizations to result from their support. Funding is restricted and there is an often unspoken limit on the number of times funding may be accessed.

*"Jurisdictional disputes prevail as entrenched bureaucracies cannot realign in support of emerging cooperative and social economy needs and potentials (Linking Learning Leveraging Project, 2007)"*

*Organizations, by virtue of their cultures; governance, approach and attitudes, still have an unsustainable and problematic "dependence on government funding (Quarter et al, 2001)."*

David LaPiana (1998) for the National Centre of Nonprofit Boards, reports that "duplication of effort, competition for

limited funds, and organizational failure is becoming endemic." The instability of the nonprofit sector is made greater by a "shrinking supply of experienced leaders willing to remain for inadequate wages and unreliable employment, and by the urgency and complexity of community needs."

As a remedy to issues of supply and demand, and in order to reduce redundancies and increase efficiencies, funders promote or require partnerships and collaboration.

Intensifying competition for funding and human resources, coupled with the understanding that increased partnerships mean added potential for resources (fuelled by the encouragement of funders) has driven the trend in restructuring. "In 2000: 24% of organizations had some experience with restructuring (LaPiana and Kohm, 2003)."

However, partnerships are often superficial and temporary. The lack of deep collaboration has been attributed to the nature of competition which fosters rivalry, mistrust, and the belief that increased profile leads to survival. Similarly, effective restructuring is inhibited by self-interest, pride, autonomy, fear, differences in organizational cultures, and by the desire for autonomy over the social good (LaPiana, 1998)."

If nonprofits are going to succeed in their purposes, it is more important that agencies adjust and reorganize, becoming attuned to the social economy, than fixated on organizational survival.

### The Movement

Early heroes of conservation in North America were perceptive and sensitive

*"The corporate approach to conservation began in 1970's causing a divide between land and people, nonprofit and grassroots- and issues in environmentalism: A split which persists today (Curtis, 2007)."*

settlers who, perhaps driven by a sense of urgency, inadvertently led a movement which removed people from the landscape. Conservation warranted and resulted in a vast system of parks and protected areas. However, the removal of people effectively separated protected spaces from the larger landscape, physically and philosophically. Relationships to the environment were fragmented, parceling ideologies and land-use management according to graded areas.

Furthermore, conservation has always been euro-centric. Discoveries and philosophies were attributed to settlers even though First Nations had often led them to the findings. Somehow First Nation's traditional knowledge was completely negated. This along with the separation between people and environment may have made the conservation movement one of segregation. Generally, the conservation movement in North America is dominated by a class and race of people: "it has been often been perceived as reinforcing exclusion – represented mostly by white upper class professionals (Curtis, 2007)."

First Nations having the most extensive relationships with these lands have been largely omitted from the "conservation association" to such a degree that it has been noted "environmentalists have, in their historical and cultural illiteracy, assumed the cloak of the conqueror (Varela, 2001)"

Whole Communities, a nonprofit with a current perspective aptly describes two phases of the environmental movement: Conservation 1.0 and 2.0:

> Conservation 1.0 was about technical and legal approaches and language measuring success in acres and dollars. Conservationists made a strategic error in assessing that our work is more a legal act than a cultural act, rather conservation will be affective with people through relationships.
> We are in a new era,  2.0, concerned with how as a nation and culture we relate to the land. Conservation 2.0 has a new set of tools of expanded membership and deeper collaboration that result from the knowledge that community health is reflected in the health of the land. Skills include: story, dialogue, cultural competency, reducing racism, movement-building. (Curtis, 2007).

## The Need for a New Approach

The flooded market and outmoded outlook are malfunctioning, calling for creative and curative approaches; new and "unconventional models and alliances (Curtis, 2007)" that "integrate nonprofits into fewer, stranger and more flexible (LaPiana, 1998)", and which provide a new

> *"Collaboration can provide the opportunity for the kind of cross-cultural communication that is necessary to address social, economic and environmental problems. But, only if the issue of race, class, and culture are faced head on, and we can gather the courage to risk stepping outside our colonized worldviews (Edgar, 2002)."*

"organizational culture, which is more representative and uses different metrics of success - There is a need for solutions that are "co-created and co-owned with communities Curtis, 2007)."

However examples are lacking as these creative experiments are limited, so that "there is a Major gap in nonprofit management literature containing more promising structural/governance options; replicable programs and recommendations. We really need a broader list of options for organizations to consider, besides mergers and consolidations…if you could develop more models, this would be the most significant contribution to moving organizations forward (LaPiana, 1998)."

## Collaborative Weaknesses

Collaboration affords efficiency in time, resources and services, while it reduces duplication. It can also be a powerful tool to leverage interest, networks and new resources. Collaboration has become common as nonprofits are interdependent. "They cannot survive without other nonprofits as they gain information, power, support from and in concert with other nonprofits (LaPiana, 1998)."

However, collaboration involves risk. It requires a heightened level of trust and transparency, new communication and management skills (Herman, 2002). Further, the balance of power in collaboration can be easily swayed by the agency or agencies that hold the funding and the contracts. The liability that is necessitated by these agreements is a justifiable rationale for more control. Also as collaboration involves many partners, as these independent entities themselves evolve, transform, and experience challenges the focus, dedication

and motivation towards the whole may shift, becoming misaligned or divergent.

Various risks have been summarized by Melanie Herman (2002) for the Alliance of Nonprofits for Insurance:

"When organizations with different cultures, histories, and perspectives come together to accomplish something, a wide range of unexpected events can occur:
   a. Motivation of one can change over time
   b. A discovery makes continued affiliation inappropriate or risky
   c. Promise broken- not delivered
   d. Incompatibility of culture, values, etc.
   e. Their "brand" has been lost or submerged in their partnership"

Therefore, for collaboration to be sustainable and dependable clear protocols and processes are necessary to weight influence and control and maintain equilibrium. However it is evident that despite the drivers within the nonprofit market, collaboration is often limited and may be compromised over time as the balance of power is tipped by those whose neck is on the block.

## Regionalism

"A region is a place with similar context/culture; with a psychic identity; a place with history; a place with unity of scale; biology/physiography- an area of a strong human sense of place (Foster, 2002)"

Regionalism as a way of organizing and operating may provide insights towards a solution that involves inclusivity, cooperation, and co-creation.

"Regionalism shares many values with community-based conservation, deliberative

democracy, and consensus building -- as it typically brings together the right people in constructive forums with the best available information. In this way effective solutions to shared problems may be found (McKinney et al, 2002)."

> *"Regionalism's roots are as ancient as humankinds first home in Africa's rift valley and early civilizations in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East (Foster, 2002)."*

Regionalism is an "integrative concept" that recognizes "the natural territory of public issues," so that although environmental attributes are compelling, the values, perspectives and priorities of inhabitants, which may include environmental, economic, social or cultural objectives, are brought to the table. Therefore, although Regional initiatives initially focus on a specific issue, most eventually touch on a mix of social, economic and environmental issues (McKinney et al, 2002; H.W. Charles, 2002).

> *"Since existing government agencies often lack broad authority, local and environmental leaders are increasingly taking the initiative to address the social, economic, and environmental issues of a place by reaching across conventional political and jurisdictional boundaries, sectors and disciplines (H.W. Charles, 2002)"*

Regionalism may present a type of collaboration that not only is responsive to the nonprofit market but which reinstates the human element in the landscape for a holistic conservation movement.

Regionalism is being revisited and reinstated as a response to the failure of existing institutions to effectively solve problems that transcend political and jurisdictional boundaries (McKinney et al, 2002).

> *"Regions should be viewed as conceptual frameworks for analysis and practise and ways to organize processes and relationships in order to harness capabilities, rather than as definitive lines on a map (Foster, 2002)."*

It is a testament to the congruency of regionalism that this approach was adopted for The Land Between -- intuitively rather than deliberately. And its relevancy was demonstrated by the resulting high levels of interest, participation and extended collaboration.

However, regionalism is not normally institutionalized as doing so is in direct contrast with its premises. Formalizing a regional effort appears to instil a singular authority on a pluralistic effort by way of public perception or through the typical administration of structured organizations. And while the Collaborative model of a single and/or rotating lead financial agency was organic and effective, it was also increasingly unstable and opaque especially as collaboration expanded. Therefore an autonomous governance model with legal legitimacy that encapsulates rather than

transforms this regional approach was desirable yet elusive.

## SECTION 2.0- THE CHALLENGE

**Governance**
When we look to legitimize a group-effort we must look at both the styles and procedures in which communications are afforded and decisions are made; we must look to governance. Governance is the reflection of a group's philosophy; the embodiment of chosen values. Decision-

> *Wikipedia defines governance as "a process that relates to the decisions that define expectations, grant power, and verify performance. For nonprofits, it relates to consistent management, cohesive policies, processes and decision-rights for a given area of responsibility".*

making (who, how, and where) and the patterns of communication are the primary expressions of these values, and so are elemental to governance. (LaPiana et al, 2003; Henehan et al, 1994)

Therefore in a regional endeavour, in order for governance to be justifiable, it must be aligned with the values of Regionalism. Regionalism inherently values inclusivity, diversity, and equality. These values are aligned with the known principles of good governance. Therefore, it is logical that good governance will be achieved through adopting Regionalism and vice versa.

# Good Governance

Governance is a verb. It is an ongoing process of communication and adaptation. Government, a noun, suggests a static institution in so far as it is not animate and may lack responsiveness. Governance has become a "hot topic." In reaction to increasing political awareness and disappointments in governments, the focus of both organizations and governments has shifted to governance.

The United Nations Development Program has have articulated core characteristics of good governance based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights principles have been related to principles of good governance as defined by the Institute of Governance. The first of these associations is to Legitimacy and Voice. Legitimacy means that leadership is derived justifiably, while the principle of Voice signifies that all have voice in decision making (Bruhn, 2009).

Further, these principles are also relatable to the Traditional Principles of First Nation Governance, where the expressions more aptly capture the understanding that governance is active and animate.

1. Attunement- maintain this order of interrelatedness
2. Responsive, Responsible Leadership
3. Harmony- decision making that values consensus and good governance
4. "We Help Ourselves" – bond with the land and cohesion with the group
5. Respect- in all relationships, sanctions against disrespect or inattention
6. Legitimacy and Voice

The commonalities of good governance are inclusivity and equality. These principles are interdependent. Arguably, it is also from these principles that the rest are derived.

| Institute on Governance Principles | United Nations Development Program Principles and related text on which they are based |
|---|---|
| **1. Legitimacy and Voice** | **Participation**- All men and women should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their intention. Such broad participation is built on freedom of association and speech, as well as capacities to participate constructively.<br><br>**Consensus Orientation**- Good governance mediates differing interests to reach a broad consensus on what is the best interest of the group and, where possible, on policies and procedures |
| **2. Direction** | **Strategic Vision**- Leaders and the public have a broad and long-term perspective on good governance and human development, along with a sense of what is needed for such development. There is also an understanding of the historical, cultural and social complexities in which that perspective is grounded. |
| **3. Performance** | **Responsiveness**- Institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders.<br><br>**Effectiveness and efficiency**- Processes and institutions produce results that meet needs while making the best use of resources. |
| **4. Accountability** | **Accountability**- Decision-makers in government, the private sector and civil society organizations are accountable to the public, as well as to institutional stakeholders. This accountability differs depending on the organizations and whether the decision is internal or external.<br><br>**Transparency**- Transparency is built on the free flow of information. Processes, institutions and information are directly accessible to those concerned with them, and enough information is provided to understand and monitor them. |
| **5. Fairness** | **Equity**- All men and women have opportunities to improve of maintain their wellbeing.<br><br>**Rule of Law**- Legal frameworks should be fair and enforce impartially, particularly the laws of human rights. |
| **(Graham and Mitchell, 2009)** | |

Representational leadership, which is essential to legitimize organized efforts, is derived from adequate and meaningful representation and so requiring the equal opportunity for everyone within the community for equally weighted expression. Chartrand and Leautier (2004) of the Institute of Governance have summarized the Principles of good governance: "Good governance is responsive leadership where final decision making power rests at the community-level and there is an emphasis on inclusiveness; and balance and harmony, founded on a respect for other and nature."

## Inclusivity

Inclusivity suggests that the diversity of viewpoints including those dissenting voices must be heard, thus demonstrating respect (another principle of good governance). Logistically as well, it is this approach that is essential in revealing solutions in regional efforts as "People have interdependent interests, yet not one alone with sufficient authority to adequately address the problems"(McKinney et al, 2006). An inclusive organization is therefore made more legitimate and relevant as a microcosm of the larger community because it facilitates orientation to issues and then pertinent decisions.

Inclusivity should naturally beget diversity (those interests, sectors, races, and classes within a community) which provides additional measures of durability for an organization by safeguarding against decline by supplying the organization with extended networks, resources, ideas and energy. Inclusivity also bridges divides, reduces segregation and alienation which is essential for a strong conservation movement. Inclusivity cultivates new relationships which are the fundamental source of all success.

*"It's about who shows up more than what (Taylor, 2010)."*

*" The whole world enters the scene: the actors are participating in different overlapping social networks, constituting a social order stretching out in time and space (Roep et al, 2003)."*

*"All organizations in the social economy satisfy a prerequisite condition of being owned socially or arguably by no one (Quarter et al, 2001)."*

## Equality

Equality in terms of governance indicates both equal opportunity for expression and equal influence. Equality and freedom (individuality) are the tenets of democracy. True democracy (where all voices are heard) takes time. So that in today's political climate deep democracy, like equality, is a cultural aspect of an organization but is partly conditional on scale: Large organizations and governments may have democratic processes to elect officials, however beyond the "vote" or opportunities afforded for input, the institution often becomes an oligarchy. Equality is diminished and lost in the levels of hierarchy necessitated by the institutions' size or across the layers of its bureaucracy.

Therefore, it has been said that "until an organization is flat, an organization is not democratic (Thompson 1961; Deetz 1992)." This is because the values we associate with democracy -- equality, participation and individuality -- stand sharply opposed to the hierarchy, specialization, and impersonality we ascribe to modern bureaucracy.

The western preoccupation with control and measuring success through productivity places these values above democratic values (Mulgan 1991). The resulting culture of control is then justified by concerns of agility and liability and these issues of control then "readily suggest the issue of horizontal versus vertical aspects of an organization and reorganization (Cheney et al, Yearbook 21)."

> *"Hierarchical decision making-common in bureaucracies doesn't work on regional issues (McKinney et al, 2002)".*
>
> *"A top-down management of innovation and transition, as in the decades of modernization, does not work nowadays (Roep et al, 2003)".*

The more hierarchical or vertical the structure the greater the propensity towards the centralized power of a linear chain of command. Also "the greater propensity of owners and managers to dominate leadership positions in traditional charitable organizations also gives their biases disproportional influence (Diamantopoulos and Findlay, 2007).". An inclusive movement required of a regional non-profit effort, is made null without equal influence by its representatives. So that overall, hierarchical structures impose singular authorities on pluralistic issues.

In contrast, self-defined success in non-profit organizations typically revolves around procedural indicators such as improving communication, collaboration, understanding, and awareness since it is understood that they provide the foundation for future on-the-ground success. Also, for

those involved in nonprofit management, working relationships and quality of the process are ranked as more important than outcomes (McKinney et al, 2002:2006).

Therefore a democratic approach can be viewed as cultivating and responding to inclusivity and equality, as well as empowerment and self-responsibility. "However, democratic practices such as "one-member one-vote" are not a guarantee of democracy. Micro-processes within an organization such as the means and forums for communications often produce power inequities (Cheney et al, Yearbook 21)". As control is systemic, organizations need to make integral the underlying values and relationships of democracy through attention and self-reflection (Cheney et al, Yearbook 21; Quarter 2001; Linking Learning Leveraging, 2009).

## Transparency

It may be argued that the communication patterns -- the way in which dialogue occurs – are characteristic of the culture of an organization. They define an organization. Language, content, style and subject are elements of story. Bakhtin (1981) describes this association: "It is from stories that we fashion our relationships with others. Stories place us in the socio-cultural landscape" (Haas Dyson and Genishi, 1994). Therefore an inclusive organization is one where expression is valued in its design.

Transparency is also fundamental to engendering trust, both internally and externally. So that "transparency as both an organizing principle and a communications approach is fundamental to reproducing membership and loyalty from generation to generation -- and the more required of participants (time, loyalty, etc.) the more

transparency is needed to justify the level of commitment (Fairbain, 2003)."

Finally, successful responses to the diverse issues within a region necessitate confronting issues from various perspectives, making it even more apparent that a "culture of open debate and transparent sharing is essential to good governance (Ledwell, 2008)."

*Erksen (2001) indicates that "legitimacy of governance is rooted in the democratic principle of which the right of equal participation is fundamental." (Bruhn, 2009)*

## Leadership

Leadership is essential in gathering interests and recruiting representation. Regional leadership differs from management and requires unique skills. (P) Regional Leaders show a high tolerance for complexity, uncertainty and change. They provide integrity and credibility. They emphasize dialogue and build relationships by respecting diversity of ideas and viewpoints. Respect builds trust which in turn fosters communication, understanding and eventually agreement. They are integrators-coalition builders. They need to work across boundaries to accomplish stewardship goals.

However, leadership is iterative and evolving. Sometimes that which suits initiation of transformation, will not suit implementation -- there are different phases or models through time and space requiring different approaches (Smart Communities, 2009). Once a movement becomes

operational, the spirit of leadership must be valued rather than vested in one individual. "Societies where leadership is not embodied in a single individual are more successful -- what is important is fostering support for leadership and a culture of leadership rather than individuals leaders per se (Chartrand et al, 2004)."

Therefore, in order for a regional effort to truly respect principles of inclusivity and equality, what remains of leadership would be more aligned with facilitation, coordination or management, while leadership and/or leaders become situational.

## Legal Recognition- Institutionalization

In order that the regional effort may enter into agreements, hold contracts and access funds legal recognition remains necessary to authenticate any governance model. This becomes challenging as Regionalism which represents a convergence of diverse or divergent views, disciplines, and sectors runs counter to established institutions.

In addition, typical legal structures are hierarchical and suggest a unilateral authority and singular right on a pluralistic affair which is inconsistent with Regionalism. Add the general malaise about familiar establishments which also place additional demands on a flooded market and the dilemma is aggravated. Thus, it has been said that "regionalism is more likely to

*"Regionalism is fundamentally about unconventional arrangements (McKinney et al, 2002)."*

thrive if it is free to be organic, flexible, and integrative, not institutionalized (McKinney et al, 2004; 2006)."

> *Paradoxically, the very structures designed to promote and represent democracy can get in the way of its practise (Cheney et al, Yearbook 21)."*

The challenge then becomes how to embrace the canons of Regionalism (diversity, representation, inclusivity, and equality) within a legally recognizable construct. The two seem fundamentally at odds: an organic arrangement versus an institutionalized one. "Diversity is at odds with the application of generic rules, procedures and methods (Roep et al, 2003)." There is often "a temptation to formalize and centralize organizations to the extent that their essential mission is lost (Cheney et al, Yearbook 21)." Therefore, it is very possible that adopting a legal structure may constrain processes and counter or undermine those valued principles of a pluralistic or collaborative approach.

> *Deetz (1995) indicates that "structures should be shaped by those at the bottom of the organization; and interactive discussions and negotiations of values and ends should occur on a frequent basis so that the organization is expansive and self-reflective rather than closed and self-satisfied." (Cheney et al, Yearbook 21).*

## SECTION 3.0 THE INVESTIGATION

The investigation into alternative models for The Land Between efforts began not as a response to the market environment but because the risks involved in collaboration were realized: Collaboration was the original chosen model as it was efficient, addressed the market, and facilitated coordination; however this cooperative approach was based entirely on trust. Ultimately, the fiscal lead agency retained legal authority and so control over funding, contractors and therefore activities. Transparency was lacking and the balance of power was tenuous. Constant vigilance was required. Attempts at reducing risk included defining policies and procedures, project charters and detailed agreements, however the resulting bureaucracy and hierarchy was misaligned with original understanding and values amongst partners, making it cumbersome.

## Characterizing Options

To recognize the interests of The Land Between Partners, provide the necessary legal recognition and reduce the risks associated with collaborations, three (3) options were chosen for investigation and assessment by partners and participants:
1. a non-profit corporation;
2. a non-profit cooperative; and
3. a program of a large, existing non-profit agency.

The basic attributes of each option were researched, charted and presented to an initial group of representative and diverse partners at a professionally facilitated "Visioning Session" for their evaluation and feedback.

## Results

It was anticipated that after reviewing the attributes of each option, participants would rank the preferable solution. However, the original meeting goal of selecting preferable or at least suitable structures was discarded as attendees naturally spoke to issues of values or principles and practices.

Values that participants described as vital for The Land Between to adopt are listed below. These values were further defined through corresponding best practices.

One poignant comment arising from this session provided insight into a superior motivation for this investigation: "This is the most dynamic multi-cultural meeting which is a reflection of the culture of The Land Between. Why is it so and how do you keep it this way?"

| Attribute/Value | Best Practices |
|---|---|
| Purpose: | Must be independent (of another agency's mandate)/must have autonomy<br>Must be distinctive<br>Must be focused |
| Management: | Must have visionary leadership<br>Must have experienced/professional leadership<br>Leader to set tone but for approval by the board<br>Must have genuine motivations aligned with the mandate of TLB |
| Relationships (culture): | Must honour relationships above targets<br>Maintain diversity of interests<br>Must afford representation of interests: facilitate working committees<br>Must be equal<br>May be aligned with Natural Law teachings (Honour, Courage, Humility, Respect) and so facilitate honour of natural tendencies and personalities and so can be of representational leadership<br>Way of relating must set the culture of the organization, not only reliant on overarching structure |

The resulting values and practices were responses to the market environment and placed a high value on relationships and diversity. Priority-attributes identified (and related best practices) were:
1. Purpose;
2. Management;
3. Relationships (as the culture of the organization).

Secondary attributes of sustainability; adaptability and productivity were identified as important and relevant practices described:

| Attribute/Value | Best Practices |
|---|---|
| Sustainability: | Relationships are the determining factor in sustainability<br>Specific roles for all members/board members<br>Foster the development of people<br>Responsive and open to new ideas<br>Founded on full spectrum of biodiversity |
| Agility/Adaptability | Dependant on management<br>Keep bylaws simple<br>Allow for change mechanisms/simplicity and review<br>Goals must be in line with needs |
| Productivity: | Must be measurable<br>Have multiple measures based on objectives |

## Interviews

The desired principles and attributes were used to create a coarse template of themes for further exploration. Complementary groups from across Canada and one from within the United States having similar mandates or areas of influence to The Land

Between (regional or large environmental NGOs) and which represented the current spectrum of structural options (programs, corporations and cooperatives) were contacted and management-persons interviewed.

Fourteen (14) nation-wide agencies/groups were contacted and interviews with representatives conducted. An additional 9 agencies or institutions were contacted for anecdotal or experiential information.

Questions and discussions were focused on 7 themes:

1. Formation/Purpose;
2. Governance;
3. Relationships/Participation
4. Sustainability (resources);
5. Strengths/Best Practices
6. Obstacles or Challenges
7. Key Lessons

For those portions of the investigation involving qualitative or experiential sampling, accuracy in interpretations for significant markers was insured by seeking evidence from additional and associated contacts (personnel, partners or affiliates).

**Findings**

See Schedule A- Charted Interview Results

A strong correlation was shown to exist between the governance style or depth of democracy (decentralization as well as consensus) to high levels of participation and sustainability. Also, broader purposes as would result from a dynamic or regional approach seemed facilitate higher participation and also a flatter organization. Those organizations experiencing the greatest success commonly referenced a valuing or honouring of relationships. Furthermore, most groups indicated that it was best to maintain flexibility by avoiding too many rules.



## Relationship Between Results

Legend:
— Purposes
— Governance
— Sustainability

Purposes: High= Broad Low= Singular
Governance: High=Decentralized and Consensus; Low=Hierarchy and Voting
Sustainability: High=High participation and resources; Low= Low participation and lacking resources

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11  12  13  14
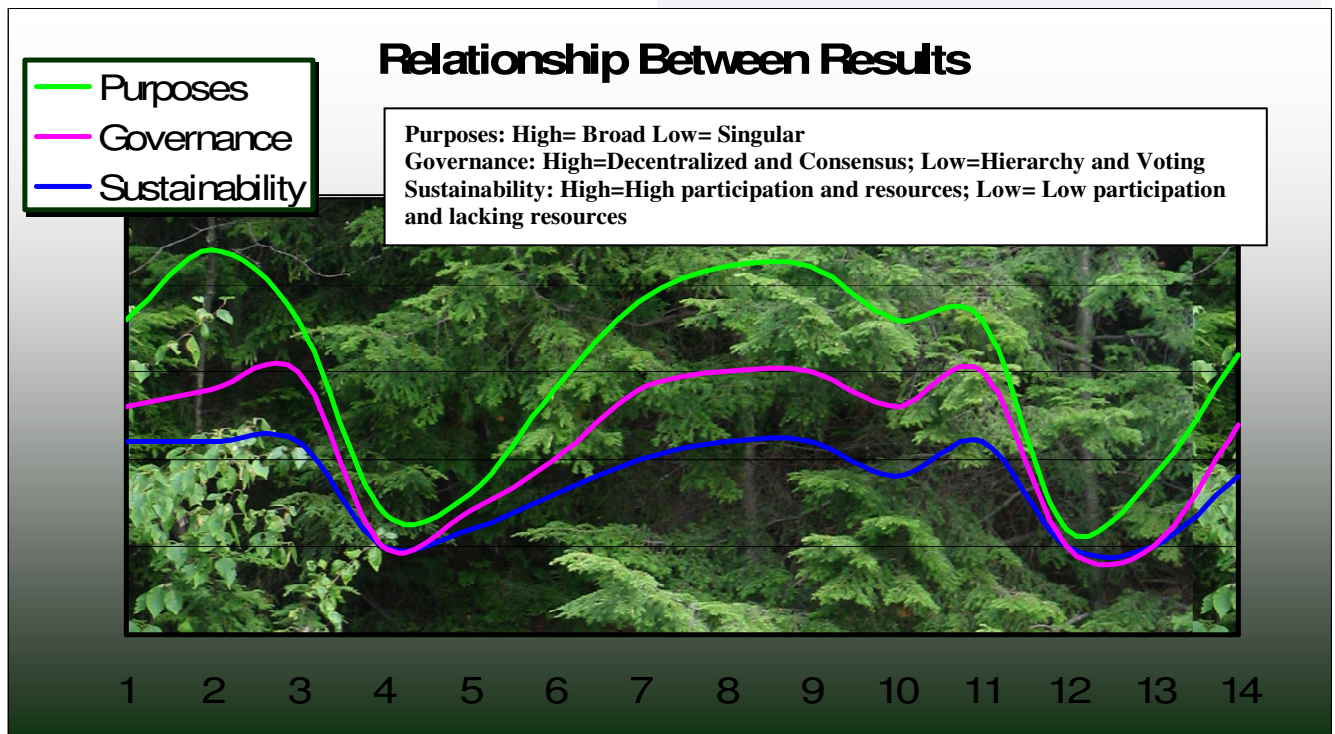
Most agencies stayed away from advocacy and maintained soft purposes of stewardship, education and outreach.

A significant number of successful groups employed the First Nations Talking Circle as a relevant and effective process for making decisions. They indicated that the nature of this medium dissuades self-interest, fosters orientation to issues and therefore is educational, so that decisions are appropriate and do not have to be revisited. Too, the Circle model which involves consensus takes time – but which efficiency is increased with practise, and the resolutions and benefits derived far outweigh any downside.

Conversely, bureaucratic hierarchical agencies relied on a few and showed a lack of both participation and uptake. They were struggling with sustainability. In fact one large regional agency was considering a merger with another smaller agency in order to bolster interest and currency.

The trends within the sample group seem to reflect those within the nonprofit market, while the groups that are thriving have employed some of the approaches suggested by the research.

Key lessons communicated are also associated with those priority values as outlined within the initial visioning session:

1. Maintain inclusivity and equality to facilitate relationships and participation – ensure this value is fixed.
2. Maintain a flat structure- no executive positions
3. Maintain the room to manoeuvre-flexibility-reduce rules and keep bylaws simple
4. Be adaptive by having *change bylaws* (bylaws to review and adjust bylaws).
5. Facilitate vested interests - adopt working board/members, committees, and/or cooperative control
6. Keep purposes broad, yet fixed
7. Avoid direct advocacy (as it brands and negates perspectives; limits support by denying groups and individuals)
8. While leadership is valued, it must not reflect ultimate authority
9. The whole must be equally involved in governance
10. Trust is established through relationships, transparency, and equality reflected in practices of in-person meetings and decisions by consensus
11. Introspection - Review and revisit processes objectively
12. Measure success by participation and relationships rather than tasks and deliverables

## SECTION 4.0- THE CIRCLE- THE SOLUTION

### The Committee

The story of The Land Between -- the culture, nature, economy and society -- had begun. Now what was needed was to create the platform.

At the outset of the investigation the original Collaborative group was reformed as new members took on new positions; a new arrangement to satisfy funding requirements. Made up of two land trusts and the widow and son of the late Peter Alley, this management committee created a memo of understanding and attempted to reduce risks by drafting project charters and assuming executive powers. A secondary steering committee was created to engage the broader Land Between partners, but it remained virtually dormant. The result was a dynamic that created a new external culture and an internal culture within the broad Land Between collaborative.

New partners were brought into The Land Between and First Nations played a greater role. Key attributes and best practices began to come into focus through research and the dynamic Visioning Session. It became apparent that the management committee would best meet its overarching goals by relinquishing its executive role to a broader, structurally flatter, more inclusive committee that could collectively co-create the governance model for The Land Between. Therefore, in the true spirit of collaboration and respecting the regional approach already in place, the Management Committee merged into the Steering Committee, divesting executive powers and decision-making to the larger group. Thus the external and internal cultures were merged. This was a key transition which, on the part of the management committee, took an act of faith in the wisdom and commitment of the broader group.

Review of results, deliberations, and decisions were made by this level steering committee- from an equal platform.

### Deliberation

Micro-processes, especially communications (the way and place in which dialogue happens) along with how decisions are made are key elements characterizing an organization.
The investigation began with a top-down approach in that the final structure was to be tailored to practices and values, rather than principles and processes fitted to a structure. Taking the priority values and lessons gleaned from research, a report was submitted to the group recommending a cooperative as the best option to provide greater assurance of equality and democracy.

The team struggled with this approach. For different members of the committee, the words cooperative and corporation were charged with negative meaning. The third option – living under umbrella of a large non-profit organization -- seemed too close to the status quo. But something happened as the committee grappled with these issues: The process evolved into the solution.

### Dialoguing

Democracy in terms of equality was a premise of The Land Between. However, democracy, like governance is active -- stimulated and engaged through processes more than policy.
The ways in which decisions are made (who, how, when, where) and the way in

which dialogue happens shapes an organization is the animate embodiment of democracy. "Democratization of organizations can be operationally defined in the terms of the extent of genuine opportunities for dissention or discussion. Speech practices are democratic expressions that should be promoted and protected. In fact, survival of egalitarian organizations is dependent on the communication patterns within organizations and between organizations and their environments (Cheney et al, Yearbook 21)." In fact the "best boards are more likely characterized by extensive exchange of view before decision are made, by constructive questions and scepticism and by decision making processing and where the prevailing culture is somewhat more interactive- more open to dialogue and debate (Ledwell, 2008)."

However, "while democracy seems to be spreading through new organizational structures it is diminishing in terms of the limits of possibilities for genuine dialogue. So that issues of democracy and participation necessarily involve questions about communication in terms of both structure and process -- taking seriously the idea that democracy is something requiring re-negotiation in an organization -- otherwise organizations become unduly circumscribed, calcified (Cheney et al, Yearbook 21)."

**The Circle**

The Circle, first introduced to The Land Between by the Anishinabek First Nations, has actually been used by many Original cultures across the world throughout history. The circle had already been the majority meeting style in The Land Between by way of the Heritage Committee.

The Circle is described with assistance from Daniel Whetung, Curve Lake First Nation: The Circle is an animate experience; one based on respect, honor and deliberate attention.
In order for the circle to function properly, the time honored traditions have to be used or applied. Simply sitting in a circle and carrying on conversations back and forth between participants, breaks down the effectiveness of the Circle.

As people have a natural tendency to be able to revere process and symbols that are steeped in tradition, the tradition of the Circle is brought into play by the use of an instrument of office- a talking stick, an Eagle feather, a braid of sweet grass, sprig of sage. When one person holds this instrument, it is their turn to speak. The rest of the Circle is obligated to listen. To begin the process of the meeting circle, the first one with the instrument introduces herself and her issues. The person second to receive the instrument needs to be able to reiterate their understanding of what was said by the person before them. Then, add their comments. The third person introduces themselves and says; "it is my understanding" and repeats what was heard by the first and second. So that the first and second person are listening to what the third person understands. And so it continues. This process is repeated by all in the Circle as their turn arrives. When the instrument returns to the first person, she addresses all of those people that have voiced their understandings and attempts to correct any misunderstandings. The instrument goes around the circle until everybody understands each other's concerns.

Through the circle, misunderstandings are clarified, and solutions are found, so that consensus is achieved. Silence is honored.

Because speech is directed to the whole, and not directly to individuals, self-interest and reactionary tactics tend to be removed. Patience and attention brings empathy and orientation.

The power of the Circle breaks down if the instrument of office travels back and forth, just as if individuals address singular persons and not the whole. Discussion is iterative. Attention is required and focus is centered.

Therefore the circle facilitates a natural progression from expression to understanding, empathy and then accord. The circle enables a "whole" reaction to issues and ideas diminishing singular biases. The Circle is a practice in communication. It allows individuals to be heard. It facilitates orientation, and reflection. It is a decent and effective manifestation of pluralism, equality and deep democracy.

The talking circle is one of the few direct and effective mechanisms for pluralism and democracy. It operates by honouring equality and diversity. Diversity requires regular communication to explore, reconcile and adapt to different perspectives and interests. This deliberate dialogue enables individuals to work through issues confronting them and arrive at common ground. Public dialogue is the way in which individuals proclaim themselves as cultural beings; the images and rhythms of their stories echo in the minds and memories of the audience and provide the opportunity to assume the experience of another. In this way others can see themselves in the speaker's story. It is this cultivation of relationship and empathy that makes that these forums more valuable to participants

than formal meetings or voting and is perhaps why large networks and collaborative organizations have indicated that they experience the most success when they have employed Talking Circles (Edgar, 2002; Haas Dyson and Genishi, 1994; Linking Learning Leveraging, 2009).

**The Journey**

All journeys, whether expeditions or explorations, are a progression of subconscious to conceptual, then cognitive to actual. The research and recommendations provided context in our investigations, but didn't allow the team to draw firm conclusions as to a way forward. It was the process itself that led to a structural solution.

Related, arriving at our conclusion was the result of an instinctive journey rather than a controlled course. Initially, the investigation reacting to the risks experienced by a collaborative constitution was logistical. At the onset, although the intention and methods for the journey were articulated and structured, a more fluid and unbounded reaction always prevailed. Even when formalizing a committee there were conflicts between two approaches of the tactical Western and fluid Native meeting styles; between the focuses of structural aspects of the organization and desired values and practices.

It was not until the Circle was understood and practiced, that its effect was realized and so it was chosen as the operating structure for the organization. The Circle embodied natural principles which were outlined:

| |
|---|
| *Principles are aligned with International Organization on Governance principles of Good Governance and with Indigenous Traditional Values.* |
| **Respect-** Respect is an understanding and appreciation that all life is sacred. It constitutes recognition of the interrelationship and interdependence of all living things and individuals. Respect acknowledges our role within this web and that what we do to others we do to ourselves. Respect involves the sharing of personal gifts and is the foundation of openness, resulting in genuine communication and a culture of peace. |
| **Honesty-** Honesty involves being true to oneself and to others. Honesty takes courage as it allows for vulnerability and creates transparency. It is the knowledge that what is shared has integrity. Honesty cultivates trust and is at the root of all successful relationships. |
| **Diversity-** Diversity embraces differences in a safe and nurturing environment, recognizing that strength and durability are drawn from multiplicity. Diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It recognizes that each individual is unique. Diversity includes the under-privileged and under-represented. |
| **Equality-** All individuals have equal rights and equal status and are treated with the same measure of respect. Equality recognizes that each individual has a responsibility to exercise their rights and to respect the rights of others. Equality is demonstrated through a balance of power, direct democracy and decisions made by consensus. |
| **Voice-** People have a right to different beliefs or practices as long as they do not infringe on the rights of other beliefs and practices. |
| **Loyalty-**Individuals think and act in the best interest of the organization reflecting the collaborative effort. |
| **Humility-**Humility recognizes that wisdom is aided by reflection and plurality; that no one person or perspectiv is absolute. Humility facilitates the examination of feelings, thoughts, motives and ideas towards adaptation adjustment, appropriate actions, and the achievement of higher standards. |

Processes could then be aligned to those principles, and consensuses, as well as meetings in person in the Circle were adopted. Administrative roles, including those of treasurer and Chair would be rotating and not fixed in order that power is not vested in individuals.

As institutions often undermine the tenets of democracy, it was essential that the legal administrative structure embody the principles and practices of the Circle rather than constrain or impede them. Typical legal models of incorporation require liable agents or executives, instilling a hierarchy. Therefore it was thought that the legal arm for The Land Between would have to become a separate distinguished entity from the Circle and that the two would be co-managed through agreements. Yet this model, similar to a collaborative with a lead agency, placed the balance of power ultimately with the legally liable agents. The Circle may be a deep democracy but as a whole transparency to the Circle was not guaranteed and operations would entirely be based on trust.

Recent changes to the Federal Nonprofits Act demonstrate a shift in perspective; one that is in line with Aboriginal Traditions. The new legislation allows for a "Council" rather than a "Board of Directors" to govern a corporation. The language is important as a Board of Directors implies singular persons with authority, while a council implies many people who communicate and act as a whole. A Council requires a treasurer, but does not require an executive.

The Circle, as the Council, has full authority to operate with power distributed equally among members. The Circle, as the operations, ensures accountability through reviews, resolutions and through the election of a treasurer. It would also have

the ability to gain charitable status and access funding independently. Therefore, the Circle simultaneously directs and becomes the instrument. As such the structure is aligned with the Principles and decisions of the Land Between identified during this process.

The Land Between now, through its mandate and messages, but also by way of its structure, has become a platform for participation.

## Key Lessons

The search for a structure for The Land Between can be considered a form of re-structuring, as a collaborative model was already employed.

In any type of restructuring there are obstacles presented and which are well-documented. These include self-interest; identity; pride; requirements for collaborative leadership.

As well, within the nonprofit market, the demand for resources far outweighs the supply, so that the creation of an entity must provide for coordination or offer a unique service to address this market.

Furthermore, in a regional endeavor attunement to culture and social economy of the community is required, not only in its representation, but in its values and practices.

Attempts to control the process of restructuring may instill biases and rules that undermine dialogue and so solutions. It is important to step away from the western fixation on agendas and meeting culture -- the strong task focus that does not make time for relationship-building

(Diamantopoulos and Findlay, 2007). Rather, collaborative leadership is required; flexibility and openness.

Finally, although deliberations in democratic decisions take more time and demand more emotional involvement, it is precisely this vulnerability and openness that facilitates orientation and understanding towards accord, so that decisions do not have to be revisited. Too, the Talking Circle becomes more rapid with practice, and overall the efficiencies of this model outweigh any lags (Cheney et al, Yearbook 21). The Circle allows dissention, but instead of dismantling the process, these voices test the approach and actually strengthen the conviction that the model is appropriate.

Eloquently stated by Gerard Segassige (2009), "A circle can only expand or contract, but is never broken; a straight line (in terms of a hierarchy) has many points of weakness along its length."

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# Schedule A- Charted Interview Results
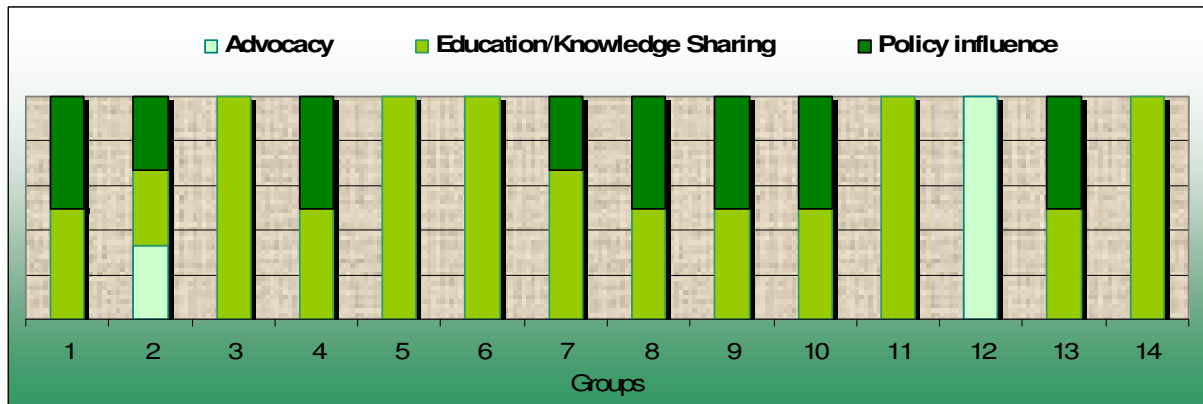
1. Purposes:



**Fig. 3: Advocacy; Education/Knowledge Sharing; Policy Influence**
Notes: Agencies were ranked from High to Low: From full engagement to minimal engagement in these activities.
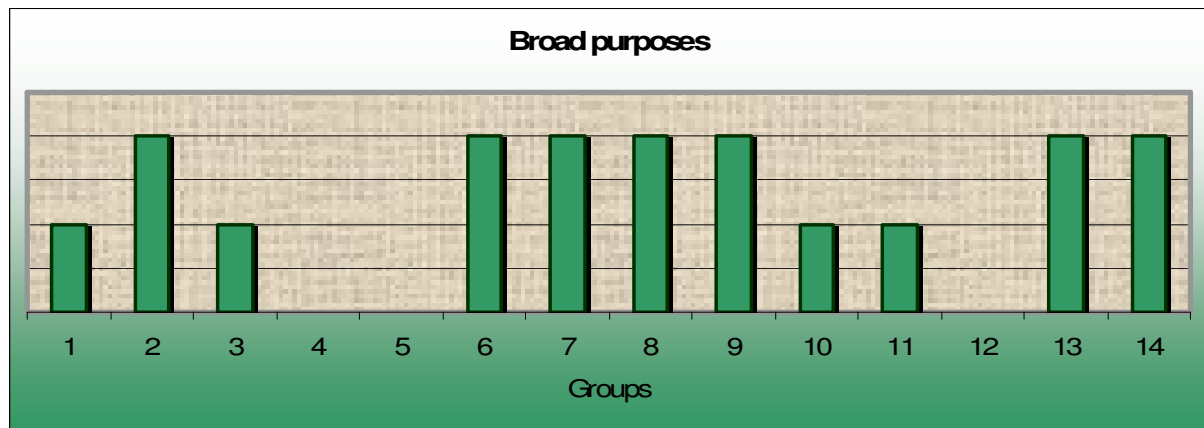


**Fig. 3: Broad Purposes**
Notes: Agencies were ranked from High to Low.
High=purposes, projects and actions of nature conservation and two or more additional focuses of cultural, economic or social.
Mid= purposes, projects and actions of nature conservation, and which included one more focuses of cultural, economic or social.
Low= purposes, projects and actions of nature conservation

Relevant Notes:
- Mandate should be broad yet fixed.
- If objectives are too limited or not distinctive, participation and operations are also limited.
- Purposes should include sharing and reflect the goal of biodiversity.
- Generally, most agencies have stayed away from advocacy, indicating that it posed threats or obstacles to cooperation by limiting trust and alignment.
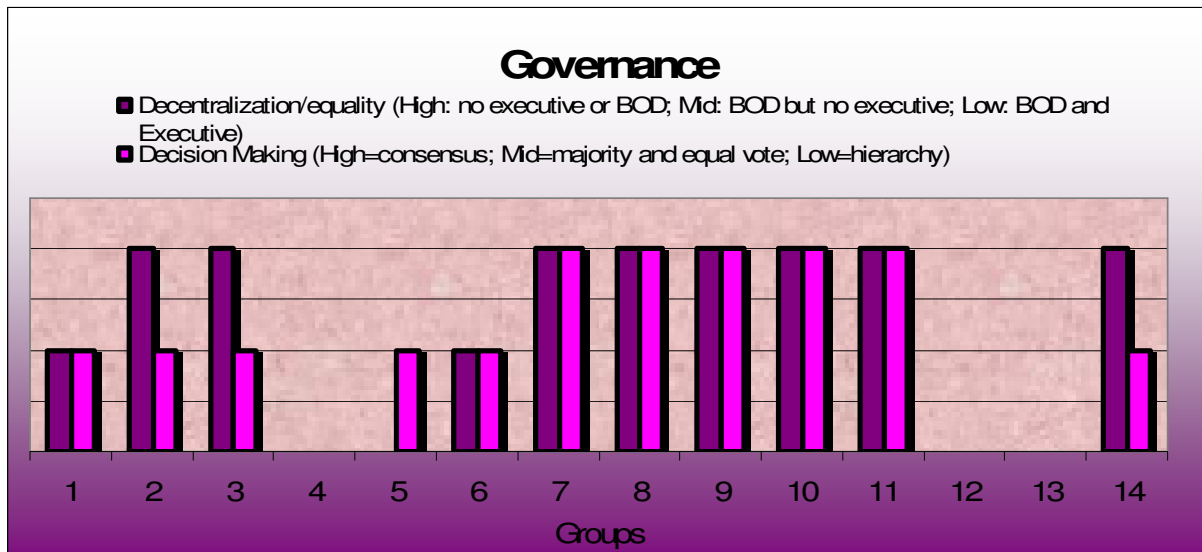
2. Governance:



**Figure 5: Governance**

Relevant Notes:
- The successful (sustainable and productive) groups made decisions informally, together without hierarchy and through consensus.
- 3 of the most successful groups indicated directly the use of "the circle" for decisions, and since these interviews, a fourth group has adopted this approach.
- Decisions in the circle or by the group and by consensus were illustrated as not affecting agility, but instead providing a source of alignment and so education for the whole. Too, it was communicated that consensus was achieved easily and decisions did not have to be revisited.
- Large national groups hosted up to 200 voting members in a circle, while other large or regional groups had voting members and members acting as a Board of Directors of up to 40 individuals without displaying lag or issue.
- The majority (11) groups had no executive committees; a Chair and Coordinator/Executive Director were positions and in some cases were those with signing authority.
- All successful groups made decisions in-person at gatherings.
- Some groups used modified consensus by allowing majority votes to make decisions on expenditures only.
- Notable is one national group which began with equal voting and consensus. The corporation after some time changed bylaws to limit voting positions and to install an executive. The documented result was a loss of a majority of its participants. They same corporation has since attempted to re-establish equal and all voting rights with decisions by consensus.
- 3 groups demonstrated issues with sustainability (indicating a lack of resources and participation). These same groups relied on a few (leadership and executive).
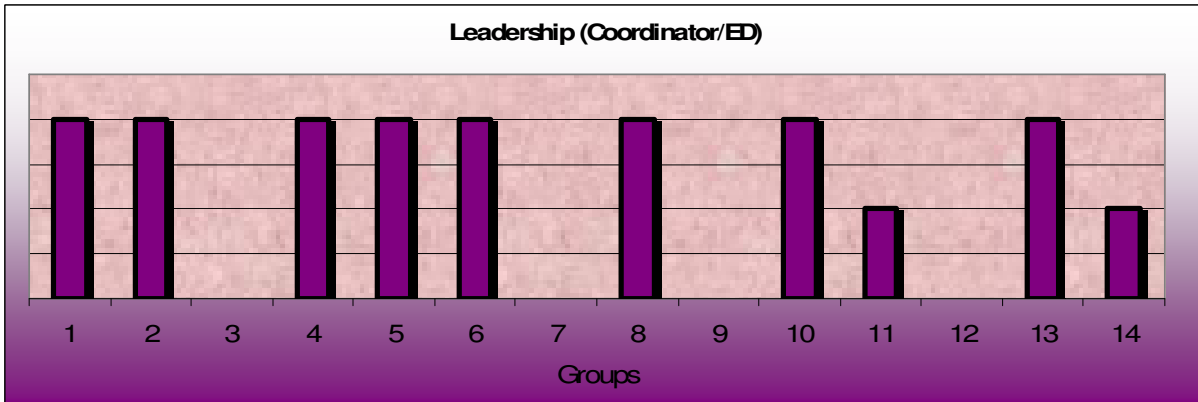
**Leadership (Coordinator/ED)**

**Fig. 6: Leadership**. High=Executive Director or Coordinator; Mid=P/T or project based leadership; Low=No leadership position

Relevant Notes:

- 3 of 10 groups with no executive committee had positions specifically of "Executive Directors"
- 3 of 10 groups with no executive committee had no management positions at all
- 2 of 10 groups with no executive employed managers specifically titled "Coordinators"
- It was communicated was that "leadership will change the face of an organization" and that "leadership must be a role; not dependant on personalities"

## 3. Sustainability
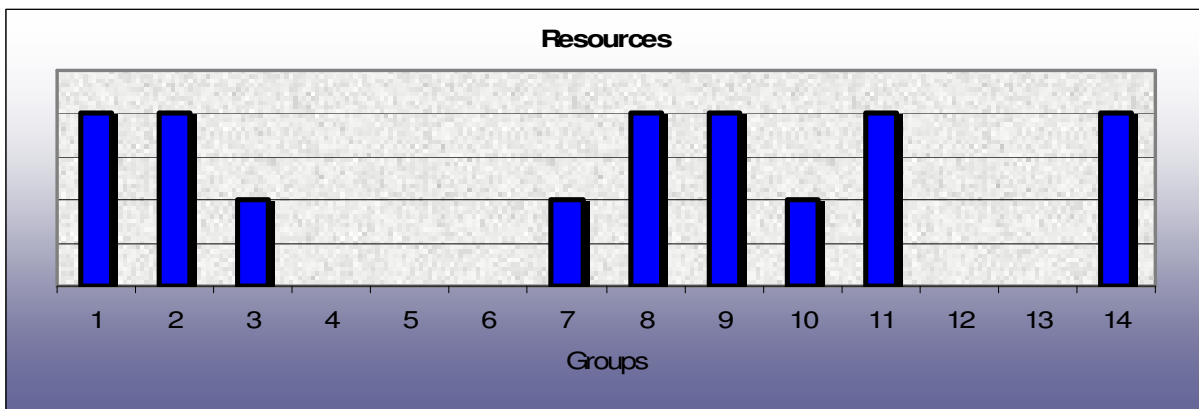


**Resources**

**Fig. 7: Resources**. High=personnel and core funding; Mid=personnel and/or core funding; Low=project personnel and/or project funding
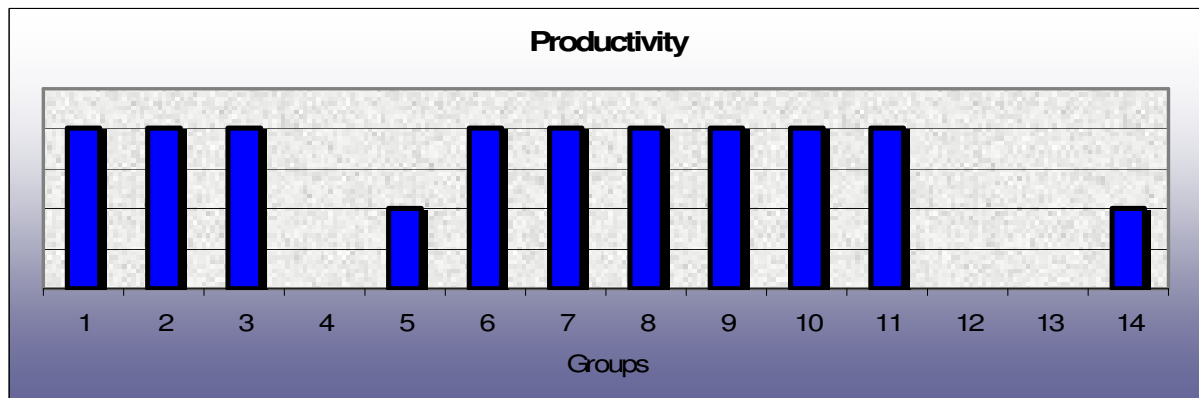


**Productivity**

**Fig. 8. Productivity**. High=Regular communications, ongoing or many projects; measurable results; Mid= Communications and many projects; Low=Infrequent communications and limited projects. Note: Intangibles such as uptake and influence are difficult to measure, therefore communications such as products, events, emails and requests for information, as well as measurable results such as numbers and frequency of enhanced acres/projects/partners/applied information etc. were used as indicators of productivity.

Relevant Notes:
- 3 groups had significant issues with sustainability (indicating a lack of resources and participation).
- These same groups had centralized governance structures, relying on a few (leadership and executive).
- A majority of groups use membership dues as a key source of core funding
- 2 groups provide lead financial services to collaborative efforts/to members as a service and means of accessing core funding.
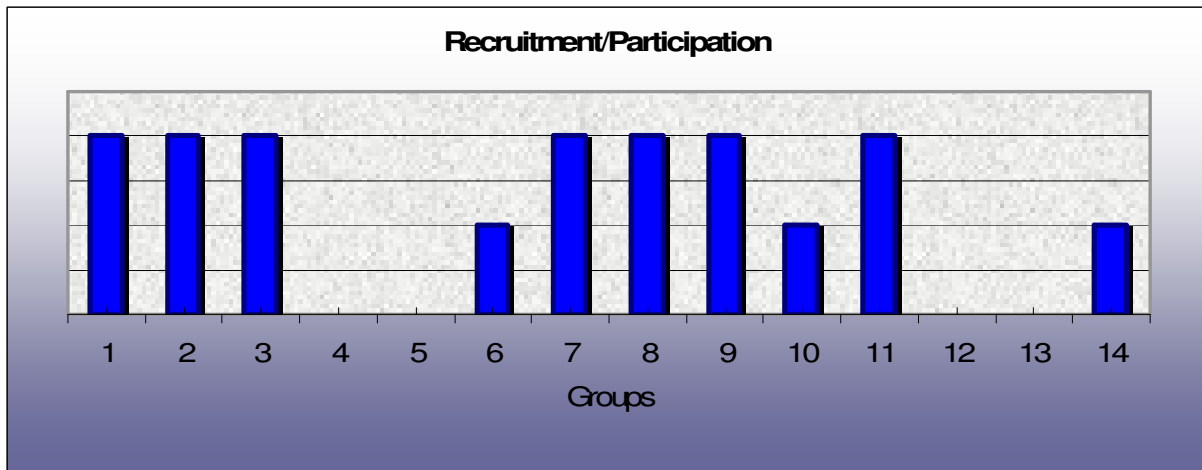
## 4. Relationships/Culture



**Fig. 9. Recruitment/Participation**. High=Large membership and/or project partners; Mid=Limited membership/BOD and partners; Low=Small BOD/membership and/or partners. Note: Recruitment/participation in governance and/or projects/actions is a measure as well of **Relationships**

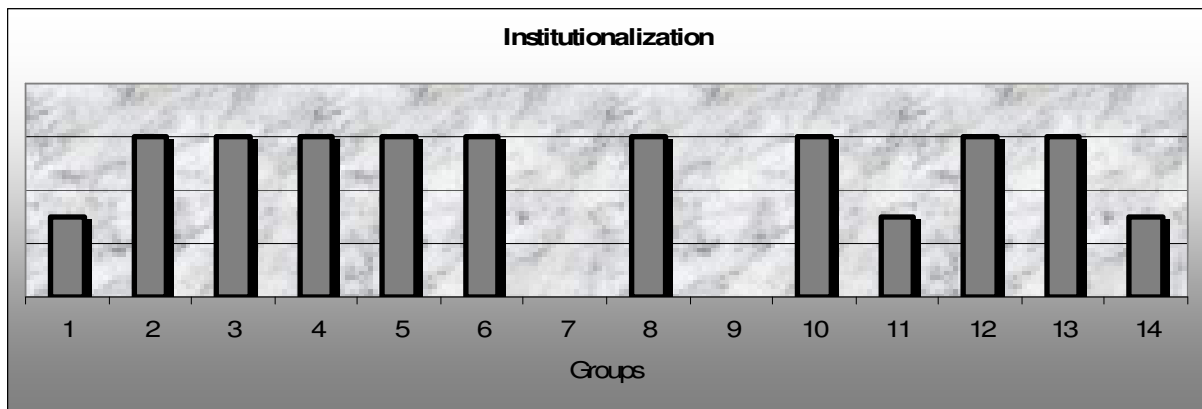Of some interest, may be the formalization of the groups interviewed:



**Fig. 10. Institutionalization**. High=formally incorporated as a non-profit corporation or cooperative with articles and bylaws; Mid=no incorporation, but charters, policies, and/or procedures outlined; Low=no formal bylaws or policies, but practices outlined.

- 5 groups were not incorporated
- 2 of the 5, are researching two primary options of a cooperative entity or program under Tides (and have opted out of a corporate structure)
- 1 group is incorporated as a cooperative
- 1 group has a corporate structure that which articles and bylaws are aligned exactly with a cooperative