

STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

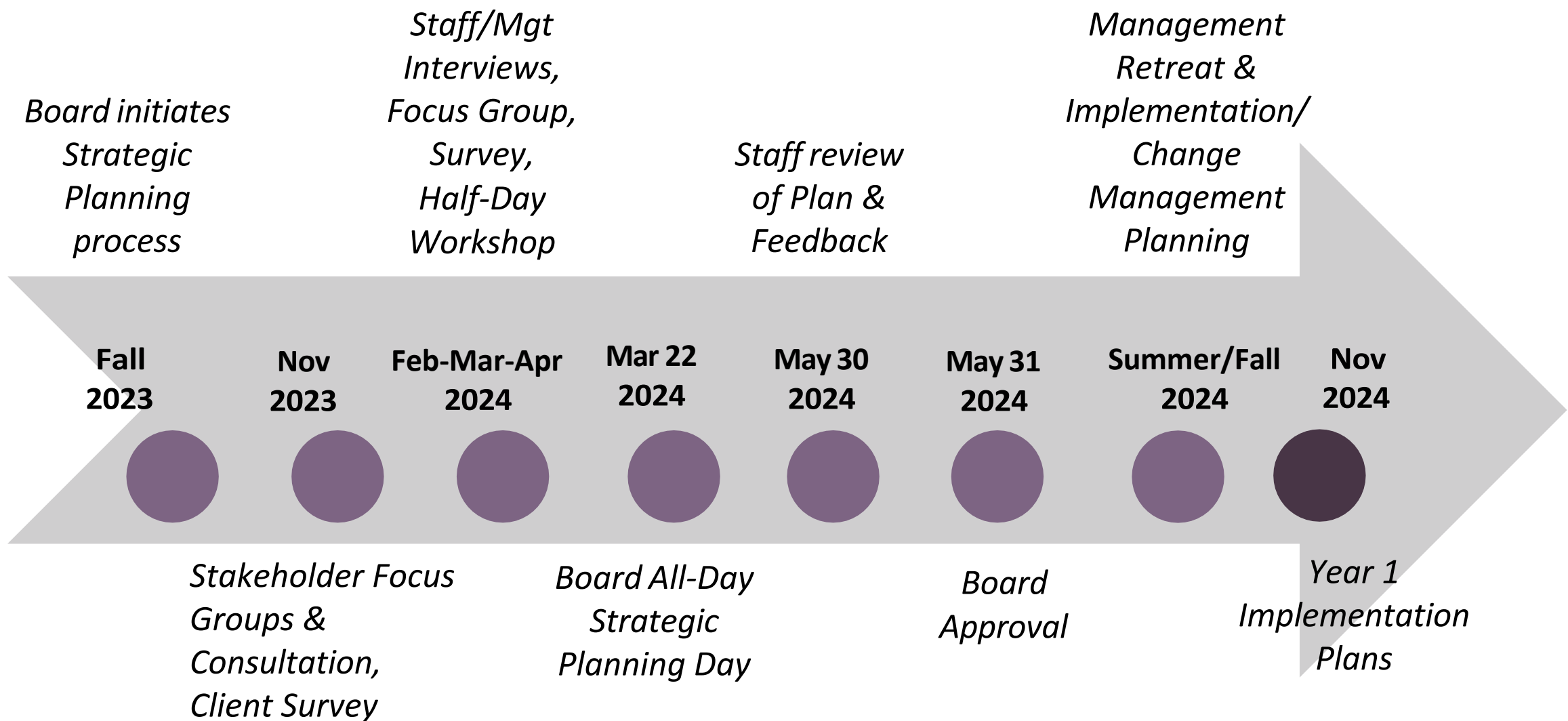
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Strategic Plan Development Process

- In the fall of 2023, the HRLSC's Board of Directors initiated a strategic planning process to better meet Ontario's changing human rights landscape and respond to the needs of the province's most vulnerable.
- The first phase of that work included stakeholder engagement which set the stage for the Five-Year Strategic plan that would be approved by HRLSC's Board of Directors in spring 2024.
- Sonja Nerad and Fay Faraday facilitated the HRLSC's strategic planning process, including the stakeholder engagement activities.

Strategic Plan Development Timeline



Stakeholder Engagement Approach

Between October 2023 and March 2024, a series of stakeholder engagement activities were conducted. More than 180 people, representing diverse perspectives and stakeholder groups participated in the planning process:

- Focus group with the Board of Directors (8 participants)
- Interviews/focus group with the Executive Directors and managers (9 participants)
- Focus group/interviews with funders, policy makers, partners and service providers (29)
- Survey with clients (68)
- Focus group with staff (8)
- Survey with staff (12)
- Half-day workshop with staff (45)
- Follow-up half-day session with staff (42)

Stakeholder Engagement Participants

- HIV/AIDS Legal Clinic of Ontario
- Parkdale Community Legal Clinic
- John Howard Society
- Community Justice Collective
- Osgood Hall Law School
- Don Valley Community Legal Services
- Community Legal Education Ontario
- Workers Action Centre
- University of Toronto Faculty of Law
- Barbra Schlifer Clinic
- Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic
- Canadian Centre for Housing Rights
- The 519
- IAVGO Community Legal Clinic
- Justice for Migrant Workers
- Metis Nation of Ontario
- Pro Bono Students Canada
- Kinna-aweya Legal Clinic
- 2 Spirited People of the First Nations
- Chiefs of Ontario
- Ministry of the Attorney General
- Ontario Human Rights Commission
- Legal Aid Ontario
- BC Human Rights Clinic
- Canadian Human Rights Association
- University of Windsor Law School

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

KEY THEMES

1. Clients and Community

PUBLIC PROFILE AND ACCESSIBILITY

Stakeholders described the HRLSC as having low visibility – in particular, it does not intentionally reach out to people who are most vulnerable to discrimination, including those living in poverty, subsidized housing, shelters, or correctional facilities. It was noted that in the context of limited resources, the HRLSC should prioritize its resources and use partnerships to maximize its reach.

Potential Opportunities:

- Identify priority populations and focus outreach efforts to these groups
- Enhance marketing, communications and community engagement
- Collaborate with partners (i.e. Ontario's community legal clinics) to establish itinerant or satellite service locations throughout Ontario

1. Clients and Community

EXPANDED SERVICE MODEL

Strong feedback from many stakeholders suggested that, given the challenges at the HRTO, the HRLSC should compliment existing litigation services by enhancing the provision of upstream services that will support people to pursue or achieve their resolution goals, especially for those who are not seeking compensation.

Potential Opportunities

- Realign and/or introduce services (i.e., information, education, letter writing, restorative justice) to be more solution-focused and/or focused on early intervention/resolution
- Prevent/reduce the number of cases going before the HRTO through effective early resolution or alternate strategies
- Strengthen people's capacity to address discrimination and navigate the human rights system

1. Clients and Community

REFERRALS AND INTAKE

External stakeholders repeatedly spoke about their lack of clarity regarding the HRLSC's intake process. Having better information would help them make appropriate referrals. They also identified an interest in establishing clear pathways for their clients, and working together to establish agreements/processes for streamlining access to human rights services and supports clients need.

Potential Opportunities

- Develop and disseminate clear information about priority populations and intake processes
- Proactively collect data to better understand priority needs
- Develop strategies for ensuring that people who do not qualify for services are referred to another organization and/or have access to legal information about their options

1. Clients and Community

COLLABORATION

External stakeholders spoke highly of the HRLSC and its value. They expressed interest in strengthening collaboration to help the HRLSC to expand its visibility, improve access for populations who experience barriers, maximize its limited resources, strengthen its capacity to secure funding through collaborative funding proposals, and enable it to participate in advocacy regarding critical human rights issues.

Potential Opportunities

- Engage private bar lawyers (allies), law schools and legal clinics to help develop, test and advance diverse initiatives that increase/advance access to justice for clients across the province
- Build on the HRLSC's experience with SHARE and ADIP to collaborate with partners on projects that can advance common human rights goals

1. Clients and Community

PLANNING FOR SYSTEM IMPACT

Stakeholders noted that the human rights environment in Ontario has shifted significantly, for example, due to increased discrimination and the backlog at the HRTO. The HRLSC is well positioned to identify and advance cases that can have systemic impact. However, in taking on resource-intensive cases that advance the laws' evolution or have a broad impact, the HRLSC's overall caseload capacity may be reduced.

Potential Opportunities

- Identify and take on cases in collaboration with community groups/partners that can result in law reform
- Amplify the efforts of partners engaged in human rights advocacy and law reform

1. Clients and Community

ONTARIO'S HUMAN RIGHTS PILLARS

Stakeholders strongly agreed that the three pillars of Ontario's human rights system should be working more closely together to maximize their resources and better identify and advance human rights priorities. Collaboration between the HRLSC and the OHRC in particular could improve Ontarians' understanding of human rights and access to human rights education. The two pillars are well positioned to identify and pursue systemic human rights cases.

Potential Opportunities

- HRLSC should look for opportunities to collaborate with its pillar partners to strategically and efficiently advance its mandate, and increase public awareness and visibility of its services and supports for people facing discrimination or harassment potentially seeking legal redress at the HRTO

2. Process and Structure

DATA COLLECTION AND EVIDENCE-INFORMED STRATEGIES

The HRLSC does not collect socio-demographic data about clients. As such, its services, supports, benchmarks, and performance indicators are not data driven. It also does not report how different populations may experience discrimination in Ontario. Many stakeholders noted that the HRLSC is uniquely positioned to use its data to identify cases that can have systemic impact or advance the law. Beyond the annual client survey, clients and community are not involved in informing the work of the organization.

Potential Opportunities

- Identify data fields and develop disaggregated data collection strategies and methods
- Use data and information that is collected to establish priorities for outreach, service delivery and systemic impact projects
- Establish methods for meaningfully engaging clients and community in the work of the organization

2. Process and Structure

GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

Stakeholder feedback indicates that there is room for organizational development and maturation including further formalization of governance policies, structures, roles, processes, and enhancement of technological infrastructure.

Potential Opportunities

- Review and update the organization structure; clarify management roles and span of control
- Invest in technology
- Add new positions to execute core functions and strategic priorities
- Review and confirm the role of the Board; strengthen Board policy, and provide regular Board governance training
- Develop a Board succession plan

3. People and Learning

Stakeholder feedback indicates that there is a need to improve staff retention and strengthen organizational cohesion.

Potential Opportunities

- Develop and advance the HRLSC's mission, values and strategic priorities and advance the business case for investment in the organization
- Realign service volume targets and clarify any implications of doing so with funders
- Strengthen the HR framework, including the performance management system, succession plans, professional development and career pathways
- Enable opportunities for diverse staff to work together

4. Accountability and Financial

The HRLSC is valued as a critical pillar of Ontario's human rights system, and many stakeholders value its independence and autonomy as an arms length organization. In order to address ongoing sustainability challenges, stakeholders encouraged the HRLSC to explore external partnerships and funding opportunities and to strengthen its engagement with and demonstrate its value to government and nongovernmental funders and decision makers, and the communities it serves.

Potential Opportunities

- Update the HRLSC's business case to ensure it is informed by evidence and aligned with strategic priorities
- Implement a resource development strategy that includes collaborative funding proposals
- Demonstrates the HRLSC's human rights expertise, leadership and value proposition to diverse government and non-governmental decision makers
- Leverage community support to underline the value of HRLSC services for members of the Ontario public, including in particular marginalized and vulnerable populations