

PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY

Reimagining Governance | Enabling Resilience and Impact

November 2025



Supporting Organizations
Supporting Immigrants
Aider les organismes
qui aident les immigrants

How Nonprofit Governance is Evolving.

Evolving Context

- Volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity (VUCA) driving more collaboration, collective work, sharing
- Data, digitization, technology, AI
- Demographic changes
- Financial challenges, austerity
- Settler colonialism, systemic inequities, EDI
- Nature of work and voluntarism
- And....?

*The role of Reimagining Governance is to **provoke a shift** in how nonprofit organizations talk about and fulfill governance.*

*...the current design of governance in nonprofit organizations is **not consistently effective** or always positioned to respond effectively to the **increasingly complex environment** of today and the future.*

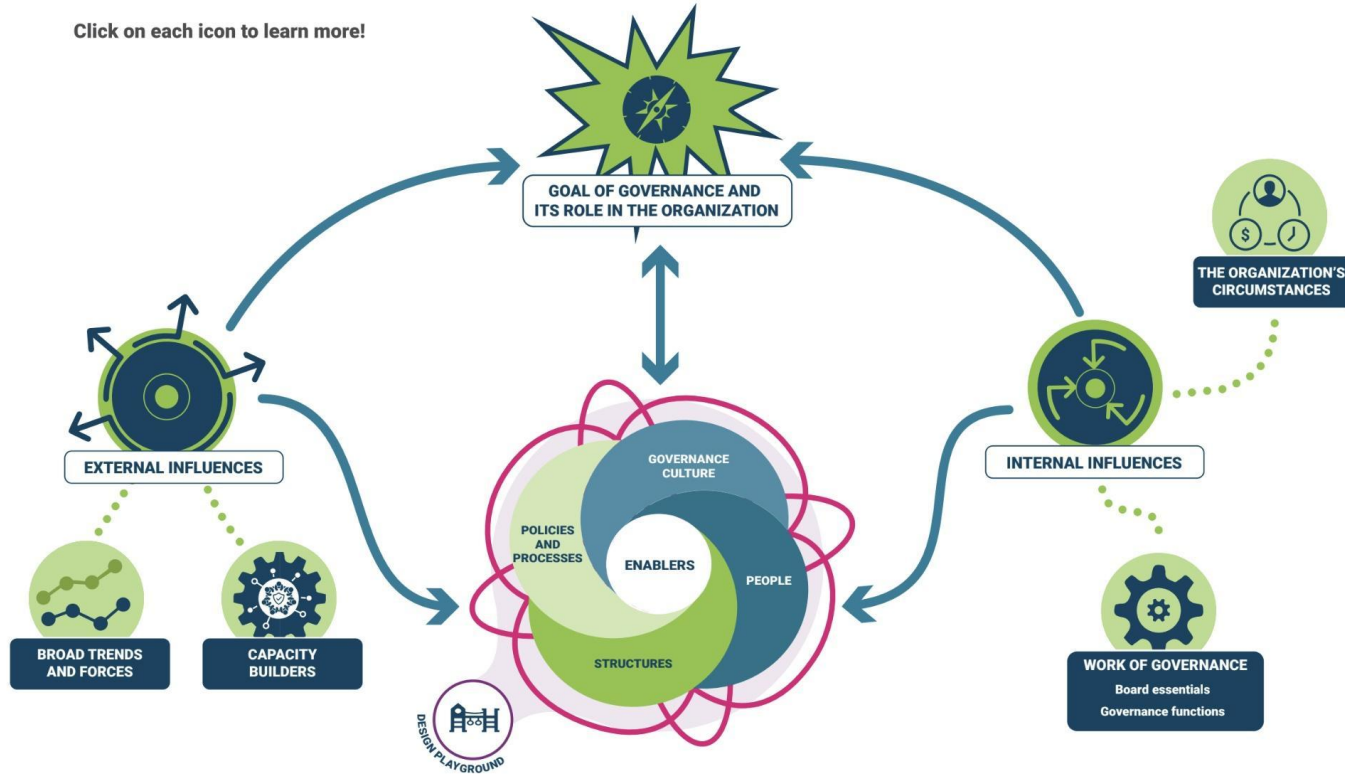
- Ontario Nonprofit Network in collaboration with Ignite NPS, 2021

Emerging Definitions

Board-focused	System-focused
“Oversight” - the practice of board directors coming together to make decisions about the direction of the organization	A framework of responsibilities, requirements and accountabilities within which organizations operate, including regulatory, audit and reporting requirements, and relationships with key stakeholders. (<i>Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Quarterly</i>) The process by which people determine the norms and rules that guide people’s everyday life and behaviour, including: How we choose to build systems and structures that reflect our shared values, and how we choose to care for the land, which provides us everything we need. (<i>WeGovern</i>)

A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION'S GOVERNANCE ECOSYSTEM

Click on each icon to learn more!



Governance is a **complex system** with many interconnected components that influence its design (the structures, processes, people, and culture put in place to fulfill governance).

- Ontario Nonprofit Network

Traditional governance

Approaches

- Centralized decision making
- Formal culture
- Organization centred
- Focus on “oversight” and accountability

Models

- Operational
- Policy governance
- Management
- Constituent representative
- Advisory board
- Patron board
- Results-based

Emerging governance

Approaches

- Purpose/mission-driven
- Participatory
- Collaborative, generative
- Decentralized
- Community centred
- Adaptive and innovative

Models

- Board as navigation system
- Shared leadership and decision-making
- Community governance
- Agile governance
- Networked governance
- Sociocracy/dynamic governance

Governance By Design

A Purpose-to-Practice Tool for RIFs & LIPs

A 5-step guide to clarify shared purpose, power and practice in network governance

Step 1: Meaning | What does governance mean to us?

Prompt: What are we actually governing — and why does it matter?

Think about:

- What does *governance* mean in the context of a partnership network (vs. a single organization)?
- What are we stewarding — resources, relationships, reputation, purpose, outcomes?
- For whom do we hold accountability — funders, partners, newcomers, community?
- What values or assumptions shape how we currently “do” governance?

Output: A short statement capturing your shared understanding of governance (e.g., “For us, governance means stewarding shared purpose and partnership so the network can adapt and deliver impact.”)

Step 2: Purpose | Why do we exist and what are we here to steward?

Prompt: What is the shared purpose our governance exists to advance?

Think about:

- What difference are we collectively trying to make in our local systems?
- How does governance help us stay aligned with that purpose during change or pressure?

Output: A one-sentence “purpose of governance” statement (e.g., “Our governance enables shared leadership and coordinated action toward equitable outcomes for newcomers.”)

Step 3: Principles | What values and agreements will guide us?

Prompt: What principles shape our decisions and relationships?

Think about:

- What does *shared leadership* mean here?
- How do we create equity and inclusion in voice and power?
- How do we behave when tensions arise?

Output: 3–5 guiding principles for collaborative, equitable governance (e.g., “*Equity and Inclusion: We intentionally share power and ensure newcomers’ perspectives guide our priorities and actions.*”)

Step 4: People | Who needs to be involved and how?

Prompt: Who's part of our governance system and what roles do they play?



Think about:

- Whose voices are shaping decisions now — and who's missing?
- How are newcomers or lived-experience leaders included meaningfully?
- How do partners share power and accountability?

Output: A simple “network map” of the people who participate in your governance — core, contributing, consulted and excluded voices.

Step 5: Practices | How do we bring this to life?

Prompt: What processes and habits help us govern with purpose and agility?

Think about:

- How are decisions made — and how could they be more transparent or participatory?
- How do we learn and adapt together?
- What one or two practices could we test or strengthen?

Output: 1–2 concrete next steps or experiments (*e.g., shared meeting facilitation, newcomer co-chairs*)

Reflection.

Thank You!

Lisa Villeneuve

coach@lisavilleneuve.com

lisavilleneuve.com

902.630.1161

Carolyn Whiteway, Executive Director, ARAISA

cwhiteway@araisa.ca

902.6431.3205



Supporting Organizations
Supporting Immigrants
Aider les organismes
qui aident les immigrants

