

# OMSPA's Strategic Plan 2023-2028

February 2023



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# Executive Summary

OMSPA’s 2023-2028 strategic plan is the result of the extraordinary contribution of OMSPA members to the strategic planning process, with over 20% of OMSPA membership having participated directly in 10 working groups that conducted deep dives into multiple areas of central importance to the future of Ontario maple producers.

OMSPA’s 2023-2028 strategic plan builds on the previous 2018-2023 strategic plan. It provides a clear vision and mission for the association, with OMSPA providing leadership and stewardship of Ontario maple syrup production, focused on increasing the economic value for Ontario producers. Core operating principles are defined for the conduct of OMSPA, embracing honesty, integrity, respect, equality of access to member services, and professionalism. This strategic plan recognizes the essential role that OMSPA Locals play for members and aims to support Locals in delivering the services they do best while removing as much of the routine administrative burden from them as possible.

The OMSPA plan activities are focused in six areas. These areas of focus are called “pillars”. A strategic goal is defined for each of these six pillars of OMSPA activity. OMSPA’s **ultimate strategic goal** is to increase the economic value for Ontario maple syrup producers by driving increases in demand for Ontario maple syrup and in maintaining and enhancing premium pricing for Ontario maple syrup due to differentiation based on quality and consumer local food preferences.

To realize this strategic goal, OMSPA will focus on:

Pillar	Strategic Goal	Major Areas of Undertaking
<b>Governance</b>	Optimize OMSPA’s structure for maximum impact and efficiency, following organizational best practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rightsizing the Board of Directors in line with organizational best practices</li> <li>- Evaluate and support Locals in the context of more effectively delivering OMSPA services</li> <li>- Evolution of committees to reflect increased scope of activities</li> </ul>
<b>Applied Research &amp; Training</b>	Develop Ontario’s capacity for applied research and training focused on Ontario maple products production.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide ready access to emerging maple industry applied research</li> <li>- Expand high quality educational resources and training for maple products producers</li> <li>- Foster maple production research in underserved areas</li> </ul>

<b>Quality Assurance</b>	Support and encourage adoption of quality assurance best practices across OMSPA's membership and Ontario maple products production.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Renewal of the best practices manual</li> <li>- A significant focus on member training and adoption</li> <li>- Careful ongoing watch of regulatory and market conditions</li> </ul>
<b>Member Services</b>	Evaluate and optimize the services and benefits OMSPA provides to its members.	Rationalize the delivery of member services, reducing and equalizing the burden on Locals while ensuring equality of services received by members across Ontario
<b>Marketing/ Branding</b>	Develop and execute a substantive multi-year multi-pronged marketing/branding campaign aimed at the Ontario market, building on OMSPA's Sweet Ontario branding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Secure funding for a multi-year campaign</li> <li>- Secure outside expertise</li> <li>- Develop and execute the campaign</li> </ul>
<b>Government and Industry Relations</b>	Build additional government and industry relations capacity, developing strong internal competencies in securing government funding for industry priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establish skilled government and industry relations capacity within OMSPA</li> <li>- Secure base funding for OMSPA operations</li> <li>- Secure grant funding for priority strategic initiatives</li> </ul>

An important component of the 2023-2028 plan is a detailed performance measurement framework, which specifies how OMSPA will measure progress against these strategic goals. For example, to measure progress against OMSPA's ultimate goal of increasing the economic value for Ontario maple syrup producers, we will be measuring the increase in average per tap revenue generated by members, and the increase in value of Ontario maple production to Ontario's GDP. Similar indicators have been identified for all OMSPA's strategic goals for 2023-2028.

The initial draft of the strategic plan was circulated to all members in October of 2022. Member feedback was incorporated into a revised draft that was presented to OMSPA's board for review on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022. The version you are reading now incorporates the feedback provided by both members and the board. A revised, almost-final version was circulated to all members. Members had a final opportunity to provide comment on OMSPA's 2023-2028 strategic plan during the information sessions being held in January 2023. Following the January Info Days, the strategic plan was ratified by the Board of Directors on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

# Letter from the President

A warm hello to my fellow OMSPA members. In October a draft of OMSPA's strategic plan was made available after thousands of hours of hard work by around 100 member volunteers who contributed to 10 working groups, each examining an important area to the future of OMSPA. You now have in your hands a revised and close-to-final version of the strategic plan.

This revised version of the strategic plan has greatly benefited from the feedback provided by members. Much of this feedback was submitted in writing. Many of you also gave your feedback during the four workshops that were held in October, each looking at a different part of the draft strategic plan. We have listened to the concerns of the members. The result is an updated strategic plan that has been improved from head to tail. The many improvements made to the plan either A) change an aspect of the plan to address something raised by a member, or B) clarifies the language used (less complicated and more precise).

I would like to personally thank all members who read the plan, thought about it, and sent us their thoughts. There is no question that your comments and suggestions has made this strategic plan stronger. The result of all our hard work is a 2023-2028 strategic plan that we can be proud of.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. Heerkens', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial 'F'.

Frank Heerkens, President

# A – Introduction

The Ontario Maple Syrup Producers Association (OMSPA) has been serving Ontario maple syrup producers since 1966. Run by a volunteer board and part-time Executive Director, OMSPA is built directly on the shoulders of the great many Ontario producers who have contributed so generously of their expertise, energy and time. OMSPA is an organization built by its members, for its members.

You are currently reading the revised draft of OMSPA's 2022-2028 strategic plan. This plan is the result of thousands of hours of effort by OMSPA volunteers, with over 20% of OMSPA's membership having contributed directly to its development. The initial draft of the strategic plan was presented to members for comment in October of 2022. The input received on the initial draft has been incorporated into this revised draft. The "Summary of Changes Made to the Initial Draft" that is presented at the beginning of this document provides a quick overview of the many changes and improvements that have been made in response to feedback.

This strategic plan is structured as follows. We first discuss the purpose of a strategic plan, and describe the immense amount of work that went into developing this document you are reading. We then provide information on where OMSPA is currently at, comparing our organization to other Ontario agricultural organizations and to maple associations in other provinces and states. We then take a close look at what OMSPA stands for and what OMSPA is trying to accomplish, looking at our vision, mission, strategic goals and operating principles, with an emphasis on the role of OMSPA Locals.

The nuts and bolts of OMSPA's strategic plan are laid out in the Section called OMSPA's Strategic Roadmap 2023-2028. This section lays out specific objectives and outcomes for OMSPA, looking at each of our six pillars (areas of focus). This strategic plan then concludes with a discussion of how we will measure our progress against the goals we've established.

Thank you to all members who provided feedback on the initial draft of this strategic plan. Your input has been invaluable in making sure the intentions of the many members who have contributed to the strategic planning process are accurately communicated, and in ensuring that all angles of the many important issues addressed in this plan have been considered.

## What is the purpose of a strategic plan?

The following is a short explanation of why, in an organization like OMSPA, we invest our precious volunteer time to put together a strategic plan. This explanation is borrowed directly from the new strategic plan just released by the Ontario Woodlot Association, with our sincere thanks to the OWA for letting us use it here.

*The purpose of strategic planning is to set overall goals for an organization, be it a business, non-profit, government agency, or any group of people trying to collectively head in the right direction. While I readily admit that I tend to be more of a just get the job done type of person, the value of taking a step back and thinking deeply and carefully about what exactly it is we want to accomplish and how, is immeasurable. A good strategic plan establishes a clear direction for us to take, and it helps to sharpen our focus in order to get there. Our recent strategic planning exercise has allowed us to develop solid goals and targets, and will help our staff and many volunteers to focus their efforts on meeting them.*

This is the exact purpose of OMSPA's strategic plan, which you are now reading.

## About OMSPA's strategic planning process

To help focus limited resources on the activities that deliver the most value to Ontario maple syrup producers, every five years OMSPA conducts a detailed strategic review. This review evaluates progress against the previously established goals, examines how the Ontario maple syrup market is evolving and what this means for producers, and develops a deep understanding of the needs and wants of OMSPA members. The outcome is a 5-year strategic plan that establishes the strategic priorities for the organization and lays out the roadmap for achieving these priorities.

Starting in the fall of 2021, OMSPA members came together in 10 working groups, representing close to 20% of OMSPA membership. These working groups conducted deep dives into multiple areas of central importance to the future of Ontario maple producers, and produced a rich body of knowledge, insights and recommendations as key inputs into the process of developing OMSPA's next strategic plan. The result of this extraordinary work by OMSPA

members is the OMSPA Strategic Plan 2023-28 which you are now reading. You can access the final reports of each of these working groups at <https://www.omspa.ca/working-group-reports>. The details of OMSPA's 2023-28 strategic plan are based directly on these reports.

OMSPA is deeply indebted to its many members that contributed to the working groups who put the hard work in to develop the insights and recommendations at the heart of this strategic plan. Some of this work is front and centre in the resulting strategy. And some of this work is more in the background, providing the crucial data and context needed to make important decisions about the future of OMSPA. **To all working group contributors, OMSPA owes you a huge and genuine thank you.**

## Contrasting OMSPA's current and previous strategic planning process

To fully understand the depth of work by volunteer OMSPA members that went into this 2023-2028 strategic plan it is useful to compare the 2023-2028 planning process with the planning process for the previous 2018-2023 strategic plan. The 2018-2023 strategic plan was developed by OMSPA's Board, with the bulk of the work being done over a two-day period. The heavy lifting involved in developing the plan fell on a small number of the most dedicated board members. A member survey was conducted as an important input into the process, with only around 40 members responding. The draft plan was not circulated to OMSPA members in advance of it being ratified by the Board.

By contrast, the process of developing the 2023-2028 plan has taken more than a year. Roughly 20% of OMSPA members participated directly in one or more working groups, with 10 final reports from working groups providing the insights and information needed to develop the plan which you are reading now. Each working group presented their findings in a webinar open to all OMSPA members. A member survey was conducted as an important input to the strategic planning process, with an emphasis on getting as many members to complete the survey as possible. Approximately 200 members responded to the survey. These reports formed the basis for developing an initial draft of the plan, which was circulated to OMSPA membership for comment. The strategic plan was also presented to members in a series of four workshops. All member feedback on the strategic plan was collected, analyzed, and used to improve the initial draft in important ways. The revised draft was presented to

and discussed by the Board at the end of November 2022. The input of the board was incorporated into a close-to final draft which was circulated to all members. Following the conclusion of OMSPA's Info Days in January 2023, the strategic plan was ratified on by OMSPA's Board on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

### Building on the 2018-2022 strategic plan

This 2023-28 strategic plan is in many ways a direct evolution of the 2018-2023 strategic plan. OMSPA is indebted to the strategic foundation that has been laid by the hard work of past OMSPA leadership, and especially the team led by past President Ray Bonenberg that developed the 2018-2023 plan. The 2018-2023 strategic plan can be found at <https://www.omspa.ca/useful-downloads>.

While many of the outcomes identified in the 2023-28 strategic plan are an obvious continuation of the priorities set in the 2018-2023 strategic plan, there are a few notable points of departure. The 2018 strategic plan identified substantial growth in membership as the top priority. In practice, this turned out to be a hard priority to make progress on. The current strategic plan considers growth in membership an anticipated outcome of realizing improvements across the full suite of OMSPA activities. Other aspects of the 2023-2028 plan that are new since the 2018-2023 plan include the development of internal government and industry relations capacity, and a focus on including the entire maple products value chain, including equipment manufacturers, packers, etc.

A further major difference between the current and previous strategic plans is how performance against objectives is measured and how accountability is assigned. The 2018-2023 plan did not discuss how progress against the plan's objectives would be measured. As such, it proved hard to assess progress against this plan. The current strategic plan lays out in detail how OMSPA will measure progress against the goals that are set, and assigns clear accountability for each area of activity.

### Thanks to OMAFRA

OMSPA's ability to dramatically expand the strategic planning process as compared to previous efforts is due to two factors: 1) the incredible dedication of OMSPA volunteers, and 2) generous support for the strategic planning process from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). The support from OMAFRA has allowed OMSPA to conduct a best-in-class strategic planning process, producing a deeper and more detailed roadmap for OMSPA than has previously been possible. Moving forward, it is our intention to continue to evolve and improve OMSPA's strategic planning process, continuing to use a structured process that is run by volunteer members. In addition, a strong emphasis will be placed on measuring progress against objectives, with ongoing adjustments to the strategic roadmap made based on actual results being realized.

## B – Context: Understanding OMSPA in 2022

To be able to properly place the strategic plan that follows for the period 2023-28 in context, it is helpful to understand OMSPA as it is operating in 2022, immediately prior to this planning window.

OMSPA is staffed by an Executive Director (half time paid position), with a large Board of Directors and associated committees comprised of volunteer OMSPA members. As of 2022



OMSPA has 600 members and operated on an annual budget of roughly \$72k for core operations, and a further \$155k in government grants for strategic initiatives. Before 2021 OMSPA was conducting business as usual, guided by the 2018-2023 strategic plan. Since 2021 OMSPA leadership has been focused first on identifying and engaging members with the skill sets needed by OMSPA to develop a comprehensive strategic plan based on deep analysis of the sector, and then on undertaking the strategic planning process itself.

### How does OMSPA compare to other Ontario ag organizations?

As part of the process of developing this draft strategic plan, the Financial Sustainability and Effectiveness of OMSPA working group benchmarked OMSPA against comparable Ontario agricultural organizations. The Ontario Beekeepers Association (OBA) was deemed the most relevant to OMSPA for several reasons, including that both honey and maple syrup industries have roughly the same contribution to Ontario's gross domestic product. It is also important to note that OBA and OMSPA have some important differences. The OBA intersects directly with a number of other agricultural associations due to the essential role that bees play in crop pollination, and the context for honey production is considerably more regulated than maple syrup production.

The comparison of the two associations was enlightening. The OBA, serving an industry roughly the same size and impact as maple syrup producers, has seven full time employees, as compared to OMSPA's 0.5 full time employees. Their annual budget is approximately \$725K, as compared to OMSPA's 2022 budget of \$228K (\$72K core funding plus \$150K in project funding). One immediate take-away from this comparison is that OMSPA appears to be significantly under-resourced compared to similar Ontario ag organizations.

It is interesting to note that membership fees provide only 19% of the OBA's income. Their primary source of income is from government grants for strategic initiatives. Until recently, the OBA was provided base funding by OMAFRA, to support a transitional period where OBA was able to expand their scope of activities while still developing strategies to sustainably fund this expanded scope. The development path for OMSPA that is laid out in this strategic plan follows a similar path to that taken by the OBA.

### How does OMSPA compare to other maple organizations?

The Financial Sustainability and Effectiveness of OMSPA working group compared OMSPA to maple syrup producers' associations in other North American jurisdictions including New Brunswick, Vermont and New York. This comparison revealed that OMSPA is understaffed and under-resourced when compared to these competing jurisdictions. All three competing jurisdictions have over 1 FTE (full time equivalent) compared to OMSPA's 0.5 FTE. In addition, Vermont and New York both have highly experienced extension staff employed by allied research organizations, and New Brunswick is now developing similar extension capacity. In addition, this comparison identified that OMSPA's Board was dramatically larger than the Boards of these other maple producers' associations.

# C - OMSPA's Vision for 2028

OMSPA is a member-led agricultural producers association in the province of Ontario, directly serving the needs of maple syrup producers across the province.

## Vision Statement

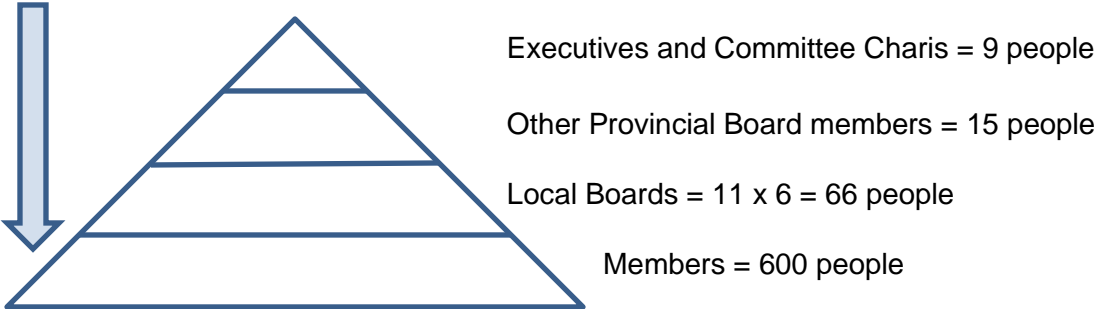
OMSPA envisions a robust and growing maple syrup industry in Ontario that embraces the highest standards of quality assurance and professionalism to provide exceptional maple products to Ontario, Canadian and international markets, under the Sweet Ontario brand that is synonymous with the highest quality. The growing Ontario industry embraces all producers from the hobbyist to the largest commercial operations, as well as the other links in the maple value chain - bottlers, equipment manufacturers, other food industry players, and researchers. A prosperous Ontario maple products sector recognizes and honours the rich tradition of maple syrup production in Ontario, while being excellent stewards of Ontario's maple sugar bushes upon which the industry depends.

## Mission Statement

The Ontario Maple Syrup Producers' Association (OMSPA) provides leadership and stewardship of Ontario maple syrup production, working on behalf of producers and the maple products value chain to support and drive adoption of best practices through ongoing education and training, to increase the economic value of the market for Ontario maple syrup through marketing and promotional activities, and to work through government advocacy towards a policy climate that aligns with the needs of producers and the entire maple products value chain.

## The Role of OMSPA Locals – Flipping the Pyramid

Most organizations describe their structure in terms of a top-down pyramid. Referring to the diagram below, such a diagram for OMSPA has the Executive Sub-Committee and committee chairs at the top of the pyramid. Under this are the remaining provincial board members. Underneath the provincial board members are the Local boards. And at the bottom of the pyramid are OMSPA's 600 members.

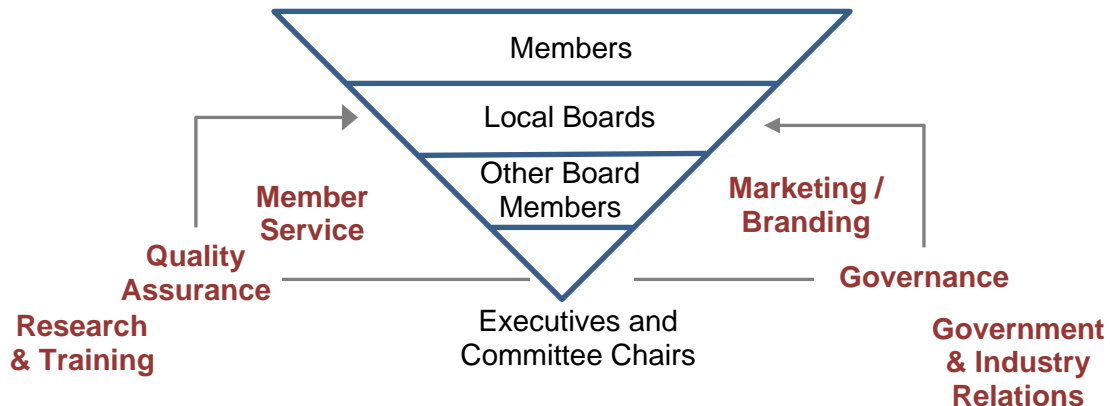


Locals play an active role in two of the top 5 reasons why members belong to OMSPA - delivery of technical information and networking (see Slide 28 of the [Member Engagement Survey Final Report](#)). Therefore, it is safe to say that the performance of OMSPA Locals is critical to the health of the organization.

However, as a group OMSPA Locals are facing serious challenges. As of now:

- 20% have ceased to function
- 20% are at risk of ceasing to operate in the next few years
- 20% are functioning well
- 40% are somewhere in between the risk of failing and functioning well

This strategic plan is focused on the needs of members, and acknowledges the importance of Locals to its members. The development of the strategic plan has been guided by an inverse pyramid, with OMSPA's executive and provincial board in place to serve members, including and especially helping Locals succeed.



Some of the ways that this strategic plan aims to better support OMSPA's Locals include:

- Helping improve governance of Locals, including providing leadership training
- Providing more support for locally held training and workshops
- Offering to take some of the administrative burden off Locals, such as providing consolidated financial reporting.

## OMSPA's Strategic Goals – 2023 to 2028

OMSPA's **ultimate strategic goal** is to increase the economic value for Ontario maple syrup producers by driving increases in demand for Ontario maple syrup and in maintaining and enhancing premium pricing for Ontario maple syrup due to differentiation based on quality and public preferences for local food.

The following goals define the primary areas of undertaking that OMSPA will focus on to increase the economic value of Ontario's maple syrup production:

- **Member Services** - Evaluate and optimize the services and benefits OMSPA provides to its members.

- **Quality Assurance** - Drive adoption of quality assurance best practices across OMSPA's membership and Ontario maple products production.
- **Applied Research & Training** - Develop Ontario's capacity for applied research and training focused on Ontario maple products production.
- **Marketing/Branding** - Develop and execute a substantive multi-year marketing/branding campaign aimed at the Ontario market, building on the existing Sweet Ontario brand.
- **Governance** - Optimize and rationalize OMSPA's structure for maximum impact and efficiency, following organizational best practices.
- **Government and Industry Relations** - Establish government and industry relations capacity, developing strong internal competencies in securing government funding for member priorities.

These six strategic goals map directly to OMSPA's six pillars (areas of focus) that are defined in the strategic roadmap presented in the next section of this strategic plan.

## Operating Principles

The following operating principles have been identified as fundamental to achieving OMSPA's vision for the future of Ontario maple syrup production:

- A. Responsibility, honesty, integrity, respect, and good faith will be fully embodied in all OMSPA activities and between OMSPA members.
- B. OMSPA will pursue professionalism (see definition below) in all its activities and in the operations of its members:
  - OMSPA will conduct all activities with professionalism, including the delivery of member services, training and educational resources, and throughout OMSPA member communications.
  - OMSPA will promote professionalism in Ontario producers as a core value and defining characteristic of Ontario's maple sector, with professionalism underlying all interactions between OMSPA members.
- C. OMSPA will strive to provide equal access and representation for all members:
  - OMSPA will strive to provide equal access to services and benefits to all members.
  - OMSPA will strive to create a governance structure where all members have equal representation.
- D. OMSPA will provide leadership in environmental stewardship of Ontario's maple forests.
- E. A detailed and constantly evolving understanding of the needs of Ontario producers (from hobbyists to large commercial producers) will inform all OMSPA decisions and strategic planning.

- F. Collaborating, partnering, and creating equality of access to underrepresented and diverse groups is important to the future of OMSPA, with Indigenous communities identified as a priority stakeholder group to engage.

## Professionalism in Organizational Behaviour

The concept of “professionalism” is central to the successful evolution of OMSPA and the sustainable growth of the Ontario maple syrup industry. For OMSPA, professionalism can be defined as an attitude which demands working at a high level of competence, coupled with upholding high standards for work outputs. Professionalism encompasses:

- How relations are conducted with other members, clients, suppliers, and government partners;
- How quality assurance standards are established and assured;
- How budgeting and accounting is carried out;
- How marketing and training initiatives are designed, delivered, and evaluated;
- How member benefits are designed, delivered, and evaluated, and;
- How OMSPA is governed.

## D - OMSPA’s Strategic Roadmap 2023-28

All activities undertaken by OMSPA in 2023-28 are aimed at realizing OMSPA’s ultimate goal of increasing the economic returns for the Ontario maple products sector by driving increases in demand for Ontario maple products and in maintaining and enhancing premium pricing for Ontario maple syrup due to differentiation.

This section discusses the roadmap to achieve OMSPA’s goal for the 2023-2028 strategic planning period, looking at how we get from here to there. We first review the six areas of focus under which OMSPA’s activities are organized, and look at the major areas of undertaking being pursued in this strategic plan. We then take a more detailed look at the outcomes, outputs, activities and target completion dates for each of OMSPA’s six pillars in turn.

This roadmap is also clearly laid out in the logic model that has been developed for the 2023-28 strategic plan. This logic model presents a clear structure with outcomes, outputs and activities, showing how the different areas of activity align and combine to realize OMSPA’s strategic goals. This logic model is included as an Addendum to this strategic plan – see page 27.

### OMSPA’s Six Pillars

OMSPA’s activities can be categorized under six pillars (areas of focus), noting that these six pillars align directly with OMSPA’s strategic goals for 2023-28 (see page 6):

**Pillars that directly touch OMSPA membership:**

1. Member services
2. Quality assurance
3. Applied research and training (ART)

**Pillars that provide value to members more indirectly:**

4. Governance
5. Government and industry relations
6. Marketing/branding

The following list summarizes the major areas of undertaking for OMSPA during the 2023-28 strategic planning period. This is not an exhaustive list of activities to be undertaken, but rather highlights the primary changes from the current status quo:

1. **Member services** - Re-focusing and improving the full range of member services based on member feedback received in this strategic planning process
  - Optimize the delivery of member services, supporting locals in delivering priority services while making sure that members all across Ontario have equal access
2. **Quality assurance** - Renewed focus on quality assurance and food safety
  - Best practices manual renewal
  - A significant focus on member training and adoption
  - Active monitoring of government, large retailers and other maple syrup producing provinces and states for changes to certification and regulatory requirements that could impact Ontario producers
3. **ART** - Creation of permanent applied research and training (ART) capacity
  - Expanded educational resources and training
    - Comprehensive extension (including regional localization) of maple industry research
    - Associated workshops and education resources addressing best practices in production and quality assurance
    - Maple technicians' course
    - Educational resources supporting producers in accessing and utilizing more trees
    - Training and resources to support members who want to achieve certification (organic and CFIA)
4. **Marketing/branding** - A multi-year marketing/branding campaign aimed at the Ontario market, based on OMSPA's Sweet Ontario branding
5. **Governance** - Improving OMSPA's governance structure in line with best practices

6. **Government and Industry Relations** - Establish government and industry relations capacity, developing strong internal competencies in securing government funding for member priorities while developing extensive industry relationships

The following discussion examines each of these categories of activity in detail.

## Pillar 1 – Member Services

The *Member Engagement* working group was formed in the fall of 2021 to develop recommendations to OMSPA's strategic planning process about the needs and expectations of members, and how best to meet these needs. This group undertook a detailed and rigorous member survey process to identify and prioritize the "benefits" that members and prospective members need and want from OMSPA and that will motivate them to join and actively participate. The report from the *Member Engagement* working group can be accessed at <https://www.omspa.ca/member-engagement>.

There were several key takeaways from the work of this working group. It was concluded that effectively engaging its membership is crucial to OMSPA fulfilling its mandate. While 62% of respondents were loyal to OMSPA, 38% were neutral or "vulnerable", indicating significant room for improvement. The survey found significant differences in how different members perceive OMSPA, based on differences in age and size of their operation.

Fundamentally, while the survey indicated that there was still significant loyalty to OMSPA within the membership, there are signs for concern. The youngest age group – the future of OMSPA – is far less loyal than the oldest age group. In addition, there is likely residual loyalty to OMSPA within the membership. However, this loyalty has likely been drawn down for the last two years as COVID significantly reduced OMSPA activities at the local level.

The process to optimize member services will look at how to best expand OMSPA's range of services to encompass areas of increasing importance to Ontario producers, including and especially the ability for producers to receive and monetize carbon credits for sustainable operations, and resources to assist producers in accessing and utilizing more trees to put into production. An example of a new benefit that could be examined is the feasibility of a health insurance program like the one offered by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. This process of optimization may also identify certain member services that are not being valued by members. In such cases, the optimization process will either recommend how this service can be re-focused and improved, or suggest that these resources be re-allocated to services that are highly valued by members.

The process to optimize member services will also look at how to best support OMSPA's Locals in delivering priority services. This will involve directly supporting Locals in delivering programs such as training workshops.

The Member Engagement working group formulated several recommendations for the 2023-28 strategic planning process, including:

- Developing a comprehensive member engagement strategy as a near-term, high priority goal.
- The planning horizon for this member engagement strategy should align with the strategic plan (5 years).

- Development of the member engagement strategy should be tasked to a committee with broad representation from across OMSPA's full range of activities. A new committee could be struck specifically for this purpose, or a sub-committee of the Governance committee could be formed.

The 2023-28 Strategic Planning process established the following medium term and immediate outcomes for optimized services to OMSPA members:

**Medium Term Outcome:** *Provide significant value to members and their operations*

**Immediate Outcome:** *Optimize the services and benefits OMSPA provides to its members*

This immediate outcome translates into four immediate outcomes. The following table captures these four outputs, their associated activities, and the target completion date:

Output(s)	Activities	Target Completion Date
Leadership secured to lead "Optimization of Member Services" initiative (from within OMSPA membership)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Short list of members with relevant skill sets identified</li> <li>2. Short list engaged on willingness and ability</li> <li>3. Leadership for initiative put in place</li> </ol>	Q1 2023
A comprehensive evaluation of OMSPA member services, with recommendations for optimization and improvement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Complete the thorough evaluation of current member services and service delivery</li> <li>2. Develop detailed recommendations on the optimization of OMSPA services</li> <li>3. Develop recommendations on how to better support Locals in delivering services where appropriate</li> <li>4. Develop recommendations on the centralization of OMSPA member service delivery where appropriate</li> </ol>	End of 2023
Detailed operational plan for optimizing member services is approved by the Board	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Members engaged on proposed plan for optimization of member services</li> <li>2. Board ratifies optimization plan</li> <li>3. Ratified optimization plan is translated into a detailed operational plan</li> <li>4. Operational plan ratified by Board</li> </ol>	Q1 2024 Q1 2024 Q2 2024 Q2 2024



OMSPA staff and Committee members put the operational plan into action	1. Operational plan is acted on, until completed	Q4 2025
Ongoing improvement to member services	1. Annual evaluation of member services based on the results of member surveys	2026 forward

## Pillar 2 – Quality Assurance

The *Quality Assurance* working group developed a detailed understanding of how quality assurance and food safety might impact Ontario producers as a key input to the 2023-28 strategic plan. The detailed report produced by this working group can be accessed here: <https://www.omspa.ca/quality-assurance>.

The working group concluded that on balance, putting a strong focus on food safety and quality assurance will deliver significant benefits to Ontario maple producers, with three primary benefits:

### 1 - Marketing Advantage

Producers of high-quality maple syrup can be more profitable if they can sell their maple syrup at higher unit prices and have a committed set of repeat customers. The quality of Ontario's maple syrup represents an opportunity to differentiate our product from maple products produced elsewhere.

### 2 - Retail Expansion

Large retail partners now typically expect strong food safety and traceability practices as a prerequisite for products they stock. Producers who cannot demonstrate strong food safety and traceability practices may face barriers when they try to expand their markets.

### 3 - Collective Benefit

A small minority of maple syrup producers can damage the reputation of Ontario maple syrup by producing and selling low quality products. It is important that OMSPA creates a supportive environment with training and other resources that can enable all maple syrup producers in Ontario to continuously improve the safety and quality of our maple syrup.

Given the importance of quality assurance to Ontario producers, the working group made a suite of recommendations to the 2023-28 strategic planning process, including:

- Immediate priority – Task the OMSPA Quality Assurance Committee with launching a process to develop revitalized best practice manuals (BPMs), with one manual focused on commercial operators (1,000 taps and upwards) and the other manual focused on smaller operators and hobbyists.
- Task the OMSPA Quality Assurance Committee with developing and offering enhanced training and outreach based on the new BPMs, fully taking advantage of relevant material produced in other jurisdictions.

- Task the OMSPA Quality Assurance Committee with ongoing monitoring of trends and developments in maple products certification, both coming down the pipe in competing jurisdictions and changes being contemplated at the federal and provincial level. If ongoing changes in other jurisdictions and/or government regulatory bodies warrant further attention by OMSPA, the Quality Assurance Committee is instructed to bring a detailed understanding of the issue and recommended solutions to the OMSPA board.

The Quality Assurance working group spent considerable time and energy exploring the issue of certification, recognizing from the outset that this issue is highly contentious for OMSPA members. The working group discussions focused on exploring the value of a certification program that certified producers who have taken prescribed courses, as opposed to certifying sugar camps. The pros of an Ontario maple certification program identified by the working group include significant advantages in accessing food distribution channels, enhanced ability to market and brand Ontario maple syrup as a premium product based on quality, and the fact that such a program would acknowledge the existing excellence in the many Ontario producers who uphold the highest quality standards. The primary con of implementing a certification program was identified as the additional burden placed on Ontario producers. The conclusion of the working group was that the evolving regulatory and retail environment, both in Ontario and in other jurisdictions, needs to be carefully monitored, and if changing circumstances warrant, the issue and one or more recommended solutions should be brought to the board. Fundamentally, the Quality Assurance Committee will need to stay vigilant to protect the competitive position of Ontario producers.

One area in which there was agreement is that it would be valuable for OMSPA to support members who wish to become certified, either organic or CFIA. This support can include educational materials (developing an *OMSPA Guide to Preparing for CFIA Certification* for example) and mentorship from members who have already certified their operations.

Given the strong feelings that mention of certification can bring up in OMSPA members, it is important to state the following clearly and directly:

- This strategic plan does not call for OMSPA to initiate its own mandatory certification program, recognizing that OMSPA members do not want to be told they have to be certified.
- If at a later point the Quality Assurance Committee feels that OMSPA does need to revisit the issue of certification due to changing markets and regulatory concerns, this issue will be brought to the board in a transparent manner for consideration. Any future discussion of certification will be done openly, with OMSPA membership engaged in the conversation.

It is also worth stating that prior to the start of this current strategic planning process the Governance Committee looked at the value of an Ontario maple syrup marketing board on behalf of the Board of Directors. The conclusion of this evaluation was that a marketing board was not appropriate for Ontario.

The recommendations of the Quality Assurance working group have been translated into the 2023-28 strategic plan with the following medium term and immediate outcomes:

**Medium Term Outcome:** *Maintain and enhance premium pricing for Ontario maple syrup due to differentiation based on quality*

**Immediate Outcome:** *Support and encourage adoption of quality assurance best practices across OMSPA's membership and Ontario maple products production*

This immediate outcome translates into seven outputs. The following table captures these seven outputs, their associated activities, and target completion dates:

<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Target Completion Date</b>
Careful ongoing watch of regulatory and market conditions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Actively monitor the changing regulatory and market landscape</li> <li>2. Bring any emerging opportunities or threats to the attention of the board</li> </ol>	Ongoing
Updated and improved best practices manual (BPM) materials	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop detailed proposal for updating of the BPM, ratified by OMSPA Board</li> <li>2. Secure required funding for BPM initiative</li> <li>3. Secure outside expertise required</li> <li>4. Develop revised BPM materials</li> </ol>	End of 2022 Q1 2023 Q2 2023 Q4 2024
Training and educational resources developed based on ongoing BPM work	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ongoing close engagement with expertise developing revised BPMs</li> <li>2. Identification of priority topics</li> <li>3. Develop training and education resources</li> </ol>	Ongoing Q1 2024 Q3 2024
Deliver training and education based on updated best practices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Regularly update membership on progress</li> <li>2. Identify and secure parties who will deliver education and training</li> <li>3. Deliver training and education to membership</li> </ol>	Ongoing Q3 2024 Q4 2024
Applied research and training (ART) staff engaged to build out training and education resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Engage new ART staff on training and education related to quality assurance</li> <li>2. Transfer program material and resources to ART staff</li> </ol>	Q3 2025 Q3 2025 Q3 2025

	3. Identify priorities for ART staff in developing new materials	
Primary responsibility for delivery of training and education resources is transferred to ART staff	1. ART staff assume responsibility for delivery of training and education related to quality assurance	Q1 2026
Develop resources to support members in becoming certified	1. Analyze options for supporting members, developing recommendations	Q1 2026
	2. Survey member on proposed resources (educational materials, mentorship, other?)	Q2 2026
	3. Adjust according to member feedback	Q3 2026
	4. Begin offering these resources to members	Q3 2026

Fundamentally, OMSPA needs to develop the capacity to actively monitor and rapidly respond to a changing regulatory and market landscape. If OMSPA members are going to be able to shape their own future with regards to quality assurance and regulation, we must be prepared to respond rapidly to external developments. For example, how do we respond if CFIA decides that all links in the maple syrup value chain need to be traced? Do we know this is coming in advance, given us time to influence and shape policy development, or are we left to react after the fact? Being able to shape our own fate regarding certification will require constant attention and the development of organizational capacity in government and industry relations (see Pillar 6).

### Pillar 3 – Applied Research and Training

The *Applied Research & Training* (ART) working group identified that Ontario research and training focused on maple products production is unfunded and unorganized compared to competitor jurisdictions. However, given that there is significant training and research being undertaken in Quebec, Vermont and New York, Ontario does not need to “re-invent the wheel”. Following the examples of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia there is the opportunity to put in place extension expertise that **can take training and research from other jurisdictions and adapt it to the needs of OMSPA members**. The final report of this working group can be accessed here: <https://www.omspa.ca/applied-research-and-training>.

There are a number of compelling factors that suggest that Ontario should be developing this capacity:

- An effective applied research and training capacity is necessary to drive increased quality assurance and food safety standards across Ontario production.
- The rate of change in Ontario maple sector has never been higher, driven by climate change, rapidly increasing demand for maple products and other factors. Ongoing professional development can play a significant role in equipping Ontario producers to adapt.

- In the face of rapidly increasing demand, the Ontario maple industry is facing a looming shortage of skilled labour and business operators. Comprehensive training at the college level will be essential to filling this pending gap.
- Research and training focused on the specific needs of OMSPA members will drive productivity improvements across the sector.
- Ontario used to have some modest capacity in maple sector research and training through OMAFRA, but this is no longer the case.

The ART working group mapped out the following training and research priorities for OMSPA:

**Short term priority** – develop workshop and training materials in support of the revitalized best practices manuals, addressing member needs from across the province.

**Medium term priority** – build capacity in research focused on the needs of Ontario maple syrup producers (for example, production techniques and technology), exploring the potential for the launch of the Maple Applied Research & Training (MART) Centre.

**Long term priority** – explore the potential to including a maple training certificate within Algonquin College’s Agricultural Business Program.

The MART Centre concept requires further explanation. The ART working group explored the potential launch of a centre focused on providing Ontario maple syrup producers with high quality training and research tailored to their specific needs. This centre, tentatively called the Maple Applied Research and Training Centre (MART) will be a virtual clearing house that will:

- A) identify research and training needs of OMSPA members
- B) find the best resources to meet these needs, heavily leaning on adapting existing high-quality materials produced in other jurisdictions
- C) provide these resources to OMSPA members through workshops, remote learning, videos, and other means.

The proposed MART Centre would be its own separate entity, with a modest staff of two full time employees. OMAFRA would be asked to fund the MART Centre, acknowledging that the Centre rebuilds Ontario’s capacity in maple sector research and training that OMAFRA used to provide. OMSPA would exercise oversight and guidance of the MART Centre through a dominant position on their Board of Directors.

Algonquin College has expressed interest in partnering with OMSPA to make the MART Centre concept a reality. Preliminary discussions have been held, and a Letter of Intent has been signed. However, it is important to stress that OMSPA is under no obligation of any kind to proceed with Algonquin, and has complete freedom in charting a path forward for research and training that best meets the needs of our members.

The recommendations of the ART working group have been brought forward into the 2023-28 Strategic Planning process with the following medium term and immediate outcomes calling for development of maple syrup-focused ART capacity in Ontario:

**Medium Term Outcome:** *Maintain and enhance premium pricing for Ontario maple syrup due to differentiation based on quality and local food preferences*

**Immediate Outcome:** *Develop Ontario's capacity for applied research and training focused on the needs of OMSPA members*

This immediate outcome translates into five outputs. The following table captures these five outputs, their associated activities, and the target completion dates:

<b>Output(s)</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Target Completion Date</b>
Targeted research to address unmet needs of OMSPA members not addressed elsewhere	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continue oversight of OMSPA RTTC research projects</li> <li>2. Extension of OMSPA applied research topics</li> </ol>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Q4 2023</p>
Support the Quality Assurance Committee in developing training and educational resources based on ongoing work on the best practices manual	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Coordinate with the Quality Assurance Committee to determine how they can best be supported in developing training and educational resources</li> <li>2. Provide ongoing assistance in developing these resources</li> <li>3. Provide ongoing assistance in getting these resources into the hands of OMSPA members</li> </ol>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Q3 2024</p> <p>Q4 2024</p>
Detailed proposal for proposed MART Centre is completed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Extend the scope of RTTC to include maple producer training</li> <li>2. Develop draft proposal for a comprehensive MART Centre</li> <li>3. Engage membership on detailed proposal</li> <li>4. Ratification of detailed proposal by the Board</li> </ol>	<p>End of Q3 2023</p> <p>Q4 2023</p> <p>End of 2023</p>
Multi-year funding secured for launch of MART Centre	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identification of government funding targets</li> <li>2. Engagement with identified funding targets</li> <li>3. Negotiation of funding package completed</li> </ol>	<p>Early 2024</p> <p>Early 2024</p> <p>End of 2024</p>

MART established and launched and providing comprehensive ART services to Ontario maple producers	1. Board of Directors is constituted / committees struck	Q1 2024
	2. Search for required resources and/or partners	Early 2024
	3. Required resources and/or partners are secured	Late 2024
	4. Hiring process completed	Q2 2025
	5. Strategic plan and initial programming developed	Q4 2025
	6. MART staff executing on strategic plan	Q1 2026

## Pillar 4 – Marketing/Branding

The *Product Differentiation and Market Development* working group took a detailed look at the role of marketing and product differentiation in increasing the economic value of Ontario maple syrup operations. The working group concluded that branding / market development is crucial to the future financial success of OMSPA members. It also found that there is an opportunity for OMSPA to further develop the Sweet Ontario brand, with carefully thought-out product differentiation essential to maximizing the value of successfully branding Ontario maple syrup. The final report of this group can be accessed here:

<https://www.omspa.ca/product-differentiation>.

The working group noted that OMSPA does not have the required expertise within its membership to develop a comprehensive marketing/branding strategy, and will therefore need to bring onboard professional food branding expertise to work closely with OMSPA's Marketing and Promotions Committee. The working group concluded that this brand strategy initiative should update and enhance OMSPA's Sweet Ontario brand, taking care to capture and build on the value that has been built.

Three factors were highlighted by the group as being essential to the success of a proposed OMSPA branding initiative:

1. Effective brand development requires consistent investment and effort over an extended period.
2. Effective branding requires a significant investment in organizational culture (OMSPA's culture). Brand is behaviour!
3. It is essential to establish clear, realistic performance goals at the outset, with continual measurement against milestones. Developing a data-driven, evidence-based branding strategy that establishes clear, measurable goals is fundamental to a successful branding campaign.

The Product Differentiation and Market Development working group envisions a branding strategy for Ontario maple syrup that is focused on authenticity, creating engagement with target demographics around the deep history and tradition of Ontario maple syrup, coupled with product differentiation based on quality and origin branding. The Sweet Ontario brand

would be synonymous with local, high-quality syrup with deep ties to location, tradition, and family.

If successfully executed, the proposed multi-year marketing/branding campaign can positively influence sales of Ontario maple syrup regionally and provincially.

Table 1: What markets can an OMSPA marketing/branding campaign impact?

	Retail	Wholesale	Bulk
Regional	Yes	Yes	N/A
Provincial	Yes	Yes	Yes
National	No	No	No
International	No	No	No

It is important to note that the *Product Differentiation and Market Development* working group concluded that OMSPA benefits directly from the national and international marketing efforts undertaken by the National Roundtable (primarily steered by Quebec). As a general statement, OMSPA’s branding and market development efforts should align and not compete with the Roundtable’s efforts. While there is an opportunity to differentiate Ontario maple syrup based on quality and local food preferences, care should be taken to avoid any negative branding of competitors or generic maple syrup.

The recommendations of the *Production Differentiation and Market Development* working group have been brought forward into the 2023-28 strategic plan in the following medium term and immediate outcomes:

**Medium Term Outcome:** *Drive increases in demand for Ontario maple products*

**Immediate Outcome:** *Develop and execute a substantive multi-year marketing campaign aimed at the Ontario market, building on and enhancing the Sweet Ontario brand.*

This immediate outcome translates into four outputs. The following table captures these four outputs, their associated activities, and the target completion dates:



Output(s)	Activities	Target Completion Date
Revised mandate for the Marketing & Promotions Committee that encompasses oversight of a multi-year multi-pronged marketing/branding campaign	1. Revise Committee Mandate	Q1 2023
Multi-year funding for OMSPA's marketing/branding campaign is secured	1. Develop detailed proposal based on the Sweet Ontario brand 2. Engage government funding targets 3. Secure funding	Q3 2023 Q4 2023 Q2 2024
Develop outreach material to education OMSPA members about the value of using the Sweet Ontario brand	1. Analyze reasons that members have not adopted Sweet Ontario in their branding 2. Develop outreach material to educate members on the value of incorporating Sweet Ontario into their branding 3. Engage members on participation in the Sweet Ontario brand 4. Re-evaluate outreach material based on newly developed branding/marketing campaign 5. Re-engage members on participation in the Sweet Ontario brand	Q1 2024 Q2 2024 Q3 2024 Q3 2025 Q4 2025
Fully developed and costed comprehensive marketing/branding campaign (including a robust performance management framework)	1. Secure outside expertise required to develop this campaign 2. Develop comprehensive marketing/branding campaign 3. Ratification of planned marketing/branding campaign by the Board	Q3 2024 Q2 2025 End of Q3 2025

Multi-year marketing/branding campaign that is executed with excellence	1. Required external resources are secured for execution of the campaign	Q4 2025
	2. Campaign is launched	Q1 2026
	3. Campaign is continually improved based on evaluation of performance against key indicators	Ongoing

## Pillar 5 – Governance

An analysis of OMSPA’s governance and financial sustainability was conducted by the *Financial Sustainability and Effectiveness of OMSPA* working group. The final report of this group can be accessed here: <https://www.omspa.ca/sustainability-and-effectivness-omspa>.

This working group brought forward three conclusions to the strategic planning process:

- OMSPA is understaffed (it should be currently staffed at least 1.5 person years).
- OMSPA’s governance structure is larger than best practices may suggest, as measured both by number of members and by taps under production.
- The analysis suggested some OMSPA Locals are underperforming. The results of the recent members survey also point at this.

### Staffing

An analysis of OMSPA against comparable maple syrup associations indicated that OMSPA, with its 0.5 FTE (full time equivalent) is understaffed. The three maple syrup associations that were deemed most comparable and relevant, and that are most progressive and active in increasing the economic value of their industry, are Vermont, New York, and New Brunswick, with staffing levels of 2.25, 1.33 and 1.5 FTE respectively. In addition, both Vermont and New York have highly experienced extension staff and applied research and training capacity outside of the core association, similar to the relationship between OMSPA and the proposed MART Centre.

Looking at the scope of activities outlined in this strategic plan, the *Financial Sustainability and Effectiveness of OMSPA* working group has proposed that OMSPA staffing be increased to two full time employees, consisting of a full time Executive Director, and a full-time support staff. Currently, OMSPA has a half time Executive Director with some part time admin support. The current level of OMSPA staffing does not meet current requirements, with no room to scale up to meet an expanded scope of OMSPA activities.

It is proposed that this increased level of staffing be supported by OMAFRA in the form of increased funding for operations. If increased funding for operations is not secured, OMSPA will not be able to increase staffing levels..

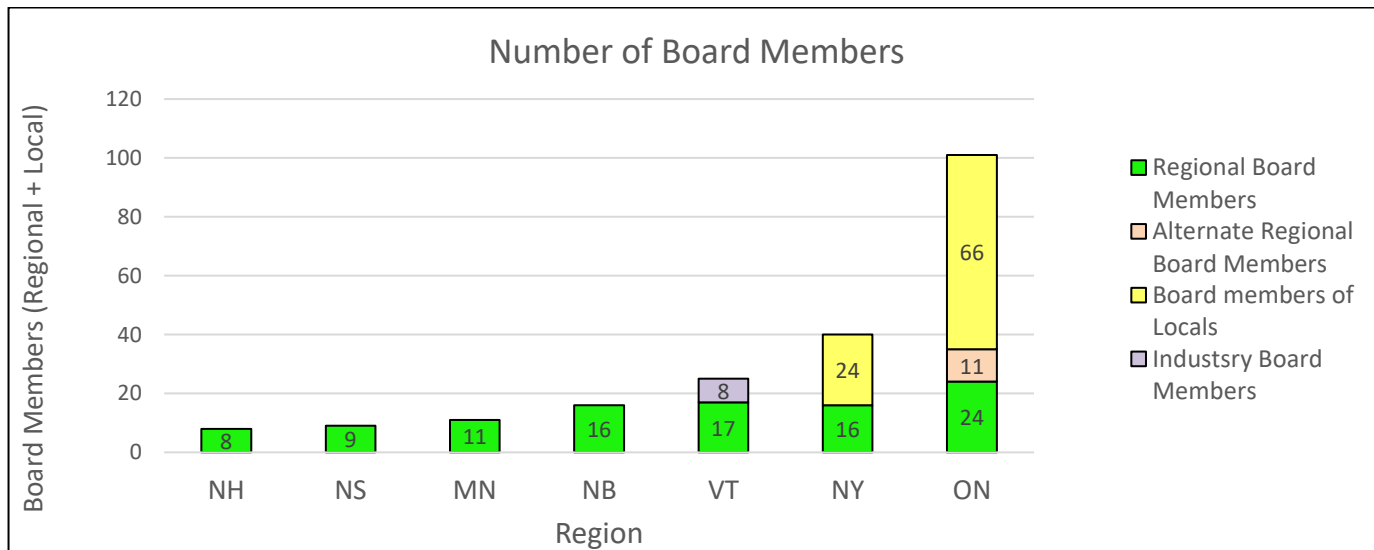
## Governance structure

The working group identified three priority issues with OMSPA's governance structure:

### The Structure of the Board

OMSPA's board is dramatically larger than other maple syrup associations in North America, and is much larger than would be suggested by governance best practices. This story is told most effectively by the following chart.

Figure 1: Size of OMSPA's board compared to other maple syrup producers' associations



Progress on OMSPA's goals will be difficult with this unwieldy and unresponsive governance structure. Due to the sheer size of OMSPA's board, much of the leadership of the organization is provided by the much smaller Executive Sub-Committee, diminishing the board's role and impact. Right-sizing to a smaller, more functional and efficient board puts the focus back on the board, and not on a small executive group.

### Organizational Due Diligence

The working group identified two areas of governance in which OMSPA or its Directors were at risk. Addressing these two issues is a high priority.

- 1) The Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act (ONCA) came into force in 2021. The Province of Ontario considers agricultural organizations not-for-profits. The ONCA requires existing not-for-profit corporations to make any necessary changes to their incorporating and other documents (Constitution or Bylaws) to bring them into conformity with ONCA before October 2024.
- 2) OMSPA's local associations may in legal terms be "unincorporated associations" in which case liabilities fall to the directors and members personally, a situation that is unacceptable. As part of the overall review, the relationship between OMSPA and the eleven Locals established in OMSPA's Constitution will be looked at to strengthen governance across the whole organization and reduce the risk for members.

## Unbalanced Representation

The problem of unbalanced representation on OMSPA's Board of Directors can be explained simply. Each OMSPA Local is allocated two spots on OMSPA's Board of Directors. But there are very large differences between different OMSPA Locals. Some have many more members than others. For example, the Wellington-Waterloo Local has five times as many members as the Ottawa Valley Local, yet both are allocated two Board seats. And similarly, some Locals have many more taps than others. The Simcoe and District Local has 31K taps compared to Algoma & District Local, with its 357K taps. The result is unbalanced and unequal representation across different regions of Ontario.

## Issues Facing Locals

The work of the Financial Sustainability and Effectiveness of OMSPA working group identified several serious issues with some Locals, including:

- A lack of critical mass and volunteers means some Locals are unable to provide full services to members.
- Some Locals cannot fill their local board and executive positions.
- More than half do not have a constitution, and there is a widespread lack of good governance practices.
  - Our Local organizations may be legally considered to be unincorporated associations. This puts all members of Locals at legal risk, since there is no legal entity (i.e.) to shield the members and directors.
- Income and expenses vary widely across Locals. Many locals have a problematic amount of funds, either too low which represents a Local that is at financial risk, or too high representing funds that are underutilized and not serving members.

With Locals an essential part of OMSPA, the restructuring initiative must make an honest appraisal of the current health of Locals, and develop an effective path forward that emphasizes what Locals do best, and removes unnecessary burdens if possible.

Responding to these challenges, the 2023-28 Strategic Planning process established the following medium term and immediate outcomes for OMSPA governance:

**Medium Term Outcomes:** *Provide strong leadership for maple syrup producers in Ontario*

**Immediate Outcomes:** *Optimize and rationalize OMSPA's structure for maximum effectiveness and efficiency, following organizational best practices and legislative requirements*

This immediate outcome translates into three outputs. The following table captures these three outputs, their associated activities, and the target completion dates:

Output(s)	Activities	Target Completion Date
The Board of Directors is rightsized in line with organizational best practices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Task the Governance committee with developing detailed plan for a restructured board, focused on increased efficiency and effectiveness in Board functions</li> <li>2. Engage members on proposed new structure</li> <li>3. Board approval of new constitution</li> <li>4. New constitution adopted</li> <li>5. Implementation of new structure</li> </ol>	November 2022  Q3 2023  Q2 2024 July 2024 (AGM) Oct 2024
Restructure Locals to better support the essential role they play in OMSPA and to address identified liability issues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Task the Governance Committee with developing a detailed analysis of what roles are best undertaken by Locals, what responsibilities could be taken off Locals, and how Locals can be best supported in playing their essential role</li> <li>2. Task the Governance Committee with developing a detailed analysis of how Locals can be structured to address liability risks.</li> <li>3. Engage members on proposed changes</li> <li>4. Board ratification of proposed changes</li> <li>5. Implementation of changes</li> </ol>	Q1 2023   Q1 2023  Q3 2023 Q1 2024 Q3 2024
Evolution of Committees to reflect increased scope of activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Task the Governance Committee with developing new mandates for existing committees</li> </ol>	Q2 2023

## Pillar 6 – Government and Industry Relations

Government support for OMSPA is essential to realizing the goals set in this 2023-28 strategic plan. There is no way for OMSPA members to insulate themselves from the constantly changing market and regulatory environments which impact your operations. Ignoring market and regulatory changes dooms OMSPA to constantly reacting and playing catch-up on important issues. Being able to effectively communicate with government policymakers and influence the shape of new policies is a critical skill for any organization whose members can be heavily impacted by ill-informed regulatory changes.

In addition to its essential role in advocating for a policy and regulatory regime that supports Ontario maple producers, OMSPA will need to secure significant amounts of additional

ongoing funding to realize the goals set in this strategic plan. As such, developing organizational core competencies in identifying, pursuing and securing government funding sources is a priority for OMSPA over the next five years.

Similarly, OMSPA members come from all aspects of the maple syrup industry, including equipment suppliers and bottlers. Our maple products sell into the market, from small retail sales to large volume relationships with major retailers to bulk wholesale. The ability to network effectively with industry from across the maple products value chain is an important skill for OMSPA. Being able to build coalitions of industry partners, general farm organizations (such as OFA and CFA), other agricultural commodity organizations, and maple products organizations in other provinces and states will allow OMSPA to be more effective in influencing policy in the interests of Ontario producers.

It is important to clarify that this strategic plan calls for the development of volunteer capacity in government and industry relations within OMSPA, building on the expertise of various OMSPA members in this area. This strategic plan does not call for the creation of a permanent paid position associated with government and industry relations.

The 2023-28 Strategic Planning process established the following medium term and immediate outcomes for OMSPA government and industry relations:

**Medium Term Outcome:** *Provide strong advocacy for maple syrup producers in Ontario*

**Immediate Outcome:** *Establish internal government and industry relations capacity, developing strong competencies in securing government funding for industry priorities*

This immediate outcome translates into five outputs. The following table captures these five outputs, their associated activities, and the target completion dates:

Output(s)	Activities	Target Completion Date
Dedicated and skilled government advocacy capacity is in place within OMSPA	1. Government and Industry Relations Committee is struck with a clear mandate	Q4 2022
Internal competencies in securing government funding developed	1. List of needed skills is developed	Q1 2023
	2. Relevant skills identified in membership	Q1 2023
	3. Additional members brought into the committee with needed skills	Q1 2023

<p>Strong relationships are developed with relevant government stakeholders</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Maintain an active engagement with provincial and federal government stakeholders focused on policy that has the potential to impact OMSPA members</li> <li>2. Augment relationships with ongoing monitoring of key government departments (regulatory foresight)</li> </ol>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
<p>System put in place for Locals to forward relevant municipal issues to the Government and Industry Relations Committee</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop proposed system to organize how Locals provide info on municipal issues to the Committee</li> <li>2. Consultations with leadership of Locals on proposed changes</li> <li>3. Implement new sharing/tracking system</li> </ol>	<p>Q2 2023</p> <p>Q3 2023</p> <p>Q4 2023</p>
<p>Funding for core operations is secured from OMAFRA</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pre-engagement with OMAFRA</li> <li>2. Detailed proposal developed</li> <li>3. Continued engagement with OMAFRA after submission of proposal until funding granted</li> <li>4. Funding secured</li> </ol>	<p>Q1 2023</p> <p>Q2 2023</p> <p>Q2 2023</p> <p>Q4 2023</p>
<p>Funding for OMSPA marketing/branding campaign secured</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Funding secured for proposal development</li> <li>2. Detailed proposal developed</li> <li>3. Government engaged on marketing/branding funding</li> <li>4. Funding secured</li> </ol>	<p>Q3 2023</p> <p>Q4 2023</p> <p>Q4 2023</p> <p>Q2 2024</p>
<p>Funding for MART Centre initiative secured</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Funding secured for proposal development</li> <li>2. Detailed proposal developed</li> <li>3. Government engaged on MART funding</li> <li>4. Funding secured</li> </ol>	<p>Q2 2023</p> <p>Q4 2023</p> <p>Q1 2024</p> <p>Q4 2024</p>

## E – The Role of Government Funding

As is made clear when looking at the table of outcomes for the Government and Industry Relations Committee on the previous page, this strategic plan calls for OMSPA to pursue expanded government funding to support our priority initiatives. An important question is “What happens if we do not get the government funding that we will be asking for?”

The simple answer to this question is that best efforts will be made within each pillar (area of activity) described in this strategic plan, no matter what government funding is secured. With more resources, we can move faster on our priorities. With less funding, we need to move slower and more of the burden falls on OMSPA volunteers. It is important to state that OMSPA will stay within its means no matter the level of funding secured.

There have been concerns expressed within the membership that “a model reliant on government grants will change the very nature of OMSPA”. There is truth to this statement. This strategic plan will change and evolve OMSPA. The reality facing all volunteer organizations, not just in Canada but around the world, is that there is a continuing erosion of volunteerism across society. OMSPA will continue to be a volunteer-based organization of and for its members. But our members will be more fully supported by dedicated resources, so the precious time of our essential volunteers can be spent on where they provide the most value. An OMSPA that has more resources to undertake the routine tasks of running a provincial association will be a better vehicle for our grassroots volunteers to make an impact.

## F – Measuring Progress

A key question for OMSPA as it plans for the next five years is how progress will be measured? How will we know if we are achieving the priority goals laid out in the strategic plan?

As part of the strategic planning process, the strategic planning team has developed a detailed performance measurement framework. This framework clearly identifies the specific outputs and outcomes that OMSPA is pursuing and identifies one or more key indicators that measure progress towards that output or outcome. The table on the following page presents some of the more important key indicators that have been identified to measure progress against this strategic plan:



Table 2: What markets can an OMSPA marketing/branding campaign impact?

EXPECTED RESULT	INDICATORS
<b>Ultimate Outcome</b>	
Increase the economic value for Ontario maple syrup producers	Increased average per tap revenue of members
	Increased value of Ontario maple to Ontario's GDP
<b>Medium Term Outcomes</b>	
Provide significant value to members and their operations	Member loyalty increases year over year
Maintain and enhance premium pricing for Ontario maple syrup due to differentiation based on quality	Revised best practices manuals utilized by growing majority of OMSPA membership
	Training and educational resources related to quality assurance accessed by growing number of producers year over year
Drive increases in demand for Ontario maple products	Increase in % total amount of maple syrup produced in Ontario compared to total amount consumed in Ontario
Provide strong leadership and advocacy for maple syrup producers in Ontario	Member satisfaction with leadership of OMSPA

## G – Next Steps

With OMSPA's strategic plan for 2023-2028 ratified by the Board in February 2023, the focus now turns to execution. This plan, built directly on the hard work of OMSPA membership, provides a clear blueprint for a strong and growing Ontario maple syrup sector supported by a renewed industry association that is focused on addressing the primary challenges facing Ontario producers. If OMSPA membership can pursue the goals and activities laid out in this plan with the same passion and intensity that went into the strategic planning process, the future of Ontario maple production is bright.