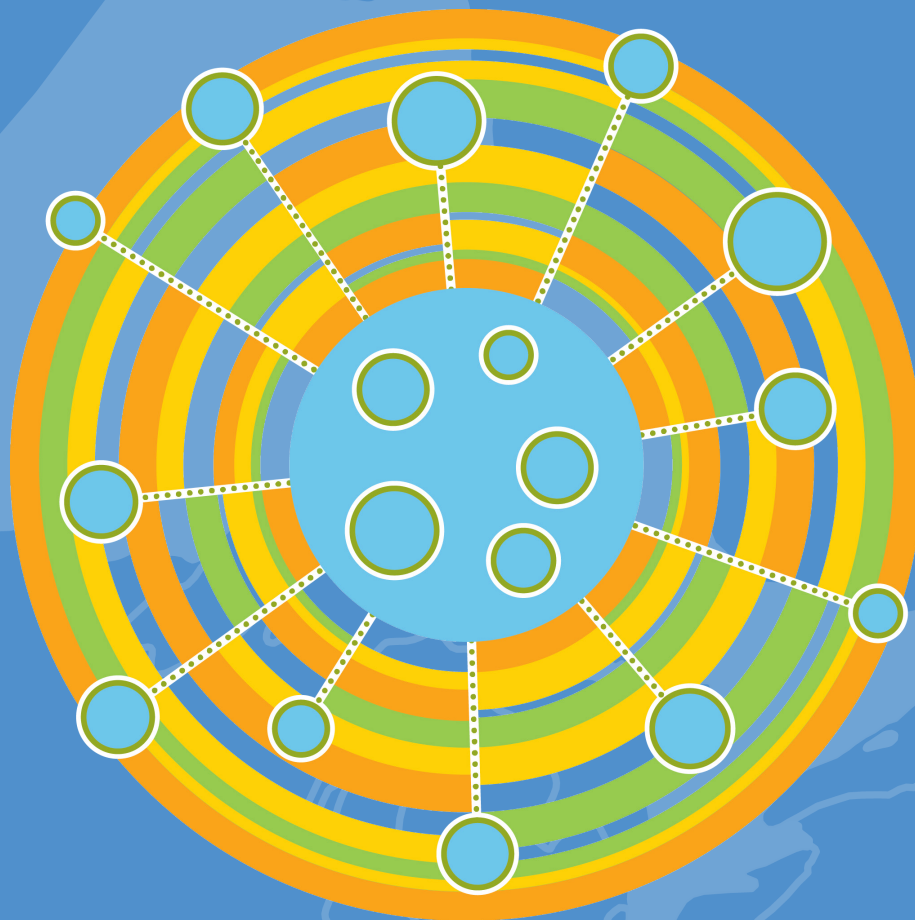


# SHARED PLATFORM

GUIDEBOOK



# Table of Contents

<b>PART 1: ONN INTRODUCTION</b>	
ONN Introduces the Shared Platform Guidebook	5
So Many People to Thank	7
<b>PART 2: LEGAL CONTEXT</b>	
Legal Context for the Shared Platform Concept	9
<b>PART 3: INTRODUCTION TO THE SHARED PLATFORM GUIDEBOOK</b>	
A Working Definition for Shared Platform	11
How to Use the Guidebook	13
Building the Foundation – The Key Elements of a Shared Platform	14
<b>PART 4: ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES</b>	
Organizational Practices for Shared Platforms	20
Section A: Shared Platform Assessment	21
Section B: Roles and Responsibilities	23
Section C: Project Review, Approval and Monitoring Processes	26
Section D: Financial and Risk Management Practices	29
Section E: Funding and Fundraising Practices	31
Section F: Human Resources	33
Section G: Project Activities	35
Section H: Communications Practices	36
Section I: Project Closure	38
<b>APPENDICES – SHARED PLATFORM TOOLS</b>	
Appendix A: Glossary of Terms	41
Appendix B: Resources and References	42
Appendix C: Terms of Reference	43
Consent to Act	48

# A Caution

The implementation of a shared platform presents legal and regulatory challenges for the host organization. If a shared platform is not implemented properly, the Canada Revenue Agency can revoke the charitable registration of the host organization. When all is said and done, the host organization must demonstrate through their policies and practices that they own and operate all projects, and control all aspects of funding and performance related to these projects.

This guidebook provides good practices, for the implementation of shared platforms as we know them today. Note that this guidebook does not offer legal advice and is not a replacement for legal counsel. Organizations using this guidebook are strongly advised to obtain legal advice.



This guidebook provides good practices, for the implementation of shared platforms as we know them today.

---

PART 1

# ONN INTRODUCTION

# ONN Introduces the Shared Platform Guidebook

It is with great anticipation that we launch our Shared Platform Guidebook. The purpose of the guidebook is to assist charities and nonprofit organizations to integrate emergent and innovative community projects into their operational framework and governance. Working with our communities and adapting to meet changing needs is essential for the renewal of our sector.

The shared platform approach supports collaboration, leadership, governance and project development for a diverse range of sector-specific work, neighbourhood work, networks and time-limited initiatives. The approach fosters social innovation, providing the opportunity for experimentation and the testing of new ideas.

The shared platform is an important

**ORGANIZATIONAL BENEFITS OF THE SHARED PLATFORM MODEL**

- **Efficiently SHARE capacity**
- **SUPPORT emergent leadership**
- **FOSTER social innovation**
- **IMPROVE funding outcomes**



## ONN INTRODUCTION

innovation in governance allowing emergent projects to focus on their community work by eliminating the immediate need to incorporate and, for charitable projects, obtain a charitable registration. In its simplest terms, the shared platform is an efficient sharing of capacity, nurturing of emergent leadership and allows innovative projects to achieve extraordinary impacts in communities across Canada.

At the same time, the shared platform model provides funders with assurance of administrative and governance capacity, lowering the risk of funding new projects and ideas. This model allows emergent projects to focus on their community work and lessens the pressure on them to incorporate, especially in the early days of their development.

Using the structure of a shared platform, existing charitable and nonprofit organizations are able to support innovation and emergent leadership in their communities. It is enabling, effective and efficient - community leadership at its best.

This guidebook is a starting point. It will help your organization understand how you might structure your project to best accomplish its goals within Canada Revenue Agency guidelines and directives.

Remember, however, it is only a guide and does not replace legal advice. Structuring these arrangements can be tricky, so

please get professional advice.

Notwithstanding the need for careful design, the actual undertaking of project adoption is really about good management practices, organizational culture and purpose, and clarity of relationships, roles and responsibilities. The rewards make the effort well worth it. We think this guidebook and the accompanying Organizational Practices Checklist will help you understand and use this innovation in governance in your community.



This guidebook is a starting point. It will help your organization understand how you might structure your shared platform to best accomplish its goals while meeting compliance requirements.

---

# So Many People to Thank

Thank you to the Laidlaw Foundation for the funds to prepare this guidebook, thank you to Leslie Wright and Jillian Witt, Novita Interpares Limited, our consultants who brought their experience and enthusiasm for the shared platform model to the project. We also thank Margaret Mason and David Stevens who reviewed the guidebook and provided legal commentary throughout the drafting process.

**LAIDLAW**  
FOUNDATION

This guidebook is the logical outcome of the Shared Platform Working Group that did much of the early thinking on refining the design features of the model. They provided their time, advice, expertise and enthusiasm without reservation. And last but not least thanks to Tides Canada who pioneered this model in Canada and went above and beyond in sharing their expertise and advice.

**Thank you all!**

**PART 2**

# **LEGAL CONTEXT**



# Legal Context for the Shared Platform Concept

In our 2010 paper, *A New Infrastructure Model for Canadian Registered Charities*, we recommended the development of a good practices framework for what we referred to as a “charitable venture organization” and which the authors of this guidebook refer to as a “shared platform”.

In the Canadian context, the relationship facilitated through a shared platform must be structured so that the “host” organization (the nonprofit or charity) demonstrates through their policies and practices that they own and operate all projects and control all aspects of funding and performance related to these projects.

The lack of a defined and consistent understanding of the shared platform model in Canada and the corresponding need for sophisticated governance to ensure compliance with the Income Tax Act (the Act) increase the risk of organizations engaging in this type of work without the capacity to do so. An ineptly managed shared platform raises questions of compliance with the Act and increases the risk of a charity losing its charitable registration.

We support and commend Ontario Nonprofit Network’s intent of advancing the understanding and practices of the nonprofit and charitable sector through the development of the Shared Platform Guidebook. The shared platform model is an innovative model that provides comprehensive infrastructure, organizational and governance supports for emerging charitable activities, for projects with limited mandates, and for community coalitions and collaborations.

***Margaret Mason, Partner, Bull Housser and David Stevens, Partner, Gowlings***

PART 3

# INTRODUCTION TO THE SHARED PLATFORM GUIDEBOOK

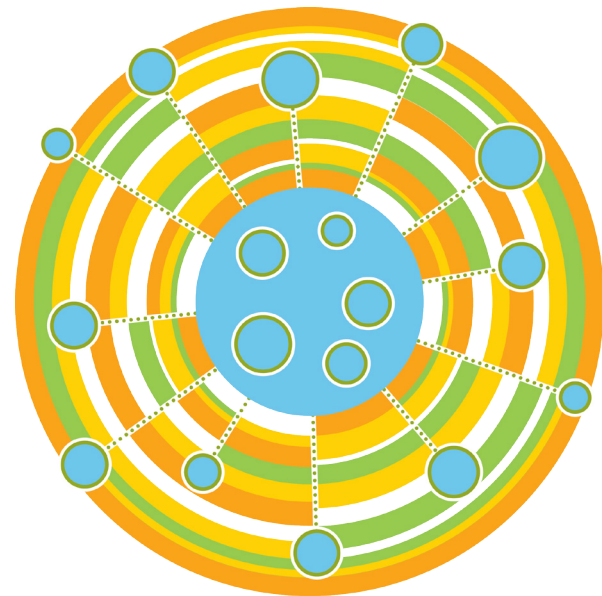
# A Working Definition for Shared Platforms

The term “shared platform” is commonly used to describe a situation where an organization “adopts” and provides a legal home for a project or initiative that is unincorporated and does not have its own legal status.

The host organization provides administrative support and oversight, assuming all legal and financial responsibility for the activities of the project.

These programs and responsibilities are additional to the host organization’s day-to-day programming and community development responsibilities. The provision of a shared platform is therefore an intentional decision to extend and leverage the host organization’s administrative infrastructure (comprehensive financial, human resources, risk and grant management) to support one or more projects.

While each project might have its own ‘brand’ and each operates independently of other projects within the shared



platform, all projects become an integral part of the host organization as a legal entity – not unlike the way in which a division or department might operate within an organization.



Do you still have questions about language? Find answers in the Glossary of Terms (Appendix A).

**THE SHARED PLATFORM APPROACH IS COMMONLY USED IN THREE DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES:**

**An internally generated project**

Evolves from organizational programming and work that needs to have its own identity.

*Example* - An environmental organization focused on water decides to start three conservation projects to address pollution issues in three different lakes. The organization receives funds for each project, hires staff and recruits advisory committees for each with local stakeholders and experts on lake conservation.



**An externally generated project**

Developed outside the organization and “adopted” or “assumed” as a project within the hosting organization

*Example* - An unincorporated theatre group approaches a large theatre company to produce a play and tour across Canada. Producing the play requires running a fundraising campaign, managing grants and hiring actors, directors, stage managers, designers, etc.



**A community collaboration project**

Emerges from the host organization’s work in the community and/or as a collaboration within the sector

*Example* - A coalition of local organizations is working to create a multi-service clinic for women experiencing domestic violence. One of the member organizations takes responsibility for the clinic - managing funds, hiring staff to coordinate services and managing the clinic space.



# How to Use the Guidebook

This Shared Platform Guidebook has been developed as a resource for any organization that is currently acting as, or contemplating offering, a shared platform and includes a comprehensive overview of the model and the issues and questions to consider.

The guidebook provides practical, tactical information and resources to assist organizations in setting up and implementing the shared platform model. It also provides a theoretical and legal framework to ensure organizational accountability and control in full compliance with the Income Tax Act.

Though the guidebook's primary audience is organizations currently acting as, or contemplating offering, a shared platform, it will be a useful reference for funders of emerging initiatives where a shared platform may be appropriate as well as projects and/or individuals wishing to work within a shared platform.

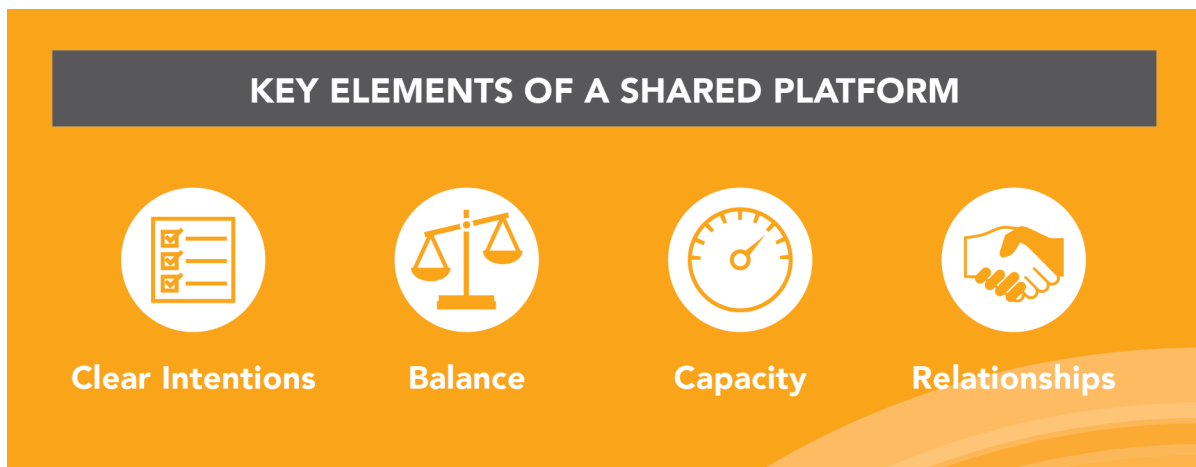


The guidebook is designed to facilitate education, discussion and review within host organizations specifically, and in the sector more broadly, including:

- Identifying and exploring key questions related to benefit and impact within host organizations
  - Reflecting on the hosting organization's motivations and rationale for adopting this model
  - Providing tools and resources that will allow hosting organizations to develop their approach and practice including compliance and due diligence requirements
  - Reminding organizations of the continuing need to operate within commonly accepted good practices and standards (e.g., board governance, human resources, fundraising)
-

# Building the Foundation – Key Elements of a Shared Platform

Below are some of the key elements to ensure your organization has a strong foundation for a shared platform.



## Clear Intentions

Good reasons to offer a shared platform within your organization

Organizations and projects considering the adoption of a shared platform need to ensure that they articulate their intentions clearly. This clarity will be achieved by fully understanding the implications of the model and the relationship between the legal home and its projects.



### Understand the Model

Shared platforms are not for everyone. They require adapting organizational practices, a commitment to working together, an ongoing attention to the



## INTRODUCTION TO THE SHARED PLATFORM GUIDEBOOK

relationship and trust building, sharing decision-making and responsibilities while at the same time holding the legal and due diligence requirements.

### **Understand the Motivation**

Organizations offer a shared platform for a range of reasons. The host organization will need to consider the implications of a shared platform for its mission, mandate and capacity – this includes thinking about the type and size of project as well as forms of support that will be offered.

### **Be Fully Engaged**

Engagement includes the board of directors, management and staff. The shared platform is a different way of working and includes new risks and implications for operational practices that need to be understood. Shared platforms work best when everyone understands the implications, the risks and the benefits.

### **Be Mission-driven**

For the host organization, offering a shared platform should be in keeping with its objects and mandate and should help further its mission. Similarly for the project, there should be both mission-alignment and a strategic reason to work together in this way.

### **Be Enthusiastic**

While there are risks and benefits to weigh, enthusiasm for working in this way will help ensure that everyone will tackle the challenges together.

While there are good reasons for becoming a shared platform, there are also reasons to avoid or very carefully scrutinize the shared platform option:

### **Generating Revenues and/or Saving Money**

Although the shared platform model can create efficiencies, it does not usually generate revenue, nor is revenue generation a good rationale for establishing a shared platform.

### **Responding to a Funding Opportunity**

While it can be tempting to enter into a shared platform relationship when an unanticipated funding opportunity arises, opportunity does not constitute a rationale.

### **Out of a Sense of Obligation**

There are great projects that may need a home, but may be beyond the host organization's vision, capacity and strengths. It is better to say "no" than to realize

in hindsight that this was not a fit or an appropriate extension of the hosting organization's limited social and financial capital.

## Balance

### Managing a fine balancing act

Shared platforms balance two core functions: on the one hand, good governance and operational oversight; on the other, an enabling organizational structure that supports each project's leadership and decision-making.



Balancing these two core functions is vital to the success of the shared platform model. While the demands may vary by organization (e.g., size, resources, organizational culture, etc.), the balance has to be understood and maintained consistently and intentionally.

Since the shared platform and its projects rest within a legal entity (nonprofit or registered charity), the leadership of the host organization (both board and staff) must understand all project activities and its role in supporting and providing oversight for them. For example, who is involved, how they achieve their mission, administrative needs, related risks and required reporting. Likewise, much of the project's decision-making can be delegated to project staff or an advisory committee.

Most shared platforms would say they are constantly learning and adapting rather than mastering the proper balance. It is important to remember that it is not only possible but necessary to do both well.

## Capacity

### Ensuring adequate organizational capacity and resources are in place

Offering a shared platform within an established nonprofit or charitable organization is no small endeavour. It is administratively complex and requires dedicated staff time and expertise to be successful. Assessing organizational capacity is a key to success.







## INTRODUCTION TO THE SHARED PLATFORM GUIDEBOOK

### **Expertise**

The organization has appropriate expertise in the operational functions.

### **Time**

The organization has the time to support the project and its activities.

### **Staff**

There are dedicated staff who understand the shared platform model, have the capacity to work closely with projects and can act as a liaison between the organization's core staff and the project.

### **Tools**

The organization has developed the necessary policies and processes to support shared platform work (See Organizational Practices).

## **Relationship**

### **Consciously and deliberately investing in ongoing relationship building**



The successful application of the shared platform model requires a level of maturity, honesty, transparency, and open and ongoing conversation between the organizational and project leadership.

There is a need to have upfront conversations (sometimes uncomfortable) about the nature of the model and what is required from everyone to make it work and succeed.

Consciously and deliberately investing in the relationship between the organization leadership and project leadership will ensure consistency and good practice.

Considerations for building the relationship include:

#### **Transparency**

Roles and responsibilities should be clear to everyone involved (See Appendix C – Terms of Reference).

#### **Mutual Benefit**

Shared platform means working together to achieve a common mission. A project



## INTRODUCTION TO THE SHARED PLATFORM GUIDEBOOK

is not purchasing services but carrying out programmatic activity as part of the host organization.

### **Commitment**

Successful shared platform relationships include a commitment by all parties to learn from each other and to value each other's knowledge and experience.

### **Communication**

There are formal and informal pathways that need to be established for consistent communication to continually build the relationship and identify and address issues early on.

**PART 4**

# **ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES**



# Organizational Practices for Shared Platforms

As mentioned previously in the Building The Foundation section of the guidebook, shared platforms require both good governance and operational oversight in a manner that supports each project's leadership and decision-making.

Each of the following guidebook sections provides a checklist focusing on good practices and standards in a different operational area of shared platforms. Each checklist can be used to facilitate and guide the review, creation or updating of your policies and practices. This checklist is not exhaustive, but will identify important considerations for your organization.



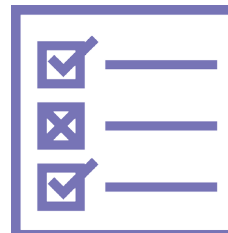
This part of the guidebook will assist organizations in structuring their policies and practices to make this a reality.

---

SECTION A

# Shared Platform Assessment

Offering a shared platform requires capacity, resources and infrastructure. The following section describes the organizational considerations and preparation necessary to offer a shared platform.



## Things to ensure:

- A1** Your organization has had a focused conversation (board and staff) regarding your organization’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for offering a shared platform. This includes thinking about:
  - How could offering a shared platform advance your organization’s mission and vision?
  - What is the difference between a shared platform model and your organization’s other activities – where would the biggest cultural and administrative changes be?
  - Do you have the capacity to take on new activities and responsibilities?
  - Do you have the legal and administrative expertise to expand your offerings? (e.g., charitable/nonprofit law, finance, HR, risk management)
  - What type of projects would you take on to advance your mission? (e.g., size, population served, approach)
  - Are the Key Elements a fit with your organization’s culture and current approach?



## ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

- A2** Your organization has the resources, capacity and infrastructure to direct and support projects. This includes adequate staff to support projects, clear roles and responsibilities assigned, financial/HR/administrative capacity and expertise, etc. To assess this, consider:
  - The number and size of projects (e.g., size of budget, number of staff contracts, leases, grants).
  - The capacity of project leaders (e.g., will staff need support with grant writing and fundraising? Reviewing financial reports?).
  - How roles and responsibilities are distributed among staff (i.e., what will shared platform staff be responsible for? What will project leaders be responsible for?).
  - The time, cost and expertise needed for developing organizational practices and policies and training staff.
  
- A3** Your organization's policies and procedures reflect and have been adapted to offer a shared platform (further guidance will be provided in this checklist).
  
- A4** The board of directors has formally approved operating a shared platform within your organization.
  
- A5** There is a regular reporting process in place to ensure that the board of directors are aware of project activities and that the project and organization are both fulfilling their commitments and obligations.



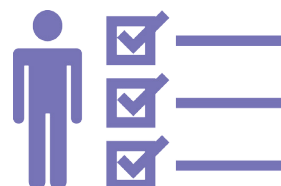
“We learned early on that taking the time to get to know one another - project and shared platform - was essential to good working relationships. It can be so tempting to rush into things when a grant opportunity arises, but if you don't take the time to figure out if the project is a good fit for your organization and how you will work together, there can be a lot of misunderstanding and frustration.”

---

SECTION B

# Roles and Responsibilities

The key to successfully implementing a shared platform within an organization is to understand, communicate and clearly outline the roles and responsibilities for everyone in the organization including the board of directors, management, staff and project leadership. The structure of responsibilities should be provided in a Terms of Reference (sample provided in Appendix C) and specific details may be described in other documents, such as policies and procedures and Human Resource documents. See Appendix C for more information on Roles and Responsibilities.



The structure of responsibilities needs to be understood from a functional perspective rather than from an individual staff perspective. For example, in some organizations, an individual staff person may be responsible for a number of functions (e.g., HR and finance responsibility).

## Things to put in place:

- B1** Roles and responsibilities for everyone involved in the shared platform should be clearly stated and understood. This will include:

### Board of Directors

- The board is responsible for all activities and obligations of the shared platform projects, as the projects are an integral part of the organization.
- The board may delegate certain responsibilities (such as the day-to-day stewardship, strategic guidance and fundraising) to the project advisory committee.

### Management

- Management should ensure that the organizational policies, procedures, frameworks are in place to guide shared platform work – working with the board, staff, volunteers, funders, etc. to understand the model and why it is important to the organization’s mission.



## ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

### Shared Platform Organization Lead

- There is someone, ideally in a management role within the organization, who is responsible for coordinating with project leaders, other staff and management. This person thoroughly understands the shared platform model, the organization's policies and procedures including compliance and risk management. Equally important is the person's ability to build a trusting and productive relationship with project leaders and senior management and be comfortable in navigating and problem solving day-to-day issues.

### Financial Lead

- Whoever is responsible for the financial tracking and reporting of projects will understand the shared platform model, the role of project leaders and other staff in monitoring finances, and the overall financial tracking approach for projects. (See Section D)

### HR Lead

- Whoever is responsible for managing the human resource needs of projects understands the shared platform model, the role of project leaders and other staff in HR-related processes and decisions. (See Section F)

### Project Lead

- There is a project lead identified for each project with responsibility for overseeing the project's activities and coordinating with the project advisory committee, project staff and shared platform staff (e.g., organization lead, finance lead, HR lead).
- This person understands the shared platform model, the project's responsibilities within the organization, policies and procedures.

### Project Advisory Committee

- A volunteer project advisory committee oversees each project with certain responsibilities delegated by the board (e.g., provides programmatic oversight/input on a day-to-day basis) ultimately reporting back to the leadership of the organization.





## ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

- B2** A Terms of Reference for every project is in place that includes:
  - A Statement of Purpose describing the goal of the project within the organization's mission and vision.
  - Clearly defined and understood roles, responsibilities and reporting structure for the board of directors, management, shared platform staff, project staff, advisory committee, et al, as to the leadership and accountability within the organization.
  - Description of the project activities and a project budget.
  - How funds will be used and managed.
  - Any specific funding allocations for the project such as an administrative allocation to the shared platform, contribution to insurance, etc.
  - Ownership of project assets and work product (including intellectual property).
  - Project termination process.
  
- B3** A regular review process is scheduled with all projects to ensure each Terms of Reference is up to date and understood.



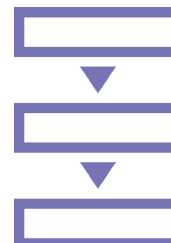
"As a new project, having a point person [Shared Platform Lead] was essential. She knew the organization in and out and could guide us through all the processes that were new for us and troubleshoot issues. If we didn't know where to go, we could always start with our [Shared Platform Lead]."

---

SECTION C

# Project Review, Approval & Monitoring Processes

Your organization should ensure that it has a consistent, well-understood and documented process for approving, reviewing and monitoring all projects within your shared platform.



**This process should include:**

- C1** Documented criteria for choosing a project. This might include:
  - The type of projects and project activities that you want the shared platform to support and that will enhance your organization’s mission.
  - Whether you will accept internally-generated, externally-generated and community collaborations (or perhaps only one type).
  - The types of project leadership and capacity your organization will require for each project.
  - The size and scope of projects your organization can support (e.g., budget, number of staff, contracts, leases, type of activities, grants, etc.).
  - The number of projects your organization can take on at a given time.



## ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

- C2** Clear upfront time and conversation with each potential project lead and/or Advisory Committee about the shared platform model.

### This should include:

- How does this project advance our organization's mission?
- What is the project lead and advisory committee's vision for the future of the project?
- Why would a shared platform be the best fit for this project?
- What are the operational and capacity needs of the project? (e.g., number of staff, contracts, leases, grants, leadership and capacity needs, etc.)
- Who will lead this project (including project lead and advisory committee) and will they be a good fit for the shared platform?
- Will the project's outcomes be enhanced by being part of the shared platform?
- Is there potential overlapping or competing funding or programming if the project were part of the organization? How would we address these issues?
- Do the project lead and advisory committee understand the organization's shared platform model, policies and procedures, and are they committed to working in this way? Where there are key decisions about a project being made, is the project leadership in agreement with the shared platform staff?
- Does our organization have the capacity to take on this project?



## ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

- C3** A new project orientation process that includes both documented policies and procedures – also discussion with shared platform staff to address questions and concerns to ensure mutual understanding.
  
- C4** An annual review process of the project and shared platform’s success and challenges among staff and project leads.
  
- C5** Your organization has chosen to offer a shared platform in order to achieve your mission and vision. Similar to other activities in your organization, evaluating the effectiveness and impact of this model will ensure you are meeting your mission, while improving and learning along the way.
  - The shared platform model is integrated into your organization’s strategic plan and evaluation framework.
  
  - This includes developing indicators, monitoring and documenting activities.



“From the board to the receptionist, it’s important that all levels of the organization believe in the value of the shared platform model for it to operate successfully and have an impact.”

---

SECTION D

# Financial and Risk Management Practices

When your organization operates a shared platform, your organization assumes all legal and financial responsibility for all project activities, obligations and commitments as with any other work and activities you provide within your organization.



## Things to put in place:

- D1** Clear guidelines for developing, reviewing, approving and signing off on all project contracts and legally binding documents. This process should include project leader input and approval.

Note: All project-related contracts must be in the name of the organization (project name may be specified also) and signed by a duly authorized signatory.

- D2** Systems for assessing and managing potential risk within projects. This includes:
  - Contract commitments including leases
  - Employee commitments
  - Project activities (e.g., insurance needs, police checks, food handling, selling merchandise, etc.)
  - Site and facility management (i.e., both on and offsite)
  - Assets and products of the work

Note: Make sure that all project leases, activities and assets such as computers and other equipment are provided to your insurer for corresponding coverage.



## ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

- D3** A process for developing and setting the organization's budget that includes project revenue and expenditures.
  
- D4** Processes to ensure that project specific funds are only used for their permitted purposes and tracked consistent with the terms of grant and contribution agreements.
  
- D5** Your organization has an easily understood and communicated method for cost allocation to projects (particularly for projects and their funders for cost allocation to projects).
  - Commonly the accepted practice is minimally 10-15% of all project revenue is assigned to host organization (shared platform). It is recognized that for small projects this does not cover the cost of support. This revenue contributes to the organizational, administrative, human resource, oversight and reporting, financial infrastructure and organizational due diligence that projects benefit from within a shared platform.

Note: A 10-15% allocation does not cover additional costs for mentoring or capacity building support that a project may need (e.g., grant writing support, financial coaching, etc.). Many shared platforms seek additional funding for mentoring and capacity-building work.

- D6** Your organization has systems that allow for tracking, monitoring and reporting (both financials and activities) for projects that this information is available to projects for their own tracking.



In a shared platform, the administrative contribution is not a purchased service or a fee – you can't purchase administration from your own organization. Instead, it is an overhead or administration allocation

---

SECTION E

# Funding and Fundraising Practices

All funding received and fundraising practices of projects within a shared platform should be compliant with organizational requirements and policies. For charitable organizations, this includes charitable funds and donations for projects within the shared platform.



## Things to put in place:

- E1** A clear understanding of everyone's role with funders. This includes:
  - Who is responsible for funder cultivation including what happens when both a project and other organizational staff are communicating with the same funder.
  - Funder communication regarding questions about a project application (e.g., typically the shared platform ensures that any project-specific questions are directed to project staff).
  - Roles and responsibilities for writing and submitting grant applications and reports.
  - There is a process for shared platform staff and the project team to notify one another of new grant cheques received and for confirming receipt and thanking funders.
  
- E2** The organization submits all grant applications and ensures that:
  - It is clear that the project is part of the shared platform.
  - Organizational details are accurate.
  - Proposed activity is charitable (if shared platform is a charity) and in keeping with organization's mission and capacity to manage (e.g., hiring new staff, leases).



## ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

- E3** Shared platform staff and the project team collaboratively track reporting requirements and ensure they are submitted in a timely manner.
- E4** Your organization accepts, tracks and provides receipts for donations and payments as appropriate (For charitable organizations, this includes charitable tax receipts.).
- E5** There is a mechanism for donors to direct their donations to a specific project.
- E6** All donations should be made out to the host organization, the legal entity responsible for the donation. The project's name can be added or referenced in the memo line.  
  
Note: Canada Revenue Agency requires clarity of donor intention and banks require certainty as to which organization a cheque is intended.
- E7** Any online donation mechanism (e.g., CanadaHelps, Artez, GiftTool) is managed by and the responsibility of the shared platform staff.
- E8** Your organization understands and clearly communicates any fundraising requirements and obligations to projects (e.g., United Way Campaigns and solicitation of funds).



Organizations operating a shared platform need to ensure that they manage their responsibilities for the physical locations and workspaces of all project staff. They need to ensure that they meet all legislative/Health and Safety requirements, and be able to act quickly if there are concerns with those work spaces/sites.

---



SECTION F

# Human Resources

The employees, contractors and volunteers assigned to projects are the employees, contractors and volunteers of the host organization and all responsibility and liability for commitments and actions rest with that organization. It is a critical to ensure that there is good communication between the shared platform staff and the project staff.



In most shared platforms, the project lead has supervisory responsibility for employees, contractors and volunteers as well as for overall project compliance with your organization's personnel policies and procedures.

## Things to put in place:

- F1** Policies and procedures to ensure that all hiring processes, decisions and commitments regarding employees, contracted personnel and consultants are reviewed and formally approved by the shared platform staff. This includes the job posting process, ensuring adequate funds are in place to make a salary commitment, and any policies and practices of the organization and employment standards are applied as appropriate and reflect the requirements of the specific sector/s your organization works in (e.g., union requirements, health vs. arts).
  
- F2** Your organization has policies and procedures to ensure that:
  - Project staff are oriented to your organization's policies and procedures (e.g., personnel, Workplace Health & Safety).
  - New staff orientation and resources are available and reflect the needs of project staff (e.g., Letter of Employment, Employee Manual).
  - Project staff understand their role within your organization and who they may talk to about HR related concerns.
  - Project staff have the skills and competencies to carry out the project and work within a shared platform.



## ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

- F3** Where your organization allows or requires project-specific personnel policies, they should be clearly defined and communicated. Some examples include: vacation entitlement, professional development and tuition reimbursement.

Your organization should review and approve project-specific policies to ensure compliance with labour law, contractual obligations and to ensure the funds and budgets are in place.

- F4** Project volunteers are reflected in the organization's volunteer policies and are aware of the shared platform model.

- F5** Volunteer recruitment, screening, orientation and retention policies reflect the work and needs of projects.



In a unionized environment, the organization's collective agreement may need a specific clause that speaks to the status of workers in projects of the shared platform (e.g., included or excluded from the bargaining unit). The union may have the right to argue that these employees are legal employees of the organization and should not be unreasonably excluded from protection. In the case of one shared platform's experience, they chose not to have this clause and not to exclude project employees - "These employees get the same benefits and rights as other staff, including the same pay scales and same health and dental benefits – a real advantage for a project operating within a shared platform."

---

SECTION G

# Project Activities

When your organization operates a shared platform, it is critical that the activities of projects are in keeping with your organizational mission and mandate.

A project may bring new approaches to a particular issue and your organization's policies, practices and culture should reflect this.



## Things to put in place:

- G1** Your organization understands the project's activities and related responsibilities (e.g., insurance needs, police checks, food handling, ticket sales).
- G2** Your organization and projects have a clear understanding of how to describe the model within the community to ensure transparency. (e.g., where does someone go if they have a complaint about the project?)
- G3** Your organization incorporates the work and impact of projects into its evaluation strategy and collaboratively works with project to adapt approaches where necessary.



---

"Before we chose to offer a shared platform, all of our activities happened at the same location during the day. When we brought on new projects, we had to take a serious look at our policies and procedures to make sure they reflected our project's activities. For example, how do we keep project staff safe when they are delivering programs off-site in the evening?"

---

SECTION H

# Communications Practices

It's important that both internal and external communications clearly communicate the project's status within your organization. By strengthening your staff and stakeholders' understanding, you are fostering transparency and strengthening the implementation of the model.



## Things to put in place:

- H1** Clear directions as to when, where and how to describe the project's status within your organization. This should be provided to projects including any logo placement instructions.

Note: Your organization's name should be included with any formal reference to a project. This includes: publications, project websites, social media accounts, reports and other public documents, grant applications and reporting, media releases, etc.

- H2** Projects should be listed in your organization's general communication materials along with other programs and activities.
- H3** Appropriate and consistent language is used to communicate the project's status within your organization (e.g., terms such as executive director or board of directors are not appropriate when referring to a project lead or advisory committee).



## ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

- H4** A description of which project communications should be reviewed by shared platform staff (e.g., political activity, publications, fundraising campaigns, websites, etc.).



“Since project staff are often the ones who build relationships with donors, our donor recognition process starts with a written thank you from project staff. We include a message letting them know that they can expect a tax receipt shortly from our host organization/ shared platform. This ensures that our response is not only prompt and personal but that they are clear that our project is part of a larger organization.”

---

SECTION I

# Project Closure

There is a range of reasons why a project may cease to be a part of your organization. Some projects are time-limited or wind down naturally; others may become their own separate organization or move to another legal entity. Projects may also close due to completion of programmatic work, insufficient funds or non-compliance.



One of the reasons for developing shared platforms is to create the opportunity to implement time-limited initiatives and test an idea without creating (or closing) a separate legal entity for each. Having proactively articulated and developed this shared platform model upfront is critical to successfully managing the close-out process when it happens.

## Things to put in place:

- I1** A clear process for project termination in your Terms of Reference (Appendix C).
  
- I2** A process for keeping track of both physical assets and products of the work and a documented process for how these assets are dealt with in the case of project termination (e.g., when is a transfer of assets appropriate).
  - For charities, a transfer of project assets must be to a qualified donee.
  
- I3** There is a process in place for ensuring all project commitments and obligations (both programmatic and financial) are documented and addressed as a project winds down, sets up a new entity or moves to another organization. Obligations may include:
  - Employment contracts
  - Leases
  - Service contracts
  - Other third party contracts
  - Grant agreements



## ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

- 14** A communication plan to inform stakeholders, partners and funders when a project leaves or closes.
  
- 15** A plan for ensuring there are reserves to cover project-related commitments in the case of project closure. An appropriate reserve should be determined based on your organizational policies and practices, including funder requirements.



“Donor contact information requires special consideration when a project leaves your organization to move to another entity. Be sure to review Canada’s Anti-Spam Legislation and The Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA or the PIPED Act) with your legal counsel.”

---

**PART 5**

# **APPENDICES – SHARED PLATFORM TOOLS**

- A. Glossary of Key Terminology**
- B. Resources & References**
- C. Sample Terms of Reference & Consent to Act**



## APPENDIX A

# Glossary of Terms

## Organization

A legally incorporated entity (nonprofit or charity) that has chosen to provide/host a shared platform for unincorporated projects within its overall work and mission.

## Shared Platform Staff Leadership

A program/department/lead staff within an organization that supports and provides oversight to all projects within the shared platform.

## Project

A venture that is adopted and rests within a shared platform. Projects are not incorporated and do not have their own legal status, rather they are adopted by the organization and are an integral part of the host organization's legal structure. This is not unlike the way a division or department might operate within an organization.

## Project Lead

A person (employee, contractor or volunteer) with responsibility for overseeing the project's activities and coordinating with the project advisory committee, other project staff and the shared platform staff leadership.

## Project Staff

Staff positions (volunteer and/or paid) dedicated to work on a specific project.

## Project Advisory Committee

Volunteers who oversee, provide support and guidance with certain responsibilities delegated by the board of the organization.

## APPENDIX B

# Resources and References

## Resources

*Imagine Canada Standards Program* help Canadian charities and nonprofits improve their practices in five foundational areas: board governance, financial accountability & transparency, fundraising, staff management, and volunteer involvement – [www.imaginecanada.ca](http://www.imaginecanada.ca)

*Volunteer Canada's Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement* is a framework for involving volunteers in all levels of an organization. This includes volunteers working in leadership, direct service and virtual roles - [www.volunteer.ca](http://www.volunteer.ca)

*The HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector's online Resource Centre* (now Community Foundations of Canada) offers free HR management tools and resources including the HR Toolkit and HR Management Standards - [www.hrcouncil.ca](http://www.hrcouncil.ca)

## References

Stevens, D. & Mason, M. (2010). Tides Canada Initiatives Society: Charitable Venture Organizations: A New Infrastructure Model For Canadian Registered Charities. *The Philanthropist*, 23(2). Retrieved from: <http://thephilanthropist.ca/2010/05/tides-canada-initiatives-society-charitable/>

Mclsaac, E. & Moody, C. (2013). A Platform For Change. *Mowat NFP, Sector Signals Series*. Retrieved from: <http://mowatcentre.ca/a-platform-for-change/>



APPENDIX C

# Terms of Reference

*Please note: An organization with charitable status agreed to share this Terms of Reference for reference only.*

**«Organization\_Name»  
PROJECT TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**PROJECT NAME: «Project\_Name»  
PROJECT NUMBER: «Project\_Name»**

## 1. Approval of Project

«Project\_Name», as described in this Terms of Reference, was approved as a Project of «Organization\_Name» by «Organization\_Name»'s Management on «Project\_Name» and ratified by «Organization\_Name» Board of Directors on (*board approval date*)

## 2. Description of Project including Current Year Activities and Future Strategic Goals

«Purpose»

«Project\_Name»'s current year activities and future strategic goals are:

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

## 3. Project Leadership

The Project Leadership comprises the Project Lead and the members of the Project's Advisory Committee. The roles and responsibilities of both the Project Lead and the Advisory Committee can be reviewed <<Location>>. Project Management Team includes the Project Lead and any other staff, contractors or volunteers assigned to the Project from time to time.



## APPENDICES – SHARED PLATFORM TOOLS

The Project Lead for «Project\_Name» is «Project\_Name».

Following are the names of the individuals who have agreed to act as voluntary members of the Project’s Advisory Committee:


Each of these individuals has completed a Consent to Act in the form provided by «Organization\_Name» to «Project\_Name», signed copies of which are attached to this Terms of Reference. If an Advisory Committee member wishes to resign, he/she must provide written notice of their resignation to the «Shared Platform Lead’s position» who works with the Project. This resignation will be effective on the receipt by «Organization\_Name» of this notice. New Advisory Committee members may be added from time to time and the Project Lead will ensure that such new members will also complete *Consent to Act* forms and provide a copy to the «Shared Platform Lead’s position».

### 4. Accountability

Day-to-day stewardship, fundraising and strategic guidance for the Project is delegated to the Project Leadership by «Organization\_Name» Management.

The Project Advisory Committee and Project Lead are accountable to the «Shared Platform Lead’s position».



The Project Advisory Committee and Project Management Team will work with the Shared Platform Team (Project Lead, Finance Lead, and Human Resources Lead) to ensure that all programmatic, organizational, funding and reporting requirements are met. Project Leadership will regularly review proposed activities, including any lobbying or advocacy activities, in advance with the Project Lead to ensure that we continue to pursue results within the parameters of «Organization\_Name»'s charitable objectives as agreed from time to time with the Canada Revenue Agency.

### **5. Overhead Allocation**

Each project within «Organization\_Name» must generate sufficient revenue to cover all of its expenses including overhead expenses as allocated to the Project by «Organization\_Name» Management. The annual overhead allocation for «Project\_Name» is:

- x% of the total annual revenue received for the Project, with a minimum requirement of \$x per fiscal year.

The allocation rate for projects will be specified in «Organization\_Name»'s policies and may be amended from time to time on 90 days' notice to Project Leadership. Any new rate would apply only to funding arrangements confirmed after such notification is given.

### **6. Annual Project Budget**

The budget for «Project\_Name» for the initial period is attached as Appendix X (the "Budget"). Budgets for future calendar years will be outlined each fall in a substitute Appendix X.

Budgets will be reviewed periodically and the adequacy of the ongoing received and committed funding will be considered by the Shared Platform Team in consultation with Project Leadership.

### **7. Ownership of Assets and Work Product**

As a Project of «Organization\_Name», «Project\_Name» is not a separate legal entity. Therefore, legal title to all assets associated with «Project\_Name» rests with «Organization\_Name». In particular, all legal right and title to any asset, report, intellectual property, product or other item produced or acquired in connection with «Project\_Name» will be an asset of «Organization\_Name». This will not include any legal right or title otherwise owned or explicitly retained by any third party collaborator in the creation or development of an asset.



## 8. Termination of Project

«Project\_Name» may be terminated as a «Organization\_Name» Project:

- by «Organization\_Name» Management at any time and for any reason on 60 days' written notice to the Project Lead and any one member of the Project's Advisory Committee; or
- by unanimous decision of the Project Lead and each of the Project's Advisory Committee members on 60 days' written notice delivered to the Shared Platform Lead.

In either event, the Shared Platform Team will work with the Project Leadership to, as quickly and effectively as possible, and in the sole discretion of the Shared Platform Leadership:

- transfer Project operations and assets (specifically including intellectual property) to a qualified donee; or
- wind down the Project, which may include the transfer of Project assets (specifically including intellectual property) to a qualified donee.

This may include, at the sole discretion of the Shared Platform Team:

- completing any obligations relating to the Project; and
- returning any unexpended Project funds to relevant funders where required by these funders.
- transferring Project assets (specifically including intellectual property) to a qualified donee; and
- removing any remaining Project funds from the Project's accounts and apply them to other «Organization\_Name» Projects or purposes as the Shared Platform Team sees fit.

## 9. Project Operational Resources

The «Organization\_Name» Operations Manual and Employee Handbook, and the «Organization\_Name» Core Operational Policies, as updated from time to time, contain detailed policies and processes to guide our work. These and other resources can be found «Location».



## Receipt and Acknowledgement

---

**Signature of Advisory Committee Chair**

---

**Signature of Project Lead**

---

**Print name of Advisory Committee Chair**

---

**Print name of Project Lead**

---

**Date (dd/mm/yy)**

---

**Date (dd/mm/yy)**

APPENDIX C

# Consent to Act

**AS A MEMBER OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR  
«Project\_name», A PROJECT OF <<organization\_name>>**

The Advisory Committee is a voluntary advisory committee to both <<Organization\_Name>> management and Project Management. Although it has no legal or governing authority, it provides an important mechanism of accountability and support. Healthy and successful <<Organization\_Name>> projects require the leadership, depth, experience, and support that an active and informed Advisory Committee can provide.

The Advisory Committee advises and makes decisions for the Project in the following areas:

- Defining purposes, goals and objectives
- Strategic planning including budget and work plan development
- Developing resources to ensure expenditures are met
- Project Lead recruitment, selection and supervision including performance evaluation
- Evaluating success in achieving deliverables on all contracts

The Advisory Committee, in particular the Chair of the Advisory Committee, advises <<Organization\_Name>> on all these aspects of the Project.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to act as a member of the Advisory Committee for «Project\_Name», a Project of <<Organization\_Name>>, and to do so in accordance with the policies of <<Organization\_Name>>. I will advise the Project Lead and <<Organization\_Name>> in writing if I intend to vacate my position on the Advisory Committee.

Dated this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 201\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Print Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Mailing Address**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**E-mail Address**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Phone Number**