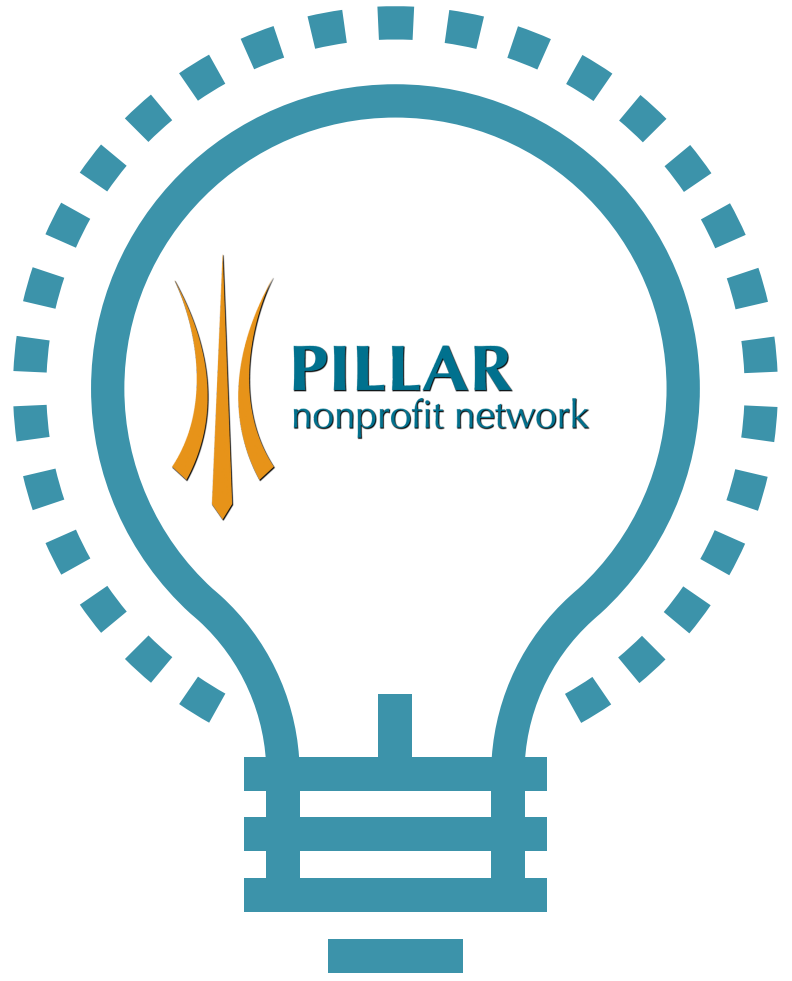


#PolicyTalk Summary Report



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23**

**BUILDING
THE PLANE
WHILE WE'RE
ON THE
RUNWAY**

Pillar #PolicyTalk Report, June 28, 2023: Building the Plane while we're on the Runway

As part of Pillar's commitment to growing policy capacity across the membership and network, and encouraging cross-sectoral collaboration with all levels of government, we convened twenty-one Pillar members and staff on June 28, 2023, at Innovation Works London for a #PolicyTalk. The event was meant to help us take stock of our combined advocacy capacity and discuss the opportunity to grow and flex our policy muscle "on the job" in the development of the City of London's multi-year budget (MYB). As a container for the conversation, we asked, **"How can social purpose organizations work together to help shape the City's multi-year budget (and keep working together to advance our missions and serve our communities better)?"**

Pillar's contribution to this project includes a commitment to publishing and sharing this report on the conversation for the benefit of attendees, registrants who sent regrets, and anyone in the membership and community who wishes to join in this work. The report includes considerations of Pillar's goals and commitments; the questions, goals, and commitments of other participants; the opportunities available to the community



The conversation began with an acknowledgment that we are discussing the stewardship of lands and waters long and successfully cared for by Indigenous peoples before there was a strategic plan or a multi-year budget or a City of London, processes and institutions that have largely excluded Indigenous people and communities. Pillar's Land Acknowledgement is printed on our website and reproduced in this report, but attendees of #PolicyTalk were encouraged to think beyond a "checkmark" or simple acknowledgment and to imagine how we will bring systems of governance into harmony through our actions, especially by acting on the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and doing the work of learning from the methods, systems, and successes of the original caretakers.

now; and the challenges we may face, either because of civic government processes, our own capacities, or people missing from the conversation. The case for increased advocacy now was presented by Paul Seale, Pillar's Manager of Public Policy, Advocacy, and Impact and by Luis Patricio, Pillar's Co-lead of SDG Cities. The facilitated conversation was captured by Public Policy Assistant Grace Estrada, and we are also including accounts of follow up surveying and correspondence about this.

Possible Outputs and Outcomes

In considering this event, Pillar had a number of short- and medium-term outputs in mind, and some related longer-term outcomes. In the short term, we envisioned:

- The growth of people's and organizations' networks, leading to greater understanding, sympathy, empathy, allyship, and/or solidarity among local social purpose actors;
- A better understanding of effective advocacy to date;
- A growth in understanding civic processes; and, perhaps,
- Early-stage workshopping, or putting allyship into action, either within the event, or in follow-up work.

Each of these might embolden and empower participants to dedicate themselves to the immediate work on influencing the MYB, but also to growing our individual and combined capacity for future collaboration and advocacy, addressing our longer-term objectives:

- To (re)build a proactive Pillar policy program;

Building Public Policy Capacity



#PolicyTalk is, in part, a relaunch of Pillar's #PolicyConversations series, offered in 2019 in reaction to the policy environment impacting the sector at the time (e.g., an unfavorable 2019 budget and expenditure estimates).

It was meant to grow advocacy capacity in the region and the sector, but that work was disrupted through the urgent conditions of the pandemic. We hope that #PolicyTalk can be a proactive program that continues the work of growing policy capacity and our ability to anticipate, make, and manage change. To learn more, the reports from the 2019 #PolicyConversations are still available.

- [Navigating the New Economic Realities, June 18, 2019](#)
- [Beyond the Talk & Getting to Action, August 19, 2019](#)
- [Future Forward Thinking, September 30, 2019](#)

- To help strengthen the local sector’s policy capacity; and
- To learn by doing – “assembling the plane while we’re on the runway,” perhaps – how to have a heightened and positive impact on investments in our sector and community over the next four years so that we can do it better in future.

Why this, and why now?

- **There is no wrong time to make our organizations stronger and no wrong time to better connect our organizational activities to our missions and visions.**

Pillar remains committed to helping our membership collaborate with governments at all levels of jurisdiction. However, there is a long history of identifying the need to grow policy capacity in the sector with little change to follow. And there is even a long history of discouraging advocacy in the sector.

On the other hand, governments have become increasingly dependent on nonprofits for advice and service delivery. **We may underestimate our potential influence and leverage.**

- **The present climate in civic politics and administration seems especially welcoming to reframe our advocacy as valued advice.**

The presentation included an account of many ways that social purpose actors were able to influence the development and final form of the City of London’s Strategic Plan 2023-2027, including explicit inclusion of nonprofits and culture organizations in the City’s economic development area of focus. For a full account of this, see [Nonprofit advocacy wins are wins for the whole community](#) on the Pillar news page.

Notably, as Luis illustrated, City administration and politicians are recognizing the interconnectedness of their areas of focus. Following Luis’ presentation on mobility justice to Councillors at a Public Participation Meeting, the term “mobility poverty” was added

Thawing out the “advocacy chill”

Until 2018, charities were prohibited from devoting more than 10% of their resources to “political activities,” at the risk of losing their charitable status.

As of 2018, this measure was removed from the Income Tax Act, and **charities can safely devote 100% of their resources to public policy work**, now called Public Policy Dialogue and Development Activities (P₂D₂A). Nonetheless, the notion that this is risky has persisted, along with avoidance for those who found it too onerous to track. Even nonprofits without charitable status may continue to be wary of appearing to be controversial to funders and, especially, to be perceived as oppositional to current government policies when governments are potential funders.

Pillar is committed to helping our members and the social purpose community to better understand what sorts of advocacy are allowed and how important it is that nonprofits and other SPOs are valued contributors to our public policy environment.

to strategies under three different areas of focus. A framework like the UN Sustainable Development Goals may help us to identify opportunities for multi-disciplinary collaborations and communities of support.

Additionally, Paul proposed, this civic administration and Council seem highly disposed to value “collaboration,” building it into the Strat Plan as a value and stewarding a collaborative role in the Health and Homelessness Whole of Community System Response.

Even more promising, that work shows a new recognition of nonprofits and nonprofit workers as pillars of our community’s success, with the addition of a workforce development table among the implementation tables and explicit mention of supporting nonprofit workers in the Mayor’s State of the City address in January, 2023.

Though we’ve become accustomed to the idea that “you can’t fight City Hall,” we’re proposing that we may not have to. If we can present a unified voice on a select number of issues, our insights may be welcomed. To capitalize on this opportunity, we need to:

- Identify areas of interest on which we could collaborate or support each other; use the UN Sustainable Development Goals as a way to identify potential synergies;
- Decide on useful ways to work together;
- Continue to welcome new voices, especially those led by and invested in communities of equity-deserving and underserved people;
- Share knowledge of civic processes and points of leverage that shape the budget;
- Acknowledge what we don’t know and seek ways to fill those gaps.

To help with the exchange of knowledge, we asked participants,

- What are the important things for you (in the Strategic Plan)?
- Where would you be willing to work with

Forms of engagement.	Who’s doin’ it?
Using social media for advocacy	33%
Voting	100% of eligible
Rallying	52%
Writing to media (or blogging)	29%
Sharing feedback on City’s getinvolved.ca site	29%
Going to Public Participation Meetings	57%
Participating in delegations	29%
Participating in Advisory Committees	19%
Serving as a Councillor	.05%
“Willing to do something you haven’t done yet”	90%

To learn what participants are already doing by way of advocacy and public policy, and to demonstrate that we have some capacity to do this work, we asked if attendees engaged in any of the above ways. All participants agreed they were prepared to do something more than they usually do, except a couple who already ‘do it all’ save serve as Councillors.

others or support others?

- In which ways could we collaborate with the government?
- What are we doing already? and
- Are we prepared to do more than that?

Opportunities in the City's Strategic Plan

Participants expressed interest, questions, and ideas on these strategic areas of focus:

- Reconciliation, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion;
- Wellbeing and Safety;
- Climate Action and Sustainable Growth;
- Well-Run City; and
- Mobility and Transportation.

Details discussed under each area are included below.

Reconciliation, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion

Several members expressed their special interest in this Area of Focus, specifically on:

- Outcome 1: "The City of London enhances the confidence of Indigenous Peoples by furthering truth and reconciliation efforts;" and
- Outcome 2: "The City of London is a leader in becoming an equitable and inclusive community."

In terms of strategies, there was an expressed will to collaborate on

- Strategy 2.2 a: "Support the community in attracting, integrating and retaining new Londoners through education, celebration, employment, and other actions;" and
- Strategy 2.2. b: "Support community-based inclusion and anti-hate initiatives and events."

Wellbeing and Safety

Information was shared about the Ontario Trillium Foundation's 2016 Profile of Wellbeing that found the London region had a higher percentage of people volunteering for recreation and culture organizations than the provincial average at (38.6 % vs 30.5%).

Economic Growth, Culture and Prosperity

The point was made that nonprofits are big employers, having a massive economic impact and that sector workers are disproportionately women, Indigenous people, immigrants, racialized people, and from other equity-deserving and underserved populations. The economic impact of nonprofits, then, also drives social impact, helping

to create economic and social opportunities for people in these communities. Also, a question was raised about the degree to which nonprofit workers ‘vote their missions.’

Mobility and Transportation

We discussed how the use of the SDG framework in the proposal of changes related to Mobility Justice to the City’s Strategic Plan facilitated their prompt acceptance by council after the Public Participation Meeting in March 2023. Using this framework, several connections were demonstrated between transportation, housing, and other equity issues with a recommendation to make better use of the City’s Equity Tool.

Climate Action and Sustainable Growth

Among the concerns voiced in this area was that of a lack of resources interfering with the sustainability of outcomes from initiatives by conservation organizations. Moreover, the need for a ‘green space inventory’, that would allow environmental organizations to know “the places that are unprotected and that may be torn up”, was brought up. This could help organizations in this sector more optimally direct their efforts. In addition, a collaboration with UTCRA (Upper Thames River Conservation Authority) in this Area of Focus was suggested. Various participants expressed interest in sharing resources, and to collaborate with diverse organizations and people because “climate action impacts everything” and results in “co-benefits” for different actors and across all sectors. That many “sectors are connected through climate, and that this needs to be taken advantage of”. Special attention was given to expected result 1.2: “Waterways, wetlands, watersheds, and natural areas are protected and enhanced.”, and strategy 1.2.a.: “Protect the natural environment and avoid natural hazards when building new infrastructure or development.”

Learning Agreements

The #PolicyTalk conversation was conducted according to a set of learning agreements meant to promote Ethical and Safe Spaces, with allowances that participants were comfortable making their participation known to promote future collaboration.

- Address the issue not the person
- Lean into discomfort (your own)
- Be respectful of others - on their terms
- Expect and accept non-closure
- Acknowledge we are growing
- Show up with humility and empathy even if opinions differ
- Be patient and accountable to one another to build trust.
- What’s said here stays here, what’s learned here leaves here (with allowances for this report)
- We will work with you to resolve disputes

We encourage you to join us in creating more Ethical and Safe Spaces. In our own journey, we’ve learned much from resources prepared by Carolinian Canada: <https://caroliniancanada.ca/safe>

Well-run City

There was curiosity about how expected result 1.2 and, especially, strategies a & b had got into the Strategic Plan. It was speculated that feedback from newly elected City Councillors might have had a role, though those specific strategies might have been contributed by staff seeking greater citizen engagement.

Outcome 1: The City of London is trusted, open, and accountable in service of the community.

Expected Result	Strategies
1.2 Reduced barriers to public participation in municipal government.	<p>a) Increase the availability and accessibility of information through a variety of formats.</p> <p>b) Improve the quality, inclusivity, and accessibility of public participation opportunities.</p> <p>c) Improve voter engagement, participation, and awareness for the 2026 municipal election.</p>

Notes from Discussion

Widespread concern was expressed about a lack of transparency in City processes.

“It is scary,” said one participant.

- There was some discussion about the degree to which **we lack information about critical pathways, timelines, and tools to engage** (e.g., business case templates).
- The group was also reminded that it can be very influential to make presentations to Council, e.g., when 90% of attendees talked about housing and climate as their areas of concern in the Public Participation Meeting on the 2020-2023 MYB, those were the areas that received greatest investment.
- We speculated that this is the time when business cases could be drafted and handed off to City staff. These business cases could be tied to strategies in London’s Strategic Plan, and could make

What we’ve Learned about Ways to Engage in Budget Development . . .

Among the greatest barriers we all identified to engaging with the development of the MYB is the lack of transparency in the budget development process itself. Both in the #PolicyTalk event and in subsequent correspondence, we were asked about critical pathways, timelines, and available tools, like business case templates.

Transparency is definitely lacking – and this may be a suitable area for advocacy – but we’ve been able to learn a little.

We’ve continued to seek information about best practices for engagement on the development of the budget, and share some of our findings about timelines and tools on the next page.

the case community organizations can meet the City's need for services in relevant areas of focus.

- The language being used currently by the City suggests they are seeking more "**community-led**" initiatives. The recognition London is already getting for the co-creation of London's Health and Homelessness Whole of Community System response might make it the right time for **grassroots business cases**.

Next Steps

An in-event straw poll showed a desire to continue the work, and a follow-up survey and member outreach have convinced us to schedule a **second #PolicyTalk event**, Thursday, August 10, 9:30am-12pm, in-person at Innovation Works London. This one will be focused on [Defining Shared Goals](#), and forming ad hoc groups around shared priorities.

Along with a lack of transparency in City processes, we found the complexity of the Strat Plan is also a barrier to naming areas of opportunity for participants.

To deal with this, we are offering to have Pillar staff examine the missions and activities of participating organizations to map connections to the City of London's Strategic Plan and other participant organizations. To get Pillar staff help in this project, email Grace at bgestrada@pillarnonprofit.ca.

Organizations who indicated they can do this work themselves will be asked to share their results with us also.

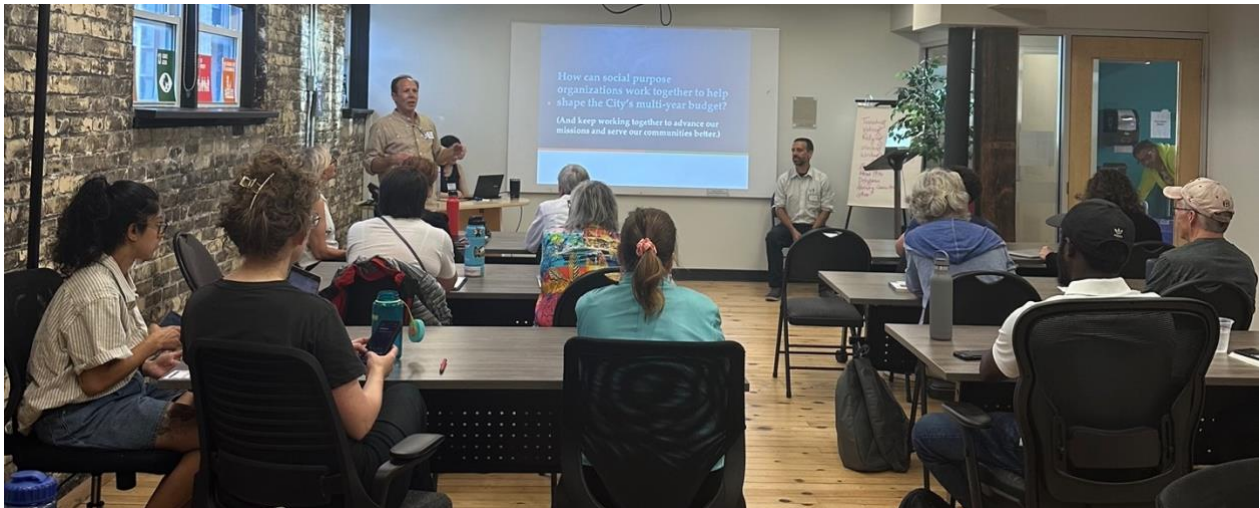
What we've Learned about Ways to Engage in Budget Development (Part II)

Timelines:

- City staff tell us that each 'service division' must have its business cases into the finance division by the **end of August**. Anyone with the resources to submit a business case needs to get info to service division staff soon so that it can be included in their division budgets.
- It is possible to secure funding outside of the MYB. (e.g., recent funding to the Humane Society or, more uniquely, the ongoing submission of business cases to the LCRN funding). There are pros and cons to both approaches. Past Councils have typically preferred requests to come through MYB or the annual budget update and often deferred discussion on a particular item until those times.
- A reminder, also, that the MYB will include what the City calls 'pacing,' so it is possible to advocate now for investments that might be made at any point in the 4-year budget. This also means that it's worth making arguments about how up-front investments can save future costs.

Tools and templates

- For general communication of priorities, London Cycle Link has permitted us to share [this letter](#), sent to Councillors in May and making good linkages between their priorities and the City's Strategic Plan.
- Though we've not found a City-supplied or endorsed template for a business case, it may be possible to reverse engineer such a thing from City documents *describing* business cases. e.g., [2020-2023 City of London Multi-Year Budget Business Cases](#) links specific business cases to areas of focus and strategies from the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan.



With respect to our short-term outcomes, we were pleased that attendees got together, met each other, were able to voice their concrete advocacy interests and ideas, and discovered areas in which they could potentially collaborate, emboldening our collaborative spirit and capacity around policy and advocacy work.

Pillar remains committed to helping our members identify items in London's Strategic Plan that they would most like to see funded in the multi-year budget and working with our membership to encourage and enable advocacy for these investments. We hope to see you soon for [#PolicyTalk: Defining Shared Goals, August 10, 2023](#)

What you told us

From a brief “information for Action” survey that opened a week after the June #PolicyTalk event, we received 11 survey responses, 6 from members who had joined the event, 3 from registrants who did not attend, and 2 who had attended as Pillar staff.

Although the small sample prevents us from drawing broader conclusions about the whole of our membership, the survey allowed us to hear some specific ideas and preferences. For example, some respondents felt it would be helpful to have Pillar staff do preliminary mapping of organizations' missions to the City's Strategic Plan.

In addition, most participants said they would “be likely to attend an in-person #PolicyTalk event, if it were offered,” and some member attendees expressly supported the idea of collaborative work around specific themes as a part of the next event.

The next event will indeed have an enhanced collaborative focus as we share a conversation, and work together, around the ways organizations could see themselves mapped in London's Strategic Plan and seek to advocate for beneficial investments in the multi-year budget.

For one respondent who said they would prefer a virtual event, for a couple who hoped we could continue to share resources, and for one who asked whether we are seeking to bring in new voices, we will certainly keep everyone as informed and engaged as possible through future work.

References

1. [City of London Strategic Plan \(Comprehensive Plan begins on p29\)](#)
2. [Nonprofit advocacy wins are wins for the whole community \(Pillar\)](#)
3. [#PolicyTalk, June 28, 2023 slide deck](#)
4. [A Profile of Wellbeing: The West Region \(Ontario Trillium Foundation, 2016\) and Snapshot: West Region.](#)
5. [Letter from London Cycle Link to Councillors, May 2023.](#)
6. [2020-2023 City of London Multi-Year Budget Business Cases.](#)
7. [Navigating the New Economic Realities, Pillar Policy Conversation, June 18, 2019](#)
8. [Beyond the Talk & Getting to Action, Pillar Policy Conversation, August 19, 2019](#)
9. [Future Forward Thinking, Pillar Policy Conversation, September 30, 2019](#)

Further Reading and Resources

1. [Can I Engage in Political Advocacy? 3 Things Charities Need to Know \(Imagine Canada\)](#)
2. [A short history of voluntary sector–government relations in Canada \(revisited\) \(Philanthropist Journal\)](#)



This report was prepared for Pillar Nonprofit Network by Grace Estrada with assistance from Luis Patricio and Paul Seale.