# #PolicyTalk Summary Report

**PILLAR**
nonprofit network

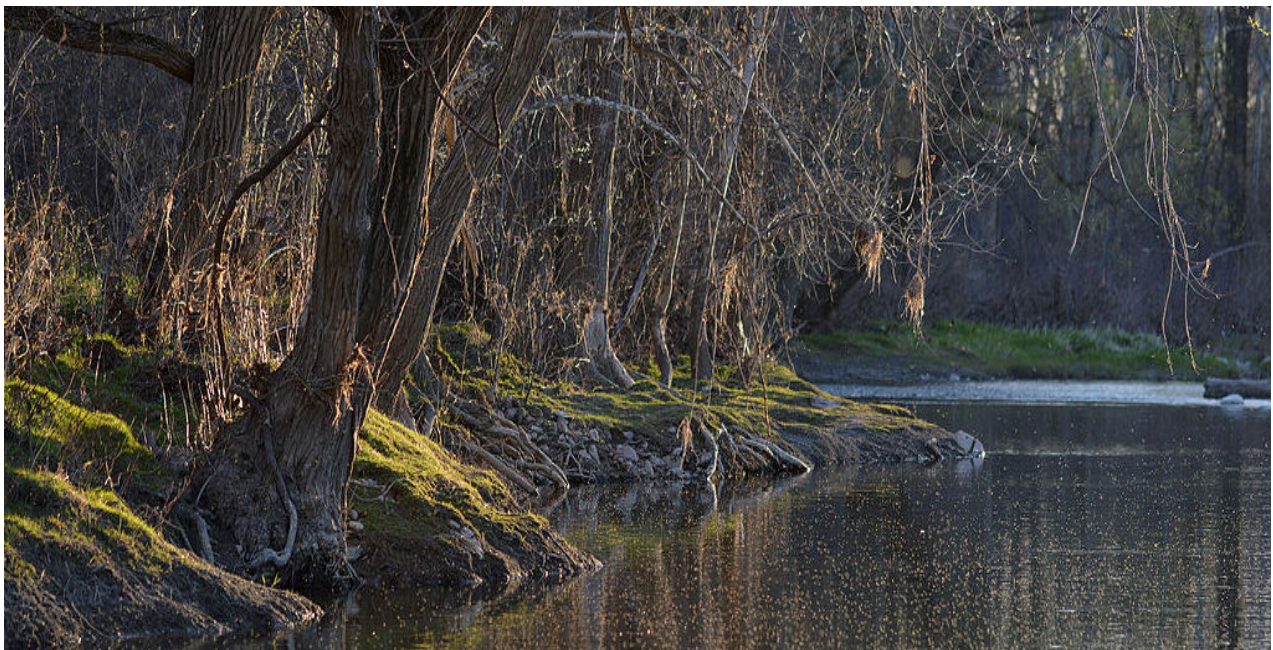**09**
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**DOING THINGS TOGETHER**

**#PolicyTalk 3: Doing Things Together**
**A report on Pillar's September 21, 2023 #PolicyTalk event**

On September 21, 2023, members of Pillar Nonprofit Network gathered for a third meeting in the #PolicyTalk series, part of Pillar's Public Policy and Advocacy program. This initiative seeks to grow the ability of nonprofits to practice effective policy and advocacy by sharing knowledge, collaborating, and using our existing strengths to develop a collective sector voice. In our third meeting, we worked together to develop and refine the advocacy tools we need to have a positive influence on the development of the City of London's Multi-Year Budget.

This year's #PolicyTalk series resumes a similar project launched in 2019 but disrupted by the urgent needs of the sector during the pandemic and the cascading crises that have continued to hamper recovery. As demands on the sector grow greater and resources



With a focus on the stewardship of the City at its centre, the #PolicyTalk series has been conducted with heightened awareness that Indigenous voices are historically and persistently excluded from municipal governance despite their longstanding stewardship of these lands and waters. We acknowledge again, as we have in our gatherings, that the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, and Lūnaapéewak have been making decisions for the health of people and planet since long before there was a strategic plan, a multi-year budget, or a City of London. Pillar's land acknowledgement is printed on our website, but attendees of #PolicyTalk were encouraged to embrace a shared responsibility to seek harmony with the governance of the Chippewa Nation of the Thames (Anishinaabek), the Oneida Nation of the Thames (Haudenosaunee), and the Munsee-Delaware Nation (Lūnaapéewak).

dwindle, it is as important as ever that nonprofits develop our capacity for advocacy and grow our collective voice.

To focus our efforts and increase our chances of some quick wins, we have used the development of the City of London's 2024-27 Multi-Year Budget as a container for the conversation and a platform for relationship-building.

In a June #PolicyTalk event titled "Building the Plane While we're on the Runway," we demonstrated 'proof of concept,' celebrating the sector's advocacy wins in influencing the development of the City of London's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan. We developed a case for continuing the work into the budget process and we discussed our shared interest in gathering again to set a shared agenda. You can read a report of the event here.

With high interest in a second event, we gathered in August for #PolicyTalk 2: Defining Shared Goals. You can read a report of that event here but, in short, as we discussed ways to align our interests and translate our shared purposes into advocacy, two very clear themes emerged:

1. There is a strong desire in the network for a **greater collaborative capacity in advocacy** and collective voice for the nonprofit sector; and

2. We have already developed a clearer understanding of the **knowledge and resources** needed to effectively engage decision-makers, particularly with respect to influencing civic administration and City politicians.

In regards to the ¨knowledge and Resources¨ referred to on the second point above, four tools or resources were indicated as having the greatest potential at lowering barriers that currently interfere with the ability of nonprofits and the sector to have a bigger voice in advocacy, for ourselves and for the communities we serve:

1. **A 'one-pager' for nonprofit board members** explaining that nonprofits may indeed engage in advocacy and, indeed, may be expected to do so. Participants had indicated that board members may be highly focused on risk but unaware of the current regulatory environment, especially after significant changes in 2018.

2. **A mapping tool** that could simplify and facilitate the process of finding alignments between organizations and other parties, including potential collaborators, policy makers, and funders. In particular, the tool should make it easy to frame a nonprofit or the nonprofit sector as a 'collaborator' in achieving the City's goals. Pillar also identified that such a tool should easily align with funding-relevant frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs).

3. **A visualization of the timeline and critical pathways** in the development of the Multi-Year Budget so that it is easier to develop strategies and tactics for influence and intervention by nonprofits and other advocates.

4. **A municipal engagement and advocacy toolkit**, that more exhaustively informs about the City's structures, processes, and resources.

And so #PolicyTalk 3: Doing Things Together was designed to address the two major themes identified by participants in the August event: 1) we used the event to start, in the words of one contributor, "doing things together;" and 2) we worked collaboratively to refine the identified resources.

Pillar staff developed draft versions of the first three tools in advance of the September gathering and shared two with event registrants via email so they could arrive with ideas. As part of the activities, attendees were asked to discuss them and share feedback, first in breakout groups and later in report-backs to the larger group. The key recommendations captured during the draft feedback-sharing exercises include:

1. **The "Board One Pager":** A resource for nonprofit board members to learn WHY AND HOW it is OK for their organization to engage in public policy development.
   - The conversational format was appreciated by some. A slide deck format was suggested by others as an initial version (with detailed notes, as second version).
   - The main audiences (board members) and possible secondary audiences are needed to be more clearly defined on the document.

- The definition of "advocacy and public policy work" as it pertains to this resource, and to the goals of the actors in the #PolicyTalks series, needed greater clarity as well. (What is **not** meant by advocacy in this context?)
- "The **why** factor. Why are we doing it?" "Why do we need good policy?"
- Address more directly the 'taboo' of speaking about politics, and explain why this should not be the case.
- What has happened since the abolition of the rule limiting charities to devoting only 10% of their resources to 'political activities?'
- Include examples of success (and failure) of nonprofits engaging in advocacy and policy work. Outline nonprofits that support advocacy and why they do it (i.e., why they think it is important). E.g., Anova has an advocacy committee.
- Acknowledge and address risk.
- Include more graphics.
- Include links to further information (legal, etc.), e.g., Community Legal Education Ontario's Nonprofit Law pages: https://nonprofitlaw.cleo.on.ca/ that could go in a resources section.

    Please find the public access document for this resource here. Commenting and suggesting modes are enabled, so feel free to provide inputs that you think are helpful.

2. **The Organizational Mapping Tool**: A template for finding alignment with potential collaborators, including funders and policy-makers, purpose-built for the City's strategic plan, but adaptable to other contexts.

- Some participants expressed appreciation for the design.
- Ensure clarity of the "value for the organization to go through this activity," i.e., additional value, like funding and 'collaboration opportunities.
- Participants favor a 'side by side' design showing the City's focus and organizational focus.

- Improve the representation of links with UN-SDGs, e.g., add a column for SDGs next to that of Expected Results and/or Strategies.
- Provide examples for 'outcomes,' and 'expected results.'
- Consider adding a section for strong mis-alignment
- Concern that this mapping tool may disadvantage smaller organizations.
- Q: "Where will this be stored, for collaborative purposes?"

The mapping tool can also aid organizations in identifying points of intersection for collaboration in advocacy.

Immediate revisions of this document after #PolicyTalk 3 included changes in the use of color, italics, and font size to accommodate low vision.

One of the key questions from Pillar staff to the participants and membership regarding the mapping template was "would a cover page or introductory paragraph that explains the value proposition and general instructions of the tool be helpful to you?"

**More on 'mapping:' Why Pillar Uses the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

The Sustainable Development Goals were developed and proposed by the United Nations as a network of targets. The SDG framework enables us to understand the interconnections among environmental, social, and economic challenges and how tackling one of them keeping in mind the relationship to the other two is a more effective way of achieving our goals.

The City of London Strategic Plan and Multi-Year Budget is a comprehensive plan addressing issues such as Reconciliation, homelessness, climate change, economic prosperity, cultural development, gender equality, and many others with limited resources and, therefore is a perfect application for the SDGs.

To learn more about the SDGs, check out SDGs 101 from SDG Cities Academy, a 4-module, self-paced online course that will introduce you to the SDGs and why the SDGs matter locally. SDGs 101 is a great place to start if you would like to dive deeper into other courses.

Learn more and sign up for the course.

[Please find the public access document for this resource here](). Again, the document is set up to allow comments and suggestions. Please propose ideas you think are helpful.

**The mapping tool in practice**.
Pillar staff also tested the tool by doing an organizational mapping to the City's Strategic Plan for the benefit of the Forest City Gallery and as 'proof of concept.' [Have a look here]().

3. **Multi-Year Budget Timeline and Critical Pathways tool.** A reference to help shed light on city processes, including those that are published and well-understood and those that happen behind closed doors to help nonprofits and others understand the best opportunities for intervention and influence.
   - Landscape orientation preferred over vertical.
   - More simplicity.
   - Better accommodation of low vision.
   - 1/3 of participants agreed it should be an infographic.
   - Make the heading clearer. Suggested title: Shaping the City's Multi-Year Budget: Timing and Steps for Nonprofits.
   - Add a legend for abbreviations and colors at the top, and for easy finding.
   - Color is possibly a challenge because of printing costs. 2/3 of participants suggested making it black and white or producing an alternate print-friendly black and white version.

   At the time of report-writing, this tool had already been reformatted to black and white for more accessible reading and for printing. There was still a need for suggestions, however, on how to make the content more compact and simplified.

   [Please find the current draft version for this resource here.]() Comments and suggestions for this one can be forwarded to [policy@pillarnonprofit.ca]().

4. With respect to the fourth resource, the toolkit for effective nonprofit-oriented advocacy, Pillar staff had identified in the August event that the Urban League of London (ULL) had previously published a 'Making local change

toolkit' that included a comprehensive section on 'Navigating City Hall.' We confirmed that this this resource still existed but also that 1) there was a lack of specific information about the Multi-Year Budget process and 2) many of the links were no longer connected to the materials indicated, in part because the City had migrated to a new website since the publication of the toolkit.

Pillar staff connected with the ULL previous to #PolicyTalk 3 to confirm their interest in refreshing the toolkit and including a section on the development of the City's Strategic Plan and the City's Multi-Year Budget. Capacity was identified by both organizations as an issue, but both also identified the value of "doing things together," both with each other and with additional interested volunteers.

In #PolicyTalk 3, we invited feedback on the resource and issued a call for volunteers, informal or formal, the former to make suggestions in a public document any time, and the latter to participate in parsing and performing the work ahead.

[You can find the public access document here](). Commenting and suggesting modes are also enabled, so please share any inputs you think are helpful.

#PolicyTalk 3 wrapped up with an evaluation survey to help the Pillar team stay informed about what's most valued and needed by the membership, and to improve the experience and outcomes of the #PolicyTalks series.

Participants were able to articulate the value of the event and the way we convened:

> **"Thank you for bringing the group together and creating the resources for us to discuss — we all need a starting point and the use of the documents by all of us will lead to changes."**

> **"Having materials ahead of time, scribes at tables, visuals on display during conversation was very helpful"**

Quantitative data also helps us understand how Pillar can improve its program.

|  | Yes | No | Not sure |
|---|---|---|---|
| Did you learn something relevant to you today? | 13 | | |
| Did you help develop something useful for you in this workshop? | 11 | | 2 |
| Did you identify opportunities (e.g., for action/collaboration?) | 10 | 1 | 2 |
| Are you more likely to take action because of this workshop? | 8 | 1 | 4 |
| Are you likely to continue or increase advocacy work because of what you've learned in this series? | 10 | | 3 |

There was also a recognition that there is still work to be done to feel ready to increase advocacy activities.

As previewed at the end of the event, **#PolicyTalk 4 will be based on the risks and benefits of advocacy** -- especially for board members, but also for anyone who wonders how to make advocacy a regular part of their nonprofit work or organization. **To make it easy for volunteer board members with daytime commitments, we'll be feeding participants, too!**

If you're reading this in time, sign up now for **[#PolicyTalk 4: Yes, Nonprofits Can do Advocacy, Actually; Let's Get Started](#)**, Thursday, December 14, 5:30-7:30pm EST, in person at Innovation Works London.

PILLAR
nonprofit network

Grace Estrada,
Public Policy Assistant,
Pillar Nonprofit Network

Luis Patricio,
SDG Cities Co-Lead (London),
Pillar Nonprofit Network

Paul Seale,
Manager of Public Policy, Advocacy & Impact,
Pillar Nonprofit Network

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