

CASE STUDY OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AT ONTARIO NATURE

by
Lynn Miller

supervised by
Roderick J. MacRae

A Major Paper submitted to the Faculty of Environmental Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master in Environmental Studies,
York University,
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

July, 30, 2019

© Lynn Miller, 2019

Abstract

Successful public engagement is crucial for environmental nonprofits that rely on the public for donations, volunteer work, and advocacy. Organizations need to carefully select and administer engagement methods in order to develop enduring relationships with their publics, while balancing their costs both in time and money. This study examines the current and past practices of Ontario Nature, a thriving environmental charity, to gain insight into the complexity and ramifications of building public engagement. Relationship management theory is used as a theoretical framework for understanding the overall effectiveness of the engagement methods.

The study concludes that Ontario Nature (ON) has a history of choosing its engagement methods strategically, taking expense and measured effectiveness into consideration. They have used an adaptive approach to public engagement and deliberately evolved their methods to keep pace with changing technologies. Although ON's engagement techniques are specific to their organization and mission, smaller nonprofits could learn from their example and adopt similar techniques. Of particular note are: i) ON's timely move to social media technologies to increase their visibility and attract new generations of community members; and ii) ON's ongoing willingness to abandon older engagement methods that have lost some of their effectiveness in favour of newer, more germane approaches.

Foreword

My interest in the performance of environmental nonprofits stems from years of volunteering with various organisations. Some groups I found to be admirable, whereas others I questioned how (and sometimes why) they continued to exist. I then wondered why many groups, that still had a valuable mission, appeared to be on the verge of dissolution due to lack of support. This led me to seek a Master's degree.

While exploring what my area of concentration should be, I found that assessing a nonprofit's "performance" is a vast domain with many grey areas. Narrowing the scope of my research to public engagement meant that I could still distinguish groups that seemed to be prospering from those that weren't, but with a more manageable dimension: Are they able to convince people to donate time and money towards their cause? From this perspective, I conducted my first research project that looked broadly at the social media use of 217 Ontario environmental charities (Miller, 2016). One of the findings from this study was that there are still a significant number (27%) of groups that don't use any social media. I also found that for those that have social media accounts, the majority didn't demonstrate that they are using a communications strategy. My second research project looked at all outreach methods used by 72 Ontario environmental stewardship charities (Miller, 2018). Here I found that the difference in outreach methods between staffed and all-volunteer groups was more apparent in their scale and sophistication than with the number or types of methods used.

Having completed two larger-scale quantitative studies, I chose a focused case study for my final project. This case study completes my research by conducting an in-depth analysis of public engagement for one environmental stewardship organization – the one that stood out in my previous studies as using engagement methods purposely. Relationship management theory served as a theoretical lens for the research. My study helps fulfil my first component (Public Engagement) by revealing how environmental groups are currently engaging the public, and my second component (Environmental Stewardship) by providing a deeper understanding of how public engagement is used to help stewardship nonprofits achieve their missions. My

hope is that small, all-volunteer environmental nonprofits, which are the majority of Ontario organizations, will be able to use this work to improve their own public engagement communications and receive more support.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Foreword.....	iii
Table of Contents	v
Introduction.....	1
Statement of Problem	3
Literature Review	4
Methodology.....	9
Selecting Case Study as a Research Methodology.....	9
Selecting Ontario Nature to Study.....	9
Environmental Stewardship at Ontario Nature	11
Sources of Data	12
Findings	15
Current methods of engagement.....	15
Magazine:	16
Events:.....	18
Exhibit Booth or Display:.....	20
Annual Gathering:.....	21
Citizen Science:.....	22
Memberships:.....	23
Photo Contest:.....	24
Website:.....	25
Email:	27
Social Media:	28
Nature Guardians Youth Program:.....	31
Past methods of engagement.....	32
Multi-day Trips:	32
Youth Summer Camps:	33
Conservation Fairs:	34
Door-to-door Canvassing:	34
Online Forum:.....	35
Volunteer for Nature:	36
Paper Flyers:	36
Youth Writing Contest:	37
Conclusion	38
References.....	42
Appendix A: Interview and Email Questions.....	47

Introduction

In order to be successful, nonprofits need to reach out and connect with their community. To achieve their mission they may need donations, volunteers, advocates, or participation in events. How nonprofits connect with people has changed significantly in the 21st century as internet access, social media, and smartphone use has considerably improved the speed and reach of communications, and the way that people expect to be engaged.

Large-scale environmental groups like World Wildlife Fund, National Audubon Society and the David Suzuki Foundation are widely known, and have resources to spend on ad campaigns and other promotions. Local, small-scale groups don't get the same kind of attention, have tight budgets, and rely heavily on volunteers. For these groups, delivering their message can be difficult. Along with a lack of resources, small-scale groups also are affected by volunteer skill level and turn-over, which impact the types and responsiveness of communication.

This research is a case study of a local-acting, environmental group in Ontario, to understand what methods they use to engage the public, how those methods have changed, and the effectiveness of the methods in helping the organization achieve their mission. This study adds to current research, and is also a useful reference for other small nonprofits to learn from.

Engaging with the public should not be confused with *public participation* (which is sometimes called *public engagement*). *Public participation* is generally accepted to be "the practice of involving members of the public in the agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities of organizations/institutions responsible for policy development" (Rowe, 2005). The type of engagement I am looking at is closer to the Oxford Dictionary definition of establishing "a meaningful contact or connection with." (OxfordDictionaries.com)

There are two major reasons why I wanted to conduct this study. The first is my experience of volunteering with, and being on the board of, local environmental nonprofits whose outreach methods were ad hoc, anecdotally evaluated, and where long-established methods were

impervious to change. This appeared untenable to me, and the groups seemed unable to connect their aging and diminishing support base with their lack of a communications strategy.

The second reason came from the results of my two previous research projects. In one study (Miller, 2018) I found that of the 72 environmental stewardship charities that work in Ontario, the three largest completely eclipse the rest in terms of staff and revenue (Ontario Nature was not one of the three). For the rest, staff and revenue were only correlated with social media use, not with any of the engagement methods like newsletters, email lists or events. This seemed paradoxical since social media is supposed to be free to use. I also found that there wasn't a difference in the number of outreach methods used by all-volunteer or staffed groups, just in the scale and sophistication. In the second study (Miller, 2016) I found that Ontario environmental charities were not taking advantage of the full potential of social media, and that in general they were not using a social media strategy.

To better understand these findings, I wanted to closely examine the engagement methods of a medium-sized environmental group that seemed to be doing well, to see what factors were leading to their success.

Statement of Problem

This research looks into the following questions:

- (1) What methods does Ontario Nature employ in their public engagement policy?
- (2) How has Ontario Nature changed their methods over time?
- (3) How effective are the different methods in achieving the organization's mission?

Literature Review

For environmental organizations to fulfil their mandates they need public support, be it donations, volunteer work, or advocating on behalf of the organizations objectives. Public donations are especially critical for the survival of Canadian environmental groups as they receive some of the lowest amounts of government and corporate funding for all charities (Imagine Canada, 2006). Recruiting volunteers is essential for most environmental organizations (Imagine Canada, 2006) but particularly so for stewardship groups that are responsible for an area of land, as they need to get the local public involved to voluntarily perform stewardship activities. An engaged public is motivated to offer assistance. This makes effective and relevant public engagement crucial for the success of these groups (Kang and Norton, 2004).

This research adopts a Relationship Management Theory (RMT) framework to examine the use of public engagement technologies by nonprofit organizations. RMT posits that organization-public relationships should be mutually beneficial (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997; Grunig, 2011; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998) and effectiveness measurements should look at the creation, development and maintenance of that mutually beneficial balance between public and organizational interests (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; Hon & Grunig, 1999) and be grounded in the RMT dimensions of trust, involvement, investment, commitment, and openness (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Although RMT began before the advent of digital media, social media, and the online experiences we have now (Ferguson, 1984), RMT still applies to organizations using these new technologies (Grunig, 2009).

Ledingham (2003) defined RMT as "Effectively managing organizational-public relationships around common interests and shared goals, over time, results in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organizations and publics " (p. 190). With RMT, communication should be two-way, and dialogic, with messaging tailored to the specific audience (Ledingham, 2003; Ledingham & Brunig, 2000). This contrasts with the view of public relations as an one-way communication activity, with the organization communicating at the public.

Public engagement methods are one aspect of creating and maintaining a relationship.

I found Kang's definition of public engagement to be the most useful for my purposes. He defines public engagement as "a psychologically motivated affective state that brings voluntary extra-role behaviors, and is characterized by affective commitment, positive affectivity and empowerment that an individual public experiences in interactions with an organization over time" (Kang, 2014).

Engagement often involves outreach, but it goes beyond that. Yen-Chu Weng's definition of environmental outreach is "Outreach informs citizens so that they will have the skills, ecological literacy, knowledge, and motivation to participate in a positive relationship with nature" (2011). Engagement incorporates the knowledge-building aspects of outreach but adds the creation of a positive connection between the person and organization.

The ultimate desired outcome of public engagement with a nonprofit is normally some type of action, such as becoming a member, donating, spreading good-will, volunteering time, or being part of an advocacy activity (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Engagement should increase the likelihood of "supportive behavioral intentions" like these (Kang, 2014, p. 410).

It is not easy to measure how effective a public engagement action is. Evaluation methods can be time consuming, methodologically difficult, and require trained personnel. These are some of the reasons why evaluation is often under-resourced (Lasby, 2018). With RMT, relations are built through many transactions, and the nature, frequency, and reciprocity of those transactions are crucial (Ledingham, 2003). This makes measuring the effectiveness of individual public engagement activities difficult. It could be that no single engagement action prompted an individual to act in the charity's interest, but a cumulation of effects over time.

With social media, a common approach of measuring engagement is by tallying easily identified, and countable, actions such as clicking, liking, following, and sharing (Kang, 2014). However, these measures do not capture motivation or if the individual is actually

psychologically engaged, which are essential for evoking tangible behaviours (Kang, 2014). A challenge here is determining how much “slacktivism” is being counted. Slacktivism is a merger of the words activism and slacker, and is generally defined as low-effort activities that make the participant feel good but have no positive impact on the issue at hand (Cabrera, Matias, & Montoya, 2017; Christensen, 2011; Martin, 2013). There is much debate on the quantity and effects of slacktivism. Some studies show that low-effort internet actions inhibit subsequent offline engagement (Schumann & Klein, 2015) and others have found that internet action increases the likelihood of future engagement – in individuals who have prior activism experience (Wilkins, Livingstone, & Levine, 2019).

A further considerable issue with all forms of online engagement activities is that it is currently not possible to track offline behaviour that results from online outreach (Phethean, Tiropanis, & Harris, 2012). For example, an online request for people to phone a local city councillor cannot determine how many people actually did so.

Finally, it is important to separate organizational effectiveness and program effectiveness as, although these are related, they are different in both goals and metrics. Nonprofits can be good with one and not the other (Herman & Renz, 2008). For public engagement, the reach of an engagement method falls into organizational effectiveness, and is tracked with metrics such as the number of people that read, attended, or otherwise interacted with the organization through the method. Program effectiveness is harder to measure for nonprofits as many have goals where achievement is difficult to evaluate (Forbes, 1998; Sawhill & Williamson, 2001). It becomes even more problematic to try to single out just the effect public engagement has since many other factors contribute to program success (e.g., staffing, funding, design).

This is not to say that organizations shouldn't try to measure the success of their public engagement methods. How these types of communications are handled can affect engagement both positively and negatively (Ledingham & Brunig, 1998) so timely assessment is needed for them to be effectively managed.

Public engagement methods change periodically as new technologies arise. Studies have found that the introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) has altered the structure and functioning of businesses significantly (Te'eni & Young, 2003). This is also true of nonprofit organizations (Hackler & Saxton, 2007), although nonprofits were slower to adopt traditional ICT (Finn, Maher & Forster, 2006). Newer technologies, often referred to as Web 2.0, "social network sites", or more generally, "social media" offer new opportunities for outreach (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Saxton, Guo & Brown, 2007) and have been adopted by nonprofits much quicker than traditional ICT (e.g., webpages, email) (Barns & Andonian, 2011). Social media is considered to be free to use, but in reality maintaining an active channel has a time cost that some nonprofits cannot afford (Zorn, Grant & Henderson, 2012).

Social media (SM) platforms provide a vehicle for nonprofits to engage with the public for fundraising (Saxton & Wang, 2014), advocacy (Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009; Guo & Saxton, 2013), community-building (Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), and recruiting volunteers (Milde & Yawson, 2017). Unlike traditional ICT, social media affords two-way dialogical discourse. Reciprocal two-way communication in SM has been found to increase engagement of the participants (Choa, Schweickartb & Haasec, 2014) but studies of nonprofits show that social media is mostly used for one-way, informational communication (Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009; Waters & Jamal, 2011; Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton, 2012; Maxwell & Carboni, 2014). Social media has allowed nonprofits to engage in more dialogic and community-building practices than they were able to with traditional ICT (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

It is also interesting to look at how SM fits within the organization. Communication methods are part of an organization's strategy of information sharing and engagement (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig 1995; Hung 2005; Maxwell & Carboni 2014). Studies have shown that many nonprofits are unclear about the benefits and purpose of SM (Quinton & Fennemore, 2012) and are not taking full advantage of its capabilities to inform people and get them involved with the organization (Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas, 2009). Most nonprofits prefer to use their website to cultivate relationships (Waters & Feneley, 2013) and see SM as a supplement (Kim, Chun, Kwak & Nam, 2014).

Lauri Goldkind found that most nonprofit organizations she studied didn't have SM policies or plans, and none had evaluation methods for their SM campaigns (2015), yet Milde and Yawson conclude that to use SM effectively, a nonprofit needs an initiative that includes an "analysis of their current strategy, goals, and marketing expenditures; and development of usage plans for the blogging, microblogging, and social networks, ensuring the integration of the plan into the strategy of the entire organization" (2017). It requires more than just posting information online to create engagement (Auger 2010).

Methodology

Selecting Case Study as a Research Methodology

I constructed this case study of Ontario Nature in order to examine a successful small environmental group's use of public engagement methods. The mechanisms and practices of engaging the public is continuously in flux as new technologies arise and preferences of contact change with new generations. Methods are also not used in isolation, and their interactions can create harmony or discord. Because of this, a case study is an ideal way of studying how and why methods are used in a real-life context.

Of Stake's (1995) three types of case studies (intrinsic, instrumental and collective), I consider this study to be categorized as *instrumental*, in that although the investigation is in-depth for this one organization, the procedures and strategies used by Ontario Nature may be useful for other environmental groups.

This research also aligns with Yin's case study definition of "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2014). For this study, the *contemporary phenomenon* is public engagement and the *context* is Ontario Nature.

The limitation of using a case study is that the findings can't be generalized. However, because I am looking at this from a relationship management theory perspective, the information gathered here may still be useful to other organizations looking at their own engagement strategies.

Selecting Ontario Nature to Study

Ontario Nature (ON) began as the Federation of Ontario Naturalists (FON) in 1931 and changed their name to Ontario Nature in 2004. FON started as an all-volunteer group, and didn't have paid staff members until 1969, when it had two. Currently ON has 22 full-time staff members,

and 12 part time staff members. In Ontario, 43% of charities that perform stewardship activities are staffed just by volunteers (Miller, 2018).

ON is unique in that it not only has individuals as members and supporters, but it has other conservation groups as members of its Nature Network. Only 3% of Ontario nonprofits have other organizations as members (Scott, Tsoukalas, Roberts & Lasby, 2006). The 158 *Nature Network* groups work together as a collective voice for conservation and a way of reaching more people than ON could alone. At present ON has around 6,000 active members and over 30,000 supporters.

Data from Canada Revenue Agency's *Charities Listings Database* shows that during ON's 2018 fiscal year, their revenue was \$2,506,733, with \$1,288,259 (51%) coming from donations and bequests. Their expenses were \$2,637,669 with \$1,959,887 (74%) used toward conservation and education programs. Their reported donations have increased from \$1,077,946 in 2013 to \$1,288,259 in 2018, an increase of 20% over 5 years. ON's revenue differentiates it from most Ontario Charities as only 13% have revenues over \$1 million ("State of the Sector," 2016).

ON was selected as it is large enough to be stable but still works locally. They manage stewardship activities on the land they own. They use a variety of social media platforms, and also have citizen science projects, so they are up to date on new technologies. And finally, they rely heavily on public donations so public engagement is important to them.

ON's mission is "to protect wild species and wild spaces through conservation, education and public engagement" ("Annual Report 2017-2018", p. 2). They achieve this by advocating for nature, building grassroot potential, purchasing and protecting land containing significant natural areas, and connecting people with nature.

I consider ON to be a successful organization because they are a long-standing group whose revenue (especially donations), memberships, and supporters continue to grow even though the latest CanadaHelps report shows that there are "significant declines in donation rates

among Canadians of all ages” (“The Giving Report”, 2018). Ontario Nature was also selected by MoneySense magazine as one of the top 10 environmental charities in Canada in their 2019 *Charity 100* report (Brownell, 2018).

ON is a rare environmental charity within Ontario in that it works across the province. The “2013 State of the Sector: Profile of Ontario’s Not-for-Profits and Charitable Organizations” report (2016) shows that only 6% of nonprofits in Ontario work provincially. Most nonprofit groups (61%) cover a local area (e.g., neighbourhood, city, town, county or rural municipality).

Throughout this report I will use “ON” to represent both names of the organization: *Federation of Ontario Naturalists* and *Ontario Nature*.

Environmental Stewardship at Ontario Nature

Ontario Nature began purchasing property for their nature reserves in 1961. They currently have 25 reserves across Ontario protecting 2,939 hectares of land. The primary goal for the reserves is to provide a haven for at-risk species. ON looks for properties that have high biodiversity, rare ecosystems, or endangered species on them. In an article on the reserves in ON Nature magazine, Brian Banks states “For new properties priority is given to four habitat types: heritage woodlands, Great Lakes shoreline, wetlands and alvars¹” (2011). The secondary goal for the reserves is providing a place where people can connect with nature. This includes learning about and appreciating nature, participating in citizen science projects, and getting involved with the reserve – possibly even volunteering to help with stewardship.

Some of ON’s reserves are remote or inaccessible. Hay Marsh, at the top of Lake Huron, is “virtually inaccessible by land, and it is difficult to land a boat on the shoreline” (“Hay Marsh Nature Reserve”, n.d.). Others, like the Wilfred G. Crozier Nature Reserve, which is close to large cities and contains part of the Bruce Trail system, are often visited. Both present stewardship challenges. ON relies on local Nature Network groups and individual members to

¹ Alvars are rare habitats with little or no soil over a limestone or dolostone base. Vegetation must survive seasonal extremes of flooding and drought (“Conservation 101: Alvars,” n.d.).

provide stewardship on their properties. The specific stewardship activities come from 5-10 year management plans that ON has for each property. These plans include both reoccurring tasks like property surveys, invasive species removal, and trail maintenance, along with transformative tasks like pit-and-mound conversion, and meadow or tall-grass prairie restoration.

Sources of Data

This research draws on multiple sources of data. I used follow-up email questions if I found discrepancies between interview and online data. See Appendix A for all questions.

- Interviews and email questions with ON staff:
 - Kirsten Dahl, Director of Development, Membership and Development.
 - John Hassell, Director of Communications and Engagement.
 - Noah Cole, Communications Technician.
 - Lisa Richardson, Nature Network & Communications Coordinator.
 - Anne Bell, Director of Conservation and Education.
 - Tanya Pulfer, Conservation Science Manager.
 - Smera Sukumar, Conservation Projects Coordinator.
- Examination of ON's Annual *Report to Donors*, 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018.
- Examination of ON's magazines from 1990-2018.
- Analysis of ON's social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram).
- Analysis of ON's website (www.ontarionature.org).
- Analysis of old Ontario Nature websites from 1998 to 2018 through use of the Wayback Machine (archive.org/web).
- Internal ON documents.
- Canada Revenue Agency charity database information on finances and staff.
- *Event Participation Report* written by me during my ON internship, Summer 2016.

For an action to qualify as a public engagement method in this study, it had to be aimed at members of the public (e.g., not at funders, other organizations, or the press) and have a primary purpose of creating a relationship between the organization and the public (e.g., not primarily fundraising).

For the Annual Reports and magazines, I read through them looking for references to anything that matched my criteria of public engagement. These typically were articles on something that had already happened, promotions for something coming up, or short pieces outlining the success of a particular method. For all of these I tagged the page so I could track the example through multiple years and data sources.

For the social media accounts, I searched through their post history looking for items that qualified as public engagement. Often Facebook posts had better information on past events than the website. Although the website lists current events and happenings, that information is removed after the event is over. Facebook keeps everything. To secure social media data for future reference, I took screen captures of relevant posts. Information found on social media was verified with other data sources where possible.

With the website, I not only searched it for evidence of public engagement, but also noted where this information was found to see how well the site itself was acting as an engagement tool, for example, if the information was prominently displayed on the home page or buried in a menu item. Because the website material could change at any time due to updates, I took screen captures to preserve what I found. This was particularly important for the event calendar as items older than 4 months are removed.

I used website archives on the Wayback Machine to find information that I didn't otherwise have access to. For example, membership information is no longer printed in *ON Nature* magazine, but is delivered either as a flyer shipped with the print magazine, or by email. So the only way for me to find historic information about memberships is using the archive material. The Wayback Machine also let me look at versions of the websites before the major overhauls

in 2000, 2003, 2010, and 2018 to see what used to be offered. I was looking for examples of public engagement that were missing from other data sources. I was also able to use the archives to determine the year when previous engagement methods were discontinued.

For this report I only considered engagement methods that were used repeatedly. I did not further investigate items that only happened once.

To rate the effectiveness of engagement methods, I relied on information from interviewees about how effectiveness was measured and what actions or impacts resulted from the method.

Findings

In this section I will present my findings on how Ontario Nature (ON) engages the public. The bulk of this section will be about ON's current methods of engagement:

- Magazine
- Events
- Exhibit Booth or Display
- Annual Gathering
- Citizen Science
- Memberships
- Photo Contest
- Website
- Email
- Social Media
- Nature Guardians Youth Program

And finally I will cover some of the past methods of engagement that are no longer used:

- Multi-day Trips
- Youth Summer Camps
- Conservation Fairs
- Door-to-door Canvassing
- Online Forum
- Volunteer for Nature
- Paper Flyers
- Youth Writing Contest

Current methods of engagement

Ontario Nature uses an explicit process for their public engagement. They have a three year strategic plan that is broken down each year into a one year operating plan. The operating plan is then broken down by department, with goals and targets. Anything that uses resources (time or money) is part of these plans, so engagement activities are carefully thought out and structured within these plans. This framework guides their decisions on whether to continue, modify or cease existing engagement methods, or add new approaches.

ON assesses their progress on the plan with a quarterly operating report that reviews all metrics that they track on success and effectiveness against their goals. John Hassell concedes that they don't do a full analysis every quarter but at a minimum look for anomalies in the data

that need to be addressed (Interview, June 19, 2019). All communication metrics are tracked in a “giant communication metric spreadsheet that we are constantly updating” (Interview, Nov 5, 2018).

ON not only uses metrics to measure the performance of their engagement methods, but also to get a sense of what people are interested in, which allows them to better tailor their communications (Interview, Nov 5, 2018). This is important as ON has multiple stakeholder groups that they interact with: scientists and professional naturalists, environmental advocates, and people with a general interest in nature and conservation.

ON uses guidelines and policies on branding and communications to maintain consistency and clear messaging across different media. All content is reviewed and edited before being released, although the degree of this depends on the medium. For example, an article in the magazine is scrutinized considerably more before being published than a Facebook post. One of their guidelines is to keep things positive. Kirsten Dahl expressed this as “There is a lot of doom and gloom out there with environmental orgs and it’s hard to avoid that, but I’d say a key part of our branding is that we are really celebrating the wonder of nature and the joy of it” (Interview, Nov 5, 2018).

In this section, I will outline the engagement methods ON is currently using.

Magazine:

ON’s first written outreach method was a newsletter called *Circular*, which started publication in 1932 with the goal to educate members and provide information about ON projects. In 1951 it was renamed *The Bulletin* and added advocating for nature to its purpose. By 1980, it had become a quarterly magazine and was renamed *Seasons*. In 2001 and 2003 *Seasons* won gold National Magazine Awards. When ON changed its name from the *Federation of Ontario Naturalists* to *Ontario Nature* in 2004, *Seasons* became *ON Nature* magazine. Since then it has continued to win awards.

Kirsten Dahl explained that the current version of *ON Nature* magazine is aimed at the general public, not just ON members (Interview, Nov 5, 2018). As such, it is available to anyone for free on ON's website. Its goal is to bring "readers closer to nature by exploring Ontario's natural species and spaces, and providing insight on timely conservation issues" ("About", n.d.). To prevent the appearance of bias, ON hires external authors for feature articles, particularly those on contentious topics.

To engage readers, all items written by ON staff try to end with an action that can be taken by the reader. Some of these actions are simply a link to get more information on the topic. For example, an article in *ON Nature* on painted turtles links to a page about that species and includes an interactive map of sightings in Ontario (Richardson, 2018). Other articles have more specific requests. The *Tracking Monarch Habitat* item ends with "Citizen scientists are encouraged to visit the MilkweedWatch website (naturewatch.ca/milkweedwatch) and submit their observations" (Sukumar, 2018). Signing petitions, volunteering, subscribing to email lists, and following on social media are more examples of end-of-item action requests.

Kirsten Dahl says that magazine is considered one of their most effective engagement methods (email, Nov 22, 2018). Effectiveness is tracked both qualitatively and quantitatively. The software that ON uses to publish their magazine online, Publitas, provides analytical data that are augmented with Google analytics data from the ON website. With this they can track the number of unique visitors and original views, page views, and average session duration. This information is assembled quarterly and compared to the previous years' quarter to check that the numbers are in line with expectations (Cole, interview, 2019). This type of information provides insights into operational effectiveness – is the magazine interesting enough that people will open it, how many people is it reaching, can visitors find the magazine on the website – but it does not measure the program effectiveness aspects of the magazine.

It is harder to measure the magazine's intangible goals – i.e., increasing public education, raising awareness of environmental issues, and connecting the public to nature. To track these ON uses membership surveys, anecdotal information (from email to the editor, and speaking

with people at events), and responses from other nature groups. Examples of responses are other publications creating similar articles, or nature network groups giving presentations on the topic after an article has come out (Cole, interview, 2019). John Hassell, Director of Communications and Engagement, acknowledges that ON lacks robust measurements of these goals but stresses that they do endeavor to learn as much as they can with the resources they have (Interview, 2019).

Although the printed version of the magazine has been around for a long time, ON is currently evaluating its effectiveness versus a digital-only magazine (Hassell, interview, 2019). To understand the issues around this, ON is conducting a series of focus groups to talk to various stakeholder groups about the magazine. The data they gather will inform a business plan for the magazine's future. This demonstrates ON's willingness to break from the past when appropriate.

Events:

Throughout ON's history, occasions where both members and non-members were invited to an event hosted by ON have been called various names. E.g., Field day, field trip, outing, guided walk, natural history walk, hike, lecture, community day, etc. In this paper I am using the umbrella term *event* for all of these single-day occasions.

ON notes on their history page that the first recorded field day was in Hamilton in 1933, where participants identified 67 bird species. By 1981 ON offered more than 100 field trips and had over 1,200 participants. In 1991 ON had over 2,000 participants for their events ("History and Milestones," n.d.). Those numbers have been going down. In 2016 ON held 60 events ("Annual Report 2016-2017", p. 8).

Examples of recent events include expert-lead walks on edible wild plants, invasive periwinkle removal work parties, butterfly identification walks, reptile and amphibian surveys, and a 5-part Biodiversity Lecture series in 2018, presented with the Faculty of Science at York University, and the Toronto Public Library.

Events aim to communicate with people in-person since that is the most compelling way of getting a message across (Rice, 1993). ON events usually have an element of learning for the participants. Events have a high cost in terms of time and money compared to other methods of engagement. However, they are effective at reaching new people. A 2016 survey of event participants found that for 61% of attendees it was their first ON event, and 81% were non-members. More than half of the participants signed up to receive the *Loon Call* newsletter and most were inspired to take action for the environment in their own community (Miller, 2016).

In 2011, ON's Youth Council began a series of conservation events called *Our Special Spaces*. During these events Youth Council members work with communities and local groups to plant natural pollinator habitats. These events aim to increase awareness of pollinator decline along with building leadership skills in high-school students who have a passion for nature.

To publicize their events, ON uses a number of strategies. They have an *Events* page on their website with a calendar that includes both their own events and those of their Nature Network members. They use social media. They contact nature clubs that are near the event so that those clubs can inform their members, and others, through word-of-mouth. In small towns, ON will write a one page press release that explains the event and invites people to attend, and then send that to the local newspaper. Since this type of material fits well with local paper's content, the information is often printed without having to pay for ad space. ON does not use paid advertising for their events (Interview, Nov 5, 2018). They have experimented with using community calendars (e.g., snapd.com) but stopped when they found that they weren't getting more participants from them (Sukumar, 2016).

ON could develop better ways of tracking the effectiveness of their live events. They do a good job of counting the number of attendees, new memberships, *eNews* sign-ups, and donations. They also often have a survey so attendees can rate their satisfaction with the event and indicate the actions they might take in the future. For example, create a pollinator garden, submit sightings to Bumble Bee Watch, join a local naturalist organization. However, ON doesn't follow-up with attendees to see if any of these actions were actually taken. Since

people tend to be inaccurate, and overly optimistic, predictors of their own future behavior (Poon, Koehler, & Buehler, 2014) some sort of follow-up would need to be performed to determine what the real impact of the event was.

Exhibit Booth or Display:

Another method ON uses for in-person engagement is staffing a table or booth at a nature-related show hosted by another organization. This is a good approach for promotion of ON as an organization, informing the public about an issue or campaign, or enticing people to take a specific action right at the booth. It is not a good approach for attracting new members or donations. Kirsten Dahl said they found that they would not get many new memberships from an exhibit booth and the few people who would sign up for memberships often didn't renew (Interview, Nov 5, 2018).

Kirsten Dahl also specified that participating in an exhibition requires considerable time to plan and staff. After reviewing their data on the poor performance of member sign-ups and donations, ON has decreased the prevalence of these types of exhibits as an engagement method. In the past, ON would "sign up for everything we could possibly get to" (Interview, Nov 5, 2018) and use help from volunteers to staff the booths. ON now is more choosy in which shows they attend. Booths are effective if the goal is to get word out about an environmental issue or to gain support for a campaign. For example, members of the ON Youth Council used event booths to reach out to people to promote their pollinator campaign. They had postcards that people would sign and then the Youth Council hand delivered those postcards to Queen's Park in an effort to get Ontario to reduce its use of pesticides. The event booths were effective in getting a substantial number of postcards signed.

So currently ON uses event booths sparingly, with the focus of connecting with people who love nature, and not in an attempt to get new members. For example, 2018 ON ran a series of interactive booths at the *Live on the Waterfront* events in Thunder Bay to promote northern conservation issues, and ON projects affecting the area. To interest people in the ON booth

they offered the opportunity for visitors to test their skills at identifying animal species from replica scat (Layng, 2018).

Annual Gathering:

Every year, since 1931, ON has held an annual spring gathering. This gathering, which includes their annual general meeting (AGM) and conservation awards ceremony, is held at different venues across southern Ontario and takes place over a 3-day weekend. Typically the event consists of speakers, workshops, and field trips, along with socializing opportunities at the reception or banquet dinner. The event is open to both members and non-members, although only members can vote at the AGM.

Although many other environmental organizations hold an AGM as required by the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act, few do more than what's legally necessary. This makes ON's AGM quite unique. As an example, here are the extra sessions from the 2018 event held in Prince Edward County.

- Early morning birding
- Keynote Presentation: Bats: A World of Science and Mystery
- Nature workshops (each 2 hours long):
 - Fluttering Across the County (butterflies of Prince Edward County)
 - Taking a Liking to Lichens
 - Turtle ER: Rehabilitating Turtles in Ontario
 - Alvars Rock! (diversity of species in a rare ecosystem)
 - Nature Through the Lens (visual storytelling skills)
- Field trips (each 6 hours long)
 - Safari on the South Shore: Exploring the wilds of Prince Edward County
 - Lively Landscapes: Discovering the dunes and marshes of Prince Edward County
 - Paddle and Ponder: A Guided Tour of West Lake on Canoes and Kayaks

- Special Presentation: A Plan for Protection (How conservation groups are working to get Ontario to protect at least 17% of its land and water, as it pledged to do.)

The annual gathering is very resource intensive and planning starts over six months in advance.

The goal of the annual gathering is to bring nature lovers and conservationists together to share knowledge, discuss issues, widen networks, and enjoy nature in a region of Ontario. Being able to discuss the challenges to the health of nature in Ontario and share successes is also a big part of the event (email, Feb 27, 2019). ON staff members use the gathering as a way of forming meaningful connections with very engaged members (email, Nov. 20, 2018), as typically only engaged members spend the time and money to attend.

Kirsten Dahl considers their annual gathering to be very successful, first, because attendance numbers are high and are normally almost near capacity. “We’re pretty happy to see that we consistently have over 100 people go to a 3-day gathering” (Interview, Nov 5, 2018). Second, because of positive feedback from the yearly survey of attendees, where members say they value the gathering (Interview, July 3, 2019). However, although the survey gathers information on subjects like why people attended, what they participated in, and how satisfied they were, it does not capture if the annual gathering furthers any of ON’s goals by getting attendees to take actions.

Citizen Science:

Citizen science is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “The collection and analysis of data relating to the natural world by members of the general public, typically as part of a collaborative project with professional scientists.” Citizen science (CS) is most useful for research where data collection is labour intensive, quantitative, and where large data sets are required that have broad spatial or temporal extents (Gommerman & Monroe, 2012). Outreach and engagement is required to both recruit and retain volunteers to work on CS projects.

ON's CS undertakings go back to its roots, when field naturalists would gather information on encountered species during their field trips. In 1987, ON published the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario* which was released after 5 years of contributions by over 1,600 volunteers. The second release, *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario: 2001-2005*, was a collaborative effort with Bird Studies Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service, Ontario Field Ornithologists, and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and was published in 2009.

That same year saw the launch of ON's *Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas* (ORAA), which is a CS project that is still ongoing. ORAA tracks distributions and spatial trends of reptiles and amphibians in Ontario. The goals of ORAA are to gather information to inform conservation efforts, and to engage non-scientists in nature study. The ORAA has been successful with 435,236 records gathered by 2019 ("Annual Report 2018-2019", p. 6). Records can be entered by online form, smartphone app, email, or even paper mail.

Memberships:

Up to February, 2012, ON had a standard waterfall membership structure where each level received additional benefits over the previous level, and all levels received their magazine ("Membership Levels and Benefits," Feb., 2012). Although the levels were designed to encourage higher levels of giving (email, Feb 27, 2019), they also provided members with extra opportunities to engage with the organization. For example, the *Steward* level included invitations to special nature events, and the *Gold* level included an invitation to the annual President's reception ("Membership Levels and Benefits," Feb., 2012).

In March of 2012, ON blurred the lines between member and donor by changing the structure so that anyone donating \$10 or more automatically became a member, effectively meaning memberships fees were actually donations. This benefitted members as now their entire membership fee was tax deductible. Those donating \$50 or more received the magazine. ON still maintained a (reduced) waterfall structure, but the benefits for each level were decreased, as were the extra opportunities for engagement with the organization. For example, the *Steward* level was gone. ("Membership Levels and Benefits," March, 2012).

Currently, membership information on the ON website is concealed under the Donate menu, and is no longer as prominently advertised in the magazine as it was before. Although ON still has membership categories, there are no stated extra benefits on the website for the higher priced tiers. Any individual donating more than \$10 automatically becomes a member¹, and those over \$40 receive the magazine. There are also no longer references to membership fees on their website, only to gifts. People giving over \$500 are listed in the annual report.

Whether to offer memberships is complicated in terms of engagement. On one hand, use of the membership model is waning in nonprofits as people now tend to prefer to take specific actions (e.g., donate, volunteer, share) instead of joining (“A Guide To Engagement Organizing”, 2017). But at the same time memberships promote attachment towards to the organization (Kang, 2014; Miller, 2010) which helps keep people engaged. Kirsten Dahl says that existing ON members have indicated, on surveys, a preference to keep the membership model (email, Feb 27, 2019), so maybe the hybrid donator/member approach ON is using best for their situation.

ON will not be removing memberships in the near future, but they are considering revisiting the current membership levels to make them clearer (email, Feb 27, 2019).

Photo Contest:

For 39 years, ON held a yearly photo contest. Analysis of back issues of Seasons magazine revealed that the contest was open to members-only until 1999, then from 2000 on it was open to all amateur photographers. Winners had their photos printed in the Seasons/ON Nature magazine and received prizes. The prizes were considerable. For example, in 2004 and grand prize was an all-inclusive five-day trip in the Algonquin Highlands at the Delta Grandview Resort. First prizes included cameras, binoculars, and a day trip on a Tall Ship with a well-known naturalist. The contest was free until 2002, when participant entry fees were introduced.

¹ Unless the donation is on behalf of someone else.

The exact reasons why the contest was discontinued aren't known due to staff turnover. It wasn't due to lack of interest. The last three years of the contest had 399 entries (in 2002), 535 (2003), and over 300 (2004). Its demise is likely due to the considerable time investment needed for a contest like this. On top of the general overhead of running the contest, donators had to be found for the prizes, and the "panel of distinguished photographers" who served as judges needed to be assembled. These tasks would be a heavy time burden. It is interesting that the last year for the contest was 2004, and 2005 was the 75th anniversary of the organization. That type of milestone year is an apt one to make changes to traditions.

In 2014 ON began a new type of photo contest using social media. These contests could be held at any time of year, and as many times per year as ON wanted. Participants would 'share' their photos (usually two maximum) with ON on social media and the photos with the highest number of 'likes' would win. Each contest has a single theme, like *Signs of Spring*, *Fantastic Fungi*, or *Picturing Protection*. In October of 2015, the *Fantastic Fungi* photo contest garnered 99 photos on Facebook, 73 photos on Twitter, and 12 photos on Instagram.

These contests are less about the quality of the photos submitted than about "increasing community visibility, connecting nature lovers, sharing the joy of nature, and getting people to think more about their love of nature and why they support Ontario Nature" (Email, Feb 27, 2019). Prizes are small, like an ON membership or a nature book.

Website:

Websites are one of the first ways that people approach a nonprofit that they have heard of. Websites allow people to investigate an organization to see if it is of interest to them, so websites are important in engaging the public. For smaller nonprofit organizations, websites are a critical part of stakeholder group communication (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001) and an efficient way of interactively reaching multiple interest groups without having to spend a lot of money (Kang & Norton, 2004).

Back issues of *Seasons* magazine show that ON launched their first website (www.web.net/fon) in the autumn 1996 (Table of Contents, 1996). It wasn't until the summer of 1998 that they obtained their own domain (ontarionature.org). The website is redesigned periodically. The newest revamp of the site was in May, 2018. Before that the site hadn't changed significantly since 2010 ("Ontario Nature's New Website," 2010). The latest incarnation of the site is "designed with your experience in mind, using the latest technology to ensure fast and easy access to all of the information you're looking for" ("Annual Report 2017-2018", p. 6).

Kirsten Dahl says that ON considers its newly redesigned site as part of their engagement strategy (Interview, Nov 5, 2018). The front page emphasizes connections with calls to action, events, and ways to interact with the organization (e.g., email sign up, memberships, blog) prominently displayed. This differentiates them from the majority of nonprofit organizations that have static information on their website (Saxton, Guo, & Brown, 2007) and little interactivity (Waters, 2007). ON's new website also "delivers a fully responsive experience across all platforms" ("Annual Report 2017-2018", p. 6). This is a large change as the previous website offered the same interface on all devices, making it difficult to navigate on smaller screens.

Like ON's email lists, the website has separate areas for different interest groups. There is an area whose focus is advocacy and has specific actions people can take. Another area is dedicated to the Nature Guardians Youth Program and the Youth Council. In the citizen science area people can input data or access the current database through an interactive visualizer.

ON tracks the conversion rate for key web pages like the advocacy, donations and membership pages. This is calculated as the number of people who visit the pages vs the number who complete and submit the form. Page visits are only counted if the person stays on the page long enough so ON knows they are there intentionally.

Email:

Email communication has been readily available since the mid 1990s and has become a standard business communication method (Market Cube, 2017) even though still nearly 10% of the Canadian population doesn't have internet access ("The World Factbook", 2018). As a marketing approach, it is the preferred contact method of consumers (Market Cube, 2017). So it is not surprising that ON uses email lists as an engagement method. The first reference to ON using email is in the Spring 1996 edition of their magazine ("We've Now Got E-mail!", 1996).

Kirsten Dahl says ON provides separate lists for different target groups so that they can tailor email communication to match their supporters interests (Interview, Nov 5, 2018). For example, they have one list for volunteer citizen scientists, an *Action Alert* list for people interested in advocacy or hearing about nature crises, and an *eNews* list for their newsletter. The bimonthly newsletter, *Loon Call*, is used to notify subscribers of breaking environmental and conservation news, and to highlight the wonder of nature. *Loon Call* has calls to action at the end of items, with links to the ON website, blog, and social media.

ON is careful to make sure their email communications are in line with Canada's anti-spam legislation. People opt-in to receiving these emails either by filling in a form on the website or by providing their email address to ON at a live event. Using a website form to collect email addresses in order to connect with an audience is a common method for nonprofits (Waters, 2007).

All email is tracked through Blackbaud, the email service ON uses, which provides information on how many unique people opened the email, how long they had it open, and if they clicked on any of the links. On the website side, ON knows where incoming traffic comes from. Through this, ON can determine what actions email subscribers take. For example, if they click on "donate" then the website can track that the donation originated from the email (Cole, interview, 2019). This information, along with unsubscribe rates, is used to measure the effectiveness of the email lists.

Email effectiveness is examined quarterly, and changes made based on the outcome. For example, the unsubscribe rate for the first quarter in 2019 was too high so ON investigated why and determined that they had sent out too many emails during that quarter. So they have set a limit to prevent this reoccurring.

Email is most effective for getting people to take a conservation action (that can be tracked on their website). It is not as effective with donation appeals (Hassell, interview, 2019).

Social Media:

Social media (SM) is extensively used by for-profit companies as a marketing, public relations, and communication tool (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012). Nonprofits have adopted SM for many of the same reasons, but at a slower rate (Waters & Feneley, 2013). SM could also help nonprofits increase their likelihood of being discovered by potential donors and volunteers.

ON joined Twitter and YouTube first in 2009, Facebook in 2011, Tumblr in 2012, and finally Instagram in 2015. This puts them slightly ahead of the curve for adoption times of Ontario environmental charities (Miller, 2016). As Goldkind found, ON discovered that although SM platforms are free, they use up a lot of resources to maintain the channels (2015). ON uses one full-time staff member for SM with the rest of the staff feeding content to her, although their conservation scientists create the bulk of the subject matter. Since creating material for SM is resource intensive, ON enlists help with the use of Social Media Ambassadors. These are volunteers who contribute content, provide new ideas for interesting nature-related stories, and help spread the message through their own SM accounts. When funding allows, ON also hires communication interns who may help with SM along with their other projects.

As of Nov 2, 2018, ON had 25,100 Twitter followers, 14,918 Facebook followers, 2,997 Instagram followers, and 220 YouTube subscribers. Support for their Tumblr account has been discontinued as that platform wasn't growing or getting much follower activity (Cole, interview, 2019).

Kirsten Dahl believes that one of the largest benefits ON receives from SM is a way to connect with people that they might not normally reach through their traditional methods – which have been successful at reaching nature clubs, scientists, and “hardcore naturalists” (Interview, Nov 5, 2018). To determine the composition of their SM followers, ON performed a cross analysis of a sample of their Facebook followers (name and email) and their membership list. They found there was not much overlap between the two (Hassell, interview, 2019). From this they assume that their SM followers may not know ON’s long history of conservation, may not be a member of any nature organization, and may just have a general interest in nature. So posts on SM by ON are not aimed at people who are already members or donors.

Another benefit of SM is that ON can demonstrate their reach to potential corporate partners and other funders – particularly those who have a strong mandate of community engagement (Interview, Nov 5, 2018). This helps ON fund stewardship activities, and public fundraising.

When ON first began using SM they had expectations that it could be used to increase donations. This was a common assumption in the early days of SM that has been disproven in practice and by research (Lord, 2012; Ogden & Starita, 2009; Warwick, 2009). ON also found SM performed poorly so they have mostly ended the practice. However, ON does use SM as part of their yearly major donation drive on Giving Tuesday (the Tuesday after Thanksgiving in the U.S.). During this drive they use a corporate funder to match public donations, and having a large SM audience helps attract those corporate funders. Have a corporate funder match donations also entices undecided people to donate.

ON uses its SM accounts mostly to educate the public on wild species and wild spaces, to draw attention to conservation issues, and to promote themselves and their programs. They also occasionally ask people to take action on behalf of nature by signing a petition, or sending a letter to their MP (by way of ON’s website). This has been successful for them. They can determine the response they get from a post because their action-alert pages track where incoming traffic came from. Petitions are useful when ON is negotiating with the government. Also, studies have also shown that signing a petition increases the likelihood of donating to a

charity (Lee & Hsieh, 2013). ON's letter writing software automatically fills in the correct policy makers information along with a draft version of a letter, so the signee just needs to add their personal information (but can customize the letter if they wish). By removing barriers, ON gets more participation in their online campaigns. However, research has shown that only 0.5% of the people that browse a site actually participate (Lu et al., 2018) so it is impractical to expect much more activity than that.

Currently ON is working to make their SM accounts more interactive to become an online community and not just a news source. This change is in line with recommendations from research (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). ON is encouraging followers to submit their own content, share posts, answer quizzes, and other activities that attempt to make the SM channels a shared resource. This is not easily accomplished. In August 2011, ON held a photo identification contest where ON staff posted plant and animal photos for Facebook followers to identify. The 8-part contest only garnered 31 likes, 53 comments and 2 shares in total.

Like many other nonprofits, ON doesn't purposefully employ the dialogical features of SM platforms (e.g., comments) to start a discussion (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Guo & Saxton, 2014). They do respond to people who make comments but believe that stopping there is not truly engaging people. They would like to have people who interact with ON's SM accounts continue on to interact with the rest of ON. So, for instance, when someone takes a quiz on Facebook they are given an link to the website, where there is a way to sign up for advocacy or *eNews*, which might lead the person to go to an event or consider being a volunteer. They try to offer another way to get involved besides just "liking" or commenting on a post. This is a good strategy as dynamic posts are more likely to engage followers (Carboni & Maxwell, 2015).

Kirsten Dahl says ON "would like to see some more tangible results from using SM – more people becoming members and going to an event at a nature reserve because they saw a Facebook post on it. We'd like to see those things improve" (Interview, Nov 5, 2018). Currently the rate of conversions of SM followers to members is quite low, although exact numbers are difficult to determine. ON can track that a person came to the membership page from a SM

account, but they can't track if the person completed the membership application (Cole, interview, 2019). Kirsten assumes that it's "a big leap for an online supporter to become a member without having other interaction with ON" (Interview, Nov 5, 2018).

Nature Guardians Youth Program:

In 2010, ON held their first *Youth Summit for Biodiversity and Environmental Leadership*, bringing together more than 60 high-school aged students from around the province. Since then, the summit has been an annual event and 2018 had 106 youth from 74 communities attending (Ambre, 2018).

The first Youth Summit helped establish the *Ontario Nature Youth Council*. Members of the council "work alongside Ontario Nature staff, become part of a vibrant peer network, and contribute to lasting, positive change through conservation action" ("Youth Council," n.d.). Youth Council members plan and host conservation events and workshops, deliver presentations to the public, create short films. In 2017 they successfully campaigned to get Stratford and Whitby to become *Bee Cities* ("Promise For The Future," 2018).

The ON website says the *Nature Guardians Youth Program* "responds to an urgent need in society to reconnect youth to the natural world. By providing opportunities to explore, discover and protect wild species and spaces, our program nurtures a love for nature and commitment to conservation" ("Impact," n.d.).

The program has been successful at producing environmental leaders. Members of the Youth Council have been honoured with the Canada 150 Youth Award for Environmental Stewardship, Canada 150 Award for Outstanding Youth, Earth Day Canada's Youth Hometown Heroes Award, Starfish Canada's Top 25 Environmentalists Under 25, Canadian Museum of Nature's Nature Inspiration Award and the Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award ("Recognition," n.d.).

Past methods of engagement

Some engagement techniques that ON used previously have been discontinued. They either no longer met the organization's needs, were found to be ineffective, or ran out of funding. In this section I am looking at methods that were used for multiple years in the past and are now discontinued. This is not an exhaustive list as in most cases I could only discover activities if they were mentioned in back issues of magazines or earlier versions of the website. ON's small staff and significant turnover has resulted in low levels of organizational memory. Their employee with the most seniority started in 2005, and over half the staff has been with the organization for less than five years. An employee that wishes to remain anonymous told me the turnover is due to low wages and insufficient opportunities for promotion. These reasons are in line with findings in the "Staffing Trends in Canadian Charities, 2012" report (2013) that indicated that these are common problems for charities that rely heavily on public funding.

Although many discontinued methods were only made possible through a grant, ON has continued some programs after grant money ceased. For instance, grant funding started the nature reserves projects, the reptile and amphibian atlas, and *Nature Guardians* program. In each of these cases ON thought the program was too valuable to what they were trying to achieve to be cut, so found alternative funding (Interview, June 19, 2019).

Multi-day Trips:

Multi-day nature excursions were common in ON's past but have largely been discontinued. As early as 1939 ON was holding nature camps on Franklin Island in Georgian Bay. Multi-day hiking and canoe trips for members continued to grow through the 1990's.

The reasons for holding these trips were i) enabling expert naturalists to share their knowledge, ii) introducing members to "special places" in Ontario, and iii) demonstrating the financial benefits of nature travel to communities. Success with the last point was demonstrated when the ON trips to the Bruce Peninsula lead to the Bruce Peninsula Tourist Association conducting

a study of ecotourism and concluding that the protection of natural areas was important to the local economy (Cartwright, 1993).

In 1998 ON offered 7 Wilderness Canoe Trips, 3 Adventure Trips, and one Getaway – an astronomy weekend at the Grandview Inn (“Trips and Talks”, 1999). Six Wilderness Canoe Trips were available in 2000 but that was the last year they were offered. The reasons given for ending these trips were “low participation and high insurance and other costs” (“Insider,” 2001).

In 2001, ON had a single season of *Cygnus Nature Trips*, which included weekend trips, managed by Bob Bowles, an ON member and internationally recognized expert field naturalist. The goal of the Cygnus trips was “to spark a commitment to conserving wetlands, woodlands and wildlife by creating exciting learning opportunities in a natural setting” (“Cygnus Nature Trips,” 2001). That was the last year ON offered local multi-day recreational trips.

Youth Summer Camps:

The summer of 2001 was the last season for ON’s *Youth Naturalist Summer Camps*. December 1st, 2001 is the last reference I could find using the Wayback Machine (“Youth Naturalist Summer Camps,” 2001). These camps were led by trained naturalists and were aimed at children from 10 to 12 years old (Junior Young Naturalists Camp) and 13 to 15 (Senior Young Naturalist Camp). The camps’ goal was to connect children to nature. For example, the activities description for the 1998 junior camp was:

Activities include canoeing, swimming, and orienteering. You'll be exploring streams, wetlands, and old growth forests. At night there will be campfires, night hikes and stargazing. There's always time for skits, crafts and wilderness skills. Special activities will be an all day trip to Algonquin Park in search of moose, computer ecology sessions, and creating and implementing a conservation project (“Camps,” 1998).

Although the reasons why the camps were discontinued have been lost, Anne Bell suggests that these activities weren't the best way to achieve ON's mission (email, March 7, 2019). The current Nature Guardians program is more aligned with ON's goals of empowering youth involvement in conservation and nature as it is designed specifically to cultivate environmental leaders.

Conservation Fairs:

ON previously held day-long nature fairs at the nature reserves, where they would invite the whole community and offer multiple activities. For example, in 2009 they held a fair at their Cawthra Mulock Reserve that attracted 350 participants. Activities included birdhouse building, face painting, a reptile and amphibian scavenger hunt, creating pine cone bird feeders, guided hikes, viewing interactive models (e.g. how a watershed works) and a raptor show ("A natural gem," 2009). The goal of the fairs was to introduce the community to nature and the nature reserves. From that standpoint they were successful. They were not a good way of signing up new members (Interview, Nov 5, 2018).

These large fairs were discontinued due to the amount of time and effort needed to plan the event, coordinate with other groups, find volunteers, and obtain funding (Email, July 3, 2019).

Door-to-door Canvassing:

Door-to-door canvassing has been around for centuries, so it can be assumed that ON had used it in the past. The first record I could find was in 2000, when ON held a door-to-door canvassing program in the Greater Toronto Area. It generated 900 new members from contact with close to 20,000 people. The goal of program wasn't just to increase membership, canvassers also spoke about the issues with land-use planning affecting the Oak Ridges Moraine, and urged people to write letters ("Community outreach program expands," 2001). Canvassing was still used in 2008, but that was the last reference I could find ("Earth Watch," 2008).

ON stopped using this method for a number of reasons. The results tended to be short lived, with memberships or monthly donations soon cancelled. There was a risk of alienating potential donors who do not like or appreciate this approach. Finally, speaking with a lot of people who had no interest in protecting nature wasted time, which is a limited resource (Dahl, email, July 3, 2019).

Online Forum:

Using the Wayback Machine, I found that ON website hosted an online discussion forum starting in March of 2000. Originally called *FON Naturalist Chat*, it was renamed to *Ontario Nature Discussion Forum* when the organization changed its name in 2004. Registration was required to post to the forum but only a valid email address was required. The site ran for 11 years, then displayed a “Sorry, this bulletin board is temporarily unavailable, while we perform some routine maintenance” message from May, 2011 to Oct, 2012. In December 2012 the forum was removed from the website.

The forum was an opportunity for dialogical communication between ON and the public and stated as its goal: “Sharing your opinions, concerns, and your victories is what we’re all about! You are Ontario Nature and this is your home – everyone is welcome!” (“Ontario Nature Online Community,” 2011).

Although the community ran for 11 years, the most popular topic, *Ask the Naturalist*, only had 24 topics and 44 posts. Many threads had no posts. The end of the forum occurred around a year after ON began using Facebook. Interactive moderated discussion forums are rarely used by nonprofit organizations. Waters’ content analysis of the websites of nonprofits in the top four hundred charitable fundraising organizations in the United States found only 3.1 percent used discussion forums (Waters, 2007).

Volunteer for Nature:

A worthwhile successor to the recreational trips was *Ontario Nature Volunteers Expeditions*, a “working vacation” program which ran from 2002 to 2006. This was part of a larger program called *Volunteer for Nature* that was run as a partnership between Nature Conservancy of Canada and ON, and was funded primarily by a 4-year grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. During those four years the program saw close to 3,000 volunteers work on 132 conservation projects, including habitat restoration, native seed collection, invasive species removal, at-risk species monitoring, and building bridges and boardwalks to improve site access while reducing visitor impact.

The *Ontario Nature Volunteers Expeditions* portion of the program were three to 16 day long trips that took place across the province, and included camping and meals along with the conservation work expected of the volunteers. The goal of these trips was to “provide people with opportunities to work outdoors, enjoy being part of a team, learn new skills and participate in hands-on conservation projects in Ontario's spectacular natural places” (ON website via <http://waybackmachine.org>). Lisa Richardson, who ran the program at the time, considered the program very successful and said it was only discontinued due to the end of funding (email, Dec 3, 2018).

Paper Flyers:

ON received a 3-year Ontario Trillium Foundation grant in 2014 to distribute flyers in communities where their nature events were being held. The flyers were hand-delivered by ON staff to the mailboxes of houses that were near the event site. A packet of native pollinator-friendly seeds was included with the flyer. The goal was to try to engage local people to visit the reserves.

The success of this project was measured through the use of a paper questionnaire that was given to all attendees of the events. One of the questions asked how the participant found out about the event, and included an entry for the flyers. During my internship in the summer of

2016, I was responsible for handing out the questionnaires and interpreting the data. The number of people who attended because of the flyers was so low (zero in 2016) that the practice was stopped.

Youth Writing Contest:

In 2006, as part of their 75th anniversary celebrations, ON started a youth writing contest for students in grades 7 and 8. Submissions were reviewed by a panel of judges and the three winners received an award and had their entry printed in ON Nature magazine. The reason for the contest was to “recognize the important role youth play in protecting nature in this province” (“Ontario Nature’s Writing Contest”, 2006). The contest ran for five years, with each year having a different writing topic. E.g., “Why do we need nature?” in 2006, “What will the environment be like in 2015?” in 2007, and “How is climate change affecting you and your community?” in 2009. In 2006 they had 100 entries to the contest. In 2009 that number had risen to 200 entries. The contest ended after 2010, even though it was growing in popularity. No one currently working at ON knows why the contest was stopped. Kirsten Dahl speculates that it may have been funded by a grant that only lasted five years (email, Feb 27, 2019).

Conclusion

This case study examines the public engagement methods of a thriving, medium-sized, environmental stewardship organization in hopes that other groups can learn from them and make strategic decisions on their own engagement outreach. I investigated the current and past techniques that Ontario Nature has used for public engagement through the use of multiple data sources including interviews, annual reports, back issues of magazines, social media channels, internal documents, and Canada Revenue Agency data. I also evaluated how well Ontario Nature was doing at setting and tracking metrics for the effectiveness of the techniques.

This study has the usual limitations of a case study in that I am looking at only one organization so the results here can't be generalized. It also doesn't cover all possible public engagement approaches, partly because I am restricted to those Ontario Nature uses, and partly because of lost or undocumented methods that may have been used by Ontario Nature in the past. I was not shown hard numbers on their metrics and data collection, so I am relying on the people I interviewed to provide accurate accounts. However, I am confident that they did given my background in online metrics and the consistency of descriptions between people.

Overall, I found that ON seems to be making strategic choices on engagement methods taking expense and measured effectiveness into consideration. Expense consists of not only the financial costs, but the amount of staff time needed to plan, carry out and maintain the method. Some discontinued methods, like the yearly photo contest, had a small financial cost but an excessive time commitment. As a charity, ON strives to ensure that they spend donor money on urgent conservation issues (interview, Nov 5, 2018) so methods that have high costs are reviewed and cancelled if they cannot be externally funded. Even programs that are effective, like Volunteer for Nature, can be cancelled if outside funding cannot be realized. For organizations with restricted resources, it is important to know when to discontinue engagement methods to free up resources to work on something else.

Effectiveness is measured both as the reach of the engagement method, and on how it helps achieve goals. Most online platforms (social media, web hosting, email services) offer an array of analytics to determine reach and ON is capitalizing on these to track if people are reading and reacting to their communications. It is more complicated to determine whether the engagement methods are working to help ON achieve their goals of increasing public education, raising awareness of environmental issues, and connecting the public to nature. It is difficult to define measurable metrics per method for these more ambiguous goals, so they are tracked globally as the gestalt of multiple points of engagement. For example, ON tracks the success of their Protected Places campaign by the overall number of signatures on the declaration.

The compounding effect of the multiple points of engagement also make it difficult to rank engagement methods in terms of effectiveness, which I had hoped to be able to do from this study. Instead, I can only list them as those that ON have continued, added, or discontinued.

Engagement methods that have been around for almost the lifetime of the organization are: memberships, events, citizen science, the magazine, exhibit booths or displays, and the annual gathering. Newer engagement methods are the website, email, and social media. The Nature Guardians youth program is the most recent and has been around for just under a decade.

Some of ON's older engagement approaches have been modified to be suitable to the digital era. Their long-standing 37-year annual photo contest has been replaced by as-needed social media photo contests. Their 29-year magazine has been made available online. This adaptation to the changing landscape allows them to reach new audiences – and possibly new supporters.

Long-running engagement methods that have been discontinued are: multi-day trips, youth summer camps, conservation fairs, and door-to-door canvassing. Newer methods that are no longer used are the online forum, and paper flyers. Methods that ran out of funding are the Volunteer for Nature program, and youth writing contest.

Effectiveness can also be viewed from a relationship management theory (RMT) perspective of how well the method satisfies the criteria of mutual understanding and benefit around common interests and shared goals.

The longest running methods, and the ones that ON devotes the most time to (memberships, events, citizen science, the magazine, and the annual gathering), adhere closely to RMT with the common interests of nature and the environment, and shared goal of conservation. In each case both the organization and the participants receive benefits from the method and there is a mutual understanding of the relationship between the organization and the public. The Nature Guardians youth program is also effective with respect to RMT plus the participants are engaged in defining the program.

Social media is an anomaly in terms of relationship management effectiveness. It provides the tools for two-way, interactive, and dialogical communication and yet when ON has tried to use these features they have had little response. Why this is so is unclear. It could be that their attempts neglect mutual benefit, or their social media followers are weak on common interests and shared goals, or it could be a characteristic of the way people use the platform. The answer to this problem wasn't addressed in this research and requires further study.

Effectively managing organizational–public relationships includes knowing when to stop using a method. Cost is an important factor here, but a lack of shared goals doomed most ON discontinued methods from a RMT perspective, even though that was not the aspect that ON evaluated them with. The Volunteer for Nature program did have common interests and shared goals, and was considered successful for relationship-building, but was too expensive to continue.

Throughout this study it became clear to me that ON uses an adaptive approach to public engagement that is mostly in line with RMT, and are deliberately evolving their methods. They are not hesitant to try a new method but then stop using it if it doesn't pan out (e.g., Tumblr). They are considering major changes to long established methods, like moving their magazine to

be digital-only. And they are willingly looking to the future, as Kirsten Dahl declared “We just don’t know what the next platform will be but will respond as quickly as we can to whatever it is!” (Email, Nov, 2018).

References

- 2013 State of the Sector: Profile of Ontario's Not-for-Profits and Charitable Organizations (executive summary). (2016). Government of Ontario. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2013-state-sector-profile-ontarios-not-profits-and-charitable-organizations-executive-summary>
- "About." (n.d.). <http://onnaturemagazine.com/about>
- "A Guide To Engagement Organizing." (2017). Nature Canada. Ottawa, ON.
- "A natural gem." (2009). *ON Nature*, 49(4). Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- Ambre, C. (2018). Youth Summit inspires environmental action. *ON Nature*, 58(4). Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- Annual Report 2016-2017*. (2017). Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- Annual Report 2017-2018*. (2018). Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- Annual Report 2018-2019*. (2019). Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- Banks, B. (2011). Where the wildlife is. *ON Nature*, 51(2). Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- Bortree, D. S., & Seltzer, T. (2009). Dialogic strategies and outcomes: An analysis of environmental advocacy groups' Facebook profiles. *Public Relations Review*, 35(3), 317–319. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.05.002>
- Broom, G. M., Casey, S., & Ritchey, J. (1997). Toward a Concept and Theory of Organization-Public Relationships. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 9(2), 83–98. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjpr0902_01
- Brownell, C. (2018). *The 2019 Charity 100*. MoneySense, Toronto, ON. Retrieved from <https://www.moneysense.ca/save/financial-planning/canadas-top-rated-charities-2019-best-by-category/>
- Bruning, S. D., & Ledingham, J. A. (1999). Relationships Between Organizations and Publics: Development of a Multi-Dimensional Organization-Public Relationship Scale. *Public Relations Review*, 25(2), 157–170. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111\(99\)80160-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111(99)80160-X)
- Cabrera, N. L., Matias, C. E., & Montoya, R. (2017). Activism or slacktivism? The potential and pitfalls of social media in contemporary student activism. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 10(4), 400–415. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1037/dhe0000061>
- Carboni, J. L., & Maxwell, S. P. (2015). Effective Social Media Engagement for Nonprofits: What Matters? *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs*, 1(1), 18–28. <https://doi.org/10.20899/jpna.1.1.18-28>
- Cartwright, J. (1993). New Trips and Tours Program Better Than Ever. *Seasons*, 33(3). Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- Christensen, H. S. (2011). Political activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or political participation by other means? *First Monday*, 16(2). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v16i2.3336>
- "Community outreach program expands." (2001). *Seasons*, 41(2). Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- "Conservation 101: Alvars." (n.d.). Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ontario Region http://www.natureconservancy.ca/assets/documents/on/Alvars_101_Factsheet_FINAL.pdf
- "Earth Watch." (2008). *ON Nature*, 48(1). Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.

- Ferguson, M. A. (1984). *Building theory in public relations: Interorganizational relationships as a public relations paradigm*. Paper presented to the Association for Education In Journalism and Mass Communication, Gainesville, FL.
- Forbes, D. (1998). Measuring the Unmeasurable: Empirical Studies of Nonprofit Organization Effectiveness from 1977 to 1997. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 27(2), 183–202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764098272005>
- Goldkind, L. (2015). Social Media and Social Service: Are Nonprofits Plugged In to the Digital Age? *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance*, 39(4), 380–396.
- Gommerman, L., & Monroe, M.C. (2012). Lessons Learned from Evaluations of Citizen Science Programs. *School of Forest Resources and Conservation Department, UF/IFAS Extension*.
- Grunig, J. E. (2009). Paradigms of global public relations in an age of digitalisation. *PRism* 6(2): http://praxis.massey.ac.nz/prism_on-line_journ.html
- Grunig, J. E. (2011). Public relations and strategic management: Institutionalizing organization–public relationships in contemporary society. *Central European Journal of Communication*, 4(06), 11–31.
- Guo, C., & Saxton, G. (2014). Tweeting Social Change: How Social Media Are Changing Nonprofit Advocacy. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 43(1), 57–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764012471585>
- “Hay Marsh Nature Reserve.” (n.d.). <https://ontarionature.org/programs/nature-reserves/hay-marsh/>
- Herman, R. D., & Renz, D. O. (2008). Advancing nonprofit organizational effectiveness research and theory: Nine theses. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 18(4), 399–415. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.195>
- “History and Milestones.” (n.d.). <https://ontarionature.org/about/history-milestones/>
- Hon, L.C., & Grunig, J.E. (1999). *Guidelines for Measuring Relationships in Public Relations*. Institute for Public Relations.
- “Impact.” (n.d.). <https://ontarionature.org/programs/nature-guardians/>
- “Insider.” (2001). *Seasons*, 41(1), 52. Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- Kang, M. (2014). Understanding Public Engagement: Conceptualizing and Measuring its Influence on Supportive Behavioral Intentions. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 26(5), 399–416. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2014.956107>
- Kang, S., & Norton, H. E. (2004). Nonprofit organizations’ use of the World Wide Web: are they sufficiently fulfilling organizational goals? *Public Relations Review*, 3(30), 279–284. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2004.04.002>
- Lasby, D. (2018). *The State of Evaluation: Measurement and Evaluation Practices in Ontario’s Nonprofit Sector*, Ontario Nonprofit Network, Toronto.
- Layng, A. (2018). Boreal fun connects youth to nature. *ON Nature*, 58(4). Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- Ledingham, J. A., & Bruning, S. D. (1998). Relationship management in public relations: Dimensions of an organization-public relationship. *Public Relations Review*, 24(1), 55–65. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111\(98\)80020-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111(98)80020-9)
- Ledingham, J. A., & Bruning, S. D. (2000). *Public Relations As Relationship Management: A Relational Approach To the Study and Practice of Public Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410604668>

- Ledingham, J. A. (2003). Explicating relationship management as a general theory of public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 15(2).
- Lee, C., & Nowell, B. (2015). A Framework for Assessing the Performance of Nonprofit Organizations. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 36(3), 299–319. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214014545828>
- Lee, Y., & Hsieh, G. (2013). Does Slacktivism Hurt Activism?: The Effects of Moral Balancing and Consistency in Online Activism. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 811–820.
- Lord, M. L. (2012). How and why fundraisers use social media: A national survey of the practice. ProQuest Information & Learning (US).
- Lovejoy, K., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Information, Community, and Action: How Nonprofit Organizations Use Social Media. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(3), 337–353. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01576.x>
- Lu, P., Wang, Z., Nie, S., Pujia, W., Lu, P., & Chen, B. (2018). Exploring the participate propensity in cyberspace collective actions: The 5% rule. *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and Its Applications*, 503(Complete), 582–590. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.physa.2018.02.152>
- Market Cube. (2017). 2017 U.S. Consumer Email Habits Report Recap and Key Findings. Retrieved from <https://www.campaignmonitor.com/resources/guides/insights-research-report/>
- Martin, N. (2013, September). Activism vs. Slacktivism. *The Atlanta Tribune; Roswell*, 27(6), 29,31.
- Miller, L. (2016). Event Participation Report. Internal Ontario Nature document.
- Miller, L. (2016). Social Media Use by Ontario Environmental Charities. Unpublished manuscript, York University, Toronto.
- Miller, L. (2018). Public Outreach Methods Used by Ontario Environmental Stewardship Charities. Unpublished manuscript, York University, Toronto.
- “Ontario Nature’s New Website.” (2010). *ON Nature*, 50(1). Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- “Ontario Nature’s Writing Contest.” (2006). *ON Nature*, 46(1). Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- Ogden, T. & Starita, L. (2009). Social networking and mid-size nonprofits: What’s the use? *Philanthropy Action*. Retrieved from http://www.philanthropyaction.com/articles/social_networking_and_mid-size_nonprofits_whats_the_use
- Papasolomou, I., & Melanthiou, Y. (2012). Social Media: Marketing Public Relations’ New Best Friend. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 18(3), 319–328. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2012.696458>
- Phethean, C., Tiropanis, T., & Harris, L. (2012). Measuring the performance of social media marketing in the charitable domain. Presented at the ACM Web Science 2012 (WebSci 2012).
- Poon, C. S., Koehler, D. J., & Buehler, R. (2014). On the psychology of self-prediction: Consideration of situational barriers to intended actions. *Judgment and Decision Making*, 9(3), 207.
- “Promise For The Future.” (2018). *Annual Report 2017-2018*. Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- “Recognition.” (n.d.). <https://ontarionature.org/programs/nature-guardians/youth-council/>
- Rice, R. E. (1993). Media appropriateness: Using social presence theory to compare traditional and new organizational media. *Human Communication Research*, 19(4), 451–484.

- Richardson, L. (2018). An Ontario without turtles? *ON Nature*, 58(3). Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- Rowe, G., & Frewer, L. J. (2005). A Typology of Public Engagement Mechanisms. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 30(2), 251–290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243904271724>
- Sawhill, J. C., & Williamson, D. (2001). Mission Impossible?: Measuring Success in Nonprofit Organizations. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 11(3), 371–386. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.11309>
- Saxton, G. D., Guo, C., & Brown, W. A. (2007). New Dimensions of Nonprofit Responsiveness: The Application and Promise of Internet-Based Technologies. Social Science Research Network, Rochester, NY.
- Schumann, S., & Klein, O. (2015). Substitute or stepping stone? Assessing the impact of low-threshold online collective actions on offline participation. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 45(3), 308–322. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2084>
- Scott, K., Tsoukalas, S., Roberts, P., & Lasby, D. (2006). The Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector in Ontario: Regional Highlights of the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations. Imagine Canada. Toronto, Ontario.
- “Staffing Trends in Canadian Charities, 2012.” (2013). HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector. Ottawa, ON.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Sukumar, S. (2016). Effective Event Planning. Internal presentation. Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- Sukumar, S. (2018). Tracking Monarch Habitat. *ON Nature*, 58(1). Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- Table of Contents (1996). *Seasons*, 36(3), P. 3. Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.
- Taylor, M., Kent, M. L., & White, W. J. (2001). How activist organizations are using the internet to build relationships. *Public Relations Review*, 27(3), 263-284.
- The Giving Report*. (2018). CanadaHelps, Toronto, ON.
- The Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector in Canada. (2006). Imagine Canada. Toronto, Ontario. www.imaginecanada.ca/sites/default/files/www/en/nsnvo/sector_in_canada_factsheet.pdf
- The World Factbook: Canada. (2018) United States Central Intelligence Agency. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ca.html>
- Warwick, M. (2009). Fundraising when money is tight: A strategic and practical guide to surviving in tough times and thriving in the future. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Waters, R. D., & Feneley, K. L. (2013). Virtual stewardship in the age of new media: Have non-profit organizations' moved beyond Web 1.0 strategies? *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 18, 216-230.
- Waters, R. D. (2007). Nonprofit organizations' use of the internet: A content analysis of communication trends on the internet sites of the philanthropy 400. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 18(1), 59–76. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.171>
- Waters, R. D., Burnett, E., Lamm, A., & Lucas, J. (2009). Engaging stakeholders through social networking: How nonprofit organizations are using Facebook. *Public Relations Review*, 35(2), 102–106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.01.006>
- Weng, Y. (2011). The dynamics of public participation in ecological restoration: Professional practitioners, volunteers, and institutional differences. The University of Wisconsin-Madison.

"We've Now Got E-mail!" (1996). *Seasons*, 36(1). Ontario Nature, Toronto, ON.

Wilkins, D. J., Livingstone, A. G., & Levine, M. (2019). All click, no action? Online action, efficacy perceptions, and prior experience combine to affect future collective action. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 91, 97–105.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.09.007>

Yin, R.K. (2014). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 5th ed., Sage, Los Angeles, CA, USA.

"Youth Council." (n.d.). <https://ontarionature.org/programs/nature-guardians/youth-council/>

Pages captured using the Wayback Machine website:

"Camps." (1998). Wayback Machine.

<https://web.archive.org/web/19990506235548/http://www.ontarionature.org/tripsandtalks/camps.html>, captured May 6, 1999.

"Cygnus Nature Trips." (2001). Wayback Machine.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20011124180951/http://ontarionature.org/action/trips.html>, captured Nov. 24, 2001.

"Membership Levels and Benefits." (2012). Wayback Machine.

<http://web.archive.org/web/20120204091514/http://www.ontarionature.org/give/membership/index.php>, captured Feb. 4, 2012.

"Membership Levels and Benefits." (2012). Wayback Machine.

<http://web.archive.org/web/20120327050130/http://www.ontarionature.org:80/give/membership/index.php>, captured March 27, 2012.

"Ontario Nature Online Community." (2011). Wayback Machine.

<http://web.archive.org/web/20110301154715/http://www.ontarionature.org/ubb-cgi/Ultimate.cgi>, captured March 1, 2011.

"Trips and Talks." (1999). Wayback Machine.

<https://web.archive.org/web/19990507024238/http://www.ontarionature.org/tripsandtalks/wildernesscanoe.html>, captured May 7, 1999.

"Youth Naturalist Summer Camps." (2001). Wayback Machine.

https://web.archive.org/web/20011201155248/http://ontarionature.org:80/action/youth_camp.html, captured Dec. 1, 2001.

Appendix A: Interview and Email Questions

Interview, November 5, 2018

Kirsten Dahl – Director of Development, Membership and Development

1. What public engagement methods do you employ? For what purpose?
2. Do you use different tools for different audiences?
3. Were there issues when introducing new methods? Why?
4. How did you connect with people prior to this technology?
5. How do you use [email, website, events, magazine, etc.] for public engagement?
6. Do you use any tools to monitor effectiveness of engagement?
7. Are there methods that you have tried and abandoned? Why?
8. What was reason for starting to use social media (SM)?
9. What was originally expected from it? Did it live up to expectations?
10. Did the impetus come from bottom-up, top-down or from an external source?
11. How was the Board involved?
12. Was there internal resistance? Why? How was this overcome?
13. How do you staff your SM accounts? Has this changed over time?
14. Who is allowed to post?
15. Do you provide any training for those posting on SM?
16. Who are the volunteer Social Media Ambassadors? How well is this working?
17. Do you use any measurements of success? What are they?
18. Do you use any tools to monitor SM effectiveness or engagement?
19. What practices have been successful? Unsuccessful? Examples?
20. Is social media part of a larger communication plan? How does it fit in?
21. Has your use of social media changed over time? Why?
22. Are you developing/improving the use of the platform?
23. Is SM as effective as you want it to be? Why?
24. Is consistent branding across SM important? How do you maintain this?
25. Any particularly successful campaigns? Ones that did quite poorly?
26. What are the stewardship management plans for the land you own?
27. What is the end goal for these lands?
28. What stewardship activities are performed? By who?
29. How do you get the public involved?
30. Has using the public for stewardship changed over time? Why?
31. What are your hardest problems with providing stewardship to your land?

Email Questions, November 20, 2018**Kirsten Dahl – Director of Development, Membership and Development**

1. I was looking the Canada Revenue page on Ontario Nature and I see that donations have increased significantly in the past 2 years (2016 and 2017). Do you why? Has there been any changes in public engagement that would be part of this?
2. Do you use traditional mail for anything besides sending out the ON Nature magazine, and direct donation appeals?
3. I forgot to ask about Instagram. It is fairly new (2015). What prompted ON to start to use it? What are your expectations from it?
4. Are you getting enough volunteers to meet your needs? For stewardship? For citizen science?
5. How would you rate the public engagement methods that you use in terms of effectiveness? (e.g., Blog , email lists, Twitter, Facebook, ON Nature magazine, YouTube, website, Loon Call, traditional mail, phone calls, staffing a table at a fair/festival, speaking at an event, LinkedIn, press releases, Annual Gathering)

Email Questions, December 3, 2018**Lisa Richardson – Nature Network & Communications Coordinator**

1. I was wondering when and why the Volunteer for Nature program was phased out?
2. It had started in 1996 as Working for Wilderness. Was it more successful back then?
3. Did it start with people paying to participate or was that added later?

Email Questions, February 27, 2019**Kirsten Dahl – Director of Development, Membership and Development**

1. What is the purpose of the annual gathering, other than holding the AGM?
2. Why does ON put so much effort into it?
3. ON has a hybrid model of membership and donators. Why did you move to this model from the traditional waterfall membership model that was in place?
4. Why are you keeping the concept of memberships at all?
5. Why are you maintaining membership levels when it appears there are no extra benefits beyond the \$40 mark? (Or at least none on the website)
6. Would anyone know why the annual photo contest was held?
7. What did ON hope to get out of it?
8. How popular was it?
9. Why was it cancelled after 39 years?
10. Why was the youth writing contest ended?

Email Questions, March 27, 2019**Anne Bell, Director of Conservation and Education**

1. Who decides if ON is going to staff a booth at an event hosted by someone else?
2. In 2009, ON held a day-long Conservation Fair at Cawthra Mulock Reserve. Is there a reason why it hasn't been done again?
3. ON used to offer multi-day canoe trips with a naturalist guide. From what I can gather these ended in 2001. Would you know why these stopped? And if not, then maybe knowing why ON would not offer them now would provide some insight into why the trips were discontinued.
4. Same question as #3 but about Youth Summer Camps with naturalist leaders, that also ended in 2001.

Interview, June 19th, 2019**John Hassell, Director of Communications and Engagement****Noah Cole, Communications Technician**

1. How does ON measure the effectiveness of the magazine? What are the metrics and how are they gathered?
2. Do you have any way to determine the impact of the magazine? e.g., If people are taking actions from reading the magazine?
3. How does ON know who makes up their social media audience and the difference between it and the membership base?
4. Do you have any way to determine the impact of the SM? e.g., If people become members, or take the actions that you are promoting?
5. Do you have a way of knowing if the various email lists are having an impact? Do you track anything to know they are worth the effort to maintain?
6. ON makes decisions on whether they should continue, modify or cease existing engagement methods, or add new approaches. What are these decisions based on?
7. A lot of things that have been started and stopped were started with a grant then stopped when the grant ran out. Has there been anything that started with a grant but continued after the grant stopped?

Email Questions, July 3, 2019**Kirsten Dahl – Director of Development, Membership and Development**

1. Does the AGM have an attendance cap? Do you get close to this number each year?
2. Do you do any kind of data gathering at the AGM?
3. In the past ON held day-long conservation fairs where you would invite the whole community and offer multiple activities. I think 2009 was the last one. Why are you not still holding these?
4. Previously ON has used door-to-door canvassers. Do you still do this as an outreach method? Why or why not?