

# LEARNING LAB SPOTLIGHT:

## *Creating an intentional governance culture with The Stop*

*In 2021, the Reimagining Governance project embarked on collaborative, co-creative journeys with eight different nonprofit organizations in a series of "Learning Labs".*

*In the Learning Labs, board and staff members from each organization committed time and energy over the course of several months to engage in experimentation and dialogue, utilizing tools and resources created by Reimagining Governance. Each organization entered this work with their own unique circumstances and motivations, which shaped each of their journeys in distinct ways.*

*The Stop participated in a Learning Lab that was focused on exploring their governance culture and how it impacts governance work and decision-making. Governance culture is the collection of mindsets, values, and ways of interacting that shape how an organization does its governance.*

### **ORGANIZATION:**

The Stop

### **KEY DETAILS:**

- Local community organization with roots as one of Canada's first food banks.
- Three locations with a diverse range of services and programs.
- 40 staff, 11 board members.



### **AT A GLANCE: THEIR BIG "AHA!" MOMENTS**

- Governance design should align with the significant shifts that took place in The Stop's programming, so it's built from the ground up with attention to a "new normal."
- While a governance culture always exists in an organization, it should be intentional so that the desired values and mindsets are clearly driving governance decision-making and choices.

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### THE PROCESS

Access the *Create a more intentional governance culture* tool in the [Reimagining Governance Lab](#) for a more detailed process guide.

- All of the board of directors and senior staff leaders of the organization answered a series of reflective questions through an online tool that explored different aspects of governance culture.
  - The questions touched on governance decision-making, the governance work environment, stakeholder engagement, strategic choices, and leadership styles.
- The responses were collected confidentially by a third party, and summarized and anonymized for the group into a snapshot.
- A smaller group of board and senior leaders met to explore the findings and reflect on their implications and learnings for governance.



### INSIGHTS

One of the major takeaways was a desire for equity to be a core governance value so the management, other staff, and the communities served are more deeply and effectively engaged in governance decision-making.

Ideas that emerged from brainstorming around this takeaway included:

- Revisit the organizational values and translate them into a governance context. For example, how should they shape governance decision-making and who participates in it? Where can they be embedded in governance policies? How do we hold governance leaders accountable for living them?

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- Deepen intentionality in applying their values to governance work to demonstrate commitment and build trust. Make sure the governance culture is demonstrated in actions, approaches to transparency, and to all relationships, not just in boardroom conversations. For example, how can the community be involved when thinking strategically about the organization's future?
- Continue to work with community members so they are more actively a part of the governance system, not only engaged through polls and surveys.
- Create committee structures that include community members and staff who want to participate in governance.
- Consider what organizational success looks like through the lens of the experiences or interpretations of individual community members, not only the organization.



*How we've made decisions as an organization, as a board, in the past may not reflect realities on the ground.*

- Chris Valentine (he/him)



### **WHAT THEY'RE DOING NOW**

- Create a shared understanding about the organization's values and/or core principles, and align them with governance processes, practices, and structures. Though certain values and core principles are present in various policies, communications, and programming, they are not formally captured, consistently understood, and widely shared.
- Create a governance task force that includes board, staff, and community members to continue this work.

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**VIDEO**

[Transcript](#)



Chris Valentine, chair of The Stop's board, shares some of the steps that The Stop will be taking based on the insights they had working with governance culture.



### **START YOUR OWN REIMAGINING JOURNEY!**

Explore some **foundational tools** that help create the governance building blocks to innovations, and access the ***Create a more intentional governance culture*** tool in the Reimagining Governance Lab to get a more detailed outline of the process and try it yourself!

[VISIT THE LAB >](#)

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