

# LEARNING LAB SPOTLIGHT:

## *LGBT Youth Line discusses aligning values, purpose, and good governance*

*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.*

### **ORGANIZATION:**

LGBT Youth Line (Youth Line)

### **KEY DETAILS:**

- Incorporated in 1995
- Provincial, 2SLGBTQIA+ youth-led organization providing anonymous peer support and referrals, resources, and training for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth



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

- Being truly youth-led in governance requires a reimagining of governance beyond traditional models.
- Recognized that values can be "lived out loud"; there's a lot of space to be innovative and disrupt the status quo without hiding behind a guise.
- Imagining governance as a "playground" can open up opportunities to do things differently.



As an organization that serves youth, and is run by youth, we found that a lot of the systems of governance that are already in place aren't always the most accessible, or the most efficient, the most usable.

- Juan Luis Garrido (he/him)

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## VIDEO

[Transcript](#)

Berkha Gupta (they/them), Juan Luis Garrido (he/him), and David Yang (he/him) from Youth Line share why it felt important to reimagine their governance.



## THEIR JOURNEY

*During the Learning Labs, each organization took a different journey depending on their motivations and unique circumstances. Teams followed the energy, and were guided by various resources, activities, and conversations.*



## MOTIVATIONS FOR REIMAGINING GOVERNANCE

- Recognition that governance is the "root system to a healthy tree"; when it's healthy, its surrounding communities thrive.
- Desire to get unstuck from traditional governance structures and expectations, and get clear on how to have young, queer people who are living at many intersections at the centre of decision-making.
- Enable governance to be more aligned with the immense growth and transformation that Youth Line has experienced over the past couple years.



## HOW THEY STARTED

- Created a snapshot of the unique organizational circumstances that shaped their governance.
- Reflected upon the role of governance in their organization, and how broader trends and forces impacted their governance design.

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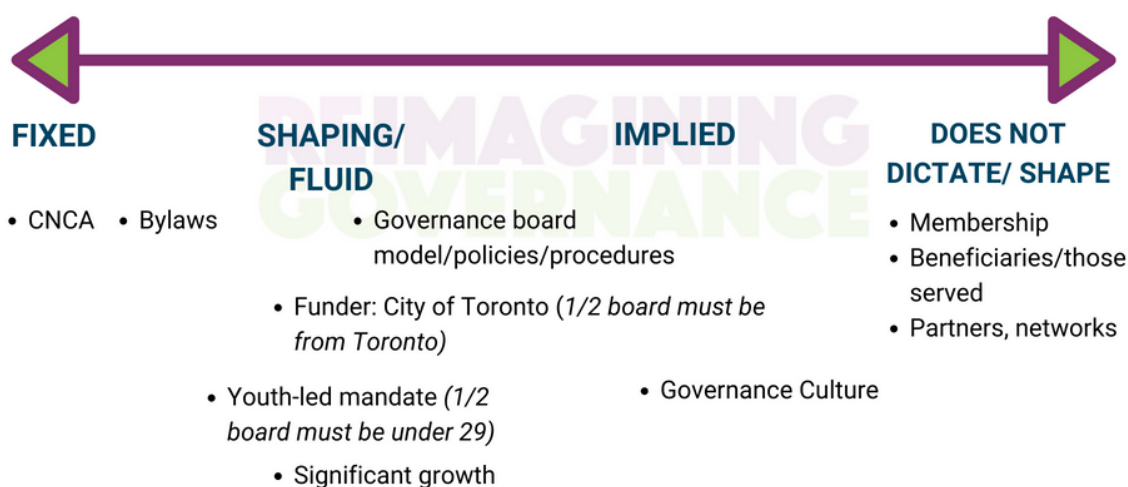
- Accessed the Reimagining Governance resource [Board essentials](#), which describes the responsibilities the board must fulfill to meet legal and regulatory requirements. It's not all the board may do, but it's the essential ones that can't be shared or delegated.



## WHAT THEY LEARNED AND UNCOVERED

Youth Line's snapshot of unique organizational circumstances showed that there weren't a lot of restrictions on how they accomplished governance work. However, while not fixed in law and regulation, there was an expectation that 50 per cent of their board would be under the age of 29. This expectation shaped how governance was done and presented more of an opportunity than a restriction.

### Organizational Circumstances Shaping LGBT Youth Line's Governance Design



[Check out a tool that will help your organization map its unique organizational circumstances.](#)

Also, governance culture was more implied than intentional because it was not formalized into desired values, mindsets, and ways of interacting. This uncovered an opportunity to create a more intentional governance culture that shapes how decisions are made, who makes them, and how.

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The group also uncovered some "creative tensions" that fueled further discussion. One creative tension was how to draw on the full range of governance expertise and skills required to fulfill responsibilities in an increasingly complex environment, while also prioritizing the lived experiences of the communities served.



### **VIDEO**

[Transcript](#)

Berkha, Juan, and David talk about some of the insights that came up for them.



### **HOW THEY DUG DEEPER**

Building on these foundations, they then unpacked some of the assumptions they were holding around governance. They checked whether they were true or valid and identified ones that they could let go of or disrupt.



### **EXAMPLES**

Assumptions to challenge include:

- There needs to be a hard "line-in-the-sand" separation between board, staff, and other stakeholders when it comes to governance work.
- Governance must be boring and rigid in order to fulfill governance responsibilities.
- The existing tendency towards disruptive thinking and challenging the status quo can't be applied to governance.

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## WHAT THEY'RE DOING NOW

Youth Line is navigating significant amounts of change in the organization, and are taking their learnings from this work to re-think governance decision-making and shared leadership moving forward.

Some steps they're taking include:

- Shifting how they approach new challenges. When a governance issue or question comes up, they lean on their rich network and deep histories of relationships to get guidance and support.
- Remaining open and iterative to what could be possible. This can mean reimagining their committees, looking at ad hoc or advisory relationships, or something different. A “north star” moving forward is that the 11 people sitting on the board of directors do not have to be at the centre of all governance work.
- The staff can share in more decision-making, especially when they are impacted strongly by those decisions. For example, the staff can draft safety policies for events they're leading and then bring it forward to the board so they are confident they meet legal, regulatory, and compliance requirements.



## VIDEO

[Transcript](#)

Berkha, Juan, and David discuss how LGBT Youth Line is carrying this work forward.



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**VIDEO**  
[Transcript](#)

Juan reflects on the importance of the journey when it comes to reimagining governance.



Ultimately, Youth Line is applying their existing values and approaches as an organization as they think about governance work moving forward. Their board co-chairs emphasize the importance of taking the time to have these kinds of discussions as a team in order to take a step back and be strategic.



## START YOUR OWN REIMAGINING JOURNEY!

Explore some **foundational tools** that help create the governance building blocks to innovations.

[VISIT THE LAB](#) >

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