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Transforming the Ontario Public Service for the Future



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CONTEXT

This report synthesizes feedback shared in a public engagement workshop on October 13, 2017, on [Transforming the Ontario Public Service \(OPS\) for the Future](#). The purpose of this workshop was to hear from organizations and individuals that partner and collaborate with the OPS about how to improve their interactions with the public service, and thereby achieve mutual goals around public service renewal.

We hope that this report sparks a larger discussion about mutually beneficial opportunities for partners, collaborators and engaged Ontarians to contribute to Ontario Public Service (OPS) goals. We also hope that our methodology and insights can support other public-sector organizations undertaking similar renewal efforts.

INTRODUCTION

Hosted by the Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship (BII+E) and the Public Service Renewal team at Ontario's Treasury Board Secretariat, this session included participants from the Greater Toronto Area who partner and collaborate with the OPS, including individuals representing:

- + Think tanks
- + Youth
- + Transfer payment agencies
- + Academics
- + Non-profits
- + Private sector organizations that provide consultation and other services to the OPS

The session was hosted at LinkedIn Canada. By working with a facilitator and convening in a neutral space, we helped create an environment that encouraged a free-flowing discussion.

Through structured activities, attendees explored what their ideal interactions with the OPS could look like in relation to *four core principles* that the OPS has identified as key to its future:

- + **Empowering Ontarians:** Developing partnerships with the people of Ontario to develop public policy with them, and not just for them.
- + **Delivering evidence-based, outcome-focused policy:** Using rigorous evidence to inform decisions and achieve better results in more cost-effective ways.
- + **Promoting open delivery systems:** Opening more services to stakeholders and the public so we are better positioned to meet the needs of Ontarians in new and innovative ways.
- + **Cultivating an open and inclusive public service:** Empowering OPS leaders and employees in creating a more open, diverse and inclusive workplace.

The Brookfield Institute curated the participant list and designed workshop activities that invited participants to address two broad questions:

- + What are some of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in your current interactions with the OPS?
- + How might we build on opportunities and/or respond to threats so that our interactions with the OPS contribute to achieving the core principles?

To answer the first question, we facilitated an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) and asked participants to speak from their own lived experiences (i.e. as an academic, student, non-profit employee, etc.).

To answer the second question, we asked participants to reflect on the opportunities and threats identified in the previous activities and generate ideas that responded to those. To prioritize these ideas, participants were asked to conduct a “dotmocracy” exercise to “vote” on the ideas they deemed to be the most impactful.

After the workshop activities, participants had the opportunity to participate in a Q+A with Steve Orsini, Secretary of Cabinet and Head of the Ontario Public Service.

The breakdown of participants can be found in Appendix A, and the detailed workshop agenda in Appendix B. Paraphrased questions from the Q+A period with Steve Orsini can be found in Appendix C. For raw responses from participants for the activities, see Appendix D.

INSIGHTS + IDEAS

Summarized here for each core principle are some of the key insights and ideas drawn directly from the worksheets and templates participants filled out during the workshop, as well as from notes taken by dedicated session note takers. Insights into current challenges were generated primarily through the SWOT activity, while ideas about how to address them were generated primarily through ideation and prioritization activities.

EMPOWERING ONTARIANS

Insights

Empowerment in this context refers to Ontarians playing a more collaborative role throughout the policy and program development process. It aligns with the increased expectations for faster and more convenient services Ontarians have of their government as a result of technological advances. Moving toward a more collaborative model of governance between the public service and Ontarians requires a rethink of how Ontarians currently interact with the OPS.

A. Improve public service communications

Participants with diverse perspectives agree that the public is not adequately informed of what the public service is doing. This applies even to its



many good news stories.

Moreover, they find that existing public service communications are not always easy to understand. Participants perceive a “language barrier” in engaging with the public service that makes it difficult even for those who consider themselves ‘very engaged’ to follow along. Many are concerned that other audiences such as young people and newcomers may struggle even more. In short, participants say they cannot be empowered if they are not aware of what is currently going on and if they cannot understand what the public service is saying.

B. Extend the public feedback loop

Participants want to contribute more to the policy and program development process yet are not necessarily aware of existing opportunities to do so. They want to understand the role of the citizen in contributing to that process and what their own relationship to the public service ought to be. They are concerned about “missing the window” of opportunity to deliver feedback through formalized channels that are limited to a small part of the overall policy and program development process. They want a more continuous cycle for such feedback.

C. Diversify the methods used for public engagement

Participants think the public service could engage the public in more ways, including through digital means, and believe that these means merit thoughtful consideration. For example, digital public engagement has potential to engage many more Ontarians, while excluding those who lack digital access or literacy skills.

Ideas

Ideas that participants prioritized include:

- + Use plain language to make the public service more accessible.
- + Implement rolling consultations so Ontarians always have the opportunity to contribute to a policy file.
- + Equip and empower public servants to engage the public on an ongoing basis and reward them for doing so.

Other ideas include:

- + Train public servants in culturally competent communication.
- + Include citizens in the analysis phase of policy and program development.

EVIDENCE-BASED AND OUTCOME-FOCUSED POLICY

Insights

Using rigorous evidence and expertise to inform policy and program decisions is the ideal. However, in many cases, specialized evidence and expertise are lacking both *within* and *outside* the public service. As such, the issue is how to better leverage existing resources to better inform policy and program decisions such that governments can be more deliberate about the outcomes they want to achieve.

A. Convene expertise

The OPS can access a broad network of external experts to address public policy problems. Furthermore, such experts, whether from think tanks or academia, want to contribute. However, they are frustrated with a perceived lack of transparency in how to contribute their expertise and how widely disseminated their advice will be.

This perceived lack of transparency undermines the trust required to maintain a network of experts and threatens their future participation.

B. Broaden the framework for evidence

Participants suggest the OPS expand its notions of what constitutes expertise and broaden its framework for evidence to accommodate all forms of public feedback to policy files. Some participants advocate having people with lived experiences serve as experts where appropriate based on the policy files on which the public service is seeking external advice.

C. Evaluation

Participants think the OPS should dedicate more effort and resources to evaluation. There is a recognition that the public service collects a lot of information and rich data. However, the data collected is not always appropriate for the purposes of evaluation.

Some participants think that evaluation is conducted at an isolated level that appears disconnected from the wider “ecosystem of policies

and programs” implemented to address a particular policy problem. The OPS could learn from other jurisdictions. Sweden’s publicly-funded innovation agency Vinnova was highlighted as doing effective systems-level evaluation for all its interventions, from tried and tested programs to experimental programs.

Ideas

Ideas that participants prioritized include:

- + Create a public-facing evidence agency with a chief evidence/data officer (a provincial equivalent to Statistics Canada) that would have an explicit mandate to interface with the public and other experts.
- + Develop a retainer model to engage experts on a longer-term basis so they can more effectively contribute to and navigate through the policy/program development process.
- + Establish a more transparent process to share data and research while adhering to privacy and security regulations.



Other ideas include:

- + Rewarding public servants who help to increase access to information for the public.
- + Encouraging open data.
- + Hiring and promoting scientists and behavioral scientists.
- + Change research rules, particularly with respect to obtaining approval around behavioral research to encourage new methods.
- + As the public service relies more on expert panels, ensure these are transparent, have access to data and someone to help them navigate the public service.

OPEN DELIVERY

Insights

The public service is shifting paradigms from “government knows best” toward a more collaborative model that designs and delivers public services from the perspective of end users. In doing so, government must reimagine its role in delivering public services. Rather than performing as the sole actor, it will be one of many actors alongside stakeholders such as non-profits and the private sector.

A. Collaborative role for delivery partners

As it stands, delivery partners including non-profits and transfer payment agencies feel their existing relationship is transactional and that they are treated as lower-tier or, as one participant described, “cheap vendors of services.”

There are opportunities to empower third parties as equal partners to the public service. Participants want to be involved in a more strategic role at the level of co-creating delivery systems. Participants saw opportunities both for third parties to play a stronger strategic role and for the OPS to play a stronger role in convening delivery partners.

B. Innovation infrastructure that supports open delivery

Participants want to work with the OPS to co-deliver services in a more flexible manner. Doing so requires what some call “the right kind of infrastructure.” Specifically, some note that although processes exist to open data to the public, there is a strong desire for more open access to public sector data that adheres to privacy and security standards. Greater access would allow civic-minded third parties such as non-profit organizations to use the data in an innovative manner towards public sector goals.

On a different note, participants feel that current funding and procurement models are opaque. They also seem unfair, especially towards smaller organizations such as startups that may be looking to drive impact in a manner that aligns with broader public policy objectives. They see opportunities for the public service to use its capacity as funders and customers to develop a broader network of organizations delivering services.

Ideas

Ideas that participants prioritized include:

- + Empower delivery partners, including front-line staff, to take on partnership roles, co-creating with public servants and moving beyond current transactional roles.
- + Engage with delivery partners and their stakeholders in their own environments and have a process in place to encourage mutual dialogue between them and public servants.
- + Experiment with innovative funding models such as open procurement to encourage delivery partners themselves to explore new and innovative ways to deliver their services.

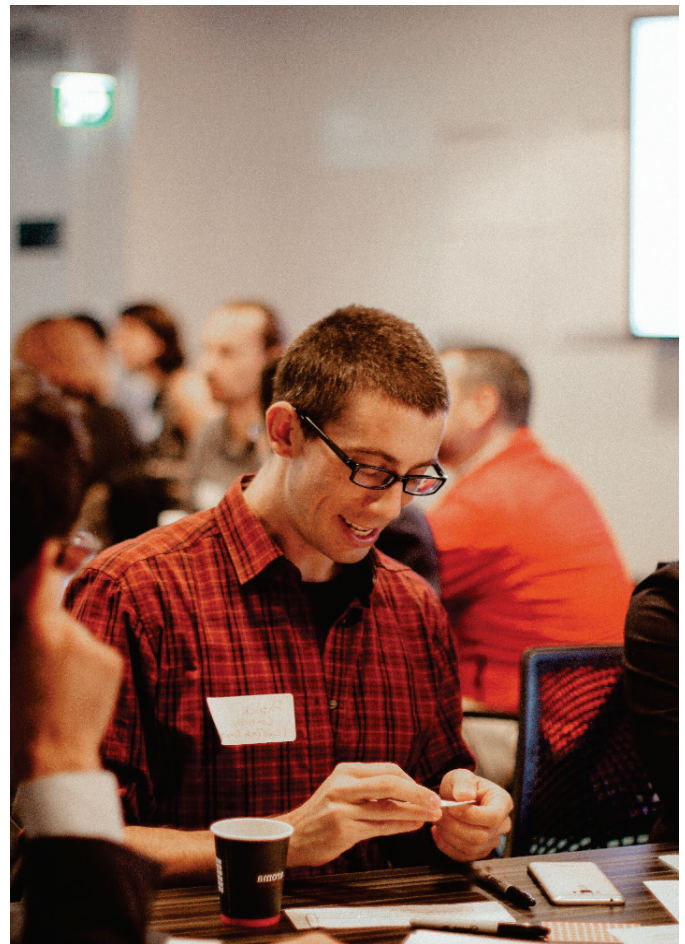
Other ideas include:

- + Enable better connections between think tanks, academics, and other partners who have data needs, and the data that the OPS has so that it can be leveraged more effectively by third parties.
- + Test different models of collaboration between the public service and external organizations.
- + Encourage forums for public servants and frontline staff to talk to one another.

OPEN AND INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SERVICE

Insights

The public service of the future must be an efficient and flexible working environment to attract innovative talent. To that end, the OPS can leverage



its role as a large-scale employer to advance a culture that is more open and inclusive.

A. Perceptions about the talent pipeline into the OPS

Participants of all backgrounds sense that the OPS comprises a highly talented pool of employees. However, youth in particular see the OPS as rather opaque and difficult to enter. While internships and co-op opportunities exist, the OPS talent pipeline seems to some to be insular. It seems to discourage candidates with diverse skill sets and experiences that could potentially add value to the OPS.

Those perceptions are reinforced by feelings that the public service is hierarchical, highly risk-averse and behind the curve on technological change.

Participants believe, rightly or wrongly, that the public service culture does not encourage creativity and entrepreneurial thinking. Knowing about the public service, said one attendee, feels like a “privileged secret” that requires an existing network to learn about. This speaks to the public’s lack of understanding of the role of the OPS in general and as an employer. There is opportunity for the public service to reach out to more diverse candidates with different skill sets.

B. Inclusive employer

Participants, particularly students, think that while the OPS does a good job of serving a diverse audience, it can do more as a potential employer to advance diversity and inclusion.

Inclusiveness in the OPS, say participants, resides in its role of being an equitable employer, working with equity-seeking groups and providing for a culture that is responsive to these needs. Some have concerns that efforts to promote inclusion could appear tokenistic. Furthermore, it is unclear whether and how it accommodates the lived experiences of employees or seeks to leverage the knowledge afforded by the lived experiences of its employees in serving the diverse needs of Ontarians.

Ideas

Ideas that participants prioritized include:

- + Develop innovative models fostering more fluidity of talent between the OPS and outside expertise, such as fellowship or other models that give public servants more latitude to experiment with different approaches.
 - One participant envisioned the public service as a large tanker

navigating the waters that relies on speedboats to chart the waters ahead before the tanker commits to a direction. Small, agile teams “navigating ahead” of the public service can work closer to end users under more flexible working environments that can enable them to test the broader direction in which the public service should move.

- + Attract talent by educating the public (with more comprehensible materials) about what the OPS is so more people are aware of what it offers as an employer.
- + Implement cultural sensitivity and anti-oppression training for public servants so they can become active agents in shaping a more diverse and inclusive culture.

Other ideas include:

- + Simplify the application process for public service jobs as well as job specifications and the web portal that receives applications.
- + Ensure diversity surveys at the management level as well as at the staff level.
- + Value lived experiences and incorporate them in the recruitment process.
- + Have processes in place to “unlearn” mindsets that may stifle innovation.
- + Develop intrapreneurial competencies among public servants and actively include these as a qualification for specific jobs.

CONCLUSIONS

Organizations and individuals with an appetite to collaborate with the OPS came into this session eager to learn about what the Public Service Renewal project is about and how they can contribute. Over half of the participants indicated this as the goal, with many others indicating wanting to contribute to the project. Many also came into the session with significant empathy for the demands of being a public servant.

Some themes they raised cut across all four core principles:

THE OPS HAS UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

All participants acknowledge the caliber of talent within the OPS and empathize with the contexts in which they operate. Participants believe the public service is not employing its inherent talent to its full potential and thus not empowering itself to enact the vision embedded in *Transforming the Ontario Public Service for the Future*.

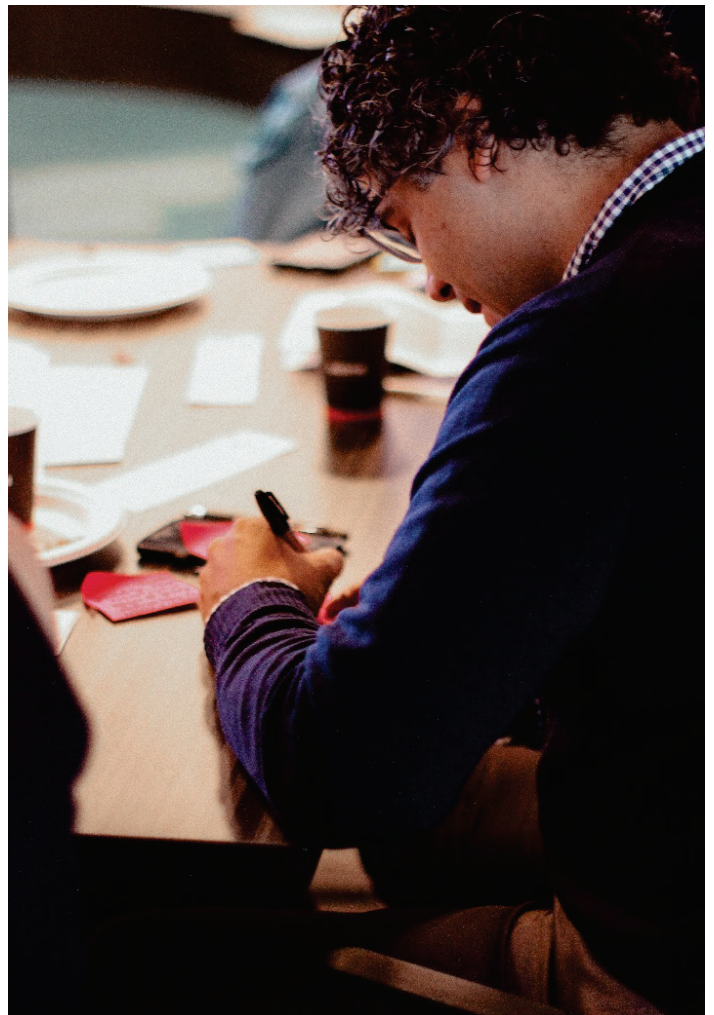
A MORE EDUCATED AND EMPOWERED PUBLIC

All participants envisioned themselves becoming empowered to take on a more equal partnership with the public service. They want to move beyond the transactional relationship they see now between public servants and Ontarians. However, to achieve this ideal, they require a deeper understanding of what happens inside the OPS. Over half of the participants came to this session to learn about the Public Service Renewal project and what the public service can achieve, and how they can productively collaborate with it.

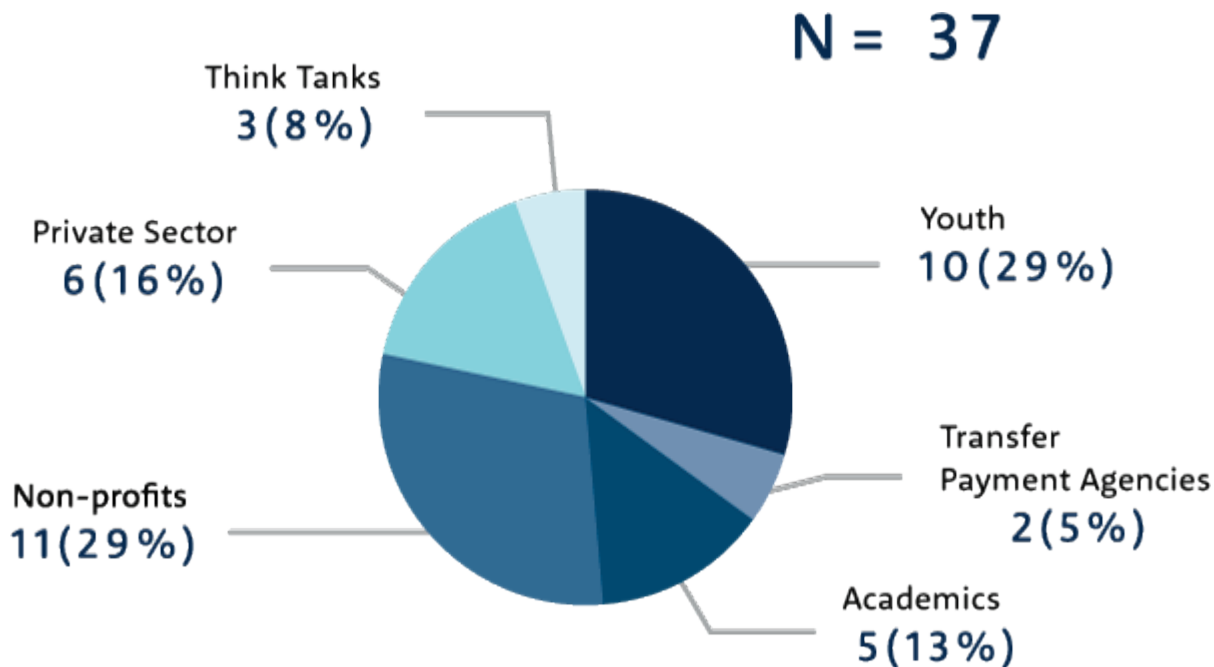
PLAIN LANGUAGE

Every breakout group during the session echoed the need for more comprehensible plain language to serve such a diverse population.

There is clearly an appetite to continue to share input on the future of the public service, which may warrant hosting further forums like this one.



APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT BREAKDOWN



APPENDIX B: AGENDA FOR THE SESSION

Time	Activities
8:30 AM – 9:00 AM (30 minutes)	Coffee, breakfast and networking
9:00 AM – 9:10 AM (10 minutes)	Welcome + opening remarks + Welcome from LinkedIn Canada + Housekeeping + Morning overview + Introduction of key players + Introduction from Diane McArthur
9:10 AM – 9:20 AM (10 minutes)	Introduction to Transforming the Ontario Public Service for the Future by Chief Talent Officer for the Government of Ontario, Diane McArthur
9:20 AM – 9:25 AM (5 minutes)	Facilitator’s introduction
9:25 AM – 9:35AM (10 minutes)	Activity #1 – Icebreaker/warm-up at 8 tables: exploring the principles
9:35 AM – 10:00 AM (25 minutes)	Activity #2 – SWOTs at 8 tables, each in relation to one of the principles, to understand current interactions between participants and the OPS

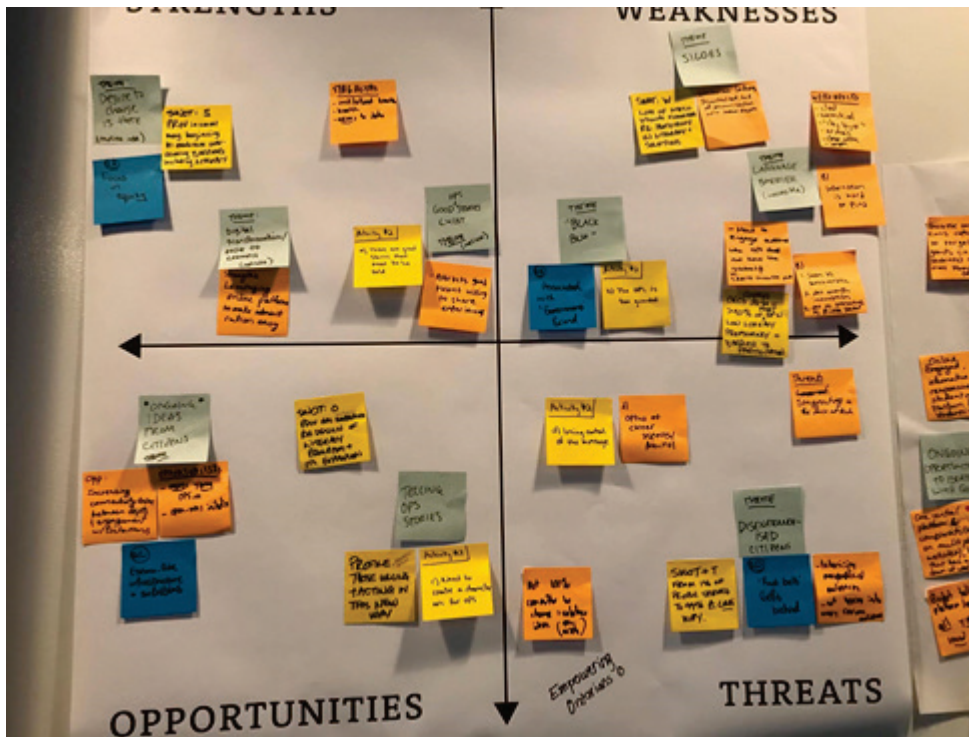
10:00 AM – 10:10 AM (10 minutes)	Playback and cross-pollination
10:10 AM – 10:25 AM	Break
10:25 AM – 10:45 AM (20 minutes)	Activity #4 – Ideation round 2: Turning threats into opportunities and ideas at each of the 8 tables
10:45 AM – 10:50 AM (5 minutes)	Activity #5 – Prioritization: Using dotmocracy to prioritize the top ideas
10:50AM – 11:05 AM (15 minutes)	Activity #6 – Gallery Walk to other tables, with an opportunity to add insights and ideas
11:05AM – 11:15 AM (10 minutes)	Playback
11:15 AM – 11:40 AM	Remarks + Q&A with Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Ontario Public Service, Steve Orsini
11:40AM – 11:50 AM	Wrap-up + evaluation

APPENDIX C: QUESTIONS FOR STEVE ORSINI, SECRETARY OF THE CABINET AND HEAD OF THE ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

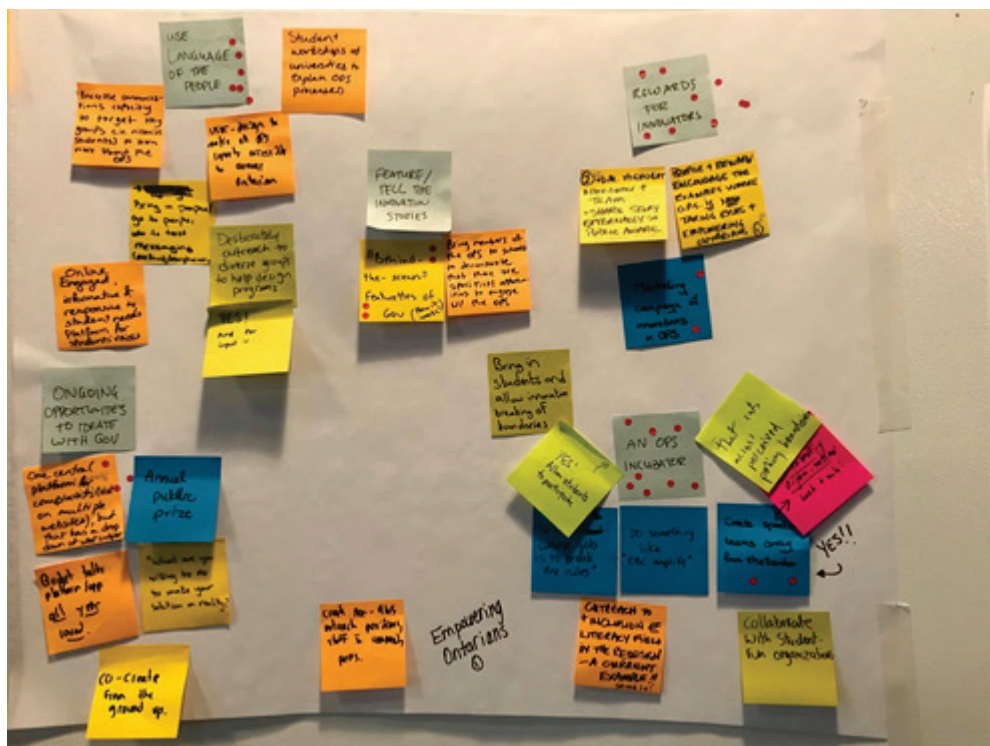
1. How is the relationship between political staff impacting the public service renewal project?
2. Digital culture is about "failing forward" but media/polis/trolls love hammering gov when they fail? What are you doing to mitigate this?
3. What can this group do once this workshop concludes to help make your job easier?
4. How do you plan to have the OPS start looking like the diverse population of Ontario? Especially at management-level roles?
5. How do you encourage a new culture of problem discovery and how soon do you expect the culture to permeate/ How will you reward systems change?
6. What are your thoughts on "unlearning" OPS approaches and norms so that we can accelerate change towards delivering better policies and programs for Ontarians?
7. How can students/universities do more to shape the future of OPS? Whether it be University incubators, hackathons or more co-ops and rotational programs?

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT SESSION NOTES

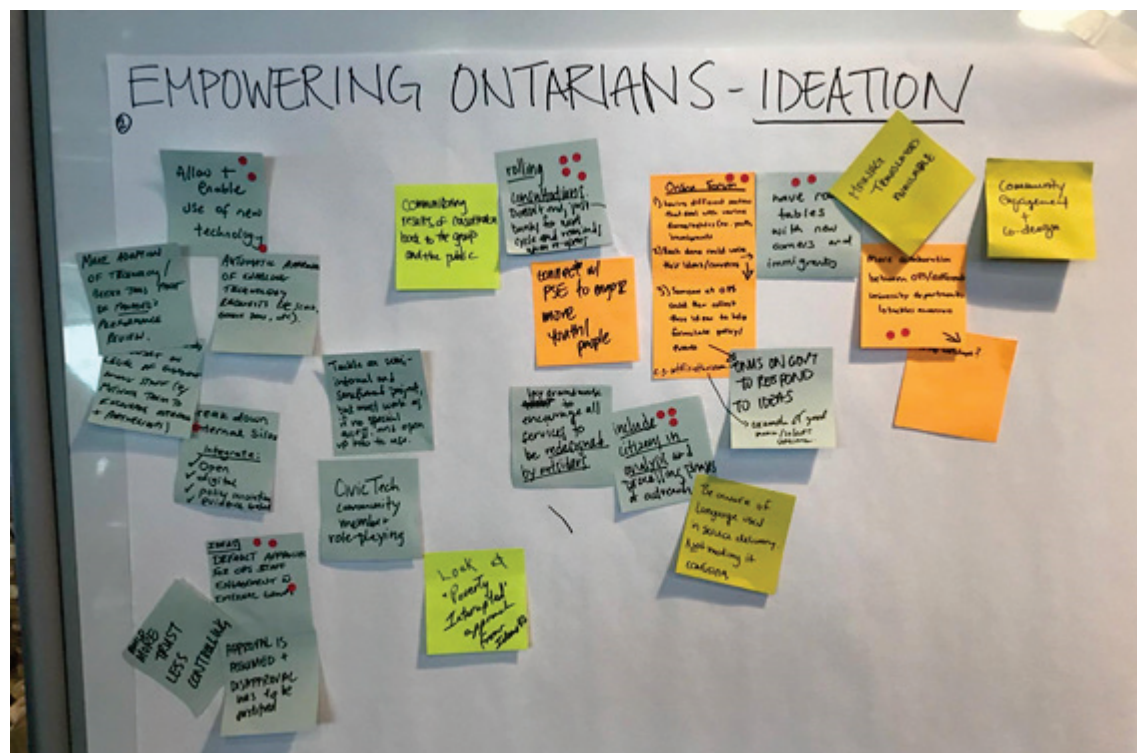
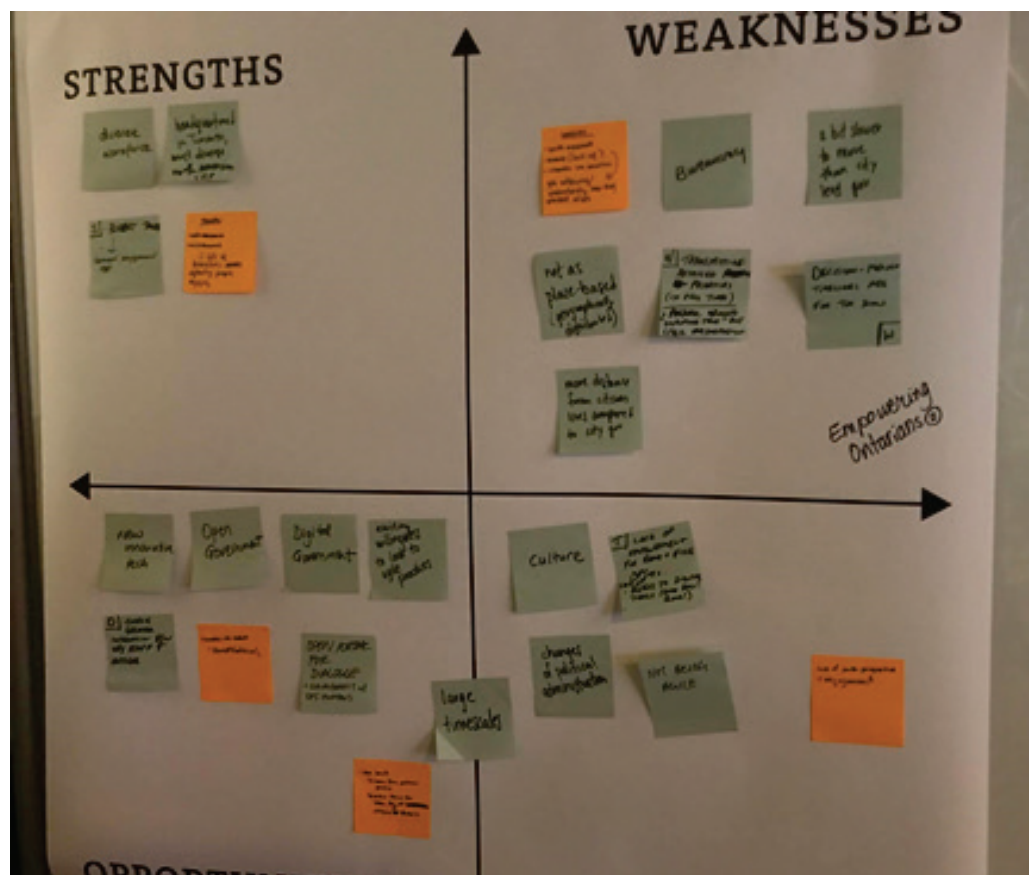
EMPOWERING ONTARIANS TABLE #1 – S.W.O.T



EMPOWERING ONTARIANS TABLE #1 – IDEATION



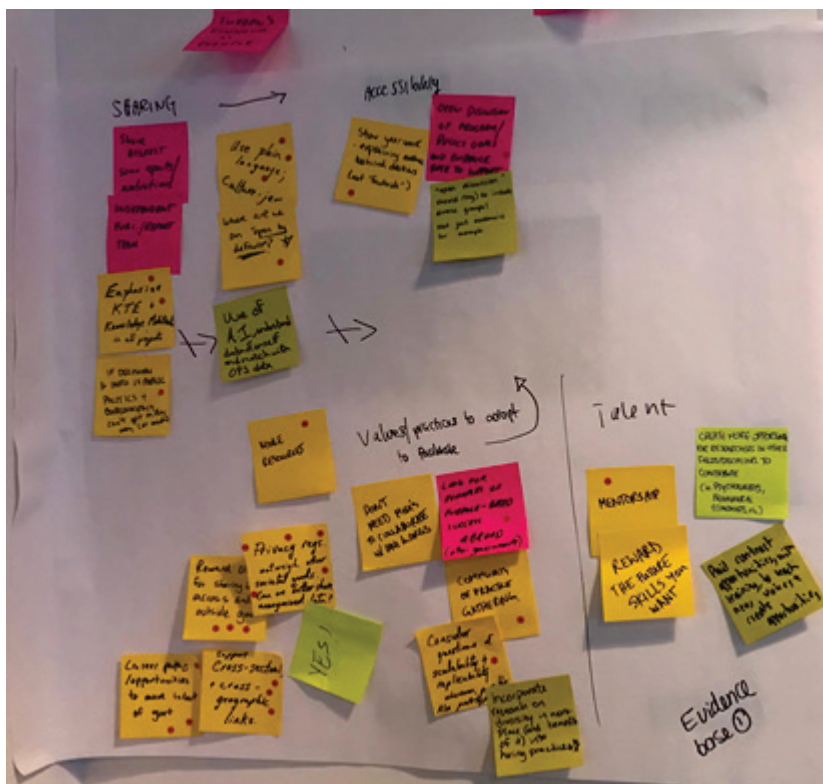
EMPOWERING ONTARIANS TABLE #2 – S.W.O.T



DELIVERING EVIDENCE-BASED, OUTCOME-FOCUSED POLICY TABLE #1 – S.W.O.T



DELIVERING EVIDENCE-BASED, OUTCOME-FOCUSED POLICY TABLE #1 – IDEATION



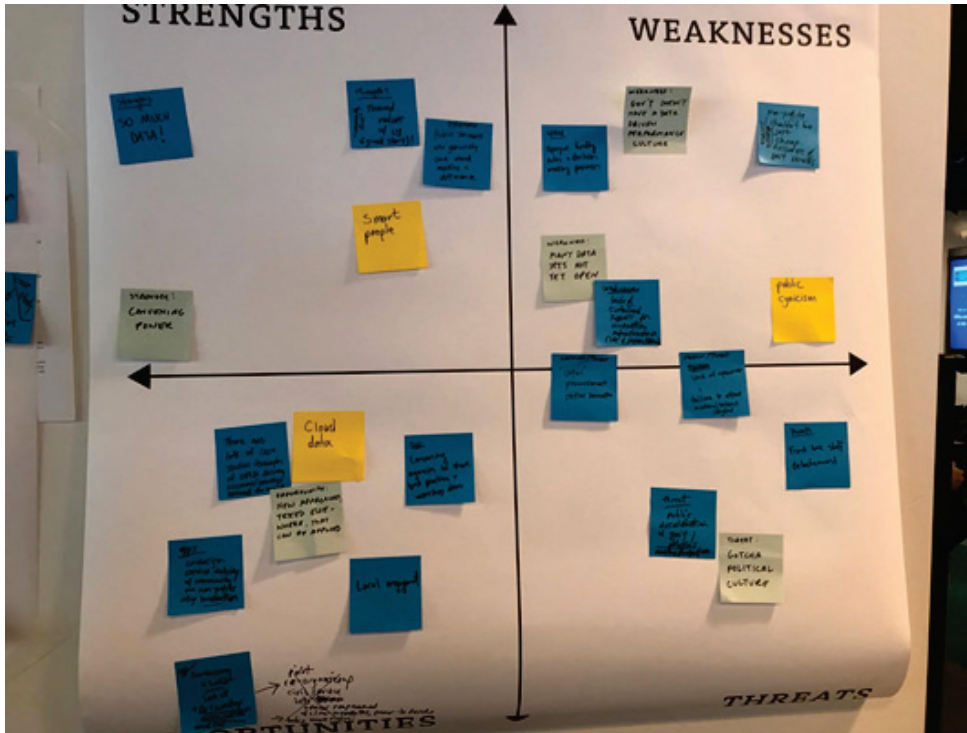
DELIVERING EVIDENCE-BASED, OUTCOME-FOCUSED POLICY TABLE #2 – S.W.O.T



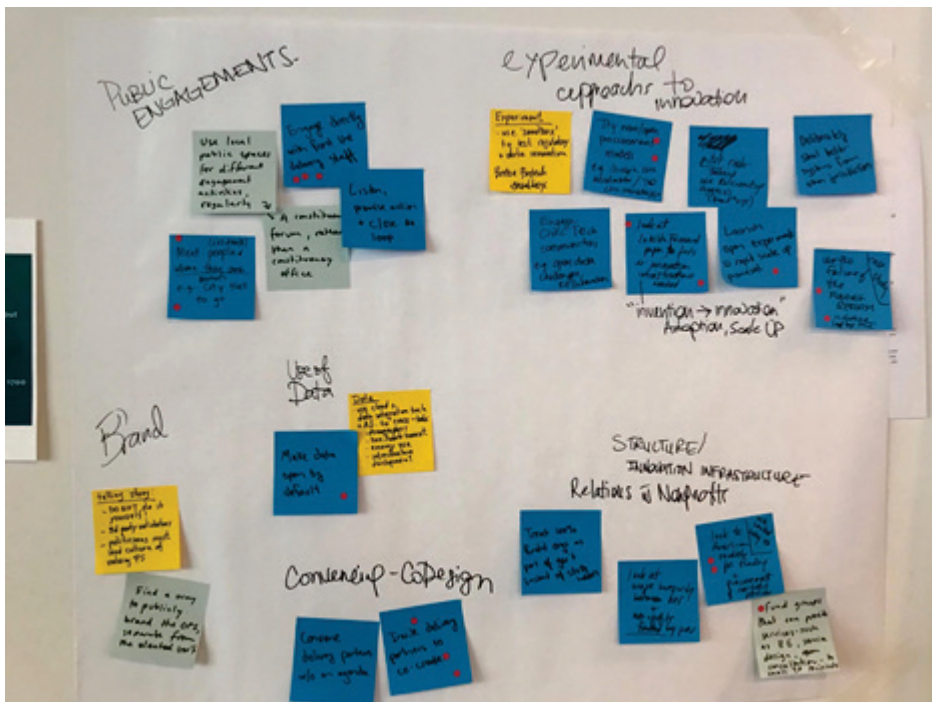
DELIVERING EVIDENCE-BASED, OUTCOME-FOCUSED POLICY TABLE #2 – IDEATION



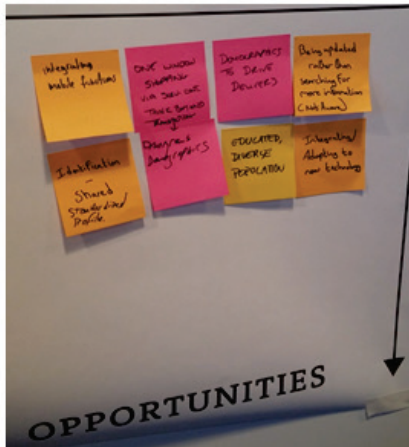
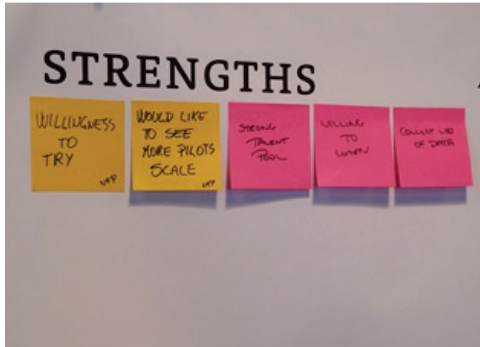
PROMOTING OPEN DELIVERY TABLE #1 – S.W.O.T



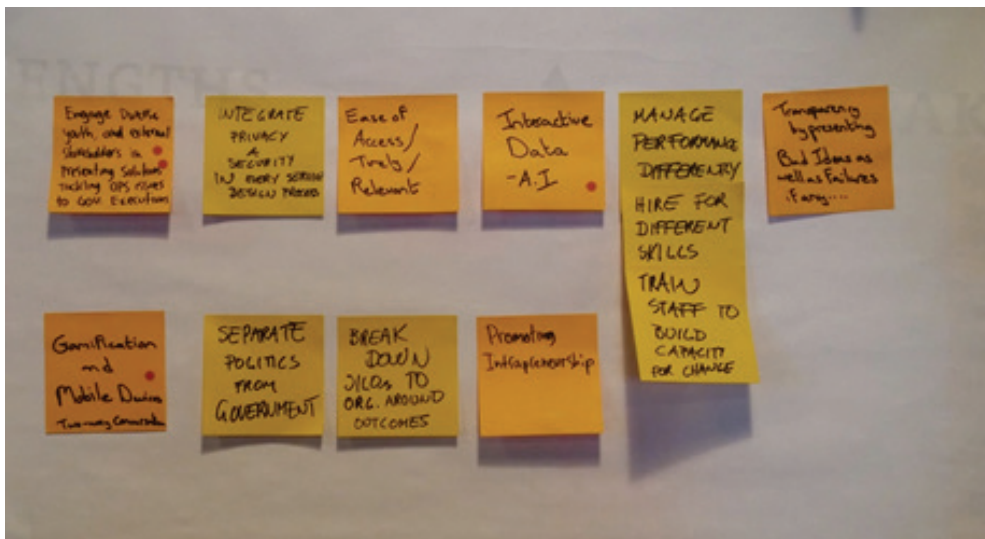
PROMOTING OPEN DELIVERY TABLE #1 – IDEATION



PROMOTING OPEN DELIVERY TABLE #2 – S.W.O.T



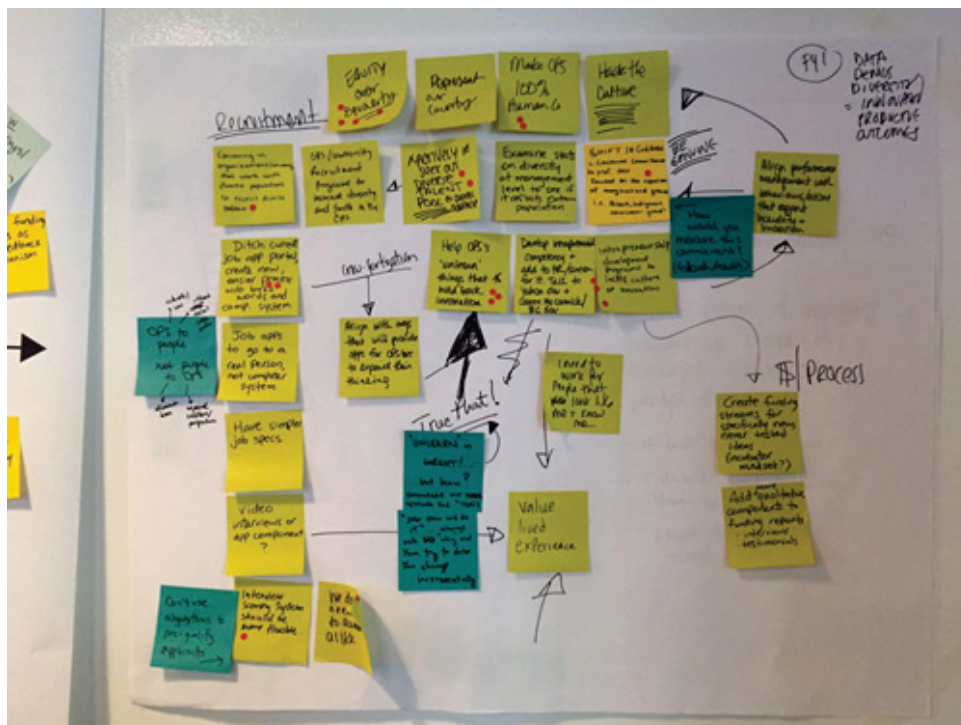
PROMOTING OPEN DELIVERY TABLE #2 – IDEATION



CULTIVATING AN OPEN AND INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SERVICE TABLE #1 – S.W.O.T



CULTIVATING AN OPEN AND INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SERVICE TABLE #1 – IDEATION



CULTIVATING AN OPEN AND INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SERVICE TABLE #2 – S.W.O.T



CULTIVATING AN OPEN AND INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SERVICE TABLE #2 – IDEATION

