



Municipal Information Systems Association

MISA Ontario  
Strategic Plan  
2015 – 2019

Delivering Member Value

# 1. Introduction & Background

## About MISA Ontario

MISA Ontario is a strong member Association comprising municipalities, vendors, partners and other levels of government who are interested in furthering and improving the use of technology in municipal government.

The Association was formally established in 1971 and MISA Ontario (alongside MISA BC, MISA Prairies, RIMQ and MISA Atlantic) is a founding member of MISA/ASIM Canada, which was formed in 2006.

The Association has a long history of facilitating information sharing and networking between those involved in the municipal IT industry through conferences, events, and web and periodical publications.

The Association has grown gradually since its creation, though membership has stabilized in recent years at around 100 municipalities and approximately 75 vendor organizations.

## Developing this Strategy

Following on from the previous five-year strategy covering the period from 2010 to 2014, this strategy was developed in an open and transparent fashion over a nine-month period in the second half of 2014, and early 2015.

All MISA Ontario members have been invited to participate in shaping the strategy – and many have actively done so, participating in interviews, workshops, online surveys and forums, and reviews. We are grateful to them for their participation.

The Strategy will be formally adopted at the 2015 AGM.

## 2. Vision, Mission & Value

### Vision

With this plan MISA Ontario introduces the following Vision statement.

***Promoting excellence in municipal Information and Communications Technology (ICT)***

### Mission

MISA Ontario's Mission remains unchanged from the previous strategic plan.

***Through information sharing and collaboration MISA Ontario provides leadership and promotes excellence in the delivery and transformation of municipal services using information and communication technologies***

The Board and members believe that the mission continues to accurately reflect the Association's mandate, reinforcing the importance of information sharing and collaboration in promoting excellence in municipal ICT – core aspects of MISA Ontario's activities.

### Value

While current members of MISA Ontario understand the inherent value of the Association, over the years MISA Ontario has struggled to articulate that value – to define its elevator pitch. Although MISA Ontario provides a wide range of products and services and has been actively involved in major projects and initiatives, member feedback consistently identifies that the value of MISA Ontario traces to three primary areas:

1. Networking and communities
2. Events and professional development
3. Shared knowledge – resources + toolkits

This Strategy targets these three programs. Today, MISA Ontario delivers value in each of these programs by providing the following products and services.

<b>Programs</b>	<b>Products and Services</b>
Networks and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Access to peers and communities of interest (online and offline via events)</li></ul>
Events and professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Conferences</li><li>● Regional events</li><li>● Municipal interface</li></ul>
Shared knowledge – resources + toolkits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Website</li></ul>

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|  | • Municipal interface |
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The membership has identified a variety of new ways to offer value in these three areas, and as part of this strategy, MISA Ontario plans to implement many of those ideas.

Going forward, MISA Ontario intends to position the Association as the community for Municipal IT professionals and solution providers, with the underlying value proposition that membership in the Association saves members time and money through its three primary programs:

**Networks and Communities**

MISA Ontario connects members and builds communities of the brightest and most progressive minds in municipal technology who willingly share ideas and experiences.

**Events and Professional Development**

MISA Ontario hosts premier events that educate and develop municipal IT professionals and showcase innovation and best practices.

**Shared Knowledge**

MISA Ontario identifies and shares municipal best practices and provides tools and resources that save municipal IT leaders and staff time.

Moving forward, the Association’s communications to existing members, and marketing to prospective members will also focus on these programs.

### 3. Strategic Goals

With such a broad membership – associate and municipal, global and local, upper and lower tier, large and small, urban and rural - there is no shortage of potential ideas and opportunities. However, as a small volunteer organization, with limited resources, the Association must identify and prioritize those that are most relevant and that offer the most value to members.

Successful organizations focus, and this strategy is designed to identify those activities that the membership and the board deem critical to the Association's success.

#### Strategic Goals

The overarching strategic goal for MISA Ontario is to focus on its members:

1. **Build member value:** the Association will work hard to deliver greater value to members of all types, adding new products and services designed to satisfy and delight current members, and attract new members.

Once significant progress has been achieved in building member value, the secondary goal, will be to:

2. **Grow MISA Ontario membership:** the Association will proactively work to expand membership of MISA Ontario by reaching out to non-members, smaller municipalities, and the vendor community. MISA Ontario will seek to extend its relevance to potential members from beyond the IT department, including GIS, Information Management, Digital, Business Transformation experts and other professionals working with technology in the municipal sector, by offering products and services tailored to their needs.

Goal 1 is intended to be the focus during 2015 to 2017 and Goal 2 in subsequent years.

#### Principles

A set of principles supports these goals, and guides how the Association will operate:

**Be sustainable:** the Association must be able to deliver on its promises and grow in a sustainable way, ensuring that funding is available to support the programs it implements, and importantly, only implementing programs for which the necessary funding has been fully identified.

**Be Open and Transparent:** This strategic plan has been developed through an open and transparent process. MISA Ontario is committed to operating openly and transparently

through its elections and decision-making, and will work to increase transparency with regard to finances.

**Balance Member Interests:** MISA Ontario will consistently work to balance the different needs and interests of its members (e.g. large and small, municipal and partner, urban and rural), thereby ensuring relevance and value to all members.

**Promote National and Inter-Chapter Collaboration:** Many of the programs identified by MISA Ontario (e.g. Technology Directory, Webinar program) could be shared with all MISA Chapters and arguably their value will be enhanced through the participation of municipalities across Canada.

MISA Ontario believes strongly in MISA/ASIM Canada and promoting cross-Chapter collaboration. MISA Ontario will therefore actively pursue and promote collaboration where it makes sense for its members (website, webinars), and encourages other Chapters to do the same.

### 3. Strategic Themes and Actions

#### Strategic Themes

The following 'strategic themes' describe MISA Ontario's focus over the coming five years. Initiatives within the themes will be prioritized by the Board, and tackled subject to resource and funding availability.

1. Events and professional development
2. Technology directory & benchmarking
3. Website revamp and resource library development
4. Best practices – guidance and tools development
5. Member involvement – Special Interest Groups
6. Member growth

#### Themes, Objectives and Actions

##### 1. Events and Professional Development

###### Theme Objective

Deliver a cohesive and relevant program of annual events and professional development activities for staff and leaders involved in delivering Municipal technology programs and initiatives.

###### Actions

- Improve the sustainability and quality of MISA Ontario conferences and events by:
  - Reducing burden on hosts by using professional MISA Ontario staff to organize and run events
  - Improving the relevance of MISA Ontario event content / programs by seeking input on the conference program from membership, and thus more accurately aligning the conference tracks with member interests.
  - Appealing to broader audiences by focusing less on IT operations, and more upon business innovation
  - Ongoing improvements to conference schedule to address over-scheduling and introduction of a 'buddy' system to assist new members
  - Reducing conference operating costs and building sustainable revenues (profitability) by:
    - Setting a standard budget for conference operation costs
    - Evaluating the incremental revenue potential of 'hosting' a conference in the same location, over multiple years
    - Leveraging accreditation as a hotel and car rental service
  - Increasing the participation of Associate members in event planning

- Reviewing the event co-branding policy
- Introduce a monthly webinar program at no cost to members, covering a range of topics including: member experiences, vendor showcases and IT leadership development
- Provide archived video of all MISA Ontario events online
- Investigate and implement web-streaming (and post event video archives) of MISA conferences
- Test the concept of a new 'Fall / Winter' conference through a Regional Event(s) in 2016, with a view to introducing a long term 'Fall / Winter conference'<sup>1</sup>
- Identify and signpost high quality, appropriate IT training & professional development programs for municipal IT staff and leadership that are available in the market (versus developing proprietary MISA programs).

## 2. Technology Directory and Benchmarking

### Theme Objective

Build a structured online database where municipal members can share information and experience with regard to systems and technologies, projects, and key aspects of IT service delivery (e.g. organization, staffing, governance, roles). Use the information collected to provide information and insights to all members about relevant aspects of municipal IT service delivery.

### Actions

- Partner with ALGIM (New Zealand) and other international partners to build an online Technology Directory in 2015
- Launch the Technology Directory to MISA Ontario members in 2015
- Execute a program to promote population of the database (Incentives, Inducements and community manager support)
- Build tools and process to promote municipal matchmaking – municipalities that use similar systems
- Conduct and present research (benchmarking, trends) on the data in the Technology Directory
- Leverage the Technology Directory to build a catalog of technology purchases (Procurement Awards) that have a piggyback clause allowing other agencies to consider

## 3. Website Revamp & Resource Library Creation

### Theme Objective

Establish MISA Ontario's websites and forums as the 'go-to' location for municipal staff to discuss and research technology questions, issues and opportunities. MISA Ontario is committed to continue working with MISA/ASIM Canada and other chapters to improving the website.

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<sup>1</sup> Suggested topic is Web, Digital, eServices, a market that we believe is currently underserved.



## Actions

- Hire a Community Manager (see section 4 for further details) to facilitate web and community improvements and stimulate MISA Ontario community activity (online and off).
- Reassign responsibility for management and operation of the website from the Web and Communications Committee to a MISA Ontario staff function (Community Manager and Webmaster). The Communications and Web Committee will continue to provide advice, oversight and feedback.
- In partnership with MISA/ASIM Canada and Chapters revamp the current website's information architecture and content (using the current technology), to improve navigation and ease of use
- Re-organize existing content (presentations, interface articles, etc.) and build subject-specific resource libraries (e.g. governance, policies, organization charts, job descriptions, information management, cloud service contracts)
- Augment resource libraries by actively searching out, posting and promoting good content and practices from members (e.g. policies, standards, job descriptions, organization charts, RFP's, requirements)
- Promote and grow MISA Ontario 'App Sharing'
- Explore the option of extending the MISA conference app, or implementing responsive design as a mobile app delivery solution for MISA
- Review MISA web technology platform

## 4. Best Practices – Guidance and Tools Development

### Theme Objective

Promote best practices and innovation in technology by sponsoring the development of municipal best practices materials such as guides, checklists and white papers.

### Actions

- Repackage and promote existing materials and toolkits
  - Good practices for Web Accessibility
  - Good practices for CASL compliance
- Promote and derive increased value from other membership and associations purchased by MISA on behalf of the membership
- Adjust MISA Ontario 'Call for Projects' process and funding in order to fund 'Best Practices' development. Allocate up to 15% of conference revenues to best practice content development.
- Poll the membership annually to seek input on relevant best practice topic areas; examples might include:
  - Good practices for managing IT services for smaller municipalities
  - Good practices for shared IT services
- Establish peer groups to compile best practice data (based on clear deliverables), and secure MISA Ontario funded 3<sup>rd</sup> party suppliers (research analyst, consultant, alumni member), to lead development of the material.
- Market / promote materials to members and non-members

## 5. Member Participation - Groups

### Theme Objective

Reduce the formality and requirement for outputs associated with SIG's. Stimulate and facilitate a vibrant set of communities online and offline that discuss important topics and share experiences. Capture the discussions so that others that follow may benefit from previous discussions.

### Actions

- Implement broadly available MISA Ontario collaboration tools to support ideation and collaboration within and across membership
- Community manager to play a role in stimulating / supporting Groups by
  - Instigating and participating in online discussion forums
  - Setting up tele/video-conferences as required
- Repurpose existing SIG's as discussion Groups, without required outputs
- Community manager to promote / surface Groups, topics and discussions to broader membership through communication channels
- Explore the concept of a 'MISA Ontario Corps' – a pool of volunteers (including Alumni members) that are willing to contribute to MISA Ontario activities and initiatives (such as participating in groups, working on projects, assisting at events)
- Review how to most effectively engage retired members of MISA Ontario (Alumni members). Consider a range of options, including Alumni member on the board, and whether Alumni members may Chair MISA Ontario Committees).

## 6. Member Growth

### Theme Objective

Grow membership of MISA Ontario across all membership types, and extend the reach of MISA Ontario membership for existing and future members.

### Actions

- Develop a detailed MISA Ontario communications and marketing plan with a focus on:
  - More effective communication and engagement with current members
  - More effective communication of MISA's value to non-members
  - More effectively influence and/or advocate to senior municipal government leaders on the importance of technology
- Formally report to the Board on member numbers and trends on a quarterly basis
- Develop and execute a member growth program for municipal members
- Develop and execute a program to increase the reach of MISA to all municipal staff (e.g. Executive, Councillors, IT staff, Web, GIS and Information Management staff) for existing members (e.g. using advertising, incentives)

- Develop and execute a member growth program for partners, including a focus on reducing member churn

### Adding Value through New and Improved Products and Services

The Association intends to increase member value by adding products and services to its primary programs – Networks and communities, Events and professional development, and Shared Knowledge. The table below summarizes:

Program	New Products and Services
Networks and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community manager to stimulate community activity and interactions</li> <li>• Expanded opportunities to participate in groups</li> <li>• Technology to support group interaction</li> <li>• ‘MISA Ontario Corps’</li> <li>• Membership growth</li> </ul>
Events and professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly webinars</li> <li>• More relevant / targeted conference content</li> <li>• Archived video of MISA Ontario events</li> <li>• Web streaming for conferences</li> <li>• Fall/Winter conference</li> </ul>
Shared knowledge – resources + toolkits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved website &amp; MISA App</li> <li>• Improved surfacing / promotion of existing services and content</li> <li>• Creation of online resource libraries</li> <li>• Development of municipal toolkits, best practices and case studies</li> <li>• Technology directory &amp; benchmarking research</li> <li>• Increased App Sharing</li> </ul>

### What MISA Ontario Will Not Do

“Focus is having the discipline to say no to a hundred great ideas if they are off strategy.” This Strategy is focused on adding value to the membership. Accordingly, some priority items from the previous strategic plan have been de-emphasized.

- Advocacy program – MISA Ontario will continue to represent and advocate on behalf of its members working through channels such as the Public Sector Chief Information Officer Council (PSCIOC) on an as needed basis. However, a formal advocacy program has not and will not be established.
- Projects – MISA Ontario continues to support, promote and facilitate collaboration on projects between members, for example the social housing

project. However funding previously directed towards the ‘Call for Projects’ will be reallocated to other areas of strategic importance (including the development of best practice material)

- Partnerships – MISA Ontario will continue to partner with other Associations, groups and events, but with a more targeted emphasis on the three areas of member value.

A number of other areas of opportunity were also considered, evaluated, and ultimately rejected by the Board. In most cases this reflected the limitations of a volunteer organization in terms of capacity and/or skillsets required to effectively pursue them. Some of these ideas included:

- Developing collaborative procurement program<sup>2</sup>
- Developing and delivering education, professional training or certification programs<sup>2</sup>
- Developing a MISA Ontario intern program
- Establishing a MISA Ontario consulting group
- Establishing MISA Ontario as an IT Service provider (e.g. data centre operations)

These ideas were discounted because the Association is not currently in a position to tackle them. Any or all of them may be revisited in the next Strategic Plan term – 2020 – 2025.

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<sup>2</sup> MISA Ontario’s role will be to direct members to providers of services (such as training providers, or BPS procurement agencies) that may be useful / beneficial to its members

## 4. Executing the Strategy

### Leadership

Leadership for the implementation of the plan comes from the Board as a whole, with the President and Vice President roles spearheading many of the initiatives. The work plan outlines the Board and MISA Ontario staff leads for each of the individual strategic actions. Further work with the board will seek to allocate specific responsibilities to Regional Directors to execute the plan.

The Executive Director, who is responsible for tracking overall progress against the strategic plan, provides continuity and program management. The Board will review progress reports provided by the Executive Director quarterly, and the President will present an annual progress report to the AGM.

### MISA Ontario Staffing

The demands of running the Association continue to grow, placing an onerous burden on board and committee members. The Association has recognized that execution is its primary challenge. While board members can direct and oversee programs, in practice they have little time to deliver programs.

Since adding the Executive Director role in 2011, MISA Ontario has sustainably added a number of additional staff positions to the organization, including:

- Event Coordinator
- Bookkeeper
- Webmaster (part-time contract position)

This has clearly illustrated that ongoing operational demands require professional staffing to ensure effective execution.

### Executive Director

The appointment of the Executive Director, a major outcome of the previous five-year strategy, has had a significant (and desirable) impact on the effectiveness of the operations of the Association. Many new programs and services have been implemented since the creation of this position.

However, much of the work of the Executive Director has been administrative in nature – offloading work from Board members. With new staff roles being added to the organization, it is an appropriate time for the Board to reassess the Executive Director role with a view to a more strategic, less administrative focus. Alison Hermansen, the Association’s current ED has a contract that runs until March 2018, so recruitment for this role needs to begin in mid-2017

## Community Manager

Reflecting the positive impact of additional staff on execution, this strategy recommends the addition of one new position: a Community Manager.

Effectively managing communications, stimulating community discussions and activity, facilitating group discussions, and organizing and promoting the resources on the website have long been a challenge for the Association. Currently these areas are the responsibility of the Executive Director. A Community Manager with experience in online and offline community building, social media, web, and marketing, would be tasked with fulfilling the following roles:

- Facilitate Association communications
- Develop the website as a valued community resource
- Stimulate and support the web community
- Support discussion groups and other member activities
- Manage vendor offers / discounts

Note that many of the actions and products outlined in the work plan hinge on the ability of the Association to fund this position. Finding sustainable ways to fund this role on an ongoing basis will be critical. However, recognizing the importance of this role, in the short term the Association does plan to use one-time funds to establish this position as a 1 year contract position at  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{3}{4}$  FTE level in 2016.

## Operational Effectiveness Improvements

In the course of developing the strategy, a number of non-strategic, but nonetheless important items that need to be addressed were identified. Accordingly this strategy recommends the following actions:

- Review and revise MISA governance and bylaws, including:
  - Formalizing the role of the Executive Committee
  - Defining clear guidelines for Board 'in camera' sessions
  - Reviewing committee mandates and revising operating rules for committees (with a particular focus on the Events Committee to ensure that the board and MISA Ontario staff have stronger control over the management and profitability of MISA Ontario events)
  - Formalizing an annual review process to ensure effective operation of each committee
  - Review the role of the Regional Directors and assign roles to support the implementation of the strategic plan.
  - Reviewing MISA Ontario Board requirement for legal counsel
  - Reviewing the role of the External Relations Committee to determine whether an alternative approach may be more effective
  - Reviewing policy on funding Board and other MISA members travel and expenses related to attendance at partner and sister association events
  - Reviewing roles and responsibilities of Partner representatives

- Review the concept of a MISA Alumni board representative
- Reviewing MISA Ontario staff arrangements
  - Formalizing reporting relationships of MISA Ontario staff (to the Executive Director)
  - Reviewing and distributing work assignments between MISA Ontario staff to ensure appropriate use of skills and resources (e.g. re-distribute administrative tasks from the Executive Director)
  - Developing a succession plan for MISA Ontario staff (and board members)
- Reviewing financial and other processes
  - Developing a Long Term Financial Plan (including investment management policy)
  - Increasing transparency to the membership on MISA revenue and expenditures (consider an info graphic similar to a ‘Where do my Taxes go’)
  - Conducting a process review for internal controls and financial approvals
  - Develop an information management plan for MISA Ontario’s electronic and paper documents and records
- Developing an evaluation process and criteria to help the Board in assessing the value of potential partnerships and event co-branding opportunities.

### **MISA/ASIM Canada and Chapter Collaboration**

Consistent with the ‘National First’ principle introduced above, MISA Ontario will need to play a stronger, more active role in bolstering and promoting collaboration across Chapters and with MISA/ASIM Canada. MISA Ontario will play an active role in demonstrating how a national approach can bring added benefit to all chapters.

Given MISA/ASIM Canada’s limited revenue streams, it will be necessary in some cases for MISA Ontario to subsidize MISA/ASIM Canada activities if they are to be viable. MISA Ontario will lead by example, reflecting the Board’s strong belief in the considerable benefits that accrue to the MISA Ontario community when participation is broadened across the country .

### **Funding the Strategy**

A core principle of the Association is to be sustainable. As a non-profit organization, the Board is committed to operating a balanced budget: where revenues offset expenses. The board has set out a balanced budget for 2015 - 2017.

In terms of revenue sources, membership dues represent less than 15% of MISA Ontario’s revenue while over 85% derives from events. This dependence on conference revenue has long concerned Board members and initial discussions suggested that revenue diversification was an important issue to be addressed by this strategy. However, after extensive debate at the Board, the Association has determined that it is comfortable with the primary source of revenue coming from conferences and events.

That being the case, the strategy focuses on sustaining and making conferences and events more profitable, by more effectively controlling the costs of operating the events. This is intended to not only deliver better and more consistent events, but also to subsidize the other activities of the Association that deliver member value.

In the context of the balanced budget, this Strategy identifies a number of new expenses which must be covered, the new Community Manager and the development of a marketing strategy are just two examples. To offset these new costs the Association plans to pursue two approaches: minimizing operating expenses and increasing revenues.

### **Minimizing Operating Expenses**

The Association will explore a range of opportunities to reduce current operating expenses. Some currently identified areas that the board will explore include:

<b>Opportunity</b>	<b>Potential Cost Saving</b>	<b>Year</b>
Credit card processing cost savings	-5000	2016
Set conference operating cost limits	-20,000	2016
Chapter payment processing cost recovery	-5,000	2016
Consider reduction in Webmaster time allocation	-5,000	2017
Consider ED time reduction from 1 FTE to 0.8 FTE	-27,000	2017

### **Increasing Revenues**

The Association will also explore the following actions to increase revenues:

<b>Opportunity</b>	<b>Potential Revenue</b>	<b>Year</b>
Introduce a new Fall/Winter conference	35,000	2016
MISA accredited hotel and car rental agency	5,000	2016



Increased attendance at conferences and events	20,000	2018
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The overriding principle of sustainability guides the Association. Thus, excepting the initial 1 year contract for the Community Manager position which will be funded using one-time funds, all other Strategic Plan initiatives are dependent upon sufficient funds being available.

### **Moving Forward**

As we've articulated through this strategy, the Board is fully committed to delivering increased value to its current and future members. We want current members to be wowed by the value that they receive for the price of their membership, and we want to be able to tell prospective members about the great products and services they can expect to receive if they become a member.

This Strategy provides a clearer mandate for the Association - to promote excellence in municipal ICT - and brings a focus on a smaller set of defined value areas. These areas are the ones that membership have identified as the key benefits of membership.

To move forward in these areas the board sees a need for a number of sustainable investments, for example in a new Community Manager position, to support initiatives designed to improve current services and introduce new products and services - such as groups, the technology directory, and best practice guides. The plan also envisages increased partnership and collaboration with MISA/ASIM Canada and MISA Chapters.

The strength of MISA Ontario is in its membership, your engagement and participation in the community. We believe that MISA Ontario is stronger than ever - but also think that we can do better. This Strategy positions the Association to engage the community more, deliver more value, and continue to grow stronger, in a sustainable way, over the next five years.

**[Please also follow this link to review the multi-year workplan associated with this strategy.](#)**

## With Thanks

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