ecampus
Ontario

Ontario Working Together:
Collaborative foundations for virtual learning innovation

The Virtual Learning Strategy (VLS) has brought together Indigenous Institutes, colleges, and universities. The VLS prioritizes collaboration for sector transformation that impacts all institutions.

The Virtual Learning Strategy is built on three key pillars:

Being the future

Being a lifelong learner

Being a global leader

This report explores the collaborations enabled by the VLS to co-create digital-by-design futures for postsecondary education in Ontario.

In spirit of collaboration, VLS project teams have done an outstanding effort to share their experience and insights through quarterly reports. Their contributions help us understand the nature and impact of collaborations enabled by the VLS.

By prioritizing collaboration, the VLS:

✓ promotes sector-wide digital transformation,

✓ ensures effective, efficient, and strategic use of virtual learning resources,

✓ encourages use, re-use, and re-mixing of VLS-developed materials,

✓ increases the reach of impact to all Ontario publicly-funded institutions,

✓ positions the Ontario postsecondary community as a leader in the global market.

100%
Ontario postsecondary sector engagement
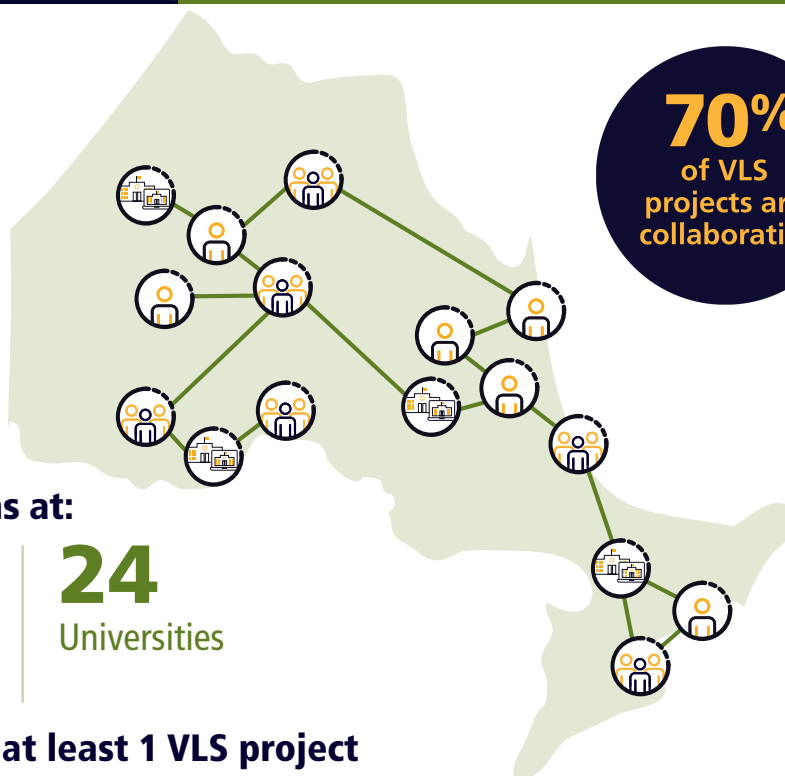
70%
of VLS projects are collaborative

100%
of VLS-funded materials
will be available for collaborative use across Ontario's public postsecondary sector

Individuals and teams at:

9
Indigenous Institutes

22
Colleges

24
Universities

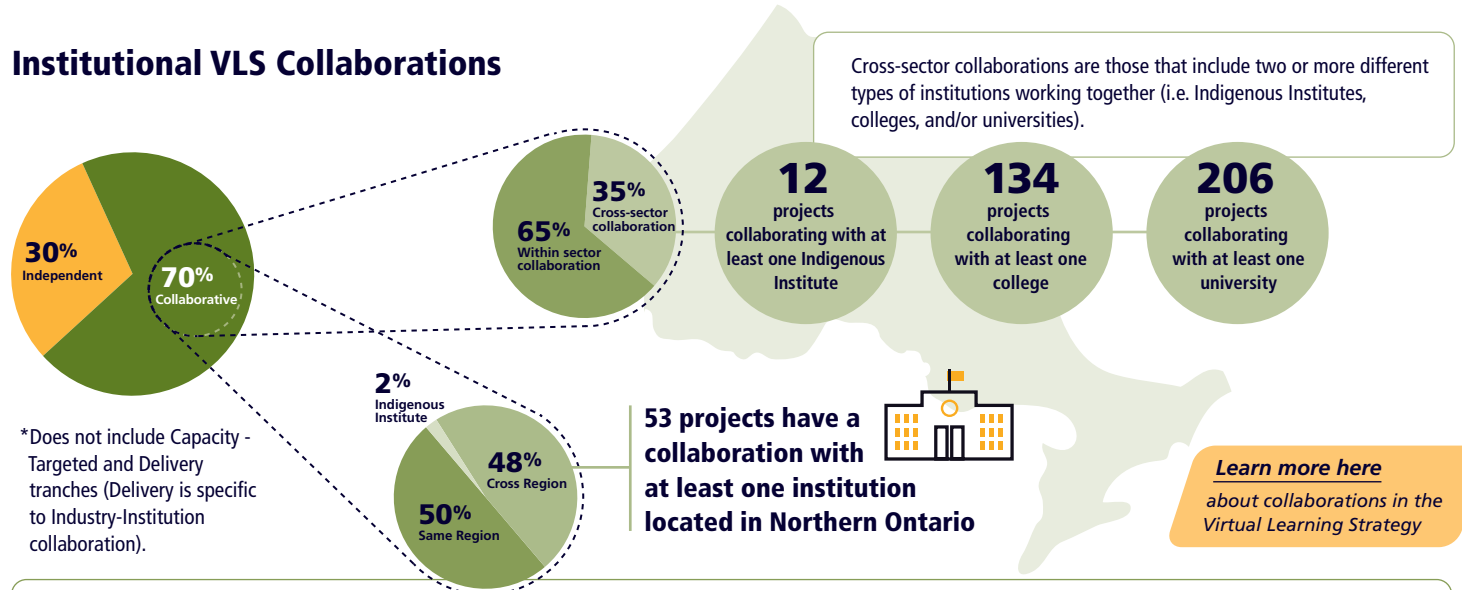**are collaborating on at least 1 VLS project**

VLS Collaborations

The VLS is investing in:

1. Developing digital content including courses, programs, resources, and micro-credentials
2. Enhancing digital fluency by creating supports & resources for educators and learners
3. Building digital capacity through wraparound services and marketing

A majority of VLS projects were collaborative efforts across regions and sectors. Collaboration occurred between postsecondary institutions and also between postsecondary institutions and industry. The graphics below highlight the levels of collaboration by Ontario postsecondary institutions through VLS projects.
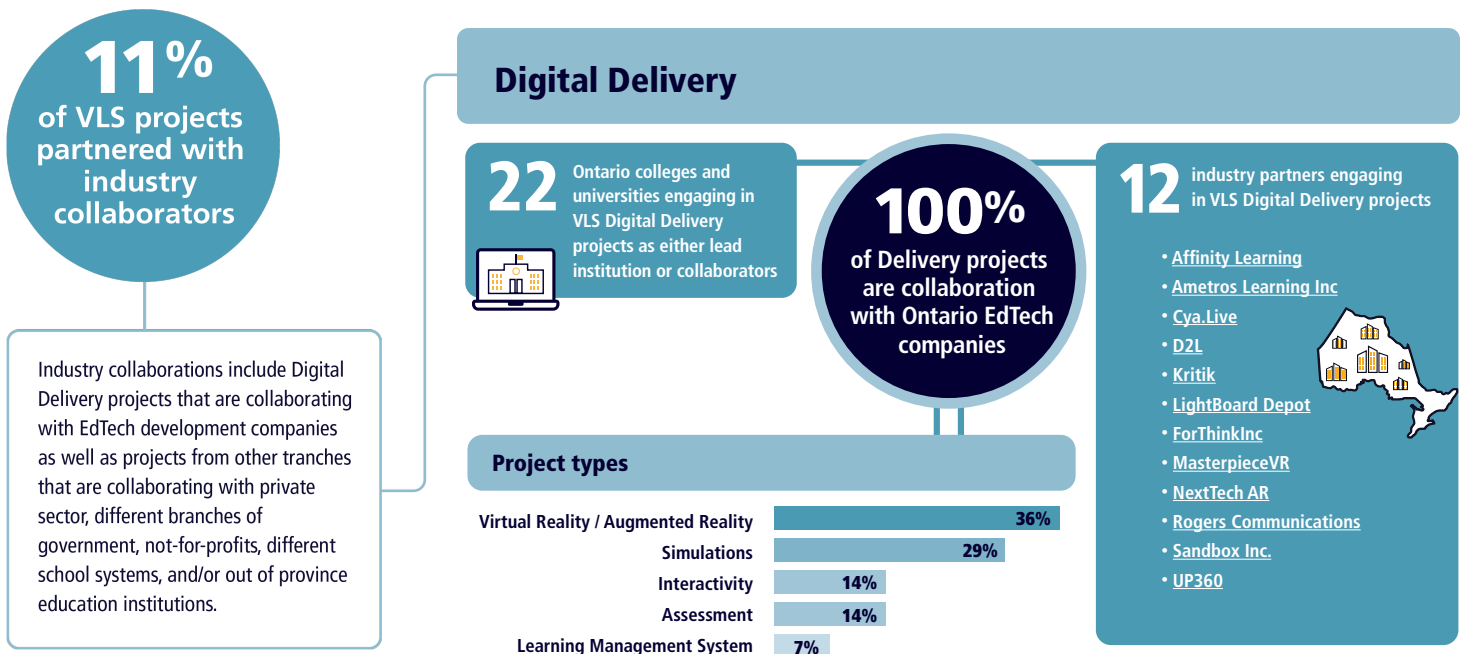
Institutional VLS Collaborations

Cross-sector collaborations are those that include two or more different types of institutions working together (i.e. Indigenous Institutes, colleges, and/or universities).

30% Independent

70% Collaborative

35% Cross-sector collaboration

65% Within sector collaboration

12 projects collaborating with at least one Indigenous Institute

134 projects collaborating with at least one college

206 projects collaborating with at least one university

*Does not include Capacity - Targeted and Delivery tranches (Delivery is specific to Industry-Institution collaboration).

2% Indigenous Institute

48% Cross Region

50% Same Region

53 projects have a collaboration with at least one institution located in Northern Ontario

Learn more here
about collaborations in the Virtual Learning Strategy

Cross-region collaborations are those that include two or more institutions from different Ontario regions working together. Projects lead by Indigenous Institutes are listed separately in recognition of Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination as described in Article 3 of the United Nation's Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Institutions and Industry VLS Collaborations

11% of VLS projects partnered with industry collaborators

Industry collaborations include Digital Delivery projects that are collaborating with EdTech development companies as well as projects from other tranches that are collaborating with private sector, different branches of government, not-for-profits, different school systems, and/or out of province education institutions.

Digital Delivery

22 Ontario colleges and universities engaging in VLS Digital Delivery projects as either lead institution or collaborators

100% of Delivery projects are collaboration with Ontario EdTech companies

12 industry partners engaging in VLS Digital Delivery projects

- Affinity Learning
- Ametros Learning Inc
- Cya.Live
- D2L
- Kritik
- LightBoard Depot
- ForThinkInc
- MasterpieceVR
- NextTech AR
- Rogers Communications
- Sandbox Inc.
- UP360

Project types

Project type	Percentage
Virtual Reality / Augmented Reality	36%
Simulations	29%
Interactivity	14%
Assessment	14%
Learning Management System	7%

Collaborative Engagement across the VLS

The findings presented in this report were collected from VLS project teams via the third quarterly report (Q3). VLS project teams were asked to respond to a series of quantitative and qualitative (open-ended) questions related to their collaborative projects. Open-ended responses were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis. The major themes were then synthesized and presented in this report. The major themes and aggregate quantitative findings were triangulated and are presented together to share and evidence-informed narrative about how the VLS principles and pillars are being realized through collaborations.

Levels of Collaborative Engagement in VLS Projects

VLS project teams were asked to rate the level of engagement of other institutions participating in their project.

78% of VLS project collaborators are positively engaged.

Collaboration styles undertaken by institutions

Tasks distributed and coordinated according to each institution's capacity and expertise

Shared tasks guided by experts to promote capacity development among collaborators

Organization strategies used by institutions

Assigned team management responsibilities	Committees
Assigned responsibilities for hiring talent	Consulting and advisory panels

Collaborative project phases and tasks undertaken by institutions

Ideation
Including direction, brainstorming, and planning

Inclusion
Ensuring materials are AODA compliant and engaging in Indigenization processes

Iteration and evaluation
Including user testing, pilots, and project evaluation strategies

Implementation
Including product publication and hosting, dissemination, and interdisciplinary integrations

Learning design
Including defining learning outcomes, content frameworks, and providing pedagogical expertise

Content development and materials design
Including instructional design guides, content development, content editing, translation, multimedia production, contacting experienced interviewees, and providing technical support

"All collaborators have been highly engaged starting with research and content development, weekly collaborative working meetings, co-design with our learner supports, and final reviews & edits. This was a true collaboration and the proof is in the quality of this resource given tight timelines and budget." – VLS project team

Learnings from VLS Collaborations

The collaborative development of VLS materials brought together a wide range of expertise and perspectives that led to building new connections and strengthening existing ones in the Ontario postsecondary ecosystem. In this section, we explore the collaboration challenges that project teams faced, the strategies they used to overcome them, and the learnings they uncovered through the experience.

Learnings

Strengthening Relationships in the postsecondary ecosystem

Through supportive collaboration, teams were able to expand their network by building on existing relationships, make new connections, and plan for future collaborations.

Teams also noted fruitful results from inter-institutional and cross-region collaborations.

Enthusiastic and Fun Project Teams

Teams were pleasantly surprised by the levels of engagement and enthusiasm for the projects. Many have indicated that the collaboration was a positive and enriching experience that brought joy to the process.

Opportunity to Build Capacity

Teams reported new opportunities to build capacity in various areas, including but not limited to:

• Project management
• Innovative uses of technology
• New knowledge
• Remote work

Incorporating a Wide Range of Perspectives

Teams were positively surprised about working with a variety of people, as enabled by the VLS. These stakeholders include, but are not limited to:

• Local communities
• Learners
• People who speak a different language
• People who have different expertise than their own

Strategies

Tools

Teams reported the use of a variety of tools, including:

• file systems for sharing work,
• online meeting spaces for asynchronous work,
• online scheduling tools for synchronous meetings.

Best practices for using these tools included providing lead time for meetings and deliverables, keeping meetings efficient, hosting bilingual meetings, and sending regular emails.

People

Teams utilized different organizational strategies to mitigate challenges they encountered, including:

• creating subgroups within their team,
• including a project manager on their team,
• changing designated project roles when needed,
• continuing previous partnerships from other projects into the VLS.

Process

Establishing flexible and practical processes was a common strategy used among teams. Processes facilitated:

• consistent feedback flow
• redistribution of workloads
• review of materials.

Project teams enacted these processes both at the onset of the VLS and during project completion.

Attitudes

The culture among projects teams included the following attitudes that enabled success:

• clear, consistent, and open communication,
• flexibility,
• ability to respectfully disagree, discuss the issue presented, and cordially come to a solution.

Challenges

Securing Institutional Resources

Securing human, financial, and technological resources can be a challenge to developing successful partnerships. Resources issues were compounded by operational processes and policies that differed across institutions.

Finding Time

Finding sufficient time and meeting the project EOI timeline was identified as a significant challenge.

Solidifying Appropriate Partnerships

Finding and engaging the appropriate collaborators who are specific domain experts and stakeholders can be challenging.

Balancing Competing Priorities

Balancing the project work with other professional and personal responsibilities was a significant challenge to project completion.

Managing COVID-19 Repercussions

Pandemic related stress and fatigue, in conjunction with public health measures limiting in-person work, was a persistent barrier to maintaining momentum.
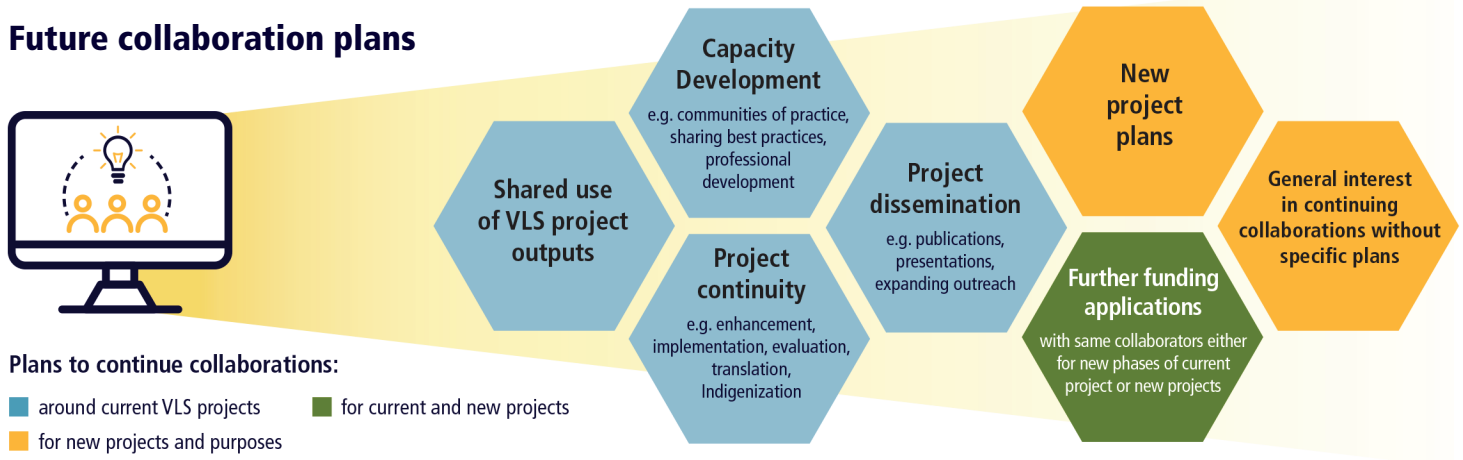
Reaching Team Consensus

The cross-functional nature of VLS project teams led to dissenting views and values coming together.
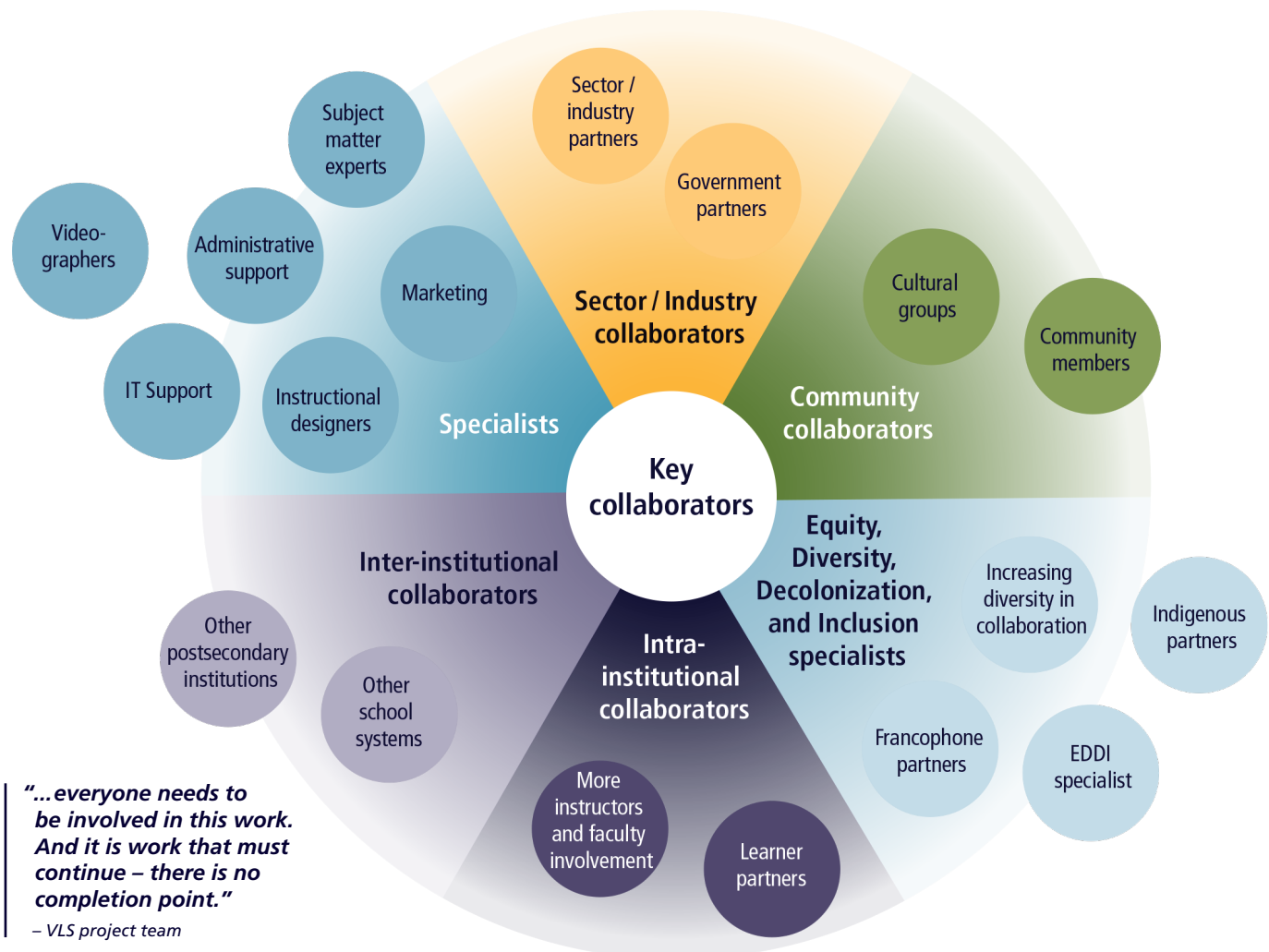
Building on VLS Collaborative Momentum

In this section, we explore some future collaboration plans envisioned by VLS project teams, and the types of collaborators that were identified as essential for collaborative success.

Future collaboration plans

Capacity Development
e.g. communities of practice, sharing best practices, professional development

Shared use of VLS project outputs

Project dissemination
e.g. publications, presentations, expanding outreach

Project continuity
e.g. enhancement, implementation, evaluation, translation, Indigenization

New project plans

Further funding applications
with same collaborators either for new phases of current project or new projects

General interest in continuing collaborations without specific plans

Plans to continue collaborations:
- around current VLS projects
- for new projects and purposes
- for current and new projects

Key stakeholders for collaborative success

After engaging in the first round of the Virtual Learning Strategy, project teams have identified key stakeholders that they consider important for successful collaborations.

Subject matter experts

Videographers

Administrative support

Marketing

IT Support

Instructional designers

Specialists

Sector / industry partners

Government partners

Sector / Industry collaborators

Cultural groups

Community members

Community collaborators

Key collaborators

Inter-institutional collaborators

Other postsecondary institutions

Other school systems

Intra-institutional collaborators

Equity, Diversity, Decolonization, and Inclusion specialists

Increasing diversity in collaboration

Indigenous partners

Francophone partners

EDDI specialist

More instructors and faculty involvement

Learner partners

"...everyone needs to be involved in this work. And it is work that must continue – there is no completion point."
– VLS project team

Some of the data presented in this infographic has been rounded and represent approximations. If you have questions or would like more information, please contact vls@ecampusontario.ca.

This report is the fourth in a series of five Virtual Learning Strategy (VLS) Focus Reports that tell data-driven stories about the VLS investment. VLS Focus Reports are accompanied by a series of five Foresight Reports. The Foresight Reports expand on the VLS pillar of Being the Future by exploring maturing trends in the Ontario postsecondary sector and situating the VLS in the futures of virtual learning. Visit the Virtual Learning Strategy website to read the reports collection.

2021-22 VLS Reports Outline

● Focus Report   ● Foresight Report

Launching the VLS

Connecting to Create

Hybrid Futures

Tomorrow's Learners

Ontario Open

Lifelong Learning

Shaping the Future Workforce

Ontario Working Together

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