



PEI Certified
Organic Producers
Co-operative

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN 2025-2028

Prepared for the PEI Certified Organic Producers Co-operative

Board of Directors

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Executive Summary

The PEI Certified Organic Producers Cooperative (COPC) is entering a critical year of renewal and repositioning. To respond to ongoing challenges—including financial instability, reduced membership engagement, and organizational drift—the Board has developed a Strategic Action Plan to stabilize operations and refocus COPC’s efforts where they matter most.

Through focused consultation and strategic reflection, COPC has committed to five core pillars that will guide its recovery and long-term impact:

One Organic Gathering: Reinstating the Annual Organic Forum as a high-impact hub for collaboration.

Partnerships for Impact: Strengthening and formalizing relationships with key allies to avoid duplication and expand reach.

Financial Sustainability: Building a lean, transparent model that reduces dependence on large, complex grants.

Advocacy Leadership: Championing organic priorities in policy discussions through a solutions-oriented approach.

Governance and Board Engagement: Enhancing board operations to improve participation and ensure long-term leadership capacity.

This renewed focus positions COPC to serve as a vital convener, advocate, and amplifier for PEI’s organic sector—operating efficiently and sustainably in a changing landscape.

Background and Context

By 2024, COPC had reached a crossroads. Operational capacity was severely diminished, finances were unstable, and its role in the organic sector had become unclear. Without intervention, the

organization risked collapse—leaving a critical gap in representation for certified organic producers on Prince Edward Island.

Recognizing this, the Board launched a comprehensive strategic planning process in early 2025. This included:

- A sector-wide survey with a 40% response rate from certified producers,
- In-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including ACORN, COG, Growers Station, government staff, and former board members,
- Two facilitated strategic planning sessions with the Board.

These consultations revealed a consistent message: while the organic sector is evolving, COPC's unique role as a connector and advocate remains important. The new Strategic Action Plan is designed to meet that need—with clarity of purpose, lean operations, and a strong foundation for future collaboration.

Why Change Was Necessary: Key Challenges

Declining Membership & Financial Instability

COPC's financial difficulties are directly tied to a shrinking membership base. As the number of certified organic farms on PEI has declined, so too has revenue from membership dues. Without the financial resources to meet provincial grant cost-sharing requirements, COPC has relied heavily on short-term, project-based funding—an approach that has not delivered long-term stability. At the same time, farmers cite certification barriers, administrative burdens, and financial pressures as reasons for stepping back from certification—and, by extension, from COPC.

Leadership and Staffing Gaps

Leadership turnover struck just as COPC's financial reality became clear. The newly hired replacement executive had to lay themselves off within a year, leaving the organization without staff for most of 2024. Day-to-day operations ground to a halt, and the volunteer board—already stretched thin—faced increasing pressure. A series of board chair resignations left new members scrambling to keep the organization afloat during peak growing season. Critical decisions were delayed until December 2024, when the Department of Agriculture provided program funding to support this strategic planning process.

An Unclear Role in a Changing Sector

With organizations like ACORN, Growers Station, Canadian Organic Growers, and commodity groups stepping into areas COPC once led, questions emerged about COPC's unique value. How can it continue to serve organic producers in ways that complement—not duplicate—other efforts?

Mission Drift

In recent years, COPC pivoted toward research-based project funding as a survival strategy. While this kept the organization running, it moved COPC away from its founding mission. The hiring of a

research coordinator instead of an executive director was a turning point. Though research has value, members voiced concern that it came at the expense of COPC’s core functions: **networking, community building, and advocacy**. The takeaway is clear—funding opportunities must support, not redefine, the organization’s mission.

What Producers Value Most

Through surveys and interviews, producers clearly identified what they value most from COPC:

- **Convening farmers and building community.**
- **Representing organic interests to government and industry.**
- **Serving as a strong voice for the sector—even with limited programming.**

The message was consistent: a **smaller, focused COPC** is better than an overstretched one.

From Board Vision to Strategic Priorities

In early 2025, the Board reviewed two formal scenarios for COPC’s future—“**Downsize & Focus**” and “**Wind-Down**”—outlined in a Strategic Memo (see Appendix). After in-depth discussion and reflection, the Board endorsed the *Downsize & Focus* model as the most viable and mission-aligned option under current conditions.

COPC will no longer attempt to do everything, but will concentrate on what it does best: **convening the organic community, maintaining a visible voice in policy discussions, and strengthening partnerships that benefit Island farmers.**

This strategic shift includes:

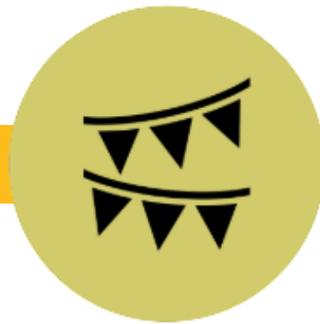
- One high-impact annual gathering (*the Organic Forum*) as the focal point for sector connection and alignment.
- Streamlined governance and operations, including quarterly board meetings and simplified roles for directors.
- Clear advocacy goals, grounded in community feedback and regular communication with the Department of Agriculture.
- Strong partnerships—especially with ACORN and Growers Station—to support shared priorities and avoid duplication.

- A simple, sustainable financial model anchored by targeted grants, community sponsorships, and low administrative overhead.

To ensure these commitments are actionable, they have been organized into five strategic pillars, which can guide COPC's work over the course of the next several years. The Strategic Action Matrix that complements this report provides a comprehensive action list breakdown to guide the organization's activities for the next year.

The Path Forward: Five Strategic Pillars

COPC's renewed direction focuses on what matters most—connection, representation, and a strong, unified voice for organic agriculture. These five pillars will guide COPC's actions and ensure its work remains impactful and sustainable.



1. One Organic Gathering

Vision:

An annual, can't-miss event that brings the organic community together to celebrate, connect, and shape the future of organic farming on PEI.

Each year, the Organic Forum becomes the heartbeat of PEI's organic sector—a vibrant day of learning, connection, and inspiration. More than just an AGM, it's where new farmers find mentors, friendships are renewed, and the sector's most important conversations happen over shared meals and big ideas.

Why It Matters:

With market fragmentation and the rise of competing labels like *regenerative* and *spray-free*, certified organic producers need a space to stay connected and keep their shared identity strong. This gathering ensures that organic farming remains visible, vibrant, and future-focused.



2. Strategic Partnerships

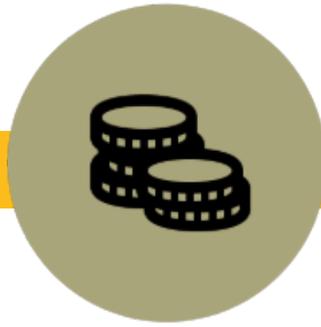
Vision:

Strong collaborations that amplify COPC’s impact while sharing resources and reducing duplication.

In a changing sector, COPC’s strength lies in working alongside allies like Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network (ACORN), Growers Station, and Canadian Organic Growers (COG). Together, we can co-host events, share staffing, and present a united voice in policy conversations—doing more for producers without stretching resources thin.

Why It Matters:

With limited funding and volunteer capacity, partnership is the most effective way to achieve big goals. By working collaboratively, COPC remains relevant and influential while staying financially and operationally lean.



3. Financial Sustainability

Vision:

A lean, realistic financial model that supports core operations and ensures COPC’s long-term resilience.

COPC will focus on predictable, sustainable funding through strategic partnerships, operational grants, and modest fundraising initiatives—freeing the organization from the instability of complex project grants and fluctuating membership dues.

Why It Matters:

The old funding model no longer works for small, volunteer-led organizations. A simpler, more predictable financial approach ensures COPC can continue serving producers without overextending resources or depending on unstable revenue streams.



4. Policy & Advocacy

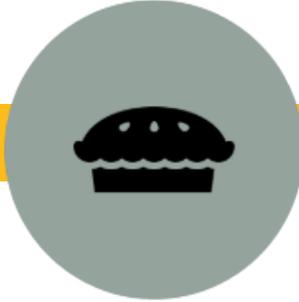
Vision:

A strong, respected voice for organic producers, ensuring their needs are heard in policy and funding decisions.

COPC will represent organic farmers where it matters most—at the tables shaping agricultural policy. By working closely with allies and keeping certification barriers and climate resilience on the agenda, COPC will help secure a stronger future for organic producers.

Why It Matters:

Without a coordinated voice, organic producers risk being left out of key policy decisions. COPC's advocacy ensures that certified growers have representation on the issues that directly impact their livelihoods.



5. Simplified Governance & Board Operations

Vision:

A practical, sustainable governance model that respects the time and capacity of volunteer leaders.

With clearer roles, fewer meetings, and a focused work plan, COPC’s board will operate efficiently—providing strong leadership without burnout, and ensuring the organization stays on course.

Why It Matters:

Effective leadership is critical for COPC’s success, but volunteer burnout is a real threat. A simplified governance model keeps the organization stable while making it easier for new leaders to step forward.

Financial Snapshot

Financial Snapshot

Where We've Been: A Challenging Financial Landscape

COPC's financial position remains one of its most pressing challenges. For years, the organization relied on a mix of membership dues, government funding, and cost-shared project grants. This model has become increasingly unsustainable due to:

- **Declining Membership Revenue:** Fewer certified organic farms on PEI mean fewer membership dues to cover core operations.
- **Grant Matching Barriers:** Most government grants require a 25% matching contribution—a significant hurdle for a volunteer-run organization with declining membership revenues.
- **Staffing Instability:** COPC has been unable to sustain paid staff, including the previously funded Director of Organic Sector Advancement role. This left a heavy operational burden on the volunteer board.
- **Outstanding Liabilities:** Projects like the Compost and Biochar initiative left unresolved financial obligations. While largely addressed, these delayed COPC's ability to apply for new funding and move forward strategically.

A Leaner Model: Opportunities for Sustainable Funding

Despite these hurdles, COPC has identified realistic paths to financial stability under a more focused, streamlined structure:

- **Organic Industry Development Program (OIDP):**
 - Potential to support operational needs if COPC positions itself as a sector convener rather than a service provider.
 - *Note: OIDP funds cannot be used for direct advocacy.*

- **Rebate Program Administration:**
 - Resuming administration of the organic certification rebate could generate modest income and help meet cost-share requirements for a part-time coordinator.
 - *In 2022, this program generated a \$6,000 surplus.*
- **Strategic Partnerships:**
 - Collaborations with organizations like ACORN, Growers Station, and COG, for example, could reduce costs through shared staffing, co-branded funding applications, and joint programming.
- **Fundraising & Community Support:**
 - Rather than increasing membership fees, COPC can explore low-barrier fundraising activities such as event sponsorships, raffles, or auctions tied to the Organic Forum.

Moving Forward: A Simplified Financial Approach

In early 2025, COPC completed a financial review to clarify its position and align future plans with available resources. The Board has committed to a leaner, more transparent financial model focused on:

- Hosting a single, high-impact annual event (*the Organic Forum*).
- Avoiding complex grants unless administered by a partner like ACORN.
- Leveraging collaborative cost-sharing (staffing, space, training) with aligned organizations.
- Pursuing a core funding agreement with the PEI Department of Agriculture to support operations.
- Requesting additional transitional funding from the PEI Department of Agriculture in the 2025–2026 fiscal year to:
 - Retain a strategic implementation coordinator to guide COPC’s transition.
 - Develop and implement streamlined systems for governance, administration, and financial management.
 - Create practical how-to resources and set up a low-cost accounting system.
 - Administer the Organic Certification Rebate Program during this critical year of restructuring.
- Investigate eliminating reliance on membership dues by exploring a merger into ACORN’s regional membership system.

This lean financial strategy allows COPC to concentrate on what it does best: convening the organic community, amplifying farmer voices, and advocating for a stronger sector. The Board will review this approach annually to ensure it remains viable and aligned with COPC's mission.

Implementation Approach and Next Steps

Phase 1: Stabilization and Focus (2025–2026)

- Request additional funding from the PEI Department of Agriculture to retain a strategic consultant who will guide COPC through this transition period and develop sustainable operational systems.
- Host a revitalized Annual Organic Forum as the primary sector gathering.
- Develop a streamlined administrative system, including:
 - Negotiating Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with key partners.
 - Creating simple how-to guides for operational processes
 - Setting up a no- to low-cost accounting system (e.g., Excel-based).
 - Resume administration of the Organic Certification Rebate Program for 2025–2026, generating modest revenue and maintaining direct engagement with certified producers.
 - Implement a simplified governance structure, including quarterly board meetings and clarified director roles.

Phase 2: Strengthening Capacity and Evaluating Long-Term Options (2026 and Beyond)

- Assess the outcomes of the transition year and determine the most sustainable long-term staffing model (e.g., volunteer-led with part-time coordination, shared staffing with a partner organization, or continued funding for a lean support role).
- Explore shared staffing models or secondment opportunities with partner organizations (e.g., ACORN, Growers Station) to reduce administrative burden and support ongoing program delivery.
- Continue to grow the reach and impact of the Annual Organic Forum, building it into a flagship event for the province and exploring co-hosting opportunities with partner organizations.

- Pursue targeted, high-impact funding opportunities that align with COPC’s focused mandate.
- Review and update partnership agreements and MOUs annually to ensure alignment of priorities and avoid duplication.
- Conduct an organizational review at the end of 2026 to evaluate governance structures, financial sustainability, and the need for ongoing external coordination support.

Phase 3: Long-Term Sustainability and Evolution (2027 and Beyond)

- **Solidify COPC’s Niche in the Sector:** Continue refining COPC’s role as a convenor and policy advocate, ensuring its efforts remain complementary to regional partners like ACORN, COG, and Growers Station.
- **Establish Sustainable Revenue Streams:** Develop and maintain modest, predictable funding sources through ongoing sponsorships, strategic partnerships, and potential administrative fees for delivering programs like the Organic Certification Rebate, as well as reliable government funding, like OI DP.
- **Formalize Governance Succession Planning:** Implement a board succession plan to ensure ongoing leadership renewal, with mentorship opportunities for new directors and recruitment pathways through the “Open Door” policy.
- **Maintain Government Engagement as a Standing Practice:** Institutionalize annual meetings with the PEI Department of Agriculture and continue presenting sector priorities in a professional, solutions-focused manner.
- **Leverage the Annual Organic Forum as a Sector Catalyst:** Evolve the Forum into a cornerstone event that not only connects Island producers but also attracts regional and national interest in the idea of a provincial organic gathering, supporting PEI’s leadership in the Atlantic organic movement.
- **Monitor and Adapt to Sector Trends:** Establish a simple annual review process to assess emerging challenges (e.g., climate adaptation, market trends, certification changes) and adjust COPC’s strategic focus accordingly.
- **Remain Lean, Impactful, and Mission-Focused:** Continue operating within a lean governance and financial model, using partnerships and collaborative projects to achieve sector-wide impact without the need for permanent full-time staff.

Conclusion: A Plan Rooted in Purpose

This Strategic Action Plan reflects a turning point for COPC—a conscious decision to scale back with intention, to focus on connection over complexity, and to let the community lead.

It is grounded in what the Board has heard from members: that COPC is most valuable when it gathers, amplifies, and advocates—not when it stretches itself too thin.

The priorities outlined here are not set in stone; they are meant to evolve with member feedback, sector conditions, and future partnerships. But they provide a firm foundation for the next phase of COPC’s work in a time of uncertainty and confusion about its role in the sector.

COPC’s role may be smaller in scope, but it remains powerful in purpose. With this plan, the Board commits to walking that path—with transparency, with realism, and with the organic community at its heart.

With the continued support of government and sector partners, this renewed model will ensure that PEI’s organic producers remain connected, represented, and resilient for years to come.

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Appendix 1

Survey Summary & Strategic Implications for COPC

The survey responses, while limited in number, represent a significant portion of PEI's certified organic farmers and key stakeholders. The findings reinforce the challenges facing COPC while also identifying opportunities for restructuring and collaboration. Key themes include financial instability, membership decline, and concerns over COPC's effectiveness in recent years. However, respondents see value in COPC's convening role, networking opportunities, and certification support.

Key Findings & Strategic Considerations

1. Financial Challenges & Organizational Stability

Broad awareness of COPC's financial struggles: Many respondents noted financial instability, with factors including a lack of core funding, loss of key personnel, and declining membership revenue.

Concerns about mismanagement in past funding decisions: Some responses highlighted previous financial risks and unclear financial oversight, reinforcing the need for COPC's financial review before committing to long-term strategies.

Strategic Considerations:

The decision to conduct a financial review with a consultant is strongly supported by survey findings.

The restructuring of membership fees to reflect a leaner model is critical to securing sustainable core funding.

Some respondents suggested that cost-sharing arrangements with other organizations could alleviate financial pressure.

2. Importance of COPC's Role as a Convener

Networking and sector alignment were consistently valued: Many respondents expressed nostalgia for past COPC-led networking events and emphasized that COPC's ability to bring people together was one of its strongest assets.

Respondents view advocacy as emerging organically from convening spaces, rather than as a standalone function.

Strategic Considerations:

The Board's decision to prioritize an annual meeting as COPC's primary convening function aligns with this feedback.

COPC should position the Annual Meeting as a platform for producers to connect, set priorities, and engage with government and industry partners.

3. Diverging Opinions on COPC's Future Structure

Some respondents supported scaling back COPC's activities, while others suggested merging with like-minded organizations.

Collaboration with ACORN, Growers Station, and NFU was highlighted as an opportunity to reduce duplication of efforts.

Strategic Considerations:

Strengthening formal partnerships with ACORN and Growers Station could create new efficiencies while preserving COPC's role.

The idea of a shared staffing model with ACORN was suggested as a way to maintain operational capacity.

The Board's decision to remain open to future collaboration models, including potential integration with other organizations, aligns with stakeholder perspectives.

4. Certification Support & Sector Development

COPC's past role in supporting organic certification was highly valued. Some respondents suggested COPC should resume administering the certification rebate program as a revenue-generating activity.

Several respondents identified a need for better support in navigating organic certification paperwork, inspections, and input approvals.

Strategic Considerations:

COPC could explore delivering certification support services, potentially in collaboration with government partners.

The feasibility of administering the certification rebate program should be assessed within the financial review.

5. Uncertainty Around a Peer-to-Peer Certification Model

Most respondents were skeptical about reviving an interprovincial or local peer-to-peer certification group.

Some noted that the regulatory landscape would make it difficult to implement, while others were open to exploring an alternative local label.

Strategic Considerations:

COPC may revisit this concept in the future but should prioritize immediate financial and structural concerns.

If COPC moves forward with exploring this concept, a feasibility study would be required to assess demand and regulatory requirements.

Conclusion & Alignment with Strategic Plan

The survey confirms that Scenario 1: Downsizing & Focus aligns with the majority of stakeholder perspectives. Respondents see COPC's greatest value as a sector convener, networking hub, and certification support resource, rather than a large-scale project administrator.

COPC's next steps should focus on:

Implementing a leaner operational model.

Strengthening partnerships to improve sector coordination.

Ensuring financial transparency and stability.

Prioritizing the Annual Meeting as a core function.

Exploring revenue-generating activities such as certification support.

Appendix 2

MEMO: COPC Future Scenarios for Board Consideration

February 25, 2025

Written for COPC Board of Directors Meeting by Theresa Richards, Strategic Consultant

Introduction

COPC is at a critical juncture, and as the current Board of Directors, its future relies on your decisions. Given financial challenges, limited capacity, and the changing landscape of organic agriculture on PEI, we must determine how to best support organic farmers.

At its core, COPC exists to serve organic producers—providing advocacy, networking opportunities, and support that strengthens the sector. I prepared this memo to outline two possible paths forward for COPC that have emerged through conversations with stakeholders, the initial questionnaire responses, and discussions at our last board meeting. That said, this is not a definitive plan—rather, I intend it as a starting point for our discussion today. The goal is to explore these scenarios, see what resonates (or doesn't), and determine whether alternate options emerge that warrant further consideration.

The two options outlined in this memo are:

1. Downsize & focus
2. Wind-Down

Scenario 1: Downsize and focus

This scenario scales COPC down to its essential functions while maintaining its role as a unifying body for organic stakeholders on PEI. COPC could focus on convening stakeholders at an annual meeting to set sector priorities and align advocacy efforts, leveraging membership fees to secure matching government funding and/or request for 100% funding from the government for these minor activities.

Key Features of this Scenario

✓ **Prioritization of Core Services - COPC could focus on:**

- Networking & Convening: Hosting a once-per-year Organic Forum (which would double as an AGM) where stakeholders:
- Identify sector priorities and advocacy efforts.
- Outline potential projects for partners to pursue.
- Network and strengthen relationships within the sector.

- Advocacy & Representation: Ensuring organic producers have a collective voice in policy discussions.

✓ **Reduction of Costs:**

- For the immediate future, eliminate any programming or operational expenses that do not directly support networking and advocacy.
- Keep administrative and staffing requirements and costs minimal (e.g. move to an all-volunteer structure or contracting specific tasks as needed).

✓ **New Revenue Model:**

- Membership fees could be restructured to align with the new, leaner model. In fact, I think we should ask for 100% support from the government for a smaller amount of funding for a very specific purpose:
 - COPC would apply for government funding specifically for stakeholder engagement (note: advocacy efforts cannot be funded by the government).

✓ **Streamlined Operations:**

- No paid staff—a shift toward a volunteer-driven organization with task-specific contracts as needed.
- The Board would transition into a Management Board rather than a policy-setting or advisory board.
- Responsibilities would include:
 - Direct financial oversight
 - Manage any funding applications (minimal at first)
 - Ensure key priorities are met—without the expectation of overseeing a large suite of programs
 - Organize annual organic forum/AGM
 - Be a liaison with Government partners
 - Opportunity to contract out services to like-minded organizations to help us achieve larger-scope work (imagine Growers Station hosting a workshop, or ACORN coordinating and facilitating the forum)

✓ **Potential Benefits to Organic Farmers**

- Greater input for advocacy efforts – Rather than spreading resources too thin, this model ensures that organic farmers directly influence advocacy priorities at the Organic Forum.
- More efficient use of funds – With a leaner model, funding goes directly into supporting farmer-led priorities, rather than administrative overhead.
- Sustained networking opportunities – an annual Organic Forum ensures organic stakeholders stay connected, fostering collaborations and shared learning.
- A unified voice for Island organics – PEI would still have it's own direct voice to government.
- Certification rebate programs would continue through the province.
- Reduced overhead increases the survivability of the organization - allowing us to build a stable foundation from which future opportunities could emerge.

Challenges & Risks

- ✗ Will members find value in an organization that primarily acts as a convener and advocate rather than a program/service provider?
- ✗ Does COPC have enough Board capacity and commitment to function as a Management Board?
- ✗ How sustainable is this model long-term?

Scenario 2: Wind-Down

Given COPC's declining membership fees and limited revenue-generating capacity, we must realistically consider whether the organization is sustainable in its current form. This is not the first time COPC has faced financial instability, and it is worth acknowledging that without a clear path to long-term sustainability, a planned, proactive wind-down may be a responsible course of action.

Rather than allowing a forced closure due to financial strain, this scenario focuses on an orderly transition, ensuring that COPC's key functions—such as advocacy, networking, and certification support—are handed off to aligned organizations in a way that minimizes disruption for organic producers.

✓ Orderly Transition of Services

- Identify which aspects of COPC's work (e.g., advocacy, certification support, networking, research coordination) could be transitioned to other organizations such as Growers Station, ACORN, PEI Department of Agriculture, or other non-profits to determine what can be absorbed externally.

✓ Financial & Legal Closure

- Ensure that outstanding obligations (debts, grants, contracts) are responsibly managed.
- Develop a clear plan for remaining assets, funds, and intellectual property to be allocated in alignment with COPC's mission.

✓ Member & Stakeholder Communication

- Provide clear, transparent communication to members, funders, and partners about the transition.
- Establish a timeline for winding down to allow an orderly shift of responsibilities.

✓ Benefits

- Prevents a crisis-driven shutdown by managing closure proactively.
- Ensures that some of COPC's core functions continue under other organizations.
- Avoids ongoing financial instability and operational strain on Board members.

Key services could be maintained by more resourced organizations – If COPC's advocacy, certification support, or networking functions are absorbed by aligned organizations, they may be delivered more effectively.

Avoids farmer burnout on an unsustainable organization – If COPC can no longer function effectively, a planned wind-down prevents farmers from investing time in an organization that may not be viable long-term.

Stronger collaborations for organic support – If COPC’s functions are successfully integrated into larger food and farming networks, organic farmers may gain access to more robust resources, funding opportunities, and infrastructure.

Redirection of resources into more sustainable initiatives – Farmers can focus on practical solutions and volunteering for other meaningful organizations rather than keeping a struggling organization afloat.

- ✘ Loss of COPC as a dedicated voice for organic farmers on PEI.
- ✘ Uncertainty over whether other organizations can fully take on COPC’s responsibilities and service PEI organic farmers.
- ✘ Requires oversight to ensure financial and legal responsibilities are met.

Key Considerations

What are the biggest risks if COPC continues operations in its current form?

Which organizations (non-profits, government bodies, co-ops) could take on COPC’s advocacy, certification support, or networking roles?

What legal and financial steps would need to be taken to ensure a smooth transition?

How do we ensure transparency and fairness in winding down operations?

Discussion & Decision Points

With these two scenarios in mind, we need to determine:

- Which scenario is the most realistic and sustainable for COPC?
- If pursuing Down-size and Focus, what do you think COPC’s core services and priorities should be?

If pursuing Wind-Down, let’s discuss the key considerations (listed above).

This is not an easy discussion, but it is a necessary one. I appreciate your time and thoughtfulness in working through this together.

Looking forward to our conversation.

Theresa Richards
Strategic Consultant for COPC

Appendix 3

SWOT Analysis for PEI COPC

Strengths (Internal)

Inclusive and Diverse Community

Broad Membership Base: While the number of certified organic producers on PEI has declined, COPC remains a trusted space for organic and “organic-adjacent” farmers, fostering a strong network.

Personalized Outreach: The small Island context enables COPC to build deep, trust-based relationships with farmers, consumers, and policymakers.

Strategic Partnerships and Market Integration

Strong Collaborative Network: COPC has played a pivotal role in launching Growers Station and has strong connections with ACORN, NFU, PEI’s Department of Agriculture, and key buyers.

Sector Representation: While limited in capacity, COPC remains one of the only dedicated voices for the organic sector in PEI.

Support for Farmers & Certification Assistance

Organic Rebate Program: Historically, COPC’s administration of the organic certification rebate provided financial relief to growers. This remains a potential source of modest revenue and value to members.

Financial Support & Knowledge Sharing: COPC has helped members access funding and training opportunities, strengthening sector capacity.

Recognition and External Support

Government & Industry Endorsement: While funding remains a challenge, COPC is recognized by policymakers and agricultural stakeholders as a critical organization for organic farming in PEI.

Weaknesses (Internal Challenges)

Financial & Administrative Constraints

Funding Limitations: COPC's reliance on short-term project funding and the absence of stable core funding make long-term planning difficult.

Unresolved Financial Liabilities: Past financial challenges—including outstanding liabilities from the Compost & Biochar project—continue to affect COPC's ability to secure new funding.

Capacity & Governance Challenges

Overreliance on Volunteer Effort: The inability to sustain paid staff has left operational and governance responsibilities solely on the Board, limiting effectiveness.

Governance Overload: Board turnover and burnout have made it difficult to maintain continuity and strategic oversight.

Lack of Financial Clarity: Unclear financial reporting in past years has made it difficult to assess and act on COPC's fiscal situation. A financial consultant is currently reviewing the organization's financial standing.

Declining Membership & Engagement

Shrinking Organic Sector: Fewer certified organic farms in PEI result in a smaller membership base, making it harder to maintain revenue and engagement.

Limited Value Proposition for Members: Many farmers do not see direct benefits from COPC, particularly in advocacy or certification support.

Opportunities (External)

Strategic Partnerships & Sector Collaboration

Alignment with ACORN: Given ACORN's regional focus, a formalized partnership (or integration) could reduce duplication and strengthen the organic voice in Atlantic Canada.

Growers Station & Small Farm Networks: The expansion of Growers Station into a hub for small-to-medium-scale farmers could provide new collaboration opportunities for COPC.

Policy Advocacy with NFU & PEIFA: Partnering with these organizations could increase COPC's influence on organic-specific policy issues.

Restructuring for Sustainability

Membership & Revenue Model Redesign: A new, streamlined membership structure aligned with COPC’s downsized role could provide a stable funding base.

Government Support for Certification Assistance: While advocacy cannot be a primary function of government-funded organizations, COPC could position itself as an administrator for organic certification support services.

Organic Market Development

Local Branding & Certification Alternatives: While national organic certification remains crucial for exports, there is interest in developing a regional “PEI Organic” label tailored to local markets.

Education & Consumer Engagement: Increased public awareness efforts could strengthen the local demand for certified organic products.

Threats (External Challenges)

Market & Economic Pressures

Rising Costs of Organic Production: Increasing input costs, labor shortages, and economic inflation make organic farming financially challenging.

Reduced Consumer Willingness to Pay Premiums: Economic pressures may lead to decreased demand for organic products in both local and export markets.

Sectoral & Organizational Viability Risks

Further Membership Decline: If the organic farming sector in PEI continues to shrink, COPC’s ability to operate sustainably will become even more difficult.

Potential for Dissolution: If restructuring efforts fail to stabilize finances, COPC may need to consider winding down operations.

Competing Labels & Certification Challenges

Erosion of Organic Certification Value: Some producers are opting for “regenerative” or “ecological” labels that are less costly and administratively demanding than national organic certification.

Regulatory Complexity: Canada’s organic certification requirements can be burdensome, particularly for small farms, deterring participation.

Appendix 4

Contingency Plan: Managed Wind-Down Scenario (If Needed)

If financial stability is not achieved by Year 2 or 3, the following steps will be taken to responsibly transition COPC's functions while ensuring compliance with legal and financial obligations.

Step 1: Communication & Transparency

Hold a formal member consultation to discuss dissolution plans and identify critical needs that must be maintained elsewhere.

Communicate with key partners and funders to determine whether core functions (e.g., networking, certification support) can transition to other organizations.

Issue a formal public statement to members, funders, and stakeholders regarding the decision to dissolve, including a clear timeline for the transition.

Step 2: Responsible Transition of Functions

Networking and convening roles: Explore the transfer of sector gatherings (e.g., Annual Meeting) to ACORN or another suitable organization.

Organic certification rebate program: If COPC administers this program, a new administrator will need to be identified, either within government or an allied organization.

Advocacy and policy engagement: Collaborate with NFU, ACORN, PEIFA, or Growers Station to ensure the organic sector remains represented in government discussions.

Step 3: Legal & Financial Closure

Legal Dissolution Process in Prince Edward Island

Board Resolution & Membership Approval

The Board must pass a resolution approving dissolution.

If required by COPC's bylaws, members must also approve the decision through a special general meeting or written consent.

Meeting minutes documenting this decision must be kept.

Filing Articles of Dissolution

Prepare Articles of Dissolution, including corporation name, address, incorporation date, and reason for dissolution.

File the Articles of Dissolution with the Director of Corporations in PEI. Upon approval, a Certificate of Dissolution will be issued, officially terminating COPC's legal existence.

If COPC is a registered nonprofit, notify Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to revoke charitable or nonprofit tax status.

Reference: Prince Edward Island Business Corporations Act.

Settling Financial Obligations

Conduct a final financial review to assess outstanding debts, liabilities, and remaining assets.

Pay off all outstanding debts and financial obligations, including any taxes, employee wages, and contractual agreements.

Close bank accounts after all transactions are completed.

Distribution of Remaining Assets

Any remaining assets must be distributed according to COPC's bylaws and nonprofit regulations.

In PEI, nonprofit assets must typically be transferred to another nonprofit with a similar mission (e.g., ACORN, NFU, or another agricultural organization).

Reference: Council on Foundations - Nonprofit Law in Canada.

Final Government Filings & Compliance

Submit final tax returns to CRA, ensuring any tax obligations are cleared.

File final annual reports if required by incorporation laws.

Notify funding agencies to formally close out any active grants or contributions.

Final Closure & Documentation

Issue a final public communication acknowledging COPC's contributions to the sector and providing resources for organic farmers moving forward.

Ensure all legal and financial documents are archived appropriately for future reference.

Formally close COPC's legal entity, ensuring no outstanding liabilities remain.

COPC Vision for the Future

The Vision Story Behind The Strategy: *A Companion Document to the COPC Strategic Plan*



Introduction

This document accompanies COPC's Strategic Action Plan, offering a vivid, inspiring picture of what's possible when we lead with clarity, purpose, and community.



1. The Annual Organic Forum: A Celebration of Community, Collaboration, and Change

This isn't just another meeting—it's the unmissable gathering of PEI's organic movement.

Each year, the Organic Forum draws together farmers, community supporters, and advocates for a day that feeds both body and soul. It's a space where seasoned growers share wisdom, new entrants find mentors, and everyone remembers why they chose this way of farming.

The Forum isn't held in sterile conference rooms—it's hosted in spaces that feel like home. There's laughter, shared meals, and spirited debate. It's where policy priorities are shaped, partnerships are formed, and the next generation of organic leaders finds its footing.

This is more than an event. It's the heartbeat of PEI's organic community—and it's here to stay.



2. Strength Through Partnership: A New Era of Collaboration

COPC's greatest strength lies not in doing everything—but in knowing where it makes the greatest impact. By focusing on convening and advocacy, and partnering with powerhouse organizations like the Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network (ACORN), Canadian Organic Growers (COG), and Growers Station, COPC has amplified its influence far beyond its size.

The result?

- Organic agriculture is no longer on the margins; it's central to PEI's agricultural future.
- Collaboration has replaced competition, creating more opportunities for farmers, new markets, and regional advocacy power.

A Deepened Partnership with ACORN

ACORN (Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network) has long been a pillar of support for organic farmers across the region. As COPC redefines its role, its relationship with ACORN is entering a new phase—one rooted in shared infrastructure, aligned advocacy, and mutual trust.

Together, COPC and ACORN have developed a unified membership model that simplifies participation for farmers and ensures strong, coordinated representation across provincial and regional levels. This approach not only reduces duplication but also lowers costs and administrative burdens for producers—especially important as farms face increasing pressure to do more with less.

In this partnership:

ACORN leads regional program delivery and grant administration, leveraging its organizational capacity to coordinate training, events, and communications that reach all four Atlantic provinces.

COPC ensures that PEI voices are central—advising on program relevance, representing PEI-specific needs, and anchoring regional initiatives in local realities.

Together, they negotiate shared goals with funders, influence provincial and federal organic policy discussions, and offer programming that reflects both scale and nuance.

Rather than competing for limited resources, COPC and ACORN are demonstrating what's possible when organizations align around function over form—using their respective strengths to build a more resilient, interconnected organic movement.

Canadian Organic Growers (COG): Connecting PEI to the National Stage

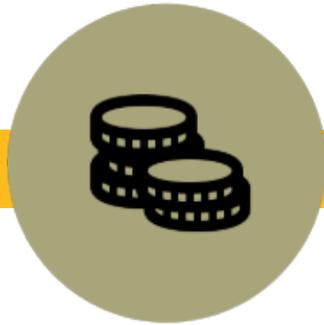
As the national voice for organic in Canada, COG brings critical capacity to the table—through policy engagement, farmer training, and public education. For COPC, partnering with COG means more than visibility; it means impact.

- COPC contributes grassroots insight from PEI's farms, helping to ground national campaigns in the lived experience of Island producers.
- COG opens doors to federal policy conversations, certification supports, and consumer outreach tools that COPC couldn't develop alone.
- Together, they build alignment—ensuring that Atlantic voices are not just heard, but actively shaping Canada's organic future.

This relationship is not just about mutual support—it's about shared purpose. PEI producers are better off when national and local organizations move together, and this partnership ensures just that.

Growers Station: A Collaborative Evolution

What began as a COPC initiative has grown into PEI's most impactful food hub. COPC proudly champions Growers Station's work to build local markets and strengthen peer learning for small-to-medium-scale farmers. Together, they are co-creating a thriving, resilient local food system that places organic food at its center.



3. Financial Sustainability: Thriving Without Complexity

COPC has broken free from the cycle of unsustainable grant dependence. Today, the organization operates with a modest, predictable, and community-supported budget.

- The Annual Organic Forum is funded through sponsorships and community contributions as well as a modest government grant.
- Strategic partnerships reduce the need for overhead and administration.
- COPC focuses on doing a few high-impact things exceptionally well, rather than chasing every funding opportunity.

This is financial resilience without complexity—organic, sustainable, and built to last.



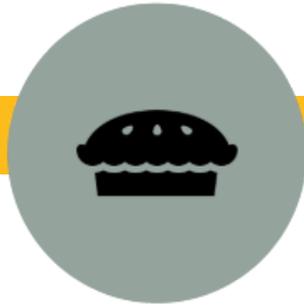
4. Advocacy Leadership: A Respected Voice in the Halls of Power

COPC is now a respected, solutions-oriented voice in government circles. Ministers and senior staff look forward to COPC’s annual meeting—a gathering where challenges are met with clear, actionable solutions.

COPC’s advocacy success is built on:

- Professional, well-researched briefing materials.
- A strong, unified voice grounded in real farm experiences.
- Ongoing, respectful relationships with policymakers that turn dialogue into action.

What was once a struggling organization is now a powerful, influential force shaping the future of organic farming on PEI.



5. Board Meetings Reimagined: Community, Connection, and Purpose

COPC's board meetings have transformed from obligation to celebration.

These quarterly gatherings feel like family dinners—potluck meals, deep conversations, and a shared sense of purpose. Minutes are transcribed with simple tools; business is handled efficiently, leaving time for what really matters: connection, storytelling, and setting the course for a thriving organic sector.

2025/2026 PEI Certified Organic Producers Co-op Strategic Action Matrix

Pillar (Strategic Pillar)	Strategic Objective	Action (Specific Deliverables)	Measurable	Achievable	Responsible	Timeline	Notes	Status
One Organic Gathering	Establish the Organic Forum as the Sector's Flagship Event	Confirm Board alignment: COPC will focus on one primary event per year—the Annual Organic Forum.	Formal board motion passed or included in Strategic Plan.	✓ Yes – already agreed in principle; low cost.	COPC Board	Spring 2025		-
		Integrate Forum planning into quarterly Board meetings.	Quarterly meeting agendas include dedicated Forum planning time.	✓ Yes – time commitment manageable.	Board Chair or Secretary	Starting Summer 2025 and ongoing		-
		Secure funding for the Forum and Coordinator role (e.g., OIDP).	Funding application submitted and approved.	✓ Yes – funding program exists.	Coordinator (with Board approval)	Apply Spring 2025; Confirm Summer 2025	- (May 2025) draft application submitted for review	In Progress
		Event coordination for 2025 Forum handled by Coordinator (no external coordinator needed).	Event successfully delivered by Coordinator; no hiring required.	✓ Yes – included in Coordinator's deliverables.	Coordinator	Fall 2025 – Event in Winter/Spring 2026		-
	Develop Tools and Systems to Sustain High-Impact Annual Forums	Develop event templates and legacy documents to support future event planning (e.g., event checklist, sponsorship packages, planning timelines, volunteer roles).	Templates and planning documents completed and stored for future use.	✓ Yes – within Coordinator's role.	Coordinator	By Fall 2025		-
		Establish feedback mechanism: Collect participant feedback during and after the event.	Feedback collected; attendance and diversity tracked.	✓ Yes – simple surveys and Slido tools available.	Coordinator	During and immediately after the event		-

2025/2026 PEI Certified Organic Producers Co-op Strategic Action Matrix

Pillar (Strategic Pillar)	Strategic Objective	Action (Specific Deliverables)	Measurable	Achievable	Responsible	Timeline	Notes	Status
Strategic Partnerships	Formalize and Strengthen Strategic Partnerships	Finalize and sign MOU with ACORN based on existing draft.	MOU finalized and signed by both organizations.	✓ Yes – draft already created; requires final review.	Coordinator to finalize; Board Chair to approve.	Summer 2025	- Draft created during Winter 2025	In Progress
		Explore drafting new MOUs with other key partners such as COG, Growers Station, and the PEI FA	MOUs drafted and signed with priority partners.	✓ Yes – relationships already established.	Coordinator to draft; Board to review and approve.	By End of 2025		
	Enhance Ongoing Collaboration and Coordination	Establish an annual partnership check-in schedule with key organizations.	Annual check-in meetings held and documented.	✓ Yes – simple calendar and coordination process.	Coordinator to schedule and support; Board to participate.	Begin Fall 2025 and ongoing		
		Develop a partnership coordination guide outlining shared opportunities, responsibilities, and expectations.	Coordination guide created and shared with partners.	✓ Yes – within Coordinator's deliverables.	Coordinator	Fall 2025		
		Integrate partnership updates as a standing agenda item in quarterly Board meetings.	Updates recorded in board meeting agendas and minutes.	✓ Yes – easily incorporated into existing meetings.	Coordinator to support; Board Chair to facilitate.	Q3 2025 and ongoing		
	Leverage Partnerships for Shared Funding and Program Delivery	Coordinate with ACORN and other partners on joint funding applications and shared program delivery.	Joint proposals submitted; collaborative events held.	✓ Yes – builds on existing relationships and capacities.	Coordinator to lead coordination; Board to review proposals.	Ongoing		

2025/2026 PEI Certified Organic Producers Co-op Strategic Action Matrix

Pillar (Strategic Pillar)	Strategic Objective	Action (Specific Deliverables)	Measurable	Achievable	Responsible	Timeline	Notes	Status
Financial Sustainability	Establish a Simple, Sustainable Financial Model for Core Operations	Confirm a simplified financial model with no reliance on large, complex grants.	Documented board motion approving the new funding approach.	✓ Yes – aligns with the board's strategic direction.	Coordinator (with COPC Board approval)	Spring 2025	- (March 2025) Projected budget presented at AGM.	COMPLETE
		Develop a low-cost financial tracking system to replace Sage Accounting.	Simple tracking system implemented (e.g., Excel-based), reducing annual costs.	✓ Yes – within current administrative capacity.	Coordinator (with Treasurer oversight)	Summer 2025		
		Prepare a Three-year Funding and Revenue Strategy outline, including sustainable revenue streams and funding evaluation criteria.	Strategy document completed and approved by the Board	✓ Yes – consultant-led with Board review.	Coordinator (with Treasurer and Board input)	Winter 2026		
		Explore options to eliminate reliance on membership dues by assessing the feasibility of merging COPC membership into ACORN's regional system.	Assessment completed and presented to the Board; Board decision documented.	✓ Yes – partnership discussions already underway.	Coordinator (with ACORN Liaison and Board input)	Fall 2025		
		Resume administration of the Organic Certification Rebate Program for 2025–2026, generating modest revenue and maintaining direct engagement with certified producers.	Rebate program successfully administered; modest surplus generated; certified producers engaged.	✓ Yes – program was previously administered by COPC.	Coordinator (with Board oversight)	December 2025		
		Review and update COPC's annual operating budget to reflect the streamlined model.	Board-approved annual budget with simplified revenue/expense lines.	✓ Yes – minimal accounting needed under new model.	Coordinator (with Treasurer and Board)	Winter 2026		
	Diversify and Stabilize Revenue Sources to Support Key Activities	Identify and apply for one core provincial funding source (e.g., OIDP) to support annual activities.	One successful grant application submitted and approved.	✓ Yes – historically accessed by COPC.	Coordinator (with Board input)	Spring/Summer 2025	- (May 2025) This is covered by the OIDP application for Coordination.	In Progress
		Develop a sponsorship strategy for the Annual Organic Forum.	Sponsorship plan created and outreach to at least 5 sponsors completed.	✓ Yes – builds on past event models and local interest.	Coordinator (Fundraising Lead if appointed)	Fall 2025		
		Collaborate to shift delivery of workshops, events, and farmer supports to regional partners (e.g., ACORN).	Documented MOUs or collaborative event plans with partners.	✓ Yes – partnerships already in development.	Coordinator (with Board and ACORN Liaison)	By end of 2025		

2025/2026 PEI Certified Organic Producers Co-op Strategic Action Matrix

Pillar (Strategic Pillar)	Strategic Objective	Action (Specific Deliverables)	Measurable	Achievable	Responsible	Timeline	Notes	Status
Advocacy Leadership	Strengthen COPC's Advocacy Infrastructure	Reconfirm Advocacy as a core COPC Function—Board formally aligned around COPC's role as a convener and voice for the sector.	Board meeting minutes include reaffirmation of advocacy focus.	✓ Yes – board-level consensus action.	COPC Board	Spring 2025		COMPLETE
		Create a reusable, professional briefing template for government engagement.	Template created, saved, and used for all briefings.	✓ Yes – one-time creation, reused annually.	Coordinator	Complete by Summer 2025	- COG is working on similar documents, reach out to COG for templates.	-
		Establish an Annual Advocacy and Partnership Calendar.	Joint meeting held; notes documented.	✓ Yes – short coordination meeting via Zoom.	Coordinator to schedule and support; Board to participate.	Annually (Fall)		-
	Ensure Advocacy is Grounded in Member Priorities	Identify Key Advocacy Topics—Include a standing agenda item at each board meeting to gather member input and discuss sector needs.	Documented list of topics generated through board/member input.	✓ Yes – integrated into board meetings.	Board Chair + Coordinator to capture and track input.	Ongoing		Ongoing
		Use the Forum to Shape Advocacy—Include a dedicated policy discussion session at the Organic Forum; gather input via Slido or live discussion.	Advocacy session held; input recorded.	✓ Yes – integrates into existing event.	Coordinator (with Board facilitation)	Annually during Forum		-
	Engage Government and Sector Partners Proactively	Formalize the Annual Ministerial Meeting—Secure a recurring meeting date with PEI's Minister of Agriculture and establish a briefing cycle.	Confirmation of scheduled ministerial meeting and standing invitation sent.	✓ Yes – can be institutionalized once started.	Coordinator to coordinate; Board Chair to lead meeting.	Target: Each Spring		-
		Coordinate with ACORN, COG—Hold annual meetings to align policy priorities and advocacy messaging.	Joint meeting held; notes documented.	✓ Yes – short coordination meeting via Zoom.	Coordinator to schedule and support; Board to participate	Target: Annually (Fall?)		-
	Communicate and Track Advocacy Effectively	Post-Forum Debrief & Advocacy Message Development—Summarize Forum themes and create a concise advocacy message for government and partners.	Post-Forum summary shared with stakeholders and posted online.	✓ Yes – handled by Coordinator or board delegate.	Coordinator	Within 3 weeks after Forum		-
		Track Outcomes—Maintain a record of government meetings, responses, and outcomes linked to COPC advocacy.	Annual outcomes report compiled and reviewed by the Board.	✓ Yes – simple documentation process.	Coordinator	Each December		-

2025/2026 PEI Certified Organic Producers Co-op Strategic Action Matrix

Pillar (Strategic Pillar)	Strategic Objective	Action (Specific Deliverables)	Measurable	Achievable	Responsible	Timeline	Notes	Status
Board Governance	Improve Governance Practices and Operational Efficiency	Confirm shift to quarterly board meetings and adopt a simplified meeting format.	New meeting schedule and simplified format approved by Board motion.	✓ Yes – reduces board burden and improves engagement.	COPC Board (with support from Coordinator to draft meeting format template).	Q2 2025		
		Record meetings and use auto-transcription tools to replace traditional minute-taking.	All meetings recorded and transcribed.	✓ Yes – reduces admin burden and improves accessibility.	Coordinator to research and recommend tools; Board Secretary to implement.	Start with Q3 2025 meeting		
		Conduct annual board feedback check-in via short anonymous survey after the final meeting of the year.	100% board participation in feedback collection.	✓ Yes – easy to facilitate using free online tools.	Coordinator to develop and administer survey.	Annually each December		
		Prepare a Long-Term Staffing and Governance Options Report outlining future models (with 2025 as a pilot year), including a simple cost-benefit analysis for each.	Report completed and presented to the Board.	✓ Yes – requires targeted research and consultation.	Coordinator (with Board feedback)	By Winter 2026		
		Revisit and adjust meeting format annually based on board and guest feedback.	At least 1 meeting each year to include reviewing governance processes.	✓ Yes – built into existing meeting schedule.	Coordinator to facilitate review and document adjustments; Board to approve.	Every December or Q1 each year		
	Strengthen Board Engagement and Governance Systems	Pilot one board meeting with a potluck format and casual, discussion-focused agenda .	Feedback from at least 75% of board members is positive.	✓ Yes – requires minimal preparation.	Coordinator to facilitate planning; Board Chair to host.	Summer 2025		
		Establish “Open Door” policy—invite non-board members to attend the social portion of meetings.	At least 2 non-board participants attend.	✓ Yes – informal and easy to implement.	Coordinator to draft invitation template; Board Chair to extend invites.	Begin Q3 2025 and ongoing		
		Celebrate COPC’s board culture by documenting potluck dishes and sharing on social media.	At least 1 social media post per board meeting featuring food and photos.	✓ Yes – easy and fun visibility boost.	Coordinator to create a simple content plan; Board members contribute photos.	Begin Q3 2025 and ongoing		
	Ensure a Smooth Handoff and Knowledge Transfer	Prepare a Long-Term Staffing and Governance Options Report outlining future models, including a simple cost-benefit analysis for each.	Report completed and presented to the Board.	✓ Yes – requires targeted research and consultation.	Coordinator (with Board feedback)	By Winter 2026		
		Provide a Final Transition Report summarizing all systems developed, templates created, and recommendations for 2026 and beyond; ensure all materials are organized in a shared, accessible digital folder.	Final report submitted; shared folder created and reviewed by the Board.	✓ Yes – coordinator-led deliverable.	Coordinator	March 2026		