Cross-sectoral policy coalitions: a case study of Sustain Ontario: the Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming's efforts to reform public policy.
How a policy coalition's choices contributed to its legitimacy and influence.

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ABSTRACT

Cross-sectoral policy coalitions: a case study of Sustain Ontario: the Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming's efforts to reform public policy.
How a policy coalition's choices contributed to its legitimacy and influence.

This paper is a case study of the formation and early development of one civil society organization (CSO), Sustain Ontario, the Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming (Sustain, the Alliance, the Network). Sustain is an example of a non-governmental, cross-sectoral policy coalition[a]. In an era of complex problems and constrained resources such policy coalitions or networks appear increasingly common in Canada, yet there has been limited research into their approaches. This paper investigates the choices Sustain made related to structures, strategies and processes; it presents integrative research on the relationships between Sustain's choices, and the Alliance's ability to cultivate legitimacy and influence policy in Ontario, Canada. Sustain's network organizational structures and membership enabled Sustain to engage and leverage requisite skills and knowledge. The Alliance employed five core strategies that enabled it to facilitate widespread member engagement, develop and disseminate research and other materials, and establish constructive relationships with policy makers. While I appreciate the limitations of a single case study, I think Sustain's experience and choices may be of interest to provincial food networks and cross-sectoral policy coalitions addressing similarly complex challenges.

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[a]I apply the terminology 'non-governmental, cross-sectoral policy coalition' to a group of organizations from different sectors (i.e. issue-focused organizations that may operate on a non-profit or for-profit basis) that join forces to advocate for changes to public policy. Although the term 'coalition' is often applied to informal, temporary alliances, it is also applied to groups that develop formal agreements outlining terms of cooperation.

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process and our discussions expanded my perspective on, and understanding of, Sustain's work.

To all those inside and outside Sustain who participated in interviews, I thank you for making the time and sharing your experiences and insights about Sustain and helping me ensure accuracy. I admire you all and wish you much success with the critical work you are doing to enhance the sustainability of Ontario's food system.

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ACRONYMS

The following acronyms appear frequently throughout this paper, they are included here for easy reference.

- AC – Advisory Council
- CSO – civil society organization
- GRWG – Government Relations Working Group
- GTA – Greater Toronto Area
- LFA – Local Food Act
- OMAFRA Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs *(Note this ministry changed its name to OMAF (the rural affairs division was separated out) for a period of time in 2013-2014, but since the June 2014 election has been called OMAFRA. For the sake of simplicity, I refer to this ministry as OMAFRA throughout).*
- NAO – Network Administrative Organization
- PNO – Provincial Network Organization
- SC – Steering Committee
- WG – Working Group

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This paper is a case study of the formation and early development of one civil society

organization (CSO), Sustain Ontario, the Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming

(Sustain, the Alliance, the Network). Sustain is an example of a non-governmental, cross-

sectoral policy coalition[b]. In an era of complex problems and constrained resources such

policy coalitions or networks appear increasingly common. Working together non-

governmental actors can be influential policy actors by expanding understanding of

issues and developing and promoting integrated policy solutions. This paper investigates

the choices Sustain made related to structures, strategies and processes; it presents

integrative research on the relationships between Sustain's choices, and the Alliance's

ability to cultivate legitimacy and influence policy in Ontario, Canada. Sustain's network

organizational structures and membership enabled Sustain to engage and leverage

requisite skills and knowledge. The Alliance employed five core strategies that enabled it

to facilitate widespread member engagement, develop and disseminate research and other

materials, and establish constructive relationships with policy makers.

> *Growing complexity means that policy issues today often can't be solved by a*
> *government acting alone.*
> ~ Don Lenihan in Rescuing policy: The case for public engagement, 2012, p. 24.

Historically CSOs – a category that encompasses non-profit and charitable organizations

– have played important roles in the public policy process and the creation of public

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[b]I apply the terminology 'non-governmental, cross-sectoral policy coalition' to a group of organizations
from different sectors (i.e. issue-focused organizations that may operate on a non-profit or for-profit basis)
that join forces to advocate for changes to public policy. Although the term 'coalition' is often applied to
informal, temporary alliances, it is also applied to groups that develop formal agreements outlining terms of
cooperation.

policy in Canada (Northcott, 2014). Practitioners and researchers today acknowledge that CSOs have a legitimate and important contribution to make in policy development because of their work with, knowledge of, and ability to convene the communities impacted (MacRae and Abergel (eds.), 2012, Moore, 2005, Kirkby, 2014, Northcott, 2014). Contributions often assume the form of advocacy, which involves identifying and promoting policy solutions.

Koc and Bas (2012) suggest CSOs are becoming recognized in policy circles as having important roles as "a vital driver of change and the democratization process, contributing to the transparency and accountability of policy making; bringing forward new information, different experiences and perspectives and contributing to the practical implementation of various initiatives…" (p. 174). As the opening quote suggests, this is partly due to the growing complexity of today's societal challenges.

Many charities and other CSOs appreciate that systemic barriers and enablers to their work may only be redressed through policy reform. Crutchfield and McLeod Grant, in their book *Forces for Good* (2007), identify and analyze twelve national 'high-impact' non-profit organizations in the U.S.; each of these organizations achieved significant results, advancing social change related to their respective missions. The organizations work in diverse issue areas such as hunger relief, youth leadership, the environment, housing and economic development. The authors distill six common practices that contributed to the organizations' ability to make an impact. One of the practices involves engaging in service delivery *and* advocacy. All twelve organizations, at some stage in their development, concluded that their connections to communities and the knowledge

they gained through service delivery were critical perspectives in policy development and systems change. This led some, that hadn't already done so, to invest a portion of their resources in advocacy work and to integrate this with service delivery. American charities' ability to engage in advocacy is also defined by law; below I discuss the situation in Canada.

Although CSOs have valuable knowledge and perspectives to offer policy makers, their ability to engage in policy development and advocacy is often constrained by factors such as capacity limitations and a limited understanding of the policy process (Lasby and Vodarek, 2011, MacRae, 2009). These constraints, along with an "advocacy chill" experienced by charitable organizations (see below), have contributed to the emergence of policy networks and coalitions in which organizations and individuals, sometimes from different sectors, combine their knowledge and resources to make sense of complex problems and identify and advocate for policy solutions. Their perspectives can enlarge the democratic space, illuminate the interconnectedness of policy issues, and lead to the development of better informed, more robust policy solutions.

Roughly half of Canada's approximately 170,000 non-profit organizations have charitable status (Imagine Canada, 2014). Becoming a registered charity enables an organization to issue tax receipts for individual donations and to access funding from a larger number of granting bodies such as public and private foundations. While this means that charitable organizations may access more resources compared to a non-profit organization with a similar mandate, it also means charities must abide by the rules

related to advocacy and political activity set out by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), the governmental body that registers and monitors charities.

CRA defines three categories of advocacy activities: 'unrestricted', 'limited', and 'prohibited' (CCVO, 2010). 'Unrestricted' activity refers to charitable activities that relate to, and support, the organization's charitable purposes; public awareness campaigns and meetings with policy makers may fall under this category. Non-partisan political activities that include a 'call to action' would fall under the 'limited' category, and charities can devote up to 10% of their resources (including staff, volunteers, equipment, etc.) to such activities[c]. Undertaking any form of partisan political activity is 'prohibited' for charities and can lead CRA to revoke a charity's status.

In my work as a consultant assisting non-profit organizations to develop strategy, I have noticed that while CSOs appreciate they have a role to play in public policy, in a constrained funding environment many organizations feel compelled to direct scarce resources to service-related initiatives (Bardach, 1994) aligned with their mandates. Funders' reluctance to invest in this work may stem partly from the fact that policy and advocacy work is challenging to evaluate and rarely delivers quick results. The limited funding available for policy and advocacy work in Canada and challenges resourcing this work has gradually eroded skills and expertise in the non-profit sector.

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[c] The CRA's rules specify that Canadian charities can allocate no more than 10% of their resources on non-partisan 'political activities'. This CRA policy (Policy Statement CPS-022, Political Activities) is often referred to as the '10% rule'.

Capacity limitations were identified in the first Canadian "National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations" in 2003, where many respondents expressed dismay about their inability to contribute to policy development due to a lack of resources, skills and connections (Hall, Andrukow, Barr, Brock, de Wit, Embuldeniya, Jolin, Lasby, Levesque, Malinsky, Stowe, Vaillancourt, 2003). More recently, Lasby and Vodarek (2011) report barriers to engaging in public awareness and advocacy activities include a lack of staff time and to a lesser extent a lack of skills. According to Wyatt and Bourgeois (2011), this is particularly true of Canadian voluntary sector organizations, a sub-set of CSOs that tends to rely more heavily on volunteer resources.

Charitable organizations' *willingness* to engage in public policy and advocacy work has been dampened by an 'advocacy chill', engendered partly by the federal government's 2012 decision to allocate $8 million to the Canada Revenue Agency to increase its capacity to investigate charities' advocacy activities (Dallaire, 2012, Kirkby, 2014, McKinnon, 2014). This decision has been questioned when only a small percentage of charities are politically active: "A Canadian Press analysis of the Canada Revenue Agency's charities database found 450 of the 85,000 charities registered in Canada reported spending money on political activities" (The Canadian Press, 2012a).

Some researchers have suggested this 'chill' is self-imposed as few Canadian charities clearly understand the laws that limit charitable organizations' participation in advocacy and lobbying (Northcott, 2014, Hashi, Langlois and Serbanescu, 2012). Fearful of compromising their charitable status, many charities have restricted their advocacy work to public awareness campaigns and sharing information with government representatives

(Lasby and Vodarek, 2011). One Canadian charity, ForestEthics, relinquished its charitable status in order to continue to challenge the Federal government on issues related to the oilsands (The Canadian Press, 2012b).

Despite these challenges, a growing number of CSOs appear to be responding to the 'advocacy chill' by collaborating in policy networks or coalitions. Participation in a policy network offers CSOs an opportunity to share and expand access to knowledge, experience and resources; present a stronger voice by amplifying a key message (Nova Scotia Nutrition Council and AHPRC, 2004); and reduce the risk to charitable status that comes with acting alone – i.e. safety in numbers.

A policy network or coalition approach appears increasingly common among CSOs attempting to solve complex, challenging problems that cross sectors, involve many different types of knowledge and expertise, and span several levels and departments of government. This reflects a growing appreciation that the complexity of today's social problems requires change at a systems level to complement, support and/or scale on-the-ground work and innovation. Systems change work is complex, and some have suggested coordinated, collective action may be required for problem solving (Kania and Kramer, 2011). Networks can play essential roles in collective action initiatives by "building linkages and connection with a broader movement" (Katcher, 2010, p. 54); they can also "deepen agreement on a shared political frame… coordinate efforts, take joint action and disseminate information about what works… and engage in advocacy campaigns" (ibid, p. 55). This interdisciplinary research is informed by theory about policy networks

(public policy) as well as social network theory (sociology); the literature related to each is explored in Chapter 3.

Similar sentiments are expressed by RE-AMP consultant Ruth Rominger, in a case study of the US-based RE-AMP Energy Network[d]. "It was a complex system we were trying to change, so we realized we needed to operate as a network. Only in the last few years has it become much clearer how the network structure and organization is critical to the success of a systems strategy." (McLeod Grant, 2010 p. 8).

Gormley and Cymrot (2006) cite 1985 research by Hansen that found coalition membership in the non-profit sector tends to increase significantly in threatening times – such as the current Canadian environment characterized by scarce resources and an 'advocacy chill'. In recent years I have observed examples of organizations collaborating in Ontario to advocate for, among other issues, systems change in areas such as child care (Quality Early Learning Network, established 2009), autism (Autism Speaks, 2005), immigrant employment (Consortium of Agencies Serving Internationally-trained Professionals, 2002), and food (Sustain Ontario, 2009). I think the formation of these groups to some degree reflects the current political and fiscal environment, as well as a desire to access some of the other benefits of participating in a policy-focused network identified previously.

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[d] RE-AMP is a network of 125 non-profit organizations and funders in eight mid-West states that advocates for legislative changes with a goal of reducing regional global warming emissions by 80% from 2005 levels. The network's efforts over a six-year period contributed to the adoption of renewable energy standards in five states, and to the passage of new transportation legislation aimed at decreasing emissions in three states (McLeod Grant, 2010).

Working collaboratively in a policy coalition is time consuming, however, and demands a range of resources and capacities. In reflecting on the formation and approaches of non-governmental policy coalitions working on complex social issues in Ontario, I noticed that the choices a coalition makes about structures, strategies and processes seem significant to its ability to solve collective problems and realize a common vision. I became interested in learning more about why some of these groups endured and succeeded in influencing policy change.

For such coalitions to have influence on the decisions and actions of policy makers and others outside their network, I suspected they needed to cultivate legitimacy internally, among coalition members, and externally, among those the coalition wanted to influence. The importance of cultivating legitimacy internally and externally was confirmed and reinforced in my literature review. Human and Provan (2000) and McEvily and Zaheer (2004) identify evidence of this, albeit in U.S.-based studies of single sector for-profit network(s) (described in more detail in Chapter 3, *Literature Review*). Because I understood from this literature that "legitimacy" is a key factor related to policy influence, I began to speculate on the role that coalition structures, strategies and processes play in cultivating the kind of legitimacy that enables a coalition to influence public policy. I crafted the following research question: **How does a non-governmental, cross-sectoral policy coalition's choices related to structures, strategies, and processes, affect its ability to cultivate legitimacy and influence public policy?**

I decided to investigate this question by selecting and examining the experience of one such policy coalition in detail using an interdisciplinary, case study approach. I focus on

Sustain Ontario, the Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming as an example of a Canadian-based 'non-governmental, cross-sectoral policy coalition'. Sustain's membership includes non-profit and for-profit groups from different sectors that have different, and at times competing, food system interests. A brief overview of Sustain in 2013 is included on page 11.

I selected a case study approach in part because there has been limited research into, and documentation of, how such Canadian groups form and operate, with the exception of recent work done by Levkoe (2014), Kneen (2011), Makhoul (2011) and Miller (2008). I also thought it would be timely to examine Sustain's experience given the shifting relationship between government and CSOs in Canada. Finally, I hoped that my research and engagement of internal stakeholders might contribute to Sustain's reflection, learning and evolution during the Alliance's formative years[e].

I am mindful of the limitations of using a single 'case' to answer a general research question. I explore this in more detail in Chapter 4, Methodology. While Sustain's early experience will not be replicable, I think it *may* assist other diverse policy coalitions and networks – whether they are advocating for food or other complex social issues, in Ontario and beyond – in making choices about structures, strategies and processes.

Sustain is an appropriate subject for this case study because food is an issue that is at the nexus of many of today's interconnected social challenges: hunger, poverty, health, farm

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[e] I first encountered Sustain through a brief work assignment with the Alliance in September 2010 where I learned about Sustain's cross-sectoral composition and objectives.

sustainability and environmental degradation. Additionally, food-related policy is developed by all levels of government and multiple government ministries – agriculture and rural affairs, health, education, environment, etc. Sustain's efforts to reform provincial food and agriculture policy thus provides the cross-sectoral and multiple-issue data I wish to analyze. Moreover, as a recently formed organization, Sustain provides an opportunity to examine the formation and early development of a cross-sectoral coalition and the strategies and related processes the Alliance selected and implemented to influence policy reform. In doing this research, what soon became evident was that the choices a coalition makes and the strategies it adopts are not strictly intentional and deliberate, but also emergent (Mintzberg, 1987, 1994).

To answer my research question, I determined it would be important to draw on research and theory from different disciplines. I conducted a wide-ranging review of literature (see Chapter 3). Management research offers insights into strategy formation, collaboration, organizational structure, and governance. Sociology, and in particular social network theory, provides theoretical frameworks elucidating the structure, interactions and value of intra- and inter-group relationships. The field of public policy describes various policy development processes and contexts and examines the role of non-governmental actors and policy networks or coalitions in public policy development.

In reviewing the literature I wanted to better understand how existing research could inform practitioners' approaches, and to what extent, and in what ways, their experiences reflected existing research. I understand this is a more recent interpretation of 'action

research' (Kirby, Greaves, and Reid, 2006, p. 30 cited Gustaven, 1996 in Reason and Bradbury, 2001, p. 17).

In reviewing the literature I found few examples of research examining the advocacy efforts of Canadian non-profit organizations, coalitions and networks – something acknowledged by long-time Canadian lobbyist Sean Moore (2005). Selsky and Parker's (2005) research into cross-sector partnerships indicates more research is required on how partners overcome or exploit sectoral differences and how such groups evolve over time. In their research on strategic alliances, Van Dyke and McCammon (2010) suggest that to understand the structural dynamics of coalitions, further study of internal organizational processes in coalition organizations is needed. They also indicate that more research is needed regarding the outcomes of coalition work. Schlager (1995) notes that coalition structure, stability and longevity have received limited attention. And, with the exception of work done by Provan and Kenis (2008), limited attention has been paid to the governance of networks. They conclude, "There is still much work to do to build and test theory related to network-level activities, structures, and outcomes" (ibid, p. 247). I hope to contribute to this literature through my detailed study of Sustain and its experience weaving and nurturing a cross-sectoral policy coalition.

1.1 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF SUSTAIN IN 2013

Sustain aims to transform Ontario's food system into one that is "healthy, ecological, equitable and financially viable". This 'vision' for the food system challenges the status quo that reflects, and to some extent serves, the interests of the more traditional food and agriculture actors that generally farm on a larger scale using less sustainable production

methods. Sustain describes its role as promoting "systems-level changes that will enable

Good Food ideas – ideas contributing to the creation of a healthy, resilient and

sustainable food system – to thrive" (Sustain Ontario, 2013f, p. 2).

Sustain describes itself not as a coalition or organization, but as a cross-sectoral alliance[f]

and network[g] of diverse groups and organizations from the farm, food, health, and

environment sectors. Many network members might describe themselves as 'alternative'

food system actors because they employ and/or advocate for sustainable practices such as

organic and permaculture on smaller, diverse farms. Some are closing the gap between

production and eaters by establishing urban farms and forming consumer supported

agriculture (CSAs[h]) relationships. Many of Sustain's members operate as non-profit or

charitable organizations although some operate on a for-profit basis (e.g. farmers and

restaurateurs). I use Sustain's language, 'network' and 'alliance', throughout this case

study.

Levkoe (2014), in his research into Sustain and other provincial food networks in

Canada, describes them as 'Provincial Network Organizations' (PNOs). Sustain's

network organization staff support the network by performing many of the organizational

functions similar to those played by 'backbone support organizations' within a 'collective

impact' initiative (Kania and Kramer, 2011, Kearns, 2003). Kania and Kramer describe

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[f]An alliance is similar to a coalition, or partnership, in that it involves groups working together to advance shared interests.

[g] Plastrik and Taylor (2010) describe a network as an interconnected set of nodes (i.e. people or things) and links (relationships or connections); they describe social networks as "systems of social ties that link people to one another".

[h] CSAs are contractual arrangements between a farmer and consumers whereby consumers purchase a defined share of a season's crop. The contract enables eaters and farmers to share in the risk or bounty of the year's harvest.

the 'backbone' as a separate organization charged with network coordination. They suggest staff in these organizations should assume three key roles: project manager, data manager and facilitator. Although Sustain's staff roles are not defined in this way, they do fulfill these functions.

The Alliance has articulated two long-term 'goals', or outcomes, which its members believe are required to bring about positive food system transformation in Ontario:

"1) New laws, regulations and policies are enacted and implemented that reflect Sustain's vision (i.e. policy reform).

2) Ontario groups are adapting and adopting feasible, on-the-ground food systems solutions and innovations" (Sustain Ontario, 2013h, p. 3).

I believe the broadness of these outcomes reflects the fact that Sustain set off on its journey without a map. The first outcome refers to influencing and reforming public policy to remove barriers to a more sustainable food system as well as to support and/or promote more sustainable practices. The second acknowledges the role a network can play in identifying and encouraging the adoption of sustainable innovations at a member level, to change the food system from the ground up. Understanding the work being implemented on the ground is a critical input to the development of viable policy recommendations. As I am focusing on factors affecting legitimacy and policy influence in this study, I have collected and analyzed data about Sustain's structures, strategies and processes related to the first of the above outcomes.

Human and Provan (2000) suggest that coalitions wanting to influence policy need to cultivate internal and external legitimacy. Suchman (1995) defines legitimacy as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are socially desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (p. 574). Because legitimacy is perceived by others and it is 'socially constructed' (ibid), a coalition has limited control over it. Despite a lack of control, it requires attention from any group attempting to influence others. Provan and Kenis (2008) note that networks often need to balance the tensions between internal and external legitimacy. Internal legitimacy is required to attract, engage and retain diverse leaders who give a network access to knowledge, expertise, networks and other resources. In Sustain's case, these resources are critical to the Alliance's ability to generate viable policy solutions for external stakeholders to consider and ideally adopt. In Chapters 7 and 8, I illustrate how the network's internal legitimacy is affected by the choices Sustain made about structures, strategies and processes. The Alliance's external legitimacy is a function of others' perceptions – for example of its composition, publications, and proposed solutions. Cultivating external legitimacy is therefore also important as Sustain attempts to influence public policy.

The descriptions of Sustain presented in this paper are based on the following data sources. A review of organizational documents and communications including Sustain's Advisory Council (AC) meeting minutes; policy backgrounders; evaluation data, reports and tools; website content; and e-newsletters. 39 semi-structured interviews with internal (e.g. AC and Steering Committee (SC) members, staff and interns) and external

stakeholders (e.g. policy makers[i] whom Sustain had engaged with, partners and a funder). Insights gained through my participation as a volunteer member of Sustain's Evaluation group, my experience sitting in on AC meetings, and attending two of Sustain's Bring Food Home conferences. My data sources are described in more detail in Chapter 4, *Methodology*.

Chapter 4 also outlines my qualitative research methodology and describes my involvement with Sustain as an 'inside/outside' researcher (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Although interdisciplinary approaches to research sometimes involves researchers collaborating with researchers from other disciplines (Kirby, Greaves, and Reid, 2006, p. 35 cited Thompson-Klein, 2000), I did not actively engage researchers from these disciplines in discussion with the exception of my three supervisors. I did however, collaborate with two of Sustain's Directors by engaging in 'mutual dialogue' (Van Den Bergh, 1995) throughout my course of study from 2011-2014. Kirby, Greaves and Reid (2006) suggest collaboration with community organizations is another form of interdisciplinary research.

In the next chapter I describe Sustain's origins and key factors that led to the Alliance's formation in late 2008 – i.e. how its members recognized and "seized the moment". The literature that informed my research and assisted me in analyzing Sustain's experience is explored in Chapter 3, *Literature Review*.

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[i] Note: I use the term 'policy makers' to refer to those external stakeholders I interviewed that Sustain engaged as part of its policy reform efforts. Some of these individuals work, or formerly worked, in government in a political capacity, others on the bureaucratic side. Chapter 4, Methodology, contains additional information about the policy makers I interviewed.

Sustain's journey from 2009-2013 is presented in Chapters 5 and 6. In Chapter 5, *Structuring and Weaving the Network,* I examine the strategies and processes the network organization used to structure, grow and engage a network with the capacity and legitimacy to influence policy. In Chapter 6, *Policy Development and Influence,* I examine Sustain's structures, strategies and processes related to research, government relations, and policy development and reform. In both these chapters I highlight some of the challenges and network tensions the Alliance encountered and how it responded to those.

In Chapter 7, *Case Discussion and Analysis,* I analyze the data presented in the previous two chapters through the lenses of network connectivity and health, and policy influence. I present evidence of Sustain's success to date and identify factors that have contributed to the Alliance's internal and external legitimacy. In Chapter 8, *Findings and Conclusion*, I discuss my findings in relation to my original research question, including factors that impacted Sustain's "legitimacy" and I outline conclusions that may be of interest to other networks, movements and network funders.

To begin the story, the next chapter provides an overview of Sustain's genesis in the context of the broader food movement in Southern Ontario.

CHAPTER 2 THE ORIGINS OF SUSTAIN ONTARIO

> *The Greek concept of 'kairos' refers to: "a time when conditions are right for*
> *the accomplishment of a crucial action: the opportune and decisive moment."*
> ~ Merriam-Webster, 2014.

In this chapter I describe Sustain's origins in 2007-2008: what catalyzed the Alliance's

formation, as well as its initial leaders and resources. And because timing appears to have

been a factor in Sustain's formation, I identify dynamics in the broader societal and

political environment that suggest the moment was 'ripe for action' (Barndt and Freire,

1991).

2.1 RECOGNIZING AND SEIZING THE MOMENT

The George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation (Metcalf, or the Foundation)[j] was the

'catalyst' (Scearce, 2011) in the formation of Sustain. The Foundation's mission "is to

enhance the effectiveness of people and organizations working together to help

Canadians imagine and build a just, healthy, and creative society" (Who we are - mission

and history, 2014). Toward this end, Metcalf had been funding a variety of food and

agriculture projects through its environment program; simultaneously food had become a

prominent element of many of the community projects it funded in the areas of social

justice, community building and planning. As Metcalf's President and CEO stated during

an interview,

> *...when we first started thinking about food we were really thinking the food*
> *lens was an environmental lens; then at some point the light bulb went off here*

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[j] This section draws on data gathered through interviews with two representatives of the George Cedric
Metcalf Charitable Foundation, notes from three meetings Metcalf convened and facilitated in 2007-2008,
and a paper outlining a preliminary strategy for the development of a food and agriculture network (Metcalf
Foundation, 2007a,b,c and 2008b). George Cedric Metcalf founded the family foundation in 1960 in
Charlottetown. Since relocating the Foundation offices to Toronto, Ontario in the 1970s, the Foundation
has supported and invested in the formation of a number of innovative local charitable organizations (Who
we are - mission and history, 2014).

and we realized, you know, there was a much larger constituency – food is central to a lot of people's concerns… We've always thought we should be able to pull the threads across the Foundation's work more than we had in past – and food could play that role – as the paper[k] said, 'food connects us all'.

In 2007 many of Metcalf's grantees working on interconnected food, environmental and social justice issues were largely disconnected from each other. To better understand who was doing what, and increase connectivity among actors, in May 2007 Metcalf convened approximately twenty-two of its grantees (many of whom are considered sector leaders) and advisors (e.g. individuals working in academia and government) for whom food was a part of their work. Participating grantees were focused on issues such as food security, farm viability, agricultural land preservation, etc. (Metcalf Foundation, 2007c).

The May 2007 meeting was the first of a series of three full-day meetings Metcalf convened with members of this group, many of whom represented urban perspectives on Ontario's food system. Metcalf exercised leadership by hosting the meetings, inviting participants and setting loose agendas. The Foundation documented meeting notes highlighting discussions and decisions from each of the three meetings (Metcalf Foundation 2007a,b and 2008b). Notes from these meetings provided insight into the factors and discussions that lead to Sustain's formation.

The initial meeting focused on the identification of priorities for agriculture and food system reform in Southern Ontario (Metcalf Foundation, 2007a). According to one

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[k] This refers to the February 2008 Metcalf-funded paper, "Food connects us all: Sustainable local food in southern Ontario", described in more detail on page 20.

Metcalf representative (O6[1]), the Foundation "became very aware in the first meetings that there were fissures and tensions; some differences around language – for example, for some 'subsidies' was a really bad word, and for others, great". The group acknowledged that although previous attempts to reach agreement on issues had been unsuccessful, "momentum around local sustainable food" (Metcalf Foundation, 2007a, p. 1) was starting to grow and that there was an opportunity to build on this at a public policy level (see also Indicators of the Moment below).

Participants observed that not everyone was at the table who should be – i.e. key non-governmental organizations (NGOs), farmers and representatives of racialized and immigrant communities were missing. Based on a comparison of participant lists for the second and third meetings (no list was included as part of the first meeting notes). It's not clear these gaps were addressed. By the third meeting participants included those more actively involved in food and farming work; there were fewer academics and less directly connected actors (e.g. those involved in housing and community work). After Sustain was formed, the network organization gradually engaged a more diverse set of actors from a sectoral and geographic perspective (member composition is discussed in Chapters 5 and 7).

Metcalf re-convened the initial group for a second meeting in June 2007 to determine if there was interest in framing common issues and goals and to assess the potential value of forming a food and agriculture network to bring different parts of the food system

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[1] In the interest of anonymity, this and other codes are used to identify interviewees, in this case (O6) refers to 'Other' interviewee number 6. See Appendix C for a list of all interview categories, codes and dates.

together (Metcalf Foundation, 2007b). Participants acknowledged that work needed to be done in a number of areas, including at a public policy level, an area where many food and farming organizations lack skills and capacity. The group concluded that a network approach – i.e. establishing a network to help connect and engage actors from different sectors rather than a standalone organization – might make sense. A working group crafted a preliminary strategy for the development of a food and agriculture network for Southern Ontario and Metcalf documented the strategy in September 2007 (Metcalf Foundation, 2007c).

During the second meeting participants identified a need to analyze the current food and farming landscape by consulting with various food and farm-related organizations and to document their food system concerns in a context paper. One participant stressed that, to avoid breaking the group apart in early days, the paper should document what is happening, rather than attempting to identify solutions or recommendations. In retrospect, according to one representative from Metcalf, this seemed "the right call because it kept people in the room talking about and really grappling with issues and not going straight to the solutions" (O6). It also set up the possibility for subsequent papers (email communication November 25, 2014); Metcalf ultimately funded the publication of a series of four additional 'food solutions' papers in 2010 (Publications, 2014).

The Foundation committed to fund a working group to guide the paper's development and craft terms of reference for a loose network. The information gathered through the scan and consultation process was incorporated into the paper "Food connects us all – Sustainable local food in Southern Ontario" (Metcalf Foundation, 2008a). Participants

reviewed and commented on draft versions and Metcalf published the final paper in February 2008. The paper described the state of food and farming and some of the barriers to a local, sustainable provincial food system; who was doing what at that time, and potential areas for collaboration. The "Food connects us all" paper has gradually come to be associated with Sustain as the network has continued to refer to, and build on the ideas outlined in it when engaging internal and external stakeholders.

The 2008 context paper was distributed to local media and policy makers and it brought attention to local, sustainable food and farming issues. The messages resonated – one political staffer (PM1) referred back to this foundational paper as an example of a useful contribution Sustain made to policy discussions. According to one Metcalf representative (O4), the provincial government had anticipated, and was surprised about the absence of recommendations in the paper; they were interested in acting on the issues identified, but wanted more direction regarding what actions stakeholders wanted government to take. Part of the reason government was receptive and looking for ideas was that other food and farming initiatives were also starting to get underway such as the ALUS (Alternative Land Use Services) pilot project in Norfolk County (Ontario, 2001). See also 'Indicators of the Moment', below.

The third and final meeting Metcalf hosted took place in February 2008. For it, the Foundation engaged an outside facilitator who was less connected to the participants than Metcalf's President and CEO (who facilitated the first two meetings). The goal for the third meeting was to develop a plan to move the network concept forward. Eighteen

participants attended, including Jeanette Longfield, the Coordinator of Sustain UK[m]. Longfield was in Toronto as part of Metcalf and Ryerson University's "City-Builder-in-Residence" series which brought renowned city builders to Toronto for town-hall meetings and discussions. One of Metcalf's program directors attended the discussions and heard Longfield speak about Sustain UK and realized that she could inspire the formation of an Ontario version, "even though we weren't thinking about it in those terms" (O6). The Foundation subsequently invited Longfield to join the February meeting as she was already in Toronto. Connecting with Sustain UK was "an important piece of the puzzle, although not as deliberate as it might look now, but it became quite deliberate" (O6).

Sustain UK has a highly diverse membership consisting of traditional agricultural organizations, health organizations, consumer organizations, and radical activist organizations; these organizations represent both urban and rural perspectives. When meeting with the Metcalf-convened group, the Coordinator indicated Sustain UK had been able to keep everyone in a 'big tent', get food on the political agenda, and move policy (Metcalf Foundation, 2008b). Successes Sustain UK identifies on its website include protecting children from junk food advertising, increased government investment in sustainable fisheries, and an expansion of urban agriculture in London (Sustain UK, 2014).

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[m] Sustain UK: The alliance for better food and farming is a national organization that was established in the United Kingdom in 1999. Their website indicates their membership consists of approximately 100 national organizations that "operate in the public interest". As a network, Sustain UK's members advocate for "food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity".

The opportunity for participants to learn more about how the UK model worked was valuable. Sustain UK's achievements and network approach appealed, and with the Coordinator's permission, the group selected the name "Sustain" for the Ontario food and agriculture network. Longfield advised the group to get started, rather than worrying about getting things just right at the start. Participants agreed, and acknowledged that "the thought processes and structures of the group will evolve over time". During the third meeting this group identified possible areas for action, established the network's broad mandate encompassing healthy food, farms and people, and considered its relationship to pre-existing projects (Metcalf Foundation, 2008b).

Metcalf representatives invited the group to imagine what Sustain might look like and determine what kind of support it would take to get the network up and running. Metcalf ultimately agreed to provide core operational funding for the network's first three years beginning in late 2008. Sustain incorporated in 2008 and with encouragement from Metcalf, it became a 'project' of Tides Canada[n] . This relationship gives Sustain access to a 'shared administrative platform' (McIsaac and Moody, 2013) and in 2008 it enabled the network to maintain momentum and get to work rather than developing a full organizational infrastructure.

Many refer to the 21 who participated in at least some of the three formative meetings Metcalf convened in 2007-2008 as Sustain's 'founders'. As noted previously Metcalf's

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[n] Tides Canada is a national charity, and as a project of Tides, Sustain has charitable status and thus is able to access a wider range of funding options than if it operated as a non-profit organization. 10% of all funding is paid to Tides Canada, and in exchange Tides carries out some of Sustain's administrative functions. Tides Canada's board of directors is responsible for governance of all Tides' projects.

President and CEO facilitated the first two meetings and in the third he played more of a participatory role. During the formative meetings participants worked collectively and there was no obvious leader within the group according to one Metcalf Foundation representative who attended (O6). Most members of this group, which was instrumental in establishing Sustain's foundations, remain actively involved in 2013, by which time Sustain's membership had expanded to approximately 450 members. Periodically founding members act as a compass, reminding newer network members of Sustain's original intent. Despite their efforts keep to Sustain focused on the original intent, Sustain has shifted somewhat to reflect the interests of its larger and more diverse membership.

The Metcalf Foundation's grantee relationships and advisory networks (e.g. relationships with academics) strongly influenced Sustain's initial composition as they invited participants to attend the series of meetings that led to Sustain's formation. As a funder holding the purse strings for food and farming initiatives, Metcalf had some influence over busy actors (both grantees and advisors) to convince them that engaging in such exploratory discussions was worthwhile.

In addition to exercising influence over who attended, Metcalf also had the financial capacity to host the initial meetings. The Foundation clearly invested resources to convene these meetings in terms of arranging for meeting space, food, and in the case of the third meeting, the services of an external facilitator. In addition, Foundation staff time was allocated to organizing, designing agendas, participating, and following up (e.g. with meeting notes) on each meeting.

I asked one Metcalf representative during an interview, "Would such a network have eventually formed in Ontario if Metcalf hadn't convened its grantees in 2007-2008?" (O6). The individual suspected it would not; as noted above, previous attempts to work together had been unsuccessful:

> *People are so busy… for any organization to take the lead would have been very difficult because it's not their day job. We know the value of backbone organizations; someone needs to be the champion… I think it takes something like a foundation, a neutral entity… a non-player on the landscape. For one organization doing the work to initiate it… I think you get into turf wars: 'is it going to be your agenda or mine?'*

Because Metcalf is not involved in work on the ground, they are a kind of 'non-player' on the landscape. However, as a funder and convenor of work done by network members, Metcalf is not a strictly 'neutral' player. Every foundation has a social agenda and vision it is committed to advancing – and that affects its decisions to invest in particular projects. Mindful of the importance of maintaining positive relationships with their funders, grantees are unlikely to decline an invitation to participate. In the case of Sustain, early involvement may have helped generate broader buy-in and commitment to the concept of Sustain and a network approach.

Although Sustain subsequently secured funding from other sources, including a provincial government foundation, Metcalf's initial and ongoing support has been critical to growing, weaving and engaging the network. The Metcalf Foundation provided Sustain with $100,000 of start-up funding in 2008, and provided additional support each year to a total of nearly $900,000 by the end of 2013 (email communication November 28, 2014). Over the years funding was allocated to network operations including network-building activities, specific project initiatives (e.g. a social media strategy), and

internships. Since inception, Metcalf's funding has comprised approximately 25-30% of

Sustain's overall budget (email communication with Director July 10, 2014) which in

2013 was $378,596 (Tides Canada, 2014 p. A20). The balance of Sustain's funding to

2013 mainly came from other public and private foundations such as the Ontario Trillium

Foundation, the Greenbelt Foundation, and the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

Sustain was the first network initiative in which Metcalf invested substantial resources.

The Foundation's motivation for doing so was driven in part by two collaborative and

network-minded program directors on staff, one of whom had studied networks and had

encouraged the Foundation to adopt more of a networked approach (O6), for example to

connect project leaders in order to help them gain a better understanding of how their

issues and proposed solutions may intersect and impact the broader system. Metcalf's

convening efforts in 2007 are a good example of a network approach, weaving previously

disconnected actors together to think collectively about how to address systemic

challenges.

In 2007, network approaches were beginning to attract more attention in the North

American foundation world, so Metcalf could be considered an early adopter. The U.S.-

based Garfield Foundation was an innovator; in 2003 they invested $2.5 million in the

exploration of systems thinking and network approaches which led to the formation of

the RE-AMP Energy Network (McLeod Grant, 2010), described earlier. Since that time,

a number of other foundations have expressed greater interest in, and have started

funding network approaches - e.g. in Canada the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation

invested in the Allies Network which launched in 2007 (McConnell Foundation, 2014)

and the Ontario Trillium Foundation funded TRIEC's Personal Immigrant Networks Initiative (TRIEC, 2012). In the U.S., the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Barr Foundation, and the David and Lucille Packard Foundation have also invested in network strategies and initiatives according to Taylor and Whatley (2011). There are some indications that foundations' interest in networks will endure. Publications by the US-based Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) and others have promoted the benefits and potential of network approaches as a way for foundations to more effectively support collaboration and movements (GEO, 2013, Scearce for GEO, 2011, Wei-Skillern, Silver, and Heitz, 2013).

2.2 INDICATORS OF THE MOMENT

During the time the Metcalf-hosted discussions were underway in 2007-2008, a number of factors in the broader environment reinforced that it was an opportune time for disconnected members of Ontario's alternative food and agriculture movements to work together. Many of these factors have persisted and become more prominent since that time, suggesting that Sustain's founding members were right to interpret this as a 'window of opportunity' (Kingdon, 2003).

Although Ontario's food movement was active in 2007, those working on complex food system issues were not well connected. This was true even of Metcalf's grantees; individuals working in geographic proximity on similar issues may have known each other and collaborated on occasion, but few worked with organizations in other sectors. As one AC member who participated in the initial meetings reflected during an interview (AC13), those working to address urban food security issues who had advocated for

lower food prices were unaware of the number of farmers living in poverty as they had not engaged in discussion with food producers. Krebs and Holley (2002), who have studied the evolution of network structures, might describe the network structure of Ontario's larger food and farming movement at the time as 'scattered fragments'. In contrast, by 2007 provincial food networks and PNOs had formed to support food movements in most other Canadian provinces: Newfoundland and Labrador (1998), Alberta (2003), British Columbia (2004), Manitoba (2006), Saskatchewan (2006), Nova Scotia (2006) and Prince Edward Island (2008) (Levkoe, 2014). So, in addition to the Sustain UK example, precedents for Canadian food networks existed.

Politically there was growing receptivity to progressive, alternative ideas related to sustainability more broadly. Provincially, the Liberal government of Ontario established a provincial 'greenbelt' in 2005 to protect 1.8 million acres of farmland and environmentally sensitive forests and wetlands north of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). In 2006 the Ontario government established the Greenbelt Foundation to coordinate and fund activities in the greenbelt. In Ontario's largest city, Toronto, Mayor David Miller (2003-2010) introduced a number of environmental and sustainability initiatives – e.g. in 2007 City Council endorsed the 'Climate Change, Clean Air and Sustainable Energy Action Plan' (City of Toronto, 2007) and in 2010 the new Toronto Green Standard that established green development standards for new buildings (City of Toronto, 2013). Toronto City Council acknowledged the connections between food production and greenhouse gas emissions and smog caused by the transportation of food. In 2008 the City adopted a local food procurement policy to increase the amount of local food served in city-owned facilities (City of Toronto, 2009).

In 2007, the Ontario Liberal party won a second majority government under Premier Dalton McGuinty. At that time the government's priorities were focused on health, education, jobs, and to a lesser extent green initiatives linked to economic opportunity (Ontario Liberal Party, 2007). Then Minister of Education, Kathleen Wynne, introduced the "Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Act" in 2008 which established guidelines for nutritional standards for food sold in schools (Ontario government, 2008b). Soon after that time discussions about a Green Energy Act began. Enacted in 2009 that Act aimed to expand the province's production of renewable energy, protect the environment and create green jobs (Ontario Ministry of Energy, 2009). The Act was aligned with the government's focus on economic development, one which has endured through a sluggish economic recovery in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis.

Ontario's shifting economy was another factor that indicated the time was right for those working in food and farming to come together. Some analysts suggest the decline of Ontario's traditional economic engine, the manufacturing sector, which began in 2003 and persists in 2013, can be attributed to the rise in the Canadian dollar (Foster, 2008, Beltrame, 2013). Others attribute it to a decline in Canadian productivity compared to the U.S., as well as the broader trend whereby manufacturers in industrialized countries have shifted their production facilities to countries with lower production costs (Krzepkowski and Mintz, 2013).

The 'middle' of Ontario's food system was particularly hard hit during this decline, as manufacturing plant closures eroded the province's food production and processing

capacity. Select closures include: Hershey's chocolate in Smiths Falls (2007), followed

soon after by CanGro Foods' fruit and vegetable canning plant in St. Davids (the last fruit

canning plant in Ontario, Walkom, 2008), and a Campbell's Soup plant in Listowel

(2008) (Hall, 2013). This trend has continued with the closure of two Bick's pickles

plants in Dunnville and Delhi (2010), an E.D. Smith salad dressing plant in Seaforth

(2013), and most recently, a Heinz ketchup plant in Leamington (2013) (ibid). Some of

these closures may be NAFTA-related; Sparling and LeGrow (2014) point out that after

Hershey closed two Canadian plants, it shifted production to a new plant in Mexico.

Despite the food production and processing closures, Ontario's agri-food exports grew,

hitting "a record high of nearly $10 billion in 2011". The Minister of Economic

Development and Innovation acknowledged the value of this stating, "The food

processing industry is helping drive economic growth and provide good jobs across

Ontario for families" (OMAFRA, 2012). The 'alternative' organic sector contributed to

this with a robust growth rate of approximately 20% each year for more than a decade

(Miller, 2008). Today Ontario's "agri-food industry contributes $33 billion to the

provincial economy… provides 700,000 jobs and pays $7 billion in wages" (Vote ON

food and farming, 2014).

Sales at Ontario's 154 farmers markets grew steadily during the 1998-2008 period,

contributing estimated economic impacts of between $641 million and $1.9 billion

annually (Experience Renewal Solutions, 2009). Government recognized an economic

bright spot as the recession hit, and in the 2008 Ontario budget (Ontario government,

2008a, p. 20), the province committed to invest $56 million over four years for the 'Pick

Ontario Freshness' strategy and the 'Ontario Farmers' Markets Initiative', to encourage Ontarians to buy locally. These programs helped cultivate public interest in local food by bringing more farmers and eaters together in conversation at farmers markets.

Comparatively, Canada's overall economy fared less well. The national economic downturn that began in 2008 led to a prolonged period of limited economic growth characterized by job losses and growing rates of poverty and food insecurity in urban and rural areas of Canada. Food Banks Canada reported that Canadian food bank usage rates in 2013 (833,098 people, more than a third of whom are children, used a Canadian food bank) remained 23% higher than pre-2008 (Food Banks Canada, 2013). They attributed this to poverty-related challenges such as low wages (12% of households using food banks are employed), layoffs, and lack of affordable housing which forces many to forgo food for rent. These proximate social issues, along with the food manufacturing plant closures, may have helped put food and agriculture on governments' agendas.

Simultaneously, public awareness of, and interest in, food and agriculture issues was being fed by a growing number of television programs, books, and documentaries. Since the TV channel Foodnetwork.ca was founded in 2000, Canadians have consumed a huge assortment of TV and internet-based programs focused on food preparation, food production and restaurants. These programs blend education and entertainment and have cultivated a celebrity chef culture. Non-fiction writers have authored best-sellers to educate eaters about food and agriculture issues - e.g. Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* (2005); Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon's *The 100-Mile Diet* (2007), Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2007), and Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*

(2008). These books helped produce audiences for food- and farm-focused documentary films such as *Fast Food Nation* (2007) and *Food, Inc.* (2009) which were popular in Canada as well as the U.S..

As Metcalf and its grantees were beginning to appreciate the interconnectedness between food and other social issues in 2007, print and television journalists were shining spotlights on issues related to food and agriculture, and their work helped members of the public, myself included, to connect the dots. Today, articles in local and national newspapers regularly link food and agriculture issues to issues of poverty (e.g. hunger and farmer livelihoods), health (e.g. obesity rates, chronic diseases, and food safety), environment (e.g. agriculture and climate change, water usage and pollution on farms, pesticides and their impacts on bee populations) and social justice (e.g. migrant labour and food access). Government policy makers were likely monitoring how food and agriculture issues were being framed in the media, along with the growing public awareness.

Ontario's food and farming policy space is crowded, dominated by large associations representing mainly conventional agriculture actors. Many of these associations were created by government and have a long history of working with government (e.g. Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (OFVGA) and Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO – until 2013 called the Ontario Cattlemen's Association). Sustain entered this space as a new voice advocating for system change in alignment with the shifting public discourse on food and farming issues. I asked one

Metcalf representative how Sustain was received by policy makers, and it appeared the time was ripe for an organization like Sustain to enter the conversation.

> *I got the sense in talking, particularly with OMAFRA (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs), that for several years they were astonished and intrigued that this new set of primarily urban actors were actually interested in agricultural policy and wanted input… I think they sort of struggled to understand – Who are you? What do you want? What relationship do you have to our agriculture Ministry? How do we reflect policy to take into account this emergent set of issues, and interests and actors? And I think the existence of Sustain went a long way to answer a lot of those questions for OMAFRA. Suddenly there was an organization that they could deal with, who carried a set of ideas and recommendations on behalf of a range of organizations who stood behind it. That put the Ministry in a place where they could look to and say OK, 'that's their constituency'.* ~ Interview, Metcalf's President and CEO.

My investigation into Sustain's origins indicates Sustain's formation was the result of, and influenced by two key factors. First – the Metcalf Foundation was a 'catalyst' that recognized the linkages between food, farming and other social and environmental issues and the potential that might be achieved by bringing key actors together. The Foundation's continued financial support has been critical to the work that Sustain has undertaken to date, as described in Chapters 5 and 6. Second, Metcalf and Sustain's founding members were aware of the growing interest around food and farming within government and the general public, and took advantage of this to engage in and advance the policy conversation. This case study suggests they were right to ride the wave of public interest and seize the moment – 'kairos' was at play.

Chapter 3, *Literature Review*, provides an overview of the literature I used to help me better understand how cross-sectoral policy coalitions might be designed to develop the legitimacy required to influence public policy.

CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents insights gained and questions raised based on a review of literature from researchers in management studies, sociology, and public policy. I also refer to grey literature or papers published by practitioners in the field that live coalition challenges on a daily basis. This literature identifies factors driving the formation of policy coalitions; insights about coalition structures, strategies and processes and the concepts of legitimacy and policy influence as they relate to policy coalitions. This literature informed my research question and the areas I inquired into as the basis for the case study of Sustain.

3.1 WHAT'S DRIVING THE FORMATION OF POLICY COALITIONS

Fully understanding the scope and nature of today's complex and interconnected social and environmental problems often requires considering the broader system from diverse perspectives. Researchers indicate that those attempting to solve such complex problems in the public and non-profit sectors may benefit from cross-sectoral dialogue, 'collective action' and intervention at the level of public policy (Provan and Kenis, 2008, p. 231 cites Agranoff and McGuire, 2003; Imperial, 2005; Lemieux-Charles, Chambers, Cockerill, Jaglal, Brazil, Cohen, LeClair, Dalziel and Shulman, 2005; Provan, Isett, and Milward, 2004; Provan and Milward, 1995).

Making sense of problems and developing effective policy solutions to shift systems in productive ways demands diverse skills and knowledge which generally do not reside in a single organization or sector. Coalitions that engage diverse actors from different sectors in dialogue and collective action may be better positioned to understand complex

problems, identify viable solutions and influence public policy. It is partly for this reason that more CSOs have formed policy-focused coalitions in recent years.

Organizations form or join policy coalitions and networks for a variety of other reasons – e.g. to acquire legitimacy, resources, systemic capacity, and serve clients better (Provan and Kenis, 2008, Cooper and Shumate, 2012). Van Dyke and McCammon (2010) cite studies that indicate, "coalitions are most likely to form when movement participants not only share interests, but also encounter threats to their common interests and expected gains" (p. 320). The advocacy 'chill' described in Chapter 1 may be an example of such a threat. Mizrahi and Rosenthal's (2001) study of 41 social change coalitions in the United States notes 'common interests and a desire to affect a larger agenda' was the most frequently cited reason coalition leaders identified related to coalition formation.

Academics and practitioners acknowledge there is no recipe for solving complex social problems (Westley, Zimmerman, Quinn Patton, 2006). Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006) note that cross-sector collaborations that bridge the public, private and non-profit sectors are sometimes formed in response to the failure of a single sector to solve public problems. The formation of cross-sectoral collaborations or coalitions in the areas of poverty (e.g. Campaign 2000, see Westley, Zimmerman, Quinn Patton, 2006), forestry (e.g. Great Bear Rainforest campaign, see Tjornbo, Westley, Riddell, 2010) and food (e.g. Sustain and other PNOs, see Levkoe 2014) in Canada indicates there is a growing recognition of the need to collaborate and work across sectors and silos to achieve systems change. This suggests that form should follow function – if a coalition thinks

collaboration is an important function, a coalition's structures should be designed to encourage and support collaboration.

Practitioners regularly acknowledge the challenges related to inter-organizational collaboration. Collaborating across sectors introduces additional complexity since each sector has different resources, values, language and perspectives on problems and solutions (Selsky and Parker, 2005). Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006) reinforce that cross-sectoral collaborations are challenging to create and sustain and observe that few research studies of such collaborations examine all of "the relationships among the initial conditions, processes, structures, governance, contingencies and constraints, outcomes, and accountabilities of collaborations" (p. 52).

This literature reinforces that various factors are driving the formation of non-governmental policy coalitions in Canada today. Key factors include a recognition by CSOs of the need to collaborate across sectors to understand and craft solutions to complex problems; to leverage limited resources, skills and knowledge; and to speak with a stronger voice and shift systems by influencing public policy.

In the next section, I highlight literature that relates to the choices policy coalitions make about structures.

3.2 STRUCTURES

Researchers that have studied collaborations, social networks and public policy suggest that a coalition's structure affects its ability to work effectively together and with others

outside the coalition (Miller, Razon-Abad, Covey and Brown, 1994, Mizrahi and

Rosenthal, 2001, Provan and Kenis, 2008). Dötterweich (2006) reports that community

partnerships benefit from a clearly documented organizational structure outlining

relationships, roles, and responsibilities. Others indicate the strategic purpose of a

network sometimes informs its structure (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003, Bryson, Crosby,

Stone, 2006); for example, the structures of policy and strategy-making networks differ

from resource-exchange and project-based networks. This echoes the enduring

organizational design theory articulated by Chandler (1962, 1977) that 'structure follows

strategy'.

The literature I reviewed suggests that key structural elements of policy coalitions

include: a broad, informed membership with a diverse range of skills, knowledge and

resources; networks of relationships with sufficient trust to work productively together; a

governance structure with defined roles, responsibilities and relationships; a leadership

model that coalition members consider legitimate; and staff with skills and knowledge to

engage members and support policy development and promotion. I explore literature

related to each of these structural elements below.

3.2.1 Membership

A coalition's membership has implications for a coalition's ability to perform required

tasks and cultivate the legitimacy to have influence. Hays, Hays, DeVille, and Mulhall

(2000) indicate that a broad-based, multi-sectoral coalition "can more effectively reach

and represent a larger constituency" (p. 375). Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury,

Jacobson, and Allen (2001) conclude, based on an extensive review of literature on

community coalitions that, "coalitions with a diverse membership are more likely to have access to the range of skills/knowledge needed for collaborative capacity…" (p. 249). Further, "…to increase the likelihood that coalition efforts will inform policy making and lead to long term systems change, coalitions need to develop relationships with key community leaders and policy makers" (p. 253). This suggests coalition members' networks may be an asset to the coalition.

Key considerations in terms of membership composition involve deciding on the perspectives required and the size of the coalition's 'tent'. Creating a 'big tent' (Cohen, Larijani, Aboelata, Mikkelsen, 2004) with room for multiple, diverse stakeholders has the benefit of engaging different perspectives, values, skills and resources; by collaborating on different levels, diverse stakeholders may be able to generate new insights, ideas and innovations. Ospina and Saz-Carranza (2010) note that achieving collaborative advantage "depends on the ability of each member organization to bring different resources to the network" (p. 409).

Prins (2010) cites Huxam's 1996 conclusion that "diversity is an essential condition for collaborative advantage" (p. 300). Hays, Hays, DeVille, and Mulhall (2000) indicate that the "ability to change policy was positively related to member diversity and the number of sectors represented…" (p. 376). The active participation of diverse stakeholders can enhance a group's sensitivity and ability to respond to changes in the external environment (Simo, 2009). This can assist policy coalitions in monitoring and responding strategically to 'policy windows' (Kingdon, 2003, Pal, 2006) and system events such as changes in governing conditions or public opinion (Birkland, 2005).

Not surprisingly, diversity also presents challenges for coalitions. "When actors from different sectors focus on the same issue, they are likely to think about it differently, to be motivated by different goals, and to use different approaches" (Selsky and Parker, 2005, p. 851). In his examination of four provincial food networks, Levkoe (2014) observes that each spent considerable "time and energy negotiating with, and responding to their constituents" (p. 160).

When a coalition is being established, questions of how much diversity to engage and who to involve become strategic choices. Wood and Gray's research on inter-organizational collaboration (1991) concludes that including all interested parties is rarely realistic or necessary; when determining who to engage, coalitions must balance the tensions of inclusivity and efficiency (Provan and Kenis, 2008). This suggests that, as a coalition engages more numbers and diversity, consulting and negotiating with members may become more onerous.

Prins (2010) refers to the determination of who is internal (i.e. members) and who is external, and how each should be engaged as 'boundary management'. Typically a coalition's convenor (i.e. the individual or organization that brings the group together – see page 54), draws on their networks when recruiting members and this influences who is in the tent. We saw an example of this with the Metcalf Foundation in Chapter 2. Wood and Gray (1991) suggest a convenor may consider engaging: those stakeholders who are most interested; those who are the most powerful and influential; the majority within a problem domain; and/or the best organized networks. Some caution that

organizations that are not engaged can undermine a group's overall legitimacy (Wood and Gray, 1991, Pasquero, 1991).

There appear to be substantial benefits to bringing different sectors together as members of a coalition. Bason (2010) notes that government/non-profit collaborations can be mutually beneficial since government can learn from organizations that have successfully implemented social innovations in communities, while social innovators can benefit from government's capacity and experience taking solutions to scale. Non-profit/business collaborations are increasingly seen by non-profits as a necessary tactic and by businesses as a key component of business strategy with mutual benefits (Eweje and Palakshappa, 2009 cite Murphy and Bendell's 1999 work). Austin (2000), however, reports that non-profit/business collaborations introduce additional collaborative challenges: organizations with different performance measures, competitive dynamics, cultures, decision-making styles, etc. For cross-sector collaborations to deliver public value, their members need to appreciate and find ways to leverage each sector's strengths as well as find ways to overcome or compensate for the weaknesses of different sectors (Bryson, Crosby, Stone, 2006). In the conclusion of their literature review, Bryson, Crosby and Stone note that those engaging in cross-sectoral collaboration should go into it recognizing that "success will be very difficult to achieve". It can also be hard to measure (Eweje and Palakshappa, 2009).

In my experience working with coalitions and collaborative groups, individual participants – both leaders and members – often impact a collaboration's success. Determining who should represent participating stakeholders or sectors needs to be given

careful consideration; at the same time, it can be unrealistic to expect an individual to 'represent' a sector which may itself be diverse, competitive and lack a single voice (Cairns and Harris, 2011). Individuals who participate as representatives of an association with a particular viewpoint, for example, may be uncomfortable shifting their viewpoint in a public forum (Roberts and Bradley, 1991). They note that exceptions to this are 'policy entrepreneurs' who come from outside a system and have the ability to challenge existing frameworks and consider more radical changes.

"Coalitions rely extensively on the extent to which their members have the capacity to perform needed tasks and work collaboratively together (Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, Allen, 2001, p. 243 they reference Knoke and Wood, 1981). Individuals who work in coalitions need to have a variety of skills such as "communication, negotiation, conflict-resolution" (Cairns and Harris 2011); interpersonal and administrative skills related to collaboration; and social psychological skills - the ability to modify mind-sets and habits (Pasquero 1991). Collaboration also requires those involved have the capacity to look beyond the competitive relationships that exist related to funding, staff and other limited resources (Cooper and Shumate 2012).

Policy coalition work demands specific technical skills related to policy development, analysis and advocacy. This includes problem framing (e.g. in alignment with government priorities), problem solving, strategy development, knowing when and how to negotiate/compromise, outreach and organizing, media and government relations (Moore 2005). The ability to gather, analyze and synthesize data – e.g. to support the monitoring and evaluation of policies that are implemented – are also important skills.

The literature related to membership suggests that a coalition's membership composition is important from three key perspectives. First, members provide the energy, knowledge and skills a coalition requires to achieve its objectives – i.e. its capacity. Secondly, individual members impact a coalition's culture, and through their personal and professional networks members extend a coalition's reach into the broader community. Thirdly, the size of the 'tent' and the diversity of the members a convenor invites to participate represent strategic choices that affect a coalition's ability to understand the broader environment, collaborate productively, and influence policy.

Each of these membership factors may contribute to, or detract from, a coalition's legitimacy. I investigated these aspects of Sustain's membership as I gathered data and reviewed organizational materials. In Chapter 5 I describe Sustain's membership composition and growth, along with processes the Alliance uses to connect members and engage their knowledge and expertise. In Chapter 7 I analyze how these structures and related processes affected Sustain's legitimacy.

3.2.2 Networks

Theory about social networks (from sociology) and policy networks (from public policy) both inform my research. Here I focus on the former. I explore literature related to policy networks and policy development and promotion later in this chapter.

Networks are often characterized as fluid, flexible and adaptable structures (Huxham and Vangen, 2005, Katcher, 2010, McLeod Grant, 2010) and are seen as having the potential

to deliver distinct benefits compared to other organizational forms (Plastrik and Taylor, 2010). These benefits, or 'network effects', include "great power to innovate, disturb, ignite, and dramatically change systems" (ibid, p. 24). Some attribute this to networks' ability to self-organize and respond to emergence (McLeod Grant, 2010). Networks are also recognized for their power to rapidly spread information and ideas (Milgram, 1967, Moore and Westley, 2011). Plastrik and Taylor (2010) suggest non-profit networks wanting to achieve network effects pursue strategies to cultivate rapid growth and diffusion, 'small-world' reach (Milgram, 1967), adaptive capacity, and resilience.

These network effects may depend upon whether a network is 'healthy'. Plastrik and Taylor (2009) developed a "Network Health Scorecard" that can be used to evaluate a network's health across various dimensions. Scorecard dimensions include the network's purpose, capacity, operational processes (e.g. internal communications, engagement, accountability mechanisms and decision-making) and performance. Scearce (2011) too reinforces it is critical to assess network health and notes, "early stage and regular evaluation can also be a way to find things to celebrate and thereby increase momentum and commitment" (p. 24). I discuss and analyze Sustain's network health in Chapter 7.

From a structural perspective, a network's boundaries can be difficult to define as the edges are often 'unbounded' and fuzzy (Cooper and Shumate, 2012, Scearce, 2011). Members of informal and social networks are members by virtue of their connections to other network members and may not be aware of their membership. But as Levkoe (2014) notes, "Shared beliefs and a sense of belongingness are central to determining the boundaries of a social movement…" (p. 127). Membership in a coalition may be clearer

as boundaries are sometimes defined through a memorandum of understanding or similar agreement. Coalitions are a kind of network since 'members' generally form connections or linkages with others coalition members. Coalition members are also part of other social and professional networks that extend beyond and/or exist outside of a coalition; as noted previously, these extended networks may be of value to the coalition.

Takahashi and Smutney (2002) conclude that informal relationships among individuals in partner agencies are key to bringing organizations together. Although some studies have identified "a previous history of working relationship as a condition for coalition formation", coalition leaders Mizrahi and Rosenthal (2001) interviewed did not identify this as a factor for coalition success.

Sociologists have applied network theory to the analysis of social networks since work done at Harvard's sociology department in the 1960-1970s (Prell, 2012). Social network analysts believe network structure matters, and much of the literature describes different structures or models and considers their impacts (Borgatti, Mehra, Brass, Labianca, 2009, Diani, 2003, Krebs and Holley, 2002). Granovetter's (1973) 'strength of weak ties' theory examines how network structure affects the flow of information, and concludes 'bridging' ties between individuals in different networks are critical to information exchange between networks. He suggests that advocacy groups that fail to expand beyond their core members may fail to accomplish their goals. Others suggest that although 'weak ties' may generate innovation, "the adoption of innovation requires strong bonds and trust" (Moore and Westley, 2011, p. 5).

Burt (1992) introduces the concept of 'structural holes' in ego networks. In 'ego-centered' networks there is a central 'node' (i.e. one network member, group or organization) to which all other nodes are connected to, as spokes to the hub of a wheel. 'Structural holes' represent an absence of ties between the nodes located on the outside of the wheel. A 'strongly bound' network has few 'structural holes', and is better able to "communicate and coordinate so as to act as one" (Borgatti, Mehra, Brass, Labianca, 2009).

The 'centrality' dimension of network structures has been another important focus of study. Actors in a network that are better connected to other network members have greater centrality and potentially greater influence (Cook, Emerson, Gillmore, 1983, Kahler, 2009, Moore and Westley, 2011). According to Cooper and Shumate (2012), "organizations with the greatest centrality in collaboration networks receive greater benefits than those with less network centrality. Benefits may come in the form of prestige (Taylor and Doerfel, 2003), access to information (Gulati, 1995), and visibility" (p. 643). I suspect such an imbalance of benefits may manifest in distrust and detract from internal legitimacy.

Segmentation is another dimension of network structure (Diani, 2003). This relates to the number of steps between network 'nodes', where more steps can be barriers to communication between members. Diani suggests higher segmentation may reflect ideological differences, or differences in interest in an issue. This suggests to me that more diverse, and cross-sectoral networks are likely to be more segmented and that a

network organization needs to invest energy to establish connections between members and create opportunities to build mutual understanding.

Diani (2003) identifies four types of movement or network structures based on their degrees of centrality and segmentation. Diani's 'movement cliques' are highly decentralized (i.e. no single actor controls exchanges among members), and reticulated with all nodes adjacent. 'Policephalous' movements are centralized and somewhat segmented; the distance between some members is long. In such a structure, some actors are better connected than others and "able to control relational flows". Diani's 'star/wheel' structure is characterized by high centralization and low segmentation. In this model the central 'hub' acts as a coordinator, and controls exchanges among other actors. Those on the outside, connected like spokes to a hub, are often more involved with others outside the network; they rely on the central hub to gain access to others in the network. This equates to a Burt's 'ego-centered' network structure discussed above. Finally there is a 'segmented, decentralized structure', which Diani suggests is difficult to characterize as a network since actors generally act alone or with a small number of others on specific issues and may reject efforts at coordination.

Krebs and Holley (2002) suggest network structures evolve through phases, with the help of network 'weavers', to become more adaptive and resilient. Some of the phases they define reflect Diani's structures above, however I find their nomenclature more visually evocative. Phase one is 'scattered fragments'; in this phase, actors may work with a few others, but their collaborative work is often done in isolation from other groups. This phase reflects characteristics of Diani's 'segmented, decentralized structure'. Krebs and

Holley suggest that a leader (an individual or organization) acting as a 'weaver' can foster new connections between actors in scattered fragments and evolve the network structure into a 'single hub and spoke' model, similar to Diani's 'star/wheel'. They caution that this structure should not be maintained over the long term since it concentrates power and vulnerability in one node, the hub. In a healthy network, weavers establish connections between members represented by the 'spokes', and facilitate collaboration within small groups. They recommend the initial weaver gradually mentor and encourage others to weave, since multiple weavers can help evolve the network toward a third phase, a 'multi-hub small-world'. In this phase, a weaver might connect to each hub; in general, ties within each hub are stronger than those between hubs. This appears to reflect Diani's 'policephalous' structure. Krebs and Holley indicate this structure assists a network to grow in scale and reach and facilitates information flow. Their final phase and end goal is the 'core/periphery' model which has at its core members who are well connected to each other, many of whom are weavers. Members on the more porous periphery of the network are less well connected to the core. They may be newer members; members who represent bridges to less well connected communities; or members with unique resources that operate outside the core community.

Cases that Takahashi and Smutney (2002) examine illustrate that structures may need to evolve throughout the course of a collaborative's[o] journey to align with a change in focus or to streamline functions to increase productivity. Mizrahi and Rosenthal (2001) observe

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[o] Although grammatically an adjective, 'collaborative' is frequently used as noun instead of a 'collaboration' or a 'collaborative group'. I encountered this usage in the literature I reviewed (I have also observed it is increasingly common in verbal discussions) and so I use it here as it is used in the source material I reviewed. In the literature it is often used to describe a collaboration or alliance that has a defined identity (e.g. when the collaborative group has a name), rather than referring to groups that are less formally defined.

that adjustments to structures, membership and goals are often a product of "adapting and

adjusting to internal and external changes… [and that] those dynamics seem to be

indications of resilience, creativity and fortitude" (p. 75). This suggests it is important for

a collaborative or coalition to monitor and reflect on its experience.

Prins (2010) notes that as more structure is introduced collaboratives should strive to

balance structure (e.g. defined roles and groups) and flexibility (e.g. to engage new

members). This reflects a tendency toward institutionalization (or stability) that occurs as

organizations and networks mature. McGuire and Agranoff (2007) observe,

> *…there is lingering evidence that bureaucratic management remains*
> *important. We know that some networks are "better" than others, but are still*
> *learning why; that too much process can stultify collaborative operations, but*
> *are still learning how; and that networks work in some situations and not in*
> *others, but are still learning when. ~ 2007, p. 1.*

Levkoe (2014) references Staggenborg's (2011) findings concerning social movement

organizations (SMO) that are more and less formalized.

> *…formalized SMOs with hierarchical decision-making structures and*
> *codified membership criteria have typically been more successful in*
> *accessing established political channels, at being recognized as a legitimate*
> *representative of a movement, and for sustaining ongoing interactions with*
> *diverse constituencies. Less formalized SMOs - managed by volunteers with*
> *few formal procedures or policies - tend to be more successful at tactical*
> *innovation since they are able to mobilize quickly and adapt to emerging*
> *situations" ~ Levkoe, 2014, pp.154-155.*

Provan and Kenis (2008) identify three tensions that they think networks need to respond

to: flexibility versus stability, efficiency versus inclusiveness, and internal versus external

legitimacy. They identified a need to build and test theory related to network-level

activities, structures and outcomes. The authors describe three forms of governance that

engage these tensions in different ways (discussed in more detail in Governance section below).

Malinsky and Lubelsky (2011) might characterize these kinds of tensions as paradoxes or contradictions, something they observe is common in networks. In the networks they studied, "Framing these paradoxes as pairs of complementary tendencies rather than as either/or choices proved to be helpful" (ibid, p. 29). They suggest networks frame their questions using 'both/and'; I think this might be a useful way to respond to the tensions above, knowing that each dimension offers something positive.

This literature indicates a network's structure is a reflection of the relationships that exist among network members, with a network's 'boundary' formally or informally defining those individuals and groups that are part of a network. Network 'weavers' are individuals or groups within a network that help shape and in some cases evolve a network's membership and structure by deliberately connecting members with one another. Informed by this, I paid attention to the nature of the relationships and connections within Sustain's network and attempted to identify who played a weaver role in the network and the strategies and processes they used to weave a network with the knowledge, expertise and legitimacy to influence public policy.

The literature also suggests a network's structure affects its ability to achieve desirable network effects such as the rapid spread of ideas and response to changing conditions. Researchers define several network dimensions and related structures. Some suggest these structures are evolutionary in nature, and that a network may choose to evolve its

structure toward a particular form. As networks and organizations mature, they tend to 'institutionalize', introducing more formal structures (e.g. for membership) and processes (e.g. for participation). Such formalization can produce tension as it detracts from the flexibility and adaptability that contributes to a network's ability to achieve desirable network effects.

This suggests that in gathering my data, I should consider Sustain's network dimensions and structural form. I looked for evidence of whether the Alliance's network structure affected information flow and members' ability to communicate and collaborate. I also looked for evidence of whether the network's structure evolved and whether Sustain experienced any of the network tensions identified above.

3.2.3 Governance

The growing number of networks and collaborations has led to an evolution in thinking about governance. Takahashi and Smutney (2002) cite Lowndes and Skelcher's 1998 definition of governance as: "the purposive means of guiding and steering a society or community"… comprised of "a particular set of organizational arrangements." Renz (2006) reinforces that in networks, no single body has the authority or power to direct, and boards are no longer the primary home of governance. According to Provan and Kenis (2008), researchers have given the topic of network governance limited attention despite the fact that is it an important mechanism for developing internal legitimacy. They note, "…governance is necessary to ensure that participants engage in collective and mutually supportive action, that conflict is addressed, and that network resources are acquired and utilized efficiently and effectively" (ibid, p. 231).

According to Simo (2009), agreeing on governance is "one of the first steps that should be taken in establishing" cross-sector collaborations. Establishing agreements at the outset around a rationale for the establishment of a collaborative, its expected duration, and membership criteria is considered important, since lack of clarity around roles and accountabilities can lead to confusion and frustration (Cairns and Harris, 2011). As the number of network members grows, the number of potential relationships increases exponentially. Under such conditions, governance becomes extremely complex. Geographic distance further exacerbates governance complexity according to Provan and Kenis (2008).

Bryson, Crosby and Stone (2006) note that initial agreements around how to work together, and to what end, may be informal or formal, with the later facilitating accountability. Keeping agreements informal initially, and designing with adaptability/ evolution in mind, is helpful since agreements can be difficult to alter after they are in place (Takahashi and Smutney 2002 reference Harrison and Weiss' 1998 work). A work group or task force structure can "serve to organize collaborative work, clarify member responsibilities, and create the task focus needed to achieve targeted goals" (Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, Allen, 2001, p. 254).

"Coalition organizations need structures that allow for input from different types of members and that avoid competition with member organizations for leadership and resources" (Van Dyke and McCammon, 2010, p. 323). Surman's (2006) "constellation

governance model" represents a governing approach and structure that acknowledges and responds to these considerations.

Provan and Kenis (2008) articulate a theory outlining three forms of governance: 'shared governance', 'lead organization', and 'network administrative organization' (NAO). In shared governance, a network is governed completely by its members/participants; there is no distinct administrative entity and governance is decentralized. In a lead organization governed network, one member of the network often takes responsibility for some or all governance activities. This form is more centralized, with most "network-level activities and key decisions coordinated through and by a single member". A NAO is characterized by a separate, non-member administrative unit (an individual or separately staffed organization) which governs the network and its activities. This administrative body is responsible for coordinating and sustaining the network. This unit is somewhat similar to the 'backbone support organization' Kania and Kramer (2011) indicate is helpful in supporting 'collective impact' initiatives. Surman's "constellation governance model" has an equivalent, she recommends a neutral secretariat be engaged to coordinate a network's work.

"In networks, the primary tension regarding efficiency is between the need for administrative efficiency in network governance and the need for member involvement, through inclusive decision making" (Provan and Kenis, 2008, p. 242). Although shared self-governance may appeal to network participants as it enables them to retain control, the authors conclude that this form of governance is best suited to small networks of organizations. As a network grows, this form becomes inefficient, and participants may

ignore network issues or spend excessive energy on coordination. The authors also observe that some networks make a strategic choice to evolve their governance model in response to changing conditions, but that an evolution does not always occur. As a network attracts new members, demands on governance grow. They conclude that the choice of governance form, and the management of tensions within it, affects a network's overall effectiveness.

The literature on governance structures and related processes suggests it is important to examine the Alliance's overarching objectives, how they were established, and the roles and responsibilities assigned to, or assumed by, individuals and groups. In other words, how did Sustain organize the Network and leverage available resources to achieve its objectives? Did it adopt a particular form of governance and did that evolve over time? Did Sustain encounter the tension of efficiency versus inclusivity? How did Sustain's governance structures and processes impact the Alliance's internal and external legitimacy?

3.2.4 Leadership

Various terms are applied to key leadership roles within a collaboration or coalition, such as: 'facilitator', 'convenor', 'director', 'sponsor', and 'champion'. As is true in an organization, an individual's leadership approach and personal effectiveness has implications for the success of a coalition. "Where community bonds are less strong, leadership is likely to be more important in creating bridges and framing issues so that diverse groups can be brought together" (Van Dyke and McCammon, 2010, p. 326). A number of examples profiled in the literature illustrate that clarity among individual

leadership roles is important – for the individual serving in the role, and for those who interact with them (Roberts and Bradley, 1991). I found helpful distinctions made in the literature between two important leadership roles: that of the initial 'convenor' and the ongoing 'director'.

The convenor: this individual, who may or may not represent a lead organization, plays a unique role as the initiator of a collaboration. This role is at times referred to as a 'champion' or 'facilitator'. Gray (1989) notes the convenor must, "identify and bring all the legitimate stakeholders to the table" (p. 71). Takahashi and Smutney (2002) refer to individuals who assume this role as a 'collaborative entrepreneur'. Collaborative entrepreneurs tend to draw on their networks of relationships when initiating a collaborative project (Takahashi and Smutney, 2002) and so this has implications for who is invited into the 'tent'. This individual may or may not lead and manage the collaboration after it is established by continuing in an ongoing leadership role such as director (see below).

Bryson, Crosby and Stone (2006) note that convenors tend to be "boundary-spanning leaders with credibility in multiple arenas" (p. 46); and that they often hold positions of power and influence in the community. Like members they need to have a range of skills; Gray (1989) indicates convenors must be able to: see the potential value and purpose of collaborating, identify relevant stakeholders, persuade people to participate, and establish appropriate processes. Convenors must also be seen by others as legitimate and as having an unbiased approach to issues.

Cooper and Shumate (2012) explore the differences between coalitions convened by the community or 'grassroots' coalitions, and those formed by actors outside the community, or what they termed 'donor-driven' (i.e. funder-driven) coalitions. They observe that coalitions established by the community tend to rely on persuasion to bring a coalition together and this means the coalitions are often larger but lack financial resources. In contrast, when donors or funders convene a coalition, they are able to mandate collaboration and select the organizations involved (i.e. members don't choose to work together), thanks in part to an unequal power relationship. Not surprisingly, they conclude that 'donor-driven' coalitions are comparatively better resourced than 'grassroots' coalitions.

The director: although formal and informal leadership is exercised within coalitions, formal leaders often go by the title of 'director' or alternatively 'coordinator'. Bryson, Crosby and Stone (2006) distinguish between directors who are 'sponsors' – i.e. those who often have access to resources they can use to support the network; and directors who act as 'champions' – i.e. those who help advance the collaboration on a process level. They reinforce that the cultivation of informal leadership throughout the network is important, since overarching direction may be limited. Surman and Surman (2008) support this, noting that a 'partnership director' (a defined leadership role in the constellation governance model) must focus on moving the process forward and nurturing leaders in partner organizations. Kania and Kramer (2011), in describing cross-sectoral "collective impact initiatives" [p], specify the need for a coordinating staff member (from a

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[p] *Kania and Kramer describe these kinds of initiatives as long-term commitments by a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem.*

separate backbone organization) charged with project management, data management and facilitation. As is true for convenors, directors should have a diverse skill-set.

Mizrahi and Rosenthal (2001) study the complexity of coalition building from the perspective of individual leaders. These leaders ranked competent leadership as the second most important element of success (the authors acknowledged there may have been some bias in this). The authors subsequently identify leadership competencies, values and attributes that affect a leader's effectiveness. The top-ranked attributes include: credibility, trustworthiness and articulateness. Additional attributes there is significant agreement on: educated, good strategic/political skills, organized, facilitation skills, visionary.

Organizational studies have traditionally focused on individual leaders, but as Reinelt (2010) observes, "While leadership in organizations is positional, individual, top-down, and directive; leadership in networks is relational, collective, bottom-up, and emergent." Leach and Mazur (2013) would agree, they reinforce there is no single leader in a movement network, rather, leadership is distributed. This hints at the concept of collective or shared leadership that was evident in the case study of the US-based national energy network, RE-AMP (McLeod Grant, 2010). There, leadership was exercised by various individuals (e.g. staff, consultants, members, facilitators) and, "This shared leadership created resilience and greater effectiveness, as the network could push forward on multiple fronts simultaneously" (ibid, p. 2).

Ospina and Saz-Carranza (2010) indicate that leaders in networks need to focus simultaneously on two types of work: "inward work, among network members… and

outward work between the network and external actors". Both of these forms of work likely have implications for a group's legitimacy.

The literature reinforces the important roles coalition 'convenors' and skilled 'directors' play in a coalition's success. These leaders not only shape a coalition's initial composition, but implement processes to attract, engage and retain members, which as we saw earlier is linked to a coalition's capacity and legitimacy. Leadership in networks tends to be distributed between formal (positional) and informal (relational) leaders in the network, and between members and, in the case of network organizations, staff. Based on this, I inquired into where leadership resides and is exercised at Sustain to determine whether it is shared and how it impacts internal and external legitimacy.

We saw in Chapter 2 that the Metcalf Foundation convened members of its network in discussions which led to the formation of Sustain. In doing so, it played the role of catalyst and 'convenor' as it is described above, which means Sustain is, at least in some respects, a 'donor-driven' coalition. Members of the initial group Metcalf convened are often referred to as Sustain's 'founding members'; in 2013 most remained actively involved as AC and SC members where they continue to exercise leadership alongside Sustain's Director.

3.2.5 Staff

Because it can be difficult to fund policy and advocacy work, many coalitions rely heavily on members and other experts in the field lending their time and energy in a voluntary capacity. While some coalitions operate without staff, in my experience,

largely volunteer-based groups often struggle to do what needs to be done and maintain momentum. There appears to be a growing recognition of the value of paid staff. Kania and Kramer (2011) indicate that a "backbone support organization" (i.e. a separate organization with skilled staff charged with network coordination) is a key condition of successful collective impact initiatives.

Dötterweich (2006) notes that coordinators of community development partnerships "played a critical role in keeping members connected and informed" and that the stability and competency of the coordinator was a factor in their success. In Provan and Kenis' (2008) NAO model, staff engage network members on an ongoing basis to build commitment to the network's goals and resolve conflict. McEvily and Zaheer (2004) suggest that a key role of such network facilitators is to build and maintain trust among members. Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson and Allen (2001) state, "…coalitions need formalized processes and procedures that clarify staff and member roles and responsibilities and provide clear guidelines for all of the processes involved in collaborative work (e.g. decision-making, conflict resolution, interagency agreements)" (p. 254). Their review of literature identifies substantial research about how successful coalitions engage in continuous learning and adaptation, "seeking and responding to feedback and evaluation data" (ibid, p. 255 - they cite Armbruster, Gale, Brady and Thompson, 1999; Barton, Watkins and Jarjoura, 1997; Bitter 1977; Coe 1988; Gray 1985). I think staff likely have a role to play in cultivating a culture of evaluation, continuous learning and adaptation.

Policy development and advocacy work, which is a central part of the work done by policy coalitions requires a range of skills and expertise. Skills include problem framing (in alignment with government priorities), problem solving, strategy development, knowing when and how to negotiate/compromise, outreach and organizing, media and government relations (Moore, 2005). The ability to gather, analyze and synthesize data – e.g. to support the monitoring and evaluation of policies that are implemented – are also important skills. This work is technical and labour intensive. While individual members and their organizations may have *some* of the required skills and expertise, many lack the time required to undertake this work. As a result, some coalitions hire staff to support members in doing this work and to solicit and synthesize contributions from members.

This literature suggests staff play an important role in supporting, nurturing and evolving networks and coalitions. To do so staff require skills in areas such as communication, coordination, facilitation, and negotiation. In a policy coalition, technical skills related to policy development and analysis are also critical as coalitions can rarely rely strictly on members for this work. Since networks and coalitions often have limited resources, determining which skills to employ (on staff) vs. which to borrow from members (as volunteers) appears to be another strategic choice. This literature suggests I inquire into Sustain's staff structure and how choices made about staff impacted the Alliance's ability to develop and promote policy solutions and cultivate internal and external legitimacy.

3.3 STRATEGIES AND PROCESSSES

The choices a coalition makes about strategies informs what work is prioritized, while related processes define how that work is undertaken. As with structures, the literature suggests a coalition's strategies and processes impact its internal and external legitimacy.

For a policy coalition or network to work productively across sectors to develop and influence policy reform it needs to design strategies and processes to engage members and foster active participation and collaboration. The coalition must also develop processes to guide work done by members and staff. This is particularly true for the areas of policy development, analysis and promotion. In this section, I examine literature related to strategy formation, collaboration, member engagement, and policy development and promotion.

3.3.1 Strategy formation

At its essence, strategy involves making choices about organizational mission and goals and how best to use limited resources. The discipline of strategic management emerged in the 1980s and extensive research has been done since that time, often focused on a prescriptive and linear approach to strategy formation in single organizations. Such an approach to strategy formation is often referred to as intentional and 'deliberate'.

While deliberate approaches to strategy formation have been adopted by non-profit organizations interested in incorporating more "business-like" models into their operations, Mintzberg (1987, 1994) criticizes this approach, arguing that strategy is a dynamic system/process characterized by 'emergent strategies', which are a 'response to

patterns recognized in a set of actions'. Kania, Kramer and Russell (2014) indicate that, "Emergent strategy accepts that a realized strategy emerges over time as the initial intentions collide with, and accommodate to, a changing reality…. They suggest it requires "a constant process of "sensing" the environment to ensure that resources are applied where opportunities are greatest" (p. 29). Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006) conclude that "cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when they combine deliberate and emergent strategy" (p. 46).

Astley and Fombrun (1983) acknowledge that organizations and their broader environment, including other actors in that environment are interconnected. They articulate the concept of 'collective strategy', which they define as "the joint formulation of policy and implementation of action by the members of interorganizational collectivities" (p. 528). By recognizing mutual interdependence and acting collectively, organizations can move beyond responding to the broader environment to shaping the environment and creating opportunities and resources. Kania and Kramer's (2011) collective impact concept reflects these ideas.

Huxham and Macdonald (1992) examine strategy as a collaborative process and they introduce the concepts of "collaborative advantage" and "meta-strategy". Collaborative advantage is "concerned with developing synergy between organizations towards the achievement of common goals" (ibid, p. 50). These are goals that individual organizations typically could not achieve alone; Kania and Kramer's (2011) "common agenda" and measures echo this. Huxham and Macdonald (1992) argue that achieving such an advantage requires the development of "meta-strategy", or strategy for the

collaboration. This strategy focuses on the aims of the collaborative as a whole and identifies what needs to be done through collaboration.

Guo and Acar (2005) observe there has been an increase in the number of non-profit organizations forming same sector and cross-sectoral alliances. They, and Osborne and Murray (2000), attribute this largely to pressures from government and other funders that are interested in reducing perceived duplication of services and, in the case of government, reducing the number of contracts they engage in. Collaboration among non-profit organizations is challenging in an environment where organizations, and particularly those in the same sector, regularly compete for limited sources of funds and other resources such as skilled staff and volunteers. This competition forces organizations to distinguish their work from others, and so although complementarities exist, a culture of competition sometimes obscures those. Osborne and Murray (2000) note that organizations that choose to collaborate in response to pressures from funders may benefit, "…such collaboration can provide legitimacy and leverage in developing relationships with their key external stake-holders" (p. 16). The four Canadian social service agencies they studied were able, "…to maintain, and indeed to promote, both their common and distinctive values in the face of such institutional pressure. It also provided them with the potential for greater influence and leverage on their institutional environment (ibid, p. 16).

When collaborating across sectors – for example when non-profit and for-profit organizations collaborate – competition for funding is less direct and opportunities for strategic cooperation may be easier to 'see'. For example, Rondinelli and London (2003)

report that corporations feeling pressures from stakeholders to improve their reputation for corporate environmental responsibility recognize non-profit organizations may offer information and knowledge about how to do business differently. Despite the potential, the authors note that these relationships too are characterized by tension and mutual distrust. Rondinelli and London conclude it is important "to establish trust early in the collaborative process and to reinforce it throughout the collaboration" (ibid, p. 74). The different values in the non-profit and for-profit sectors may inhibit collaboration, something I explore in more detail in the section on collaboration below.

The strategy literature suggests I should consider the processes Sustain used to develop strategy; whether the Alliance's strategy was deliberate, emergent or a combination of both; and whether and how these strategies informed structures and operational processes and impact legitimacy. The concept of collective or meta-strategy also appears worth investigation whether driven by strategic intent or external pressures.

3.3.2 Collaboration

Gray's (1989) classic text, *Collaborating*, frames collaboration as a mechanism for solving shared problems. Collaborative work can be particularly challenging for cross-sectoral groups since members have different cultures and values, access to resources, and sometimes competing interests. Gray examines the experience of different groups that came together to define problems and implement solutions and outlines key steps in the collaborative process related to problem setting, direction setting, and implementation.

Gray indicates initial agreement on problem definition helps participants recognize their interest in the problem. Bryson, Crosby and Stone (2006) reference Logsdon's 1991 work which concludes recognized self-interest and acknowledged interdependence are necessary preconditions for collaboration. Austin (2000), in examining non-profit and businesses collaborations suggests that both sides came to recognize the importance of crafting mutually beneficial, win-win arrangements or "mutual gain" (Bryson, Crosby, Stone, 2006). A focus on mutual gain does not appear to be as prominent in same sector collaborations.

Gray (1989) also suggests that participants in a collaborative process or coalition need to find common ground they can agree on early in the process. Common ground is often defined through agreements about problem definition, a common agenda or shared vision, goals, outcomes and language (Kania and Kramer, 2011). Developing a shared vision with all community partners (Dötterweich, 2006, Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, Allen, 2001) and articulating it in language that all can support, can help keep participants focused on a common goal and remind them why they are involved. "In cross-movement coalitions, where participants may come from different backgrounds and have different goals, the creation of a common identity, in part through framing, is particularly important." (Van Dyke and McCammon, 2010, p. 325).

Language is a critical part of finding common ground. Kania and Kramer (2011) note it takes time to create a common vocabulary; however, reaching agreement on terminology definitions is important as words can elicit different interpretations, images and reactions from those in different sectors. Strategic discussions among a leadership team comprised

of broad thinkers can help groups frame an issue so that it is inclusive of different sectors and interests (Cohen, Larijani, Aboelata, Mikkelsen, 2004, Mintrom and Vergari, 1996). Effective framing can help keep partners with different interests engaged in the conversation (Loewen and Makhoul, 2009). Malinsky and Lubelsky's (2011) 'both/and' framing (described on page 49) appears to offer one way to bridge different interests.

Key advantages of collaboration include: knowledge transfer and the creation of new knowledge; acquisition and sharing of critical resources; and the acquisition of power and influence (Hardy, Phillips, Lawrence, 2003). Sherif (2001) reinforces the importance of creating 'super ordinate' goals that one group cannot reach alone. Pasquero (1991) notes that it is 'perceptions' of positive benefits and interdependence that are important, and that introducing the 'principle of shared responsibility' can be a powerful way to sustain commitment. Coalition leaders Mizrahi and Rosenthal (2001) interviewed ranked commitment to the collaborative's goal/cause/issue as the most important element of success. Provan and Kenis (2008) arrive at a different conclusion, "…networks can still be quite effective with only moderate levels of goal consensus" (p. 238).

If cross-sector collaborations are to deliver public value, members need to appreciate and find ways to leverage each sector's strengths as well as find ways to overcome or compensate for weaknesses (Bryson, Crosby, Stone, 2006). Wood and Gray's (1991) study of collaboratives reinforces that, "…participating stakeholders must explicitly agree on the rules and norms that will govern their interactive process" (p. 148).

Takahashi and Smutney (2002) point out that those engaging in collaboration must overcome a variety of challenges related to turf, organizational norms, power differentials, autonomy and accountability, all of which can contribute to conflict. They suggest that conflict may be an inherent characteristic of collaboratives/networks that bring together organizations with diverse mandates and perspectives. Collaboratives need to find ways to equalize power (Bryson, Crosby, Stone, 2006) and apply strategies for conflict resolution and consensus building (Kania and Kramer, 2011, Roberts, 2010, Takahashi and Smutney, 2002). Gray (1989) notes that dialogue can be used to help conflicting parties: "explore differences, clarify areas of disagreement and search for common ground without the expectation that binding agreements will emerge" (p. 180). Takahashi and Smutney (2002) note that formal agreements (often required by funding agencies), can be used to define power relationships.

Dötterweich (2006) observes that successful community development partnerships practice participatory leadership and decision-making by establishing and documenting (e.g. in memoranda of understanding, partnership agreements, or by-laws) clear and transparent mechanisms for decision making and roles. "The decision-making structures for coalitions often involve a complex system of shared decision making across a wide number of groups" such as staff, committees, membership, funders (Wolff, 2001, p. 178). This reinforces the importance of clarifying roles and responsibilities.

Many researchers reference trust as an enabler or condition of successful collaboration (Bryson, Crosby, Stone, 2006, Huxham and Vangen, 2005, Gray, 1989, Guo and Acar, 2005). Himmelman (1996) notes that successful partnerships can build trust and resolve

turf issues by clarifying expectations, responsibilities, and benefits; and ensuring communication and decision making processes are clear. All of this hints at the potential value of institutionalization. Trust is also built through positive experiences in joint work and repeated interactions (Schlager, 1995). Dötterweich (2006) notes that getting to know each partner's expertise, resources and limitations helps build trust; this suggests collaboratives may benefit from investing time to engage in dialogue to learn about each other.

Although trust is built at the level of the individual (Austin, 2000, Takahashi and Smutney, 2002), open communications contribute to the development of inter-organizational trust. Austin (2000) points out that multiple channels of communication between organizations are important enablers of collaboration; these channels can be formal and informal, and should facilitate frequent, efficient, effective communications. While geographic proximity allows for more opportunity for face-to-face communications which helps enhance trust and solidify relationships (Takahashi and Smutney, 2002), web-based communication tools can be useful when members are geographically dispersed (Kania and Kramer, 2011).

Because organizations' capacities often vary significantly, the nature of resources they can contribute also varies. Despite this, Mizrahi and Rosenthal (2001) report that members' contributions are critical to coalition success and that "the more resources members gave and received, the more they stayed committed…" (p. 73). Participating in a collaborative initiative may require that an organization be prepared to transfer expertise, technologies and innovations (Pasquero, 1991). Creating 'credible commitments' (Hageman, Zuckerman, Alexander, Bogue, 1998) can help organizations

recognize that all partners are bringing something to the table and minimize perceptions that some are along for a "free ride" (Olson, 1965).

The literature on collaboration reinforces the importance of collaborative groups finding common ground in order to be able to solve shared problems. It highlights challenges cross-sectoral groups may encounter as well as benefits that can be achieved by leveraging and sharing members' distinct knowledge, skills and resources. The literature also reinforces the importance of clarity around roles, shared decision-making processes and trust-building. In gathering data, I inquired into these areas in order to better understand the processes Sustain uses to create connections and foster cross-sectoral collaboration.

3.3.3 Member engagement

Engaging diverse policy coalition members effectively requires an understanding of why members are interested in investing their time, energy and other resources. Convenors and network 'weavers' (Holley, 2010) need to understand members' motivations so they can encourage them to participate in activities aligned with their interests and maintain their investments. Convenors also "…establish links between network members and foster the development of strong, trust-based relationships" (Svendsen and Laberge, 2005, p. 97); we saw above that these are key foundations for collaboration.

Motivation for organizations to engage in collaborative processes appears to stem from a combination of self-interest (e.g. gaining access to information, knowledge and resources) and collective interests (e.g. having a stronger voice on system issues, power

and safety in numbers). Wood and Gray (1991) state that, "…the need and the potential for stakeholders to derive benefit are what makes collaboration possible". Even when stakeholders have few shared interests, they may be sufficiently motivated to participate by the prospect of being able to meet some of their own interests through a collaboration (Westley and Vredenburg, 1991). Identifying and reminding members of joint successes they have contributed to appear to be important in maintaining engagement.

Policy coalitions or networks can engage members actively in collaborative initiatives such as priority setting, policy development and analysis. The PNOs Levkoe (2014) studied established various on- and off-line spaces in which they convened and engaged members. In such forums, members can engage in dialogue, environmental scanning (e.g. the identification of system gaps and barriers) and sense-making (Weick, 1995), which helps "build shared understanding, knowledge, vocabulary and mental models from which sustainable solutions may be generated and supported" (Svendsen and Laberge, 2005, p. 93).

Active participation in a diverse network enables community members who may have disparate interests to engage in collective action (Steuart, 1976, cited by Hays, Hays, DeVille, Mulhall, 2000). Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson and Allen's (2001) review of literature concludes that establishing structures that engage and include diverse members with different capacities is "critical to maintaining effective diversity" (p. 250). It is not clear from the literature I reviewed how a policy coalition can determine whether it has engaged an appropriate amount of diversity.

Clearly defining outcomes can help participants assess whether their investment in collaborative work is justified (Loewen and Makhoul, 2009). A well-designed evaluation system can help a collaborative gain recognition for outcome results. Finding ways to describe complex outcomes in a clear way can enhance recognition (ibid) which in turn can reinforce members' commitment and encourage continued engagement.

Achieving results and delivering value through a collaborative or network approach takes time, and progress is often incremental. Agreeing on indicators to measure, or a shared measurement system, is a critical success factor in collective impact initiatives according to Kania and Kramer (2011). I think this might help build buy-in among members. In describing business-non-profit collaborations that create 'shared value', Porter and Kramer (2011) note that "successful collaboration will be data driven, well connected to the goals of all stakeholders, linked to defined outcomes and tracked with clear metrics" (p. 16).

Achieving and publicizing 'small wins' along the way was identified as helpful to sustaining commitment to, and participation in, a coalition over the long-term (Bryson, Crosby, Stone, 2006, Mizrahi and Rosenthal, 2001). Revisiting visions, goals and outcomes at annual reflection sessions can also be helpful in maintaining engagement (Dötterweich, 2006). Austin (2000) reports that to sustain non-profit-business collaborations' success over the long term it is important to continually search for ways to renew the value delivered through collaboration.

The literature on member engagement reinforces the important role convenors and network weavers play in connecting diverse members to opportunities in which they can participate to advance their own, and the coalition's, goals. Convenors and weavers also clearly play critical roles in establishing spaces in which members can engage, learn and collaborate with other members. Their effectiveness in engaging members appears to impact members' willingness to remain actively involved. This literature encouraged me to investigate how Sustain's weavers engaged members in different spaces and initiatives and how and where members participated.

3.3.4 Policy development and promotion

As noted in the introduction, CSOs are increasingly working together in policy coalitions or networks to develop and promote policy reform. Carlsson (2000) indicates that such "Networks are formed on the basis of some "problem" to be solved…" (p. 514) and that unless actors agree there is a problem, no collective action occurs. Further, because most problem areas are complex and require different actors to find a solution, "…the mobilization of actors is one of the crucial activities in the process of establishing networks" (ibid, p. 515).

Börzel (1997) offers a broad definition of a 'policy network' that seems a reasonable description of my case study subject: "a set of relatively stable relationships which are of non-hierarchical and interdependent nature linking a variety of actors, who share common interests with regard to a policy and who exchange resources to pursue the shared interests acknowledging that co-operation is the best way to achieve common goals" (1997, p. 1). Carlsson (2000), questions whether common interest is necessary.

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"Networks can be strongly integrated and the level of coordination may be significant, but at the same time individual participants in these networks might have quite disparate interests. Their interests might be compatible or complementary but not necessarily common... This is typical for policy networks" (ibid, p. 510). I find this an important distinction as it appears to acknowledge the potential for policy networks to engage diverse actors.

The public-policy literature I reviewed provides additional interpretations of what a 'policy network' refers to. Dowding (1995) and Börzel (1997) indicate policy networks began as a metaphor to acknowledge the different public and private actors involved in policymaking and the relationships between groups. They indicate others consider it useful tool for studying the policymaking process. Carlsson (2003) notes that "The processes of policymaking in society are multifarious, and no single theory captures this complexity." (p. 507); and that, "*the* network theory of policymaking has not yet been developed" (p. 516, italics in original). He indicates the term 'policy network' is a broad category "with a great number of subcategories" such as 'policy communities', 'issue networks' (Heclo, 1978) and 'advocacy coalitions' (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993) (p.504).

Carlsson (2003) references Jordan's (1990) description of a 'policy community' that "exists where there are effective shared 'community' of views on the problem" (p. 327). This suggests the potential for a large community to engage. Heclo (1978) describes 'issue networks' as, "Shared-knowledge group[s] having to do with some aspect (or, as defined by the network, some problem) of public policy" (p. 103). This suggests quite a

focused 'group'. Carlsson reinforces issue networks tend to have limited formal coordination. In contrast, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) describe 'advocacy coalitions' as, "people from a variety of positions (elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers, etc.) who share a particular belief system – that is, a set of basic values, causal assumptions, and problem perceptions – and who show a nontrivial degree of coordinated activity over time" (p. 103).

Each of these subcategories partially characterizes my case study subject and others like them. For that reason, throughout this paper, I mainly use the term 'policy coalition', as a metaphor which blends the terms 'policy network' and 'advocacy coalition'. I offer a broad definition: a group that engages in coordinated, collective action to influence policy decisions and raise awareness of issues with government. This reinforces that such groups consist of non-governmental actors, unlike an 'advocacy coalition', and that the group has a level of coordination that is not present in Heclo's 'issue networks'.

Policy coalitions have a variety of strategic choices to make concerning the processes they use to identify, develop and promote, or advocate for, their policy solutions. Moore (2005) reinforces that those working in a policy coalition must be prepared to invest time and energy over the long term to achieve influence. Coalitions often use an annual conference or meeting to identify priorities for policy work in consultation with members (Edgar, 2002).

Policy theorists inspired by Easton's (1965) 'systems' model, which acknowledges that the policy process operates within, and is affected by, the broader environment, have

developed models illustrating stages of policymaking (Sabatier and Smith, 1993). These 'textbook models' have been criticized for framing policymaking as a linear process (Birkland, 2005, Sabatier and Smith, 1993), when most agree that the process is inherently messy and that the stages are not discrete. For policy coalitions, the stages model may be useful as it highlights points in the process where those outside government may be able to exert influence, e.g. by influencing what is on the agenda, offering policy alternatives, or monitoring and evaluating policy once it is implemented.

Kingdon's (2003) study of public policy making in the U.S. led to the development of an agenda setting framework. He defines the political 'agenda' as "the list of subjects or problems to which government officials and those around them are paying serious attention" (ibid, p. 3). Carter (2011) suggests, "the philosophy of the party in power has a major impact affecting which policy issues get on the agenda (i.e. who is listened to), the analysis of the issues, and approaches to solving them" (p. 428).

Kingdon (2003) indicates that groups outside government may be more influential after an issue is on the government's agenda. Carter (2011) notes that once an issue is on the agenda, coalitions can contribute to policy design. Kingdon's research concludes that interest groups such as CSOs are well positioned to generate policy alternatives. He reinforces that advocates should have alternatives developed, ready to share with decision makers once an issue moves onto the government's agenda.

Kingdon (2003) states that 'policy windows' or 'windows of opportunity' open when a new problem is recognized by government or there is a change in political administration

(p. 168). Some 'windows' open on schedule, as in the case of the expiration of legislation or the scheduled renewal of a program, while others are unpredictable. A diverse group of members who are continuously scanning the environment can assist in the identification or recognition of policy windows. Such windows tend to close quickly… so being prepared and mobilizing members to take advantage of the open window is critical. Kingdon (ibid) describes the roles of 'policy entrepreneurs' (Walker, 1974, Mintrom, 1997): how they watch for and take advantage of 'windows of opportunities' to link solutions they've developed to newly acknowledged problems.

Gormley and Cymrot (2006) distinguish between the use of 'insider' and 'outsider' strategies to influence public policy. 'Insider' strategies involve advocating directly to government, while 'outsider' strategies attempt to engage a broader audience in order to shift public opinion. They suggest outsider strategies tended to be employed to expand the 'scope of conflict' to include other stakeholders, or to build public will. This might become increasingly relevant in an environment where some governments are adopting a 'consumer' approach to politics (Lenihan, 2012, Delacourt, 2013), mining public opinion data and crafting policies to appeal strategically to the interests of subsets of voters. Bourgeois (in Wyatt and Bourgeois, 2010), commenting on the influence of email notes, "public policy-making is more responsive to the "public" than it ever has been" (p. 553).

While some CSOs employ a combination of these two strategies, others opt for one or the other. The availability of resources, in the form of skills, knowledge, financial and social capital (Burt, 1992, Coleman, 1988, Jacobs, 1961, Putnam, 2000), is one factor that impacts a CSO's choice of 'insider' or 'outsider' strategy. Comparatively better

resourced corporate interests often adopt an 'inside' approach and consequently dominate some policy discussions (Birkland, 2005).

The government's policy making culture and their openness to external participation in the policy process also informs CSOs' decisions about whether to employ inside or outside strategies. Gormley and Cymrot (2006) report groups tend to use 'insider' strategies more frequently when they perceive decision makers to be open – e.g. if there are opportunities to present to committees. Another factor concerns a coalition's social and political capital – i.e. whether members have access to, and/or productive relationships with, policy makers. Opportunities for participation may exist throughout the policy making process from agenda setting, to solution generation, to decision making, and evaluation.

"Participatory governance" (Heinelt, 2010) acknowledges that individuals affected by issues may be in a position to offer solutions. Governments committed to participatory governance create various spaces, platforms and processes to engage citizens and invite participation in policy development – e.g. through the use of committees, social contracts, and other participatory processes. MacRae and Abergel (eds.), (2012) note that in Canada "…treasury board edicts and other directives have for some time been pushing civil servants to consult more widely" to find more innovative solutions (p. 3).

Groups that embrace an 'insider' strategy need to familiarize themselves with government's priorities and values. Effective lobbying, or government relations, involves tracking and developing relationships with key actors and "understanding the key

institutions and spaces, and how they affect decision-making" (Jones, 2011, p. 9). Moore (2005), a seasoned Canadian lobbyist, notes that advocates must invest time to understand decision-makers' interests and values as well as the policy-making process. Wyatt and Bourgeois (2011) would likely agree as they report voluntary sector organizations in Canada have limited understanding of the public policy process.

Moore (2005) observes that very little of the written material that exists "deals with the dynamics of advocacy. There's a distinct lack of research, analysis and teaching materials related to public policy advocacy (i.e. lobbying) in Canada, particularly involving non-profits and charities" (p. 49). Moore has started sharing his advocacy expertise with CSOs and has established an advocacy school (advocacyschool.org). He articulates a process that he refers to as 'strategic inquiry' based on his experience as a business lobbyist. Moore (2010) describes strategic inquiry as "a process of informal but methodical inquiry into the political and public-policy environment surrounding an issue prior to – and, in the course of – an advocacy initiative" (p. 15). Makhoul (2011) illustrates Moore's process in a case study of a coalition of caregiving organizations. In it she notes the 'strategic inquiry' process "…is used to conceptualize an issue in a broad context, understand the motivation of government and learn its language" (ibid, p. 4).

In *Health and Sustainability in the Canadian Food System* (2012), editors MacRae and Abergel conclude that there is room for improvement in CSOs' advocacy strategy. For example, "opportunities to play an effective and collaborative inside-outside advocacy game, where certain CSOs act as external critics while others work with the state and agribusinesses, have not been optimized" (ibid, p. 274). Criticisms of CSO approaches

include pitching policy proposals at the wrong level of government and failing to submit proposals in a format that is useful to policy makers (whether politicians, bureaucrats or civil servants). Some of this may reflect the fact that CSOs don't understand where policy decisions are made, and/or that CSOs have not matched their tactics to individual decision-makers. The editors conclude that CSOs "need to turn their attention more to the details of creating solutions, and devise new ways to collaborate with unusual partners… [and that] CSOs need to develop the capacity to contribute to detailed implementation plans, often in concert with key actors…" (ibid, p. 278).

In an earlier paper, MacRae (2009) reinforces a changing policy making context in Canada has opened up new opportunities to influence food policy development in Canada. He suggests that because Parliament is less likely to engage in fulsome discussion of complex policy issues, CSOs may have greater potential to influence program design by focusing their advocacy efforts at a sub-regulatory level.

Once government relations and advocacy strategies have been selected Gormley and Cymrot (2006) suggest they tend to remain stable, in part because an organization has invested in the development of expertise and capacity to implement its selected strategies. Mintzberg (1987, 1994) might question the wisdom of this approach; he reinforces that strategies need to be dynamic and flexible in order to be responsive to changes in the environment and the degree of progress being made. This suggests that to maximize influence CSOs should assess incremental progress, continually monitor the policy making environment, and consider adapting their strategies and tactics.

If as the literature suggests, opportunities to contribute to policy development exist throughout the policy process, determining where to engage, and how, appear to represent strategic choices for policy coalitions. Putting processes in place to identify and respond to emerging windows of opportunity appears important. Another strategic choice relates to whether to focus efforts 'inside', working with government, 'outside' building public will, or to employ a combination of both strategies. This particular choice seems to be informed by the resources available and the political climate of the day. Coalitions that opt to work 'inside', with government, must build relationships in order to understand government and policy makers' priorities. Based on this literature, I determined to pay attention to the processes Sustain uses to develop and promote policy solutions to determine whether the Alliance emphasizes inside or outside strategies and what informed this choice.

3.4 LEGITIMACY

> *Legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.... Legitimacy is a perception or assumption in that it represents a reaction of observers to the organization as they see it; thus, legitimacy is possessed objectively, yet created subjectively.*
> ~ Suchman, 1995, p. 574.

> *Legitimacy refers to the status and credibility of the network and network activities as perceived both by member firms and outside constituents like funders and customers.* ~ Human and Provan, 2000, p. 328.

> *...we believe that building legitimacy comes first and is critical to the capacity of a network to attract needed resources from both internal and external sources.* ~ Human and Provan, 2000, p. 363.

"Institutional theorists argue that legitimacy building is the driving force behind decisions on organizational strategies and structures" (Human and Provan, 2000, p. 328 cites

Meyer and Rowan, 1977, DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, Zucker, 1987). Human and Provan (2000) conducted a comparative study of two for-profit, same-sector networks; both networks had separate administrative entities (an NAO) supporting their work (see page 52). They indicate that prior to their work, there were no explanations of how networks establish and maintain legitimacy.

Human and Provan (2000) and McEvily and Zaheer (2004) acknowledge that legitimacy needs to be built 'inside' with members, and 'outside' with those a network or coalition wants to influence. Human and Provan (2000) conclude that legitimacy can be built using an 'inside-out' or an 'outside-in' strategic orientation – i.e. first focusing internally to cultivate legitimacy among member firms, or vice versa. They attribute this framing of legitimacy strategies to Edstrom, Hogbert and Norback (1984). The approach each of the networks they studied adopted was influenced by key stakeholders. One of the two networks initially opted for an 'inside-out' approach, by first building legitimacy internally. Although this strategy was resource intensive and detracted somewhat from external work, the connections established between members and commitment ultimately enhanced the network's sustainability. The other network opted for an outside-in approach. Each strategy was effective in cultivating a legitimacy base in the early stages of the two networks, however, "Internal legitimacy issues led to the demise of one of the networks" (Human and Provan, 2000, p. 328). They conclude that long-term network sustainability requires the engagement of both strategies, or a 'dual legitimacy-building strategy' (ibid, p. 361). They acknowledge that adopting a dual strategy may be unrealistic until a solid legitimacy base is established, either internally or externally.

Human and Provan (ibid) distinguish between three dimensions of network legitimacy "network as form", "network as entity" and "network as interaction". 'Network as form' refers to building legitimacy around the concept of working as a network as opposed to in a more traditional organizational form. 'Network as entity' refers to building the legitimacy of the network by establishing a distinct identity for the network. They suggest this could be built in part by "adopting familiar organizational structures" such as a paid director and staff. 'Network as interaction' involves building a case for the individual and collective benefits of cooperating in a network, something that was challenging for both networks they studied to convince network members of. The legitimacy of 'network as interaction' was cultivated through the use of an insider strategy in one of the two networks.

Human and Provan (ibid) identify some examples of 'legitimacy set-backs' where actions taken by a NAO (see page 52) caused members concern and detracted from internal legitimacy. They reinforce that it is important to monitor the evolution of legitimacy during the early growth and that, "legitimacy building is not a task that is ever actually completed" (ibid, p. 352, they cited Suchman, 1995 and Deephouse, 1996).

Their research affirmed for me the importance of policy coalitions building legitimacy internally and externally. I explore each of these in more detail below. In researching network governance, Provan and Kenis (2008) conclude networks need to balance the tensions that exist between internal and external legitimacy. They suggest that because a NAO provides a single point of contact, it "could also enhance the legitimacy of the network as a whole" (ibid, p. 241).

3.4.1 Internal legitimacy

As discussed previously, inviting the right mix of members to participate in the coalition is an important strategic choice. Ideally, a coalition wants to establish a network that engages and fosters productive relationships with key stakeholders such as community leaders and other networks (Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, Allen, 2001). Convincing the right individuals and organizations to participate is partially dependent on whether the stakeholders consider the coalition's convenor to be credible and legitimate.

Power is sometimes identified as a prerequisite for forming a collaborative, but it can also be expanded by the work of the collaborative. Mizrahi and Rosenthal (2001) state, "As a coalition amasses power, it becomes a place where organizations want to be – which in turn, contributes to its power base and its legitimacy" (71). This suggests that who is involved as coalition members contributes to a group's legitimacy. As noted previously, some researchers caution that organizations that are not engaged can inhibit a collaborative's overall legitimacy (Wood and Gray, 1991, Pasquero, 1991).

Influencing policy tends to be a slow process, so coalitions need to make a long-term commitment if they hope to have an impact. Mizrahi and Rosenthal's (2001) study of 41 social change coalitions concludes that a group's longevity increases the likelihood that a group is able to "amass the power to influence the social change target and achieve their goals" (p. 73). Provan and Kenis' (2008) research on network governance supports this view, "stability is critical to maintaining legitimacy, both inside and outside the network"

(p. 244). Over time, such stability can enable a network to find internal efficiencies and develop responses to external stakeholders that are more consistent. Formal structures can be used to enhance a group's stability, but networks need to build some flexibility into these structures so they don't stifle adaptability and other desirable network effects.

3.4.2 External legitimacy

In the external environment, the concepts of credibility and legitimacy appear closely linked. Sharing information and research with government appears to be one way to establish constructive relationships with policy makers while at the same time enhancing a coalition's credibility and legitimacy (see also policy influence below). Miller, Razon-Abad, Covey and Brown (1994) conclude that inside allies are crucial to enhancing the legitimacy of coalitions inside government and achieving policy change.

Howlett and Ramesh (2003) stress that knowledge is one of the most important resources for advocates, particularly when such information is not widely available. CSOs often possess relevant information and in-depth knowledge required to inform the details of policy and program design; in contrast, governments today may have limited capacity to do such work (MacRae, 2009). Coalitions with specialized knowledge are well positioned to play a 'knowledge broker' role which involves helping reframe and/or bridge issues to make them more accessible or lessen resistance (Hargadon, 1998, 2002, Moore and Westley, 2011 cite Litfin, 1994). Communicating knowledge to policy makers, in a timely way and in an appropriate format, are critical capacities for a policy-focused coalition.

CSOs' perceived credibility among policy-makers can significantly affect their ability to influence. CSOs can strengthen their case for change and enhance their credibility by conducting quality research and sharing findings with decision-makers. An evaluation of Oxfam's advocacy campaign on climate change concluded that one of their research papers "was credited with having shaped the debate on climate financing" (Cugelman and Otero, 2010, p. 4). On the flip side, "Nothing undermines civil society advocacy more than the revelation that the facts used are not solid." (Malena (ed.), 2009, p. 276 quotes Keller-Herzog).

The literature on legitimacy reinforces that legitimacy is perceived by internal and external stakeholders and that it is important for networks or coalitions to actively build legitimacy. Policy coalitions and networks face a strategic choice as to whether to first focus energy and processes on cultivating legitimacy internally or externally, although some researchers suggest both strategies are ultimately necessary.

Internal legitimacy appears critical to a coalition's ability to attract and retain an appropriate mix of members to undertake and resource its work. Externally, legitimacy is important in order for a coalition to be seen as having something valuable to offer the policy development process. Quality research and communications appear to be important coalition capacities. This literature suggests I should examine the strategies and processes Sustain uses to cultivate legitimacy of various forms: internal, external, and network as 'entity', 'form' and 'interaction'. I should also watch for evidence of how stakeholders assess the Alliance's legitimacy.

3.5 POLICY INFLUENCE

A policy coalition or network's influence can be assessed at different points in time in their journey and from a number of different perspectives. Moore (2005), in a report prepared for the Muttart Foundation, defines various forms of influence. These include: "motivating government to initiate/modify/sustain/continue/terminate/limit something by way of law, regulation, policy, program or other expenditure" (ibid, p. 5); being 'at the table' for consultations; being acknowledged by media, government and other organizations as a 'player'; successfully gaining funding or a mandate from government; influencing the definition of criteria; and increasing decision-makers' understanding.

Political culture affects "how policy problems are perceived" and the degree to which policymakers are receptive to and rely on research (Stone, Maxwell, Keating, 2001). There has been a growing interest in evidence-based policy making in some countries like the United Kingdom (Mulgan, 2009) and the Netherlands (Edgar, 2002); however in Canada the commitment to this approach appears limited (Wyatt and Bourgeois, 2010). This may be due in part to a reduction in government's capacity to conduct research in-house (Gregg, 2012). Actions taken by Canada's Federal government over the last few years related to crime and climate change also suggest the government is not particularly interested in rational arguments and evidence-informed policy development (Gregg, 2012). In contrast, in the 2014 speech from the throne, the government of Ontario expressed its commitment to an evidence-based approach to policy making (Ontario government, 2014b).

Research is one form of information or evidence that influences public policy decisions, along with books, media, anecdotes, experience and propaganda (Lomas 2000a, Shields and Evans, 2008). It potentially has an influential role at multiple stages of the policy lifecycle – from the articulation of issues, to the identification of solutions, and the evaluation of the impact of policies implemented (Carden, 2004, Flicker, 2008). Shields and Evans (2008) offer a narrower and less optimistic view, "in the absence of a policy window, research rarely has much influence on policy decision-making" (p. 7). In addition, although technically based on a systematic review of all research, research findings that reinforce research users' policy perspectives are more likely to get attention (Stone, Maxwell, Keating, 2001). For any research to have influence, it must be accessible, reach policy makers at the right time, be presented in an appropriate format, and be rigorous (Lomas, 2000a, b, Shields and Evans, 2008, Stone, Maxwell, Keating, 2001). Some indicate that research is most influential when policy makers have some up-front involvement or investment in the development of the research (Black, 2001, Lomas, 2000b). In other cases, policy makers may reach for research to help them legitimate their policy positions (Stone, Maxwell, Keating, 2001) or to inform decisions about which programs to fund (Orszag, 2009).

Kingdon (2003) suggests that moving an issue onto or up the government's agenda requires a convergence or 'coupling' of three independent and related 'streams': when a problem is recognized, a policy solution is available, and the political climate makes it a good time for action. Although many coalitions begin trying to get policy makers to make their issue a priority, as noted earlier, Kingdon concludes that CSOs may be better positioned to have influence after an issue moves onto the government's agenda. He also

suggests that interest groups' power comes in part from their ability to mobilize support – through letter writing, media campaigns, or sending a delegation to talk to decision makers. This reinforces the importance of active participation by a coalition's members and constituents.

As noted earlier, coalitions often form out of a desire to give greater voice to issues members are concerned about, and members have a role to play in speaking up. In trying to influence government, or build public will, flexible messaging can be helpful. Makhoul (2011) in describing the approach of one successful Canadian advocacy coalition notes, "Instead of trying to get all partners to agree to a standard position, messages are structured in a way that allows partners to promote those elements that resonate with their constituents" (p. 4). The coalition she profiles developed a menu of messages for partners to choose from. This approach may be particularly helpful when participating in unlikely alliances (Campbell and Balbach, 2009). Oxfam UK worked with private sector partners on their climate change campaign and found it beneficial that those partners were able to express different, but complementary views on the same issue (Cugelman and Otero, 2010).

Although there are various forms and levels of influence as described above, at the end of the day, policy coalitions and networks measure their success based on whether or not policies are enacted that reflect their concerns and whether the implementation of policies actually has the intended effect on their issue. Van Dyke and McCammon's (2010) study of strategic alliances, coalitions and social movements suggest that more research is needed to "assess the outcomes of coalition work".

There appears to be no recipe for effective influence as approaches that have worked in a particular situation are difficult to replicate or transfer (Jones, 2011). This reinforces the importance of CSOs assessing incremental progress, paying attention to the policy making environment, and regularly adapting strategies and tactics to maximize their influence.

This literature reinforces that influencing policy takes time and that influence can be assessed in various ways. Some researchers suggest that the political climate and ideology of government affects a coalition's ability to exercise influence. Other researchers suggest that coalitions can be more influential at particular points in the policy process such as after an issue moves onto the government's agenda.

Timely, quality research appears to be an important tool for coalitions wanting to develop relationships with and influence policy makers. Coalition members appear to have a key role to play in interpreting and amplifying key messages in their communities. This literature led me to inquire into the processes Sustain uses to produce and leverage research and how members amplify the Alliance's policy solutions. I also inquired into the policy issues that Sustain and its members tried to influence in an attempt to assess the Alliance's success.

In the next Chapter, *Methodology*, I describe the methodological approaches I employed to investigate the areas outlined in this chapter and answer my broader research question.

CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION TO CONSTRUCTS AND MODEL

Based on a review of relevant, interdisciplinary literature, it appears a "model" can be

constructed illustrating the interrelationships between a number of theoretical constructs:

a coalition's "choices" related to its structures, strategies and processes; a "legitimacy"

construct which pertains to perceptions of the coalition and which is informed, in part, by

a coalition's "choices"; and an "influence" construct which is affected by both a

coalition's choices and its perceived legitimacy.

These constructs appear to be related in a somewhat "causal" chain (bearing in mind that

this study is not a positivist attempt to confirm or disprove hypotheses based on statistical

correlation). A visual representation of the relationships between these constructs is

illustrated in Figure 4.1.
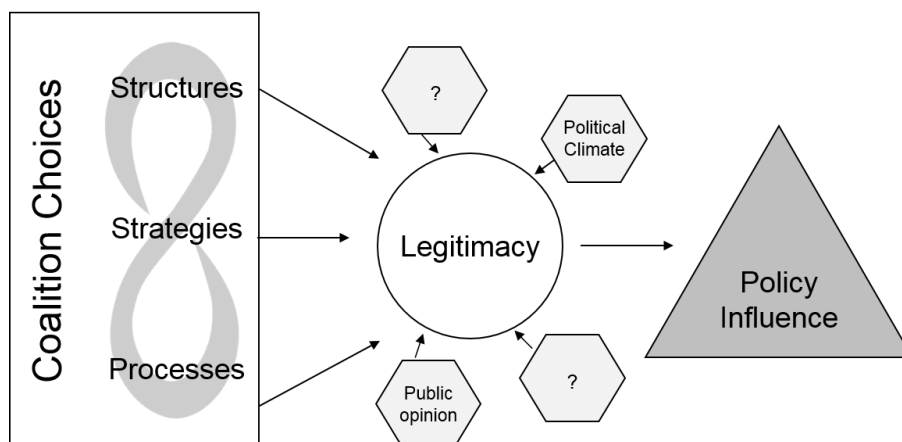
Figure 4.1 Theoretical constructs and working model

The literature review, combined with my experience consulting to cross-sectoral policy-

focused coalitions and networks, led me to formulate the above as a working model

which subsequently guided my data collection and analysis. The model suggests that

choices concerning coalition structures, strategies and processes are interconnected and affect the degree to which a policy coalition or network is perceived to have legitimacy. Together, coalition choices and legitimacy affect a policy coalition's ability to influence public policy decisions, and ultimately address the broader systemic issues the coalition is trying to change.

Coalition choices - structures, strategies and processes: Based on the literature in Chapter 3, I understand these three areas of 'choices' are interconnected as I suggest with the infinity symbol in Figure 4.1. Researchers indicate 'structure' affects a coalition's ability to work effectively together (Miller, Razon-Abad, Covey, Brown, 1994, Mizrahi and Rosenthal, 2001, Provan and Kenis, 2008). Structural options abound and coalitions must make choices about key structural elements such as membership (e.g. number and degree of diversity); network structure (from centralized to highly segmented (Diani, 2003)); governance structures (with defined roles, responsibilities and relationships and structures for input (Provan and Kenis, 2008, Van Dyke and McCammon, 2010)); and leadership and staff (with relevant skills and credibility (Bryson, Crosby and Stone, 2010, Kania and Kramer, 2011)). These structures or 'forms' need to be designed to enable a coalition's work and the functions defined by a coalition's strategies (Chandler, 1962, 1977).

A coalition's mission and goals are at the core of a coalition's strategy and reflect choices a coalition makes about how best to use its limited resourced (including members, staff and finances). A coalition subsequently needs to develop strategies for achieving its mission and goals. In addition to informing a coalition's structural choices, these more tactical strategies (e.g. for strengthening the coalition) inform how work is done and so in

turn they inform choices about operational "processes". Strategies can be developed intentionally or deliberately and also emerge, and be adapted, in response to changes in the broader environment (Mintzberg, 1987, Kania, Kramer and Russell, 2014).

The literature indicates coalitions often develop strategies and related processes to facilitate effective collaboration (Bryson, Crosby, Stone, 2006, Gray, 1989), enable active member engagement (Dötterweich, 2006, Levkoe, 2014, Svendsen and Laberge, 2005), develop strategy (Mintzberg, 1987, 1994, Astley and Fombrun, 1983, Huxham and Macdonald, 1992), and develop and promote policy solutions (Gormley and Cymrot, 2006). In the case of policy promotion, some researchers reinforce that the availability of skills, knowledge, social and financial capital (possessed by members and staff that are key elements of a coalition's 'structure') often informs the strategies and processes adopted (Burt, 1992, Coleman, 1988, Jacobs, 1961, Putnam, 2000).

Because coalitions adapt their strategies in response to changing conditions, a coalition may also need to evolve its structures and processes to align with and support the new strategy. In the case of a policy coalition, if, as the literature suggests, legitimacy is an important factor in having influence (see below), it is important for a coalition to consider how its choices related to structures, strategies and processes might impact its legitimacy, internally and externally.

Legitimacy: "Institutional theorists argue that legitimacy building is the driving force behind decisions on organizational strategies and structures" (Human and Provan, 2000, p. 328 cite Meyer and Rowan, 1977, DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, Zucker, 1987).

According to Suchman (1995) legitimacy is continuously assessed by internal (i.e. coalition members) and external (i.e. those a coalition wants to influence, and funders) stakeholders who have different norms, values and beliefs. Human and Provan (2000) report that networks must build legitimacy internally and externally in order to succeed and sustain themselves. Some coalitions opt to cultivate legitimacy inside the coalition first, while others begin by focusing externally; Human and Provan (ibid) conclude that a dual legitimacy-building strategy is ultimately required.

Internal legitimacy appears particularly important as it is necessary for a coalition to attract and retain members with needed skills, knowledge and other resources. I think internal stakeholders assess a coalition's legitimacy largely based on their experience of, and confidence in, a coalition's structures, strategies and processes.

In the case of external stakeholders, some are the policy makers a coalition wants to influence. I think policy makers' perceptions of a coalition's structures, strategies and processes factor into their assessment of a coalition's legitimacy. It is unlikely these are the only factors that influence their perceptions. Their perceptions of a coalition's legitimacy may be affected by external factors such as the political climate and public opinion, however I focus less on external factors since they are largely outside a coalition's control. I do, however, look for evidence of other external factors affecting a coalition's legitimacy.

Policy influence: The literature I reviewed indicates that policy reform is often slow and incremental and may depend on a convergence of three 'streams': problem recognition,

the availability of a solution, and a receptive political climate (Kingdon, 2003). Policy

coalitions can adopt various strategies and processes to influence policy change, such as

conducting and disseminating research (Carden, 2004, Flicker, 2008), developing

relationships with policy makers and "inquiring" to better understand government

priorities and the political and public policy environment (Moore, 2010), or working

'outside' government to build public will (Gormley and Cymrot, 2006). It is impossible

to anticipate in advance which mix of strategies and processes will be most effective,

however each time a coalition interacts with policy makers, policy makers have an

opportunity to assess a coalition's legitimacy.

Coalitions can assess their own influence in a variety of ways – e.g. if an issue a coalition

has advocated for moves onto the government's agenda and is identified as a priority, or

if a policy is enacted that reflects a coalition's proposed solution(s) (Moore, 2005,

Kingdon, 2003). I think both outcomes are unlikely if a coalition fails to acquire

legitimacy in the eyes of policy makers.

The 'model' described above consists of a number of interconnected constructs: coalition

choices related to structures, strategies and processes; legitimacy; and policy influence.

The model informed my research question: **How does a non-governmental, cross-**

sectoral policy coalition's choices related to structures, strategies, and processes

affect its ability to cultivate legitimacy and influence public policy?

As noted previously, this is a general and multifaceted question, and I appreciate that it

may not be possible to fully answer this question using a single case study. In the

remainder of this chapter I describe why I selected a qualitative, interdisciplinary case study research approach to begin to answer such a general question. I also outline my rationale for focusing on Sustain Ontario, the Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming as the subject of my case study. I describe the data I gathered and methods I used to gather it. I conclude by outlining how I analyzed this data to interpret Sustain's story and draw conclusions.

4.1.1 Why a case study approach

Based on the interdisciplinary literature I reviewed, better understanding the inter-relationships between the constructs depicted in the model above did not appear to lend itself to a large scale statistical study or survey. Instead, I selected a case study approach as it enables me to draw on multiple sources and forms of evidence to begin answering this question, including interviews with those actively involved (Flyvbjerg, 2006, Ragin and Becker, 1992, Stake, 1995, Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) suggests the case study method is appropriate when trying to explain "…"how" or "why" some social phenomenon works" (p. 4) and that it is helpful in understanding "…a real phenomenon in-depth" (p. 18). Additionally, a case study "benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis" (ibid, p. 18), hence my model.

Adopting a case study approach I produced 'a case record' (Stenhouse, 1978) or narrative of Sustain as an example of a cross-sectoral coalition attempting to influence provincial food policy in Ontario, Canada. Another reason I opted to develop a case study was that, in reviewing the literature, I uncovered few documented examples of such groups, despite the fact they appear to be growing in number. Previous studies focus on various aspects

of a coalition's work and the role of coalitions in the policy process (Kingdon, 2003,

Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993); however the design and interplay of their structures,

strategies and processes appears to have received less attention. Based on my experience

working with such groups, each coalition's structural design, strategies and processes

reflect the coalition's unique internal and external conditions. Furthermore, a coalition's

approach to policy change is neither straight-forward, nor linear, and those involved often

have different perspectives on how a coalition should undertake its work. In addition,

members bring different skills and resources, including 'social' (Coleman, 1988, Jacobs,

1961, Putnam, 2000, Salisbury, 1969) and political capital, and these impact a coalition's

capacity and approach.

This study is in some respects an 'intrinsic' case, which Stake (2000) suggests is

undertaken in order for a researcher to better understand the particular case. I wanted to

focus on Sustain's experience because I too am concerned about the food system issues

the Alliance is trying to address through policy reform. In other respects, Sustain

represents an 'instrumental' case, which Stake (ibid) indicates will help us understand

something else, in this case the interconnected constructs and my overall model. I

consider Sustain a case of a new policy coalition finding its way, structuring a cross-

sectoral network with the capacity and legitimacy to influence food and agricultural

policy.

I selected the Alliance because I thought Sustain would assist me in answering my

research question (Stake, 1995). I gathered data about the coalition's structures,

strategies, processes, issues and context (Yin, 2009) and interpreted these to create "thick

descriptions" (Geertz, 1973, Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). This approach enables me to describe the denseness and complexity of Sustain's formative years, from 2009-2013, allowing readers to "to make different interpretations and draw diverse conclusions regarding the question of what the case is a case of" (Flyvberg, 2006, p. 238).

While some have questioned the value of a single case, such an approach offers an opportunity to examine a particular situation and develop an in-depth understanding of that case. Flyvberg (2006) points out that, "the strategic choice of case may greatly add to the generalizability of a case study" (p. 226). Sustain is a strategic choice in that, as is common in policy coalitions, the Alliance engages members from different sectors who have different perspectives on problems and possible solutions, in this case related to the food system. Sustain is a provincial Alliance and, as noted below, similar groups exist in other Canadian provinces. I anticipate this case will be helpful in commenting on, or extending theory, while also being instructive to practitioners (particularly those working on food policy) who look to others' experience when designing a coalition and/or social change efforts.

4.1.2 Why food

As noted in Chapter 1, cross-sectoral coalitions established to influence public policy in Canada are emerging in a variety of policy areas. I decided to focus on a coalition concerned with the health of food systems and food policy because food is an issue that is at the centre of many of today's interconnected social challenges: hunger, poverty, health, farm sustainability, and environmental degradation. These interconnected issues demand creative, integrated solutions within food systems that are themselves complex. While it

may appear that food policy coalitions deal with more complexity compared to coalitions focused on other issues, I think similar arguments might be made by those attempting to resolve issues like homelessness, climate change and poverty, all of which require solutions on multiple levels of society. And so, although the specific issues Sustain is attempting to resolve may not be of interest to policy coalitions focused on other issues, the Alliance's approach to engaging diverse stakeholders from multiple sectors and dealing with complex and interconnected issues may be.

Media stories focused on food issues highlight how those working on the issues, and citizens, increasingly recognize the need for systemic change on the ground, within institutions, and at the level of public policy. Achieving systemic change requires the participation of various industries, individuals and government, all of whom have different concerns and interests related to food systems. The food production and distribution system is dominated to some extent by large industrial operators alongside smaller scale businesses such as family farms and individual food entrepreneurs (e.g. food processors, restaurateurs, etc.). Various non-profit organizations also have an interest in the health of the food system, from the perspectives of food security, food sovereignty, sustainable farming, and from an environmental and economic perspective. Food system-related policy is developed by all levels of government and the food system has implications for the priorities of multiple government ministries – e.g. agriculture and rural affairs, health, education, environment, etc.

Canada, its provinces and territories lack cohesive, joined-up or interconnected food policies (e.g. supply chain issues that make it difficult to get local food onto local plates)

and many see this as at the root of the problems in our food systems (MacRae, 2011). In the last 10-15 years national (e.g. Food Secure Canada) and provincial food networks (e.g. The British Columbia Food Systems Network, Food Matters Manitoba, Nova Scotia Food Security Network, and Sustain Ontario) have formed to develop food system solutions and many advocate for policy change (Levkoe, 2014). These and other coalitions attract and engage different industry, sector, and citizen interests; many of these provincial food networks are grassroots in nature. As noted in Chapter 2, more established, less diverse associations comprised of conventional food actors are active and influential players in Ontario's food and agriculture policy space. One comparative study of provincial food networks was recently conducted (Levkoe, Bebee, Wakefield, Castel, and Davila, 2012), but as far as I am aware, no in-depth case study has been developed of the more grassroots provincial food networks in Canada.

Since I am interested in the role that non-governmental, cross-sectoral coalitions can play in the public policy process, a case study of a food network represents an opportunity to examine one coalition's choices, legitimacy and policy influence. I think those involved in other provincial food networks inside and outside Canada may be interested in learning from Sustain's experience.

4.1.3 Why Sustain Ontario

I selected Sustain as an appropriate site for my case study for a variety of reasons. Firstly because the Alliance is attempting to influence provincial food policy by convening groups and individuals from a number of sectors (i.e. farm, food, health, and environment) and engaging their knowledge and expertise to develop and promote integrated policy solutions. Secondly, Sustain's provincial focus is large enough to encompass a range of food systems issues, and bounded enough to contain a case study (Stake, 1995). Thirdly, I thought Sustain's efforts to reform provincial food policy in Ontario would provide the cross-sectoral and multiple-issue data I wanted to analyze to better understand and illustrate the role coalitions can play in public policy development.

Finally, this organization is located in Toronto, where I live and work, and the Alliance's first Director was receptive to Sustain participating in this research, although my research question was not fully formed at the time I approached her. I first learned of Sustain when their regular consultant was unavailable and the consulting firm I work with facilitated the first in-person meeting of Sustain's AC in September 2010. At that time Sustain was in the early stages of structuring and weaving the network and exploring how to approach and focus its work. I was excited by the diversity of perspectives represented on the AC and Sustain's vision for transforming Ontario's food system.

I characterize my research approach and relationship with Sustain throughout this project as collaborative and in some respects participatory (Kirby, Greaves, and Reid, 2006). When I approached Sustain's first Director, I described my research interests and she agreed the project would be of interest to Sustain. I indicated that I hoped that Sustain's

participation in the research would contribute to the Alliance's learning – through the process of inquiry and as a result of insights generated through analysis. Sustain's second Director started in early 2011 and soon after I confirmed that she was interested and willing to participate. Throughout the duration of my studies I informally sought input from, and discussed insights and questions with, the Director. I also collaborated with Sustain as a volunteer member of the Evaluation group; the nature of my involvement and contributions as part of that group are described on page 104.

As a recently formed organization, Sustain represented an opportunity for me to study the formation (2007-2008) and early stages of development (2009-2013) of a cross-sectoral coalition, and the evolution of structures, strategies and processes the Alliance selected and implemented to influence policy. Sustain's membership includes non-profit and for-profit groups that have different, and at times competing, food system interests and values. I hoped examining Sustain's experience would enable me to build on existing theories and draw conclusions that could be of use to other coalitions and networks – whether they are advocating for food or other complex, interconnected social issues.

I explore various dimensions of Sustain's structures – i.e. the Alliance's membership composition and governance structures and how those evolved; the skills, knowledge and other resources the network had access to through members; the evolution of network relationships and engagement; as well as leadership, staffing and governance. I also examine choices Sustain made about strategies and processes related to engagement, research, policy development and promotion (i.e. government relations and advocacy). I describe processes Sustain uses to help the coalition find common ground and foster

productive relationships and leverage members' diverse perspectives, skills and resources in identifying and promoting viable policy solutions.

The need to establish external legitimacy shifts any policy coalition's focus outward, to relationships with external stakeholders. In Sustain's case, this means policy makers on the political and bureaucratic sides of government; the public; and other actors in the policy space. Members have a role to play in giving voice to, and amplifying, a coalition's issues and solutions in different communities. I wondered how members' willingness to play an active role in publicly supporting the Alliance's policy proposals might affect Sustain's external legitimacy.

Since a coalition's legitimacy is continuously re-assessed by internal and external stakeholders, I asked representatives from both groups how they assess Sustain's legitimacy. I hoped this would help me identify which aspects of Sustain's structures, strategies and processes enhance or detract from the Alliance's legitimacy (see Chapters 7 and 8). I also wanted to explore if Sustain adopted an 'inside-out' or 'outside-in' approach to building legitimacy – i.e. whether the Alliance focused first on building legitimacy internally with members, or externally with policy makers (Human and Provan, 2000). I used semi-structured interviews to gather data related to this question.

To gather the rich data needed to understand how the choices Sustain made about structures, strategies and processes impacts its ability to influence policy, I consulted with various internal and external stakeholders; reviewed organizational documents; and

engaged in some general observation. A more detailed description of my data collection methodology is outlined below.

Sustain opted to form an alliance or network as a vehicle to influence policy reform. Since the Alliance's capacity to influence policy depends on the network, I thought it would be useful to analyze the 'health' of the network. I adapted Plastrik and Taylor's (2009) network health scorecard to analyze Sustain's network health (see Chapter 7). This tool evaluates the health of a network in four dimensions: purpose, performance, network operations and network capacity.

As noted in Chapter 3, policy influence can be assessed in various ways (Kingdon, 2003, Moore, 2005) – e.g. whether policy makers are willing to engage in discussion; whether a policy issue moves onto or up the government's agenda; and whether a policy proposal is advanced in a Bill, is enacted in legislation or leads to the introduction of a program or other investment by government. Consultations with internal and external stakeholders combined with a review of existing internal and external documents provided some insight into Sustain's policy influence (see Chapter 7).

4.2 DATA COLLECTION

Using the model of the antecedents of policy influence illustrated in Figure 4.1 as a guide, I set out to collect data on the constructs of interest and the relationships among them. As Yin (2009) suggests case study researchers should, I set out to collect multiple forms of evidence.

To obtain a rich and accurate understanding of the choices Sustain made about structures, strategies, and processes, and so I could communicate the nuances of the network's experience through a case record, most of the data I collected and analyzed was qualitative. Qualitative research is 'inherently multi-method' (Denzin and Lincoln (eds.), 2000), and I gathered information using several collection methods. This enabled me to create a 'montage' (ibid) of Sustain's story as it is expressed by the coalition and experienced and interpreted by different stakeholders inside and outside of the Alliance. These multiple perspectives helped clarify meaning and assisted me in creating a "thick" description which enabled me to interpret the case (ibid). I periodically sought input from Sustain's Director regarding how my research questions and activities could contribute to the network's learning and was open to incorporating questions she thought relevant to explore.

A qualitative research approach is useful because it encourages researchers to engage multiple points of view while also allowing for some flexibility in research design based on what is learned during the study, since "data collection and analysis go on simultaneously" (ibid). This permitted me to refine my questions as I came to better understand the case (Stake, 1995) and as themes started to emerge.

Stake (1995) suggests that case study researchers should "try not to disturb ordinary activity of the case… if we can get the information we want by discrete observation or examination of records" (p. 12). And so, my data collection methods included a review of documentary evidence; observation (Anzul, Freidman, Garner, and McCormack-

Steinmetz, 1991, Spradley, 1980); and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (Kvale, 1996, Oakley, 1981, Roulston, deMarrais and Lewis, 2003, Weiss, 1994). Since human participants were involved I completed York University's required Human Participant Research Protocol and obtained written or oral consent from interviewees.

I did become more actively involved through my volunteer role in the Evaluation group's activities. In 2011, shortly after I confirmed Sustain's willingness to participate in this research, the second Director invited me to become part of an evaluation group she was forming to conduct a developmental evaluation process for the Alliance. The group consisted of the Director, a consultant, another researcher, three interns (at different points in time) and myself. Although the group tried to recruit AC members the few who expressed interest were ultimately too busy to participate. The absence of AC members on this group meant we did not have member perspectives to shape the evaluation process. This ultimately undermined the evaluation process' effectiveness and perceived legitimacy amongst AC members who felt disconnected from the process.

Under the guidance of Sustain's evaluation consultant, the group designed a developmental evaluation process for Sustain which included the documentation of Sustain's outcomes map (see Appendix B) and logic model. Like most other members of the group, I had limited understanding of, and experience in, developmental evaluation. I think Sustain's Director invited me to participate in part because she thought it would assist me in my research and possibly because she thought I might offer a useful perspective based on my consulting experience. Through my involvement in this group I

was exposed to other staff and interns and some AC members and this helped me build familiarity and trust.

As a member of this group I assisted Sustain in gathering and analyzing information. This included reviewing organizational documents; contributing to the development of consultation tools (e.g. focus group questions, surveys and interview guides); co-facilitating two focus groups (one with staff and one with a sub-set of AC members) and conducting interviews (with policy makers). This was mutually a beneficial arrangement: like other volunteers, I expanded Sustain's capacity and in doing so I gained insight into Sustain's choices, challenges and successes. My participation in the Evaluation group gave me an inside perspective on the Alliance's culture, work, strategies and processes. In the interest of knowledge exchange, I periodically shared research papers, articles and other insights from my academic studies with the group. My participation also gave me a reason to attend AC meetings, something I discuss in more detail on page 117.

As a result of my involvement in the Evaluation group, I became, or was perceived by some to be, an 'insider' researcher (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). For example, I attended some AC meeting to present as part of the Evaluation group, and I supported an intern in co-facilitating a focus group with AC members. Stake (1995) might perceive such active involvement with Sustain to be inappropriate as it blurs the line between the research subject and researcher. Kirby, Greaves and Reid (2006) acknowledge this muddiness is not unusual and that 'insiderness' and 'outsiderness' are "not fixed or static positions… As collaborative researchers, we are never fully outside or inside the community" (p. 38).

Because the Evaluation group connected with other parts of Sustain only periodically I did not feel I was a member of, or genuinely part of, Sustain's larger network. Although I attempted to clearly articulate my research project and involvement with Sustain when I invited interviewees to participate, I felt I needed to clarify and reinforce my 'outsider' status as an academic researcher during interviews with some policy makers and internal stakeholders. Despite these efforts, some stakeholders I interviewed seemed to consider me more of an 'insider' than an 'outsider' – for example some external stakeholders referred not to Sustain, but to 'you' or 'your' when referring to Sustain's work.

4.2.1 Documentary evidence

The review and analysis of documentary evidence such as organizational documents and documents in the public domain (e.g. in media, government legislation) is an unobtrusive form of research since it relies on existing materials. Atkinson and Coffey (1997) note that "written texts provide particularly telling windows into social worlds" and that, "groups represent themselves, both to themselves and to others, through the documents they produce" (p. 97). van den Hoonaard describes Dorothy Smith's "institutional ethnography" approach which involves the review and analysis of organizational documents such as application forms, funding proposals, terms of reference, meeting minutes, policy briefs, reports, newsletters and media releases (van Den Hoonaard, 2012). Review and analysis of such documents, as well as evaluation data, provided insight into Sustain's formation, evolution, structures, strategies and processes. This data assisted me in understanding the processes that guided the Alliance's work and illuminated important structural elements. Organizational documents provided insight into processes Sustain formalized, key decisions and shifts in approaches.

I scanned provincial election campaign materials and popular media in Ontario (e.g.

newspapers, radio, and online discussions) to better understand the context within which

Sustain operates, and to identify possible factors influencing provincial food policy

discussions. I paid attention to how food and farming issues were framed and connected

to issues such as health, the environment and social justice. I considered this important

since policy makers are influenced by public opinion. I also scanned content related to

provincial food policy proposals and developments, particularly related to the

introduction and evolution of Ontario's Local Food Act (LFA). This material helped me

identify other organizations and groups advocating in the food policy space and to assess

whether Sustain contributes a unique perspective.

4.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews with individuals closest to the lived experience being studied "help us to

uncover the participant's views" (van den Hoonaard, 2012, p. 81) and provide nuanced,

qualitative insights into the research topic by giving us access to experiences, stories and

narratives (Silverman, 2000). My objective in conducting interviews was to gather

different perspectives on Sustain's journey – e.g. concerning how the Alliance is

structured and if or how that has evolved; and to what extent Sustain's structures,

strategies and processes contribute to, or detract from, the network's legitimacy and its

ability to develop and promote viable policy solutions. I designed the interviews to invite

reflection on Sustain's structures, strategies, and processes, to uncover what interviewees

thought worked well and what might need to change. I wanted to understand whether and

how members participated, collaborated and contributed skills and resources; and whether/how they thought they benefited from their involvement.

I conducted 39 semi-structured interviews: 24 with 22 internal stakeholders (i.e. staff and AC members), and 15 with 17 external stakeholders, 11 of whom were policy makers, 6 of whom collaborated with Sustain (Appendix C contains a detailed list with interview formats and dates). Sampling on page 113 outlines how individuals were selected and the perspectives they represent. 15 interviews were conducted in-person in Toronto and Guelph, with the remainder conducted by phone, due to the geographic location of interviewees and/or their expressed preference. Because I wanted to record the interviews (with permission), for in-person interviews I suggested we meet somewhere quiet. With some exceptions this meant an office in the interviewee's work-place; I conducted four interviews at individuals' homes, and one in a noisy café. These environments sometimes gave me insight into the interviewee and/or the nature of his or her work.

In total, I invited 50 individuals to participate in interviews via email invitations. In the interest of transparency, and in the hope that it would increase participation rates, I copied Sustain's Director on all invitations. On invitations to policy makers I also copied Sustain's Co-Chairs. Some individuals were immediately responsive to the invitation, while others required one or more prompts by email or phone. Many of the interviews were clustered into a period when I was off work. While this enabled me to offer participants a wider range of scheduling options, sometimes it meant that I didn't have much time to digest and reflect between interviews. The late June to early August timing of the interviews may not have been ideal for some stakeholders who farm or for others

who take summer vacation, but I offered various dates and times during and outside of regular business hours. I rescheduled a few interviews to accommodate changing schedules.

Overall I was pleased with the response and participation rates. Although all internal stakeholders I approached agreed to an interview, I was only able to interview eleven of the twenty policy makers I contacted. Three other policy makers agreed to participate in an interview, but despite multiple attempts I was unable to schedule a time to meet with them. Two did not respond to my requests; two referred me to others they thought were more appropriate (some of these individuals were on my original list); and two indicated they didn't feel they had much to contribute. Some of those who declined or referred me to others had moved to different ministries, and were no longer involved in food policy development. I updated the Director in August 2013 and asked how she interpreted the nine responses. She indicated that she wasn't surprised; some of those I invited are very busy senior bureaucrats who tend to be very challenging to reach. Two of those who indicated they had limited involvement with Sustain were at the time involved in significant discussions with Sustain; the Director speculated they may not have felt comfortable engaging in an interview while such discussions were underway.

The interviews I conducted with policy makers served a dual purpose. In addition to being an integral part of my research, I conducted these interviews to collect data as part of Sustain's developmental evaluation process. As noted previously I had been volunteering as part of the Evaluation group for almost two years and the timing of the information gathering for the evaluation process dove-tailed with my research schedule. I

volunteered to interview policy makers on behalf of the group for the sake of efficiency and to reduce duplication. The Evaluation group identified questions it hoped to answer about policy making and I incorporated some of these into the question guide I developed for policy makers. Some of the suggested questions did not lend themselves to an interview because answering them required quantitative data; I indicated that Sustain might need to find the answers another way (e.g. by mining internal data or via a survey).

The Evaluation group thought I would be seen as a reasonably neutral party. I highlighted the dual purpose of the interviews in the email invitation and when I conducted the interviews I reinforced my role as an academic researcher developing a case study of Sustain. I informed them I would share aggregated results with Sustain and committed to maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. I prepared a summary of information gathered for the Evaluation group to discuss and interpret. I also presented highlights to Sustain's AC and staff at the November 2013 AC meeting.

Interviews ranged from 30-45 minutes with most policy makers, and to one hour or longer with internal stakeholders. I developed question guides for different stakeholders organized around a sequence of topics (Kvale, 1996) with a "series of pre-determined but open-ended questions" and also used "a variety of probes that elicit further information" (Ayres, 2008, p. 10). This approach enabled me to explore key topics and related questions.

The question guide for internal stakeholders focused on their experience and perceptions of Sustain's structures, processes and strategies – including policy development and

promotion. For external stakeholders, and especially policy makers, the questions focused more on the of Sustain's policy development work, including the Alliance's research, policy promotion and communications. I shared the main set of questions with participants in advance of the interview to give those who were interested an opportunity to reflect. Despite the fact that policy makers tended to be quite focused and thoughtful in their responses, I felt a bit stretched to cover the range of topics identified in my policy maker interview guide in 30 minutes. I did time checks and if the interviewee was amenable, and most were, the interview sometimes extended from 30 minutes to 45 or longer.

During the interviews I encouraged individuals to reflect on and describe their involvement and experiences with Sustain, as well as their attitudes and feelings (Kirby, Greaves and Reid, 2006, van den Hoonard, 2012). The semi-structured interview format enabled me to probe an individual's responses to clarify ambiguities and gain greater insight into what is important to them. I think this was something that would have been impossible to accomplish through a survey. I at times used leading questions to "check repeatedly the reliability of the interviewees' answers as well as to verify the interviewers' interpretations" (Kvale, 1996, p. 158). Qualitative research approaches acknowledge that it can be useful to modify a question guide as more insight is gained from the interviews (Stake, 1995); I appreciated the flexibility and sometimes adapted questions during interviews. This too would have been impossible in a survey.

I sought, and received, consent to record interviews to ensure accurate records. When citing comments, I committed to maintaining anonymity to the extent that was possible,

and to check back with interviewees to confirm accuracy and re-confirm permission. I emailed draft content – direct quotes and paraphrased material in context – to all interviewees. Some suggested minor modifications or clarifications which were helpful. A small number of interviewees objected to the inclusion of some content, as they did not think the codes provided sufficient anonymity. To respect their desire for anonymity, I dropped or modified some content.

When initially seeking consent, I indicated I did not expect to quote many individuals by name. I also indicated that if I thought that was important in particular cases, I would seek their permission. In developing this paper, I concluded it *would* be helpful to include the names of the three Directors as each played a prominent and public role in Sustain at different points in time. In this instance, anonymity was almost impossible as it would be easy for readers to identify each of them based on publicly available materials. After I explained my rationale and each Director reviewed draft content attributed to them, all three provided permission. I also determined it was difficult to maintain the anonymity of a small number of other interviewees. They too agreed to be quoted and named after reviewing draft content.

The interview recordings allowed for re-listening (Kvale, 1996). I also took notes during the interviews, since note-taking helps me process and enables me to refer back to and/or clarify my interpretation of their response. In re-listening I paid attention to frequently used words, phrases and ideas that interviewees used to describe Sustain (van den Hoonard, 2012). This gave me some insight into the Alliance's culture and language and how accessible it is to people from different sectors. After each interview I set aside time

to document my reflections, feelings about the interaction, how the individual responded to me, and other non-verbal insights related to each interview in an interview journal (ibid). I reflected on most interviews shortly after I conducted them, and in the process I sometimes identified key questions to explore with specific stakeholders.

4.2.3 Sampling

Because I am studying Sustain as an example of a cross-sectoral coalition, I restricted my selection of interviewees to individuals who had a direct relationship with Sustain. This included internal stakeholders who are part of the coalition (i.e. members, staff and interns) and external stakeholders who had had some direct involvement with Sustain (i.e. policy makers Sustain had engaged, and representatives from partner organizations). This was designed to ensure those I interviewed could provide a perspective based on first-hand experience with Sustain. Since participation in these interviews was voluntary I hoped their relationship and/or involvement with Sustain would be sufficient to convince them to participate. Since each sub-set of interviewees offered a different perspective on Sustain, I identified interview objectives for each group.

Sustain has a large number of internal stakeholders (i.e. over 400 members, 40 AC members including six SC members, and staff), and so I selected interviewees based on the following criteria. 1) I engaged stakeholders who had been involved for different lengths of time; some provided an historical perspective on Sustain's evolution, while newer members provided insights based on a fresher perspective. 2) Because I was interested in investigating a cross-sectoral coalition, I interviewed individuals from different sectors (e.g. farm, food, health, environment; for-profit and non-profit) to better

understand the nature of their involvement in the network. 3) Because Sustain is a provincial alliance, I interviewed members located in different parts of the province in an attempt to uncover some of the regional interests and concerns and whether/how these are reflected in Sustain's work. This also gave me some insight into the connections individual members developed within the Alliance. 4) Finally, because Sustain aims to influence public policy, I interviewed members who had been most actively involved in Sustain's government relations work including the chair of the Government Relations Working Group (GRWG).

I asked Sustain's Director to identify policy makers Sustain had engaged, and to suggest AC members who met this criteria while also representing one or more of the perspectives in the chart below. I identified additional AC members based on my observations of individuals at meetings I had attended. I also asked interviewees for suggestions about key internal or external stakeholders they thought I should interview. I expanded my original list from 39 to 50 to ensure I heard from people with a range of perspectives. Interviewees' ages ranged from those in their early twenties to those in their fifties and possibly sixties.

Table 4.1 below presents my classification of non-staff "internal" stakeholders and illustrates how the AC members I interviewed represented different perspectives. Some AC members are involved in more than one issue sector and some are involved in both for-profit and non-profit initiatives.

Table 4.1: "Internal" interviewees

	ISSUE SECTORS				ECONOMIC SECTORS		GEOGRA-PHY	ENGAGEMENT	
AC Members	Farm – farmers, farm support or education	Food – e.g. literacy, access, education	Health – e.g. nutrition, public health	Environment - e.g. sustainable farming, land preservation	For-profit	Non-profit or Charitable (including education)	North (N), East (E), South-West central (SW-c), GTA	Active	Less active
Numbers	8	10	3	6	3	14	N: 3 E: 3 SW-c:4 GTA: 5	12	5

In terms of "external" stakeholders, I interviewed ten individuals involved in provincial policy making since that was the Alliance's main level of policy focus during its formative years. By 2013 Sustain's spokespeople (i.e. the Co-chairs, Director and Acting Director) had developed relationships with provincial politicians inside and outside government, and bureaucrats, mainly in the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). I refer to these individuals collectively as 'policy makers' since all are involved in the policy development process on some level. Interviewing individuals Sustain had connected with gave me insight into how the Alliance was perceived externally (including its legitimacy) and the efficacy of its government relations and policy reform strategies. Sustain sought out advice on government relations and advocacy strategies and processes from consultants. I interviewed one such consultant, who is also a former policy maker, in the hope of obtaining an informed external perspective on how the design of Sustain's structures, strategies and processes impacted the Alliance's ability to develop legitimacy and if, and in what areas, Sustain influenced public policy.

The other external stakeholders I interviewed can be described collectively as "partners",

with the exception of one individual who represents another policy actor in the food and

farming space. "Partners" include a representative from Tides Canada (as we saw in

Chapter 2, Sustain is a 'project' of Tides Canada); two representatives from Canadian

Environmental Law Association (CELA), an organization Sustain partnered with on

policy work related to the LFA (see Chapter 6); and two representatives from The

Metcalf Foundation (a core funder).

As we saw in Chapter 2, Sustain was established with significant facilitation and support

from The Metcalf Foundation. For this reason I interviewed two representatives from

Metcalf to better understand the Foundation's motivation and the role it played in the

formation of Sustain. I also wanted to understand their perspective on how Sustain's

structures, strategies and processes affected the Alliance's ability to influence public

policy and more broadly, on coalitions as a vehicle for influencing public policy.

Table 4.2: "External" interviewees

POLICY MAKERS			PARTNERS			POLICY ACTOR
OMAFRA staff (current and former civil servants)	Premier's office staff (current and former)	Politicians and political staff	Metcalf Foundation staff	Tides Canada staff	CELA staff	Agriculture Association staff
5	2	3	2	1	2	1

4.2.4 Observation

Spradley (1980) describes 'participant' observation as an ethnographic technique that

assists researchers in learning from people (Spradley, 1980). Unlike interviews, which

rely mainly on what people *say*, it provides an opportunity to learn from what people

actually *do*. Anzul, Freidman, Garner, and McCormack-Steinmetz (1991) describe

participant observation 'as ongoing and intensive observing, listening and speaking….

covering a broad continuum of kinds and degrees of participating' (p. 42). My approach

to observation was somewhat less formal than some descriptions of participant

observation. In this section I describe opportunities I had to observe and the roles I played

in those contexts.

As noted previously, I began volunteering on the Evaluation group in 2011 and

subsequently started attending and observing portions of AC meetings, sometimes as part

of the Evaluation group. During meetings I indicated I was researching Sustain and

developing a case study. I attended part of Sustain's second Bring Food Home conference

in October 2011 as a public participant. In these settings in 2011-2012 I did not formally

observe and I did not take detailed notes, in part, because my research proposal and

Human Participants Research protocol had not yet been developed or approved. After

receiving my ethics approval in the spring of 2013, I had only one opportunity to attend a

meeting, the AC meeting before the Bring Food Home Conference in November. There, I

played a more active role (described below) and did not change my approach to observe

more formally.

These opportunities to be a 'fly on the wall' proved valuable as an orientation to Sustain.

The AC meetings gave me insight into the coalition's culture, group dynamics and

interpersonal relationships. By showing up periodically, I eventually became a familiar

presence and got to know some AC members. As a result, I think I became what Wolcott

(1998, cited by Anzul, Freidman, Garner, and McCormack-Steinmetz, 1991, p. 45)

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describes as a 'privileged observer', someone who is known and trusted and has easy access to information.

As part of my involvement in the Evaluation group, in addition to I attending AC meetings in 2011-2013 I engaged directly with staff and AC members as part of the information gathering process. This volunteer role gave me a kind of inside status and I think helped me gain access to, and more productively engage, internal stakeholders. One AC member I interviewed (AC11) encouraged me to share my interview findings with the Evaluation group so that Sustain would have access to anonymous insights shared by AC members. I did so broadly in the context of discussions and analysis of the data gathered through the evaluation process.

After attending several meetings and getting to know members, I sometimes found it difficult to confine myself to a strictly observational role. I participated in some group discussions, particularly related to questions the Evaluation group had worked on if I was there as a representative of that group. When I had a less active role to play it was easier for me to pay attention to other things like the space and place (Stimson, 1986); the content, flow and structure of the agenda; who attended and how members participated in the conversation, etc.

Sustain's bi-annual AC meetings often involve more than forty people: AC members, staff and interns, and guests like myself. These forums enabled me to observe without being overly intrusive, while being transparent about my research interests. The meetings provided me with insights into how members and staff and members interact, illuminated

issues that may not have been identified through interviews, and provided insight into Sustain's approach to strategy development. They also assisted me in identifying key actors in the network and helped me gain a better understanding of the nature of member engagement and Sustain's approach to collaboration, policy development and promotion. As noted above, at the November 2013 AC meeting I played a more active role, presenting highlights from my interviews with policy makers, and co-facilitating a discussion on emerging priorities with another member of the Evaluation group.

Sustain's biennial Bring Food Home conference is hosted in collaboration with other partners and sponsors that have an interest in transforming the food system. The 2-3 day conferences are held in a different part of Ontario (see Chapter 5). As part of my participation in the Evaluation group, I was involved in discussions about the design of the closing conference sessions in 2011 and 2013 where Sustain engages the broader food movement in discussions about priorities for the coming year (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5). In 2013 I co-facilitated the closing session with another member of the Evaluation group.

The qualitative information gathered from these three different methods – documentary evidence, interviews and observation – assisted me in understanding and describing Sustain's origins, structures, strategies and processes, and how they impacted Sustain's legitimacy in the form of a case study record. This record will be accessible to Sustain and other cross-sectoral coalitions and I hope it will prompt continued reflection and learning. I intend to document key findings in a format that is more accessible to the coalition and others. Interpreting the data related to Sustain's work has raised additional

questions related to existing theory and whether and how other cross-sectoral coalitions can learn from their experience. I explore these in Chapter 8, Findings and Conclusion.

4.3 DATA ANALYSIS

As noted above, my research methodology is qualitative and includes a literature review supplemented by interviews with key informants, a review of organizational documents and observation. I use this data to document the activities and processes in 2007-2008 that led to the formation of Sustain and the network's formative years from 2009-2013. I analyze the data informed by various theoretical constructs and literature from management studies, public policy and administration and sociology. I describe my approach to analysis below. As part of this analysis I refined my theoretical constructs, as per a grounded theory approach.

My research question incorporated theoretical constructs (see Figure 4.1, page 89) and I revisit these constructs in Chapter 8 to make sense of the findings (Ely, 1997). When analyzing the data I explore the extent to which my findings reflect or conflict with previous research. I identify how choices about structures, strategies and processes contribute to, and detract from, Sustain's legitimacy. I identify other factors that appear to impact legitimacy.

The three qualitative methods I used to gather data – interviews, review of documentary evidence, and observation – provided me with a substantial amount of raw material to analyze to help me understand, document and interpret this case. I was guided by

Spradley's (1980) description of analysis as "a search for patterns…a systematic examination of something to determine its parts, the relationship among parts and the relationship to the whole" (p. 85). Each method and data source provides a somewhat different perspective on, and interpretation of, Sustain and its work.

Coding is a common strategy used in several analytic approaches including 'grounded theory' (Bowen, 2006, Charmaz, 2000, Glaser and Straus, 1967), schema analysis, and content analysis. I used coding to help me organize and make sense of data gathered via different methods. While I wanted to uncover patterns and themes that emerged in the data, the literature that guided my information gathering suggests a number of themes (e.g. different processes, structures, strategies, influence tools). This reflects a classical content analysis approach which "assumes codes of interest have already been discovered and described" (Ryan and Bernard, 2000, p. 785). I used these themes as a starting point for a 'code book' (ibid). Ryan and Bertrand recommend such a book include a description of the code, the tag used to mark codes in texts, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and examples from the data (ibid). I analyzed the data gathered to identify and tag content illustrating different themes.

Silverman (2000) references Atkinson's 1992 comments on the uses and disadvantages of coding. Coding schemes are 'a powerful conceptual grid' which can be constraining and which also "…deflect attention away from uncategorized activities" (ibid, p. 825). Silverman points to other limitations: while categories may be useful, they are not always accurate or true. I was mindful of these limitations when identifying and applying codes and categories.

A 'grounded theory' approach encourages researchers to search for meaning and tell a "story about people, social processes and situation" (ibid, p. 522). The "systematic analytic approach" (ibid, p. 522) involves "a continual interplay between data collection and analysis to produce a theory during the research process" (Bowen, 2006, p. 2). Although grounded theory does not specify particular data collection methods, it acknowledges the value of multiple methods and emphasizes the importance of making comparisons across data gathered from various sources (Charmaz, 2000). In grounded theory, codes are generated from the data itself, by analyzing text on a line-by-line basis and then grouping similar codes into categories and then synthesizing those into themes. Although I did not analyze text in this level of detail, as I analyzed my data and coded material I watched for content that suggested a new code, pattern or theme.

Analyzing data gathered using different methods, enabled me to do some rough triangulation, by looking for points of convergence and contradiction (Anzul, Freidman, Garner, and McCormack-Steinmetz, 1991, Yin, 2009). While analyzing this data I identified some questions that made it necessary to return to the field to confirm information or to find a specific answer. As a result I conducted a second interview with the Director and Acting Director, interviewed a second representative from Metcalf, and confirmed information via email with one AC member.

4.3.1 Interviews

Interviews with stakeholders who represent diverse perspectives provide opportunities for analysis on two levels: 'direct interpretation' of particular interviews and 'aggregation'

across multiple interviews (Stake, 1995). Internal stakeholders are perhaps most knowledgeable about Sustain; however the perspectives of external stakeholders based on their varied experience interacting with representatives of the Alliance complemented the perspectives of internal stakeholders. In accordance with grounded theory, I "look[ed] for views and values as well as acts and facts" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 522).

In analyzing the interview data, I reviewed notes taken during and after interviews (i.e. my reflective journal) and marked themes using tags. I did not develop such a detailed code book as was described by Ryan and Bernard above. As I re-listened and reviewed my notes for each interview, I tried to determine if there was an underlying theme as suggested by van den Hoonaard (2012). In addition to coding themes, I listened for and identified illustrative stories as well as unanticipated responses and perspectives that could be used to enrich the description of the case and assist readers in making their own interpretations (Spradley, 1980). Sometimes I was unsure if responses reflected solely an individual perspective or if it was more broadly representative. Time and budget limitations made it impossible to fully transcribe the 41 interviews conducted; however when I re-listened, I watched for content that fell outside my defined codes and themes.

4.3.2 Observation and participation

As noted above, participating in and observing AC meetings, was most helpful in providing insight into Sustain's members, culture and processes. My participation in the Evaluation group offered an opportunity for a slightly different kind of observation. As a volunteer I was an active participant in this group and the experience gave me a different

perspective on how Sustain operates. It also gave me easy access to additional data for analysis.

My research benefitted from the data gathered as part of the evaluation process from March to late October 2013. This included summaries of focus groups with AC members and staff (which I co-facilitated), interviews with staff (facilitated by an intern), interviews with policy makers (which I conducted on behalf of the group), and a summary of the 2013 member survey. I looked forward to an opportunity to discuss and analyze this data with the rest of the group. Although the group planned to meet in September 2013 to discuss and analyze the information gathered, the survey was still underway and the meeting was deferred until early November.

The evaluation information gathering and analysis process was delayed and lengthy, in part a reflection of Sustain's resource limitations and reliance on volunteers. Staff eventually synthesized and developed a preliminary analysis of the evaluation data in November 2013 and Evaluation group members commented on this material by email. Although as group members we reflected individually on the data gathered, there was limited opportunity to discuss and analyze insights with the rest of the group before the Acting Director presented highlights at the AC meeting in Windsor (McKay, 2013). The Director eventually produced an evaluation report in 2014.

4.3.3 Organizational documents

I reviewed organizational documents including AC meeting minutes, newsletters, proposals, and Terms of Reference to identify examples of structures, strategies and

processes Sustain uses to weave connections among members, foster cross-sectoral collaboration and engage members in policy development and promotion. Reviewing and analyzing this data with codes in mind gave me insight into how the coalition describes itself internally and externally. I included some of Sustain's materials, such as a geographic map of membership (page 144), an outcomes map (see Appendix B), and an election campaign postcard (pages 186-187) to assist readers in better understanding the Alliance's composition, objectives and strategies.

Atkinson and Coffey (1997) caution researchers that organizational documents can't be relied upon to tell the full story of how an organization operates. As part of my analysis I looked for examples of how the coalition described itself versus how it was experienced and perceived by different stakeholders based on interview comments and observations. This enabled me to assess and confirm or disaffirm the accuracy of assertions made by interviewees (Silverman, 2000). Stake (1995) indicates this kind of comparison represents a form of 'methodological triangulation'.

In Chapter 5, *Structuring and Weaving the Network,* I describe Sustain's 2009-2013 efforts to grow a provincial food and farming network with the legitimacy to influence public policy.

CHAPTER 5 STRUCTURING AND WEAVING THE NETWORK

5.1 INTRODUCTION

By 2013 Sustain was a growing, cross-sectoral provincial alliance with more than 400 members who aspire to transform the food system in the province of Ontario into one that is more sustainable ecologically, socially and economically. I examine its evolution from 2009 to 2013 from two perspectives: as a network, and as a 'network organization' or NAO as described by Provan and Kenis (2008) (see page 52). This involves a study of Sustain's organizational structure as well as two core strategies, 'Network' and 'Showcase', and related processes the Alliance used to weave a provincial food and farming network.

Sustain has established a niche in alternative, sustainable food and farming and their members represent diverse urban and rural perspectives (see Table 5.1 on page 131). Some members represent other networks, and through their professional and personal networks they connect Sustain to the broader provincial food and farming movement. I consider Sustain a network, among networks, within the broader provincial and national food movements in Canada.

I also agree with Levkoe's (2014) characterization of Sustain as a PNO, which could also be considered a NAO. As a PNO, Levkoe indicates Sustain is strategically positioned "as weavers within the provincial food movement" (ibid, p. 60). Holley (2011) suggests that network weavers have four roles: connector, network facilitator, network guardian and project coordinator. Individuals ultimately take on these roles, and at Sustain, staff, and particularly the Director, play all of them, alongside some members. By fulfilling the

network weaving and related PNO roles, Sustain exemplifies many of the characteristics of a 'backbone support organization' in the context of Kania and Kramer's (2011) 'collective impact initiatives'. 'Backbone support organizations' have staff with skills to coordinate, "plan, manage and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details for the initiative to function smoothly" (ibid, p. 40).

Throughout this chapter I identify examples of how Sustain's structures, strategies and processes have contributed to, and detracted from, the Alliance's internal and external legitimacy. I first examine Sustain's network organization structures and describe key elements. Then I look at how Sustain implemented its 'Network' and 'Showcase' strategies, and related processes to weave a diverse network. Appendix D contains an overview of historical milestones in Sustain's journey discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

5.2 STRUCTURING THE NETWORK

Like the network itself, many of Sustain's organizational structures, strategies, and processes have evolved organically; the network acknowledges these are a work in progress. Sustain's most recent draft Terms of Reference reinforces this, "These Terms of Reference represent the needs of a particular moment in our development and will continue to change…" (Sustain Ontario, 2013a, March, p. 3).

Director Nuaimy-Barker noted during an interview that she thinks the evolutionary nature of Sustain's structure and processes had started to detract from its internal legitimacy in

2013. A great deal of ambiguity remains and she has been very conscious of network

tensions: "at each step of the way it's about figuring it out… what at this moment is

going to work" (S3 – see Appendix C for interview codes used throughout this and the

following chapters). Another staff member commented during an evaluation interview

that they experienced a constant tension between remaining flexible and institutionalizing

(Vu Nguyen, 2013).

This is not uncommon, as organizations grow and mature they tend to become more

institutionalized and, according to Kearns (2003), this can dampen their ability to respond

and adapt. Provan and Kenis (2008) indicate the tension between flexibility and

institutionalization is a common tension in networks. Although Sustain's staff value the

flexibility that permits experimentation and adaptation, according to the Director (S3), as

Sustain matures staff are feeling pressures to, and are starting to welcome,

institutionalization. Other members of Sustain are more cautious about

institutionalization, as one Co-Chair noted: "Once you become very process oriented…

the goodness will go away, it's really organic right now… for now it works" (AC1). This

suggests the balancing act must continue.

Figure 5.1 on the next page illustrates key structural elements developed by Sustain that I

refer to in this and subsequent chapters.
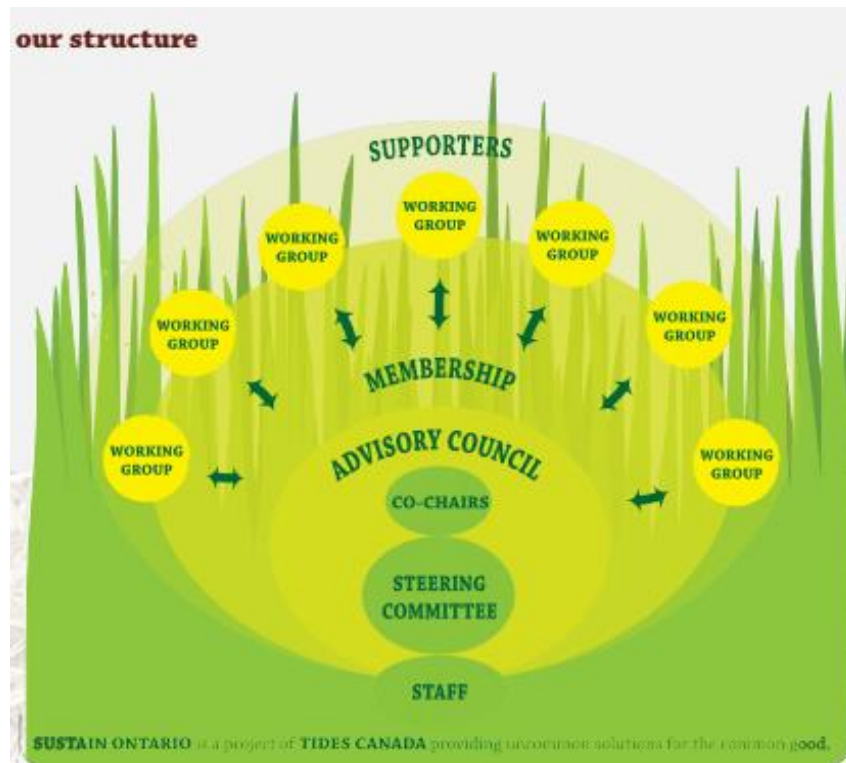
Figure 5.1 Model and structural elements of Sustain's network (Sustain Ontario, 2013g, p. 8)

Figure 5.1 illustrates that the core of Sustain's structure consists of an AC that includes

Co-Chairs and the SC. The AC is a sub-set of Sustain's larger membership; its forty

members are elected by the broader membership to provide network leadership. The AC

elects the SC from among its members to provide administrative guidance and oversight.

The Co-Chairs are selected to act as spokespeople for Sustain. Staff support the network

and undertake projects in alignment with direction provided by the AC. Members and

non-members participate in Working Groups (WGs) which are organized around issues

of interest, supported by staff. Supporters 'support' Sustain in various ways; this new

structural element was introduced and defined as part of Sustain's new membership

model in late 2013.

Table 5.1 on the next page provides a more detailed overview of these structural

elements: Members, Supporters Circle, AC, SC, Co-Chairs, WGs, Director, Staff and

interns, and Tides Canada - Support Team. I developed the table to highlight the key

characteristics of each structure so that it can serve as a quick overview and reference

guide. Included in the table are defined roles and responsibilities that Sustain has

documented and a brief overview of how those involved in each structure engage as part

of the Alliance.

Table 5.1 Overview of Sustain's network organizational structures

Structures in 2013	Composition	Defined roles and responsibilities	Frequency and form of engagement
Members	452 members (as of late 2013) Sectoral profile (Sustain Ontario 2013a) - 19% Farming and farmer training - 19% Goods, service and retail - 11% Education - 9% Food and farm NGOs - 7% Local economy support - 6% Health and nutrition - 5% Urban agriculture and architecture - 5% Distribution - 4% Justice, anti-hunger, legal aide - 15% Other Geographic distribution: see map on page 144.	Members "support working towards a food system that is healthy, ecological, equitable and financially viable" (Sustain Ontario, 2013b, p. 4). Vote annually on the membership of the AC, SC and CCs. "Members must appear on the Sustain Ontario website and will receive the Sustain Ontario e-news" (ibid, p. 7). A new membership model introduced in late 2013 defines and clarifies more expansive expectations for members. Current and interested member will be required to register annually as a 'member' or 'supporter' (see page 147).	Until late 2013, becoming a member involved simply submitting organizational information on Sustain's website. Receive weekly newsletter: "Good Food Bites". Sustain's broader membership is not highly engaged, although some participate in WGs; respond to calls for action (e.g. to support Sustain's advocacy campaigns); and attend webinars and/or the Bring Food Home conference. Members can, and do, self-nominate to the AC.
Supporters Circle *(NEW element introduced as part of membership model in late 2013)*	Supporters may be groups or individuals that are not eligible for membership under the new model.	"Like Members, Supporters are assumed to endorse all Sustain Ontario policy and advocacy initiatives but will be given the opportunity to opt out" (Sustain Ontario, 2013d).	"Supporters can help to create a healthy food and farming system by: - Publicly showing support for Sustain Ontario and its initiatives - lending their time, energy, skills, and perspectives to the work of the Alliance - supporting Sustain Ontario Members directly" (ibid).

Structures in 2013	Composition	Defined roles and responsibilities	Frequency and form of engagement
Advisory Council (AC)	The AC consists of a maximum of 40 members/sector leaders. Members self-nominate as AC members. A committee reviews nominations and prepares a shortlist for members to vote on. This group illustrates the diversity of interests and geographies involved in Sustain.	The AC provides leadership by working "to strategically support the cohesion and collective interest of the network. This means providing a clear vision and ongoing strategic analysis to guide the work… Members of the Advisory Council can "trigger" or lead working groups within the collaborative network." (ibid, p. 4)	Meets in person semi-annually for approximately 2 days (budget permitting). Between meetings the AC engages in discussion via email and teleconference. Some AC members attend external meetings with staff. Individual members often lend their expertise related to specific projects (e.g. policy development, conference planning) and on emerging policy questions.
Co-chairs	Two members are elected by the AC as Co-Chairs of the AC. In recognition of the time required, Sustain converted this to a paid role in spring 2011 (budget permitting).	The Co-Chairs of the AC "work with the Director to determine strategic programmatic directions, to liaise with the SC and AC, build membership and to act as spokes people for Sustain Ontario" (ibid, p. 5).	As spokespeople the Co-Chairs regularly accompany the Director to meetings with external stakeholders and also engage with policy makers independently. Although they are Co-Chairs of the AC, they do not play a conventional chairing role during AC meeting. The Co-Chairs participate in SC meetings, however they are not members of the SC.
Steering Committee (SC)	The AC selects and elects 4-7 AC members to represent the AC on the SC. *For the first 4 years, this group consisted of founding members (i.e. a sub-set of the Metcalf grantees and others who formed Sustain); in 2013 three members changed.*	The SC provides "administrative support and strategic direction to the Director… responsible for making decisions regarding the work, direction and development of the Sustain Ontario, maintaining primary responsibility to the broad spectrum of projects and activities and ensuring the on-going health of Sustain Ontario " (ibid, p. 9).	The SC meets monthly, normally via teleconference. Between meetings the SC responds to emerging issues by email/phone.

Structures in 2013	Composition	Defined roles and responsibilities	Frequency and form of engagement
Working Groups (WG)	The number of active WGs varies: Sustain's Almanac 2008-2013 identifies 14, however a much smaller number are active at any point in time (~3-4). Groups consist of members (often one or more AC members) and non-members (often practitioners in the field). WGs are 'self-organizing': new groups are initiated by members and non-members who reach out to Sustain.	WGs "…identify and work on strategic activities that harness converging "mutual self-interest" as well as the expertise, time, and energy of groups of people within the network" (ibid, p. 4).	The level of engagement varies by WG: some meet regularly, others only meet to respond to an emerging issue. WG members are often geographically dispersed, and so many connect primarily via teleconference or web-meeting. Although initially envisioned as self-directed, staff and/or interns have supported most WGs in connecting and organizing.
Director	One paid position.	"The Director's role is to coordinate Sustain Ontario activities, execute activities where appropriate, and ensure administrative issues are in order" (ibid, p. 5).	The Director (Acting Director in 2013) is a full-time role. The Director attends to internal administration and network health as well as external and government relations informed by AC direction.
Staff and interns	In 2013 Sustain employed four additional staff and engaged 14 interns in total, many of whom were university students.	"Other staff and interns support the Director in executing the activities of the alliance to build on existing energy, disseminate information, convene members and build membership, strengthen membership, and document successes and challenges" (ibid, p. 5).	One full-time Program Manager Three part-time staff: - Events Coordinator - Communications Coordinator - Coordinator of the WG: Ontario Edible Education Network

Structures in 2013	Composition	Defined roles and responsibilities	Frequency and form of engagement
			Interns are assigned to specific projects and typically work part-time (e.g. 10 hours/ week) for periods of four months or longer.
Tides Canada – support team	Sustain is structured as a 'project' of Tides Canada. Tides Canada Initiatives' support team consists of their Project Coordinator and other staff with expertise in various administrative functions.	"The Tides Canada support team provides Sustain Ontario with support in all areas of operations including finances, grant administration, human resources, and risk management." "The Tides Canada Board has full governing, legal, and fiduciary responsibility for Sustain Ontario" (ibid, p. 5).	Tides Canada's Project Coordinator communicates frequently with Sustain's Director and staff via email, phone and in-person.

5.2.1 Structuring the network organization

Sustain's network organizational structure was informed in part by requirements defined in the Alliance's contractual agreement with Tides Canada – i.e. establishing the SC and identifying a project coordinator/ Director. The structure was consciously modelled after the "constellation governance model" articulated by Tonya Surman (Surman, 2006, Surman and Surman, 2008) as "a framework to serve and inform partnerships, coalitions, networks and movements" (2006, p.1). The "constellation governance model" has been used by other networks including the Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and the Environment; the Ontario Non-profit Network (ONN); and Sustain U.K.. Sustain did not adopt the constellation model in its entirety, but adapted some structural elements and concepts: WGs as 'constellations' and the SC as the equivalent of a 'stewardship group'. Sustain's staff, particularly its Director, fulfill many of the core 'secretariat' functions described in the model – e.g. catalyzing and supporting collaboration by leading the process, responding to needs, and building capacity (ibid).

Sustain's first Director reflected during an interview that the Alliance's structure evolved more or less as she expected and that the different elements of the "constellation model" are in some ways more functional than anticipated. It took time for staff and members to understand the roles and inter-relationships between Sustain's structural elements. Since staff and AC members come and go, orientating new members to these structures and how Sustain works has been important. Sustain's most recent Draft Stakeholder Terms of Reference (Sustain Ontario, 2013a) contains more detailed descriptions of key structures and related roles and relationships; this is one example of how Sustain has started to institutionalize. Educating all about Sustain's network organizational structure helped to

build internal legitimacy of 'network as entity' as described by Human and Provan (2000) in Chapter 3.

5.2.2 Decentralized leadership and decision-making

Figure 5.1 on page 129 does not illustrate where leadership resides at Sustain and in 2013, leadership and decision-making responsibility and processes remained unclear to many members and staff. As in other networks, Sustain has attempted to decentralize and share leadership (McLeod Grant, 2010, Reinelt, 2010), and this makes the Alliance's leadership more difficult to define. Levkoe (2014) comments on the absence of clear leadership in the PNOs he studied.

During interviews, I initially adopted a traditional view of leadership by suggesting it was shared between Sustain's Director and Co-Chairs, all of whom act as spokespeople for Sustain. Although some "internal" interviewees agreed with this characterization (AC16, AC17), others questioned this framing. Three AC members indicated that the Co-Chair role was never designed to be a leadership role, although some thought it had evolved in that direction (AC9, AC11, AC13). The Director commented that the SC only started to take on a more active leadership role during the transition to an Acting Director in March 2013 (S3).

Sustain's 40-member AC embodies the diversity of the network, and the Director indicated its members are the 'true leadership' of Sustain, although staff also exercise leadership based on AC input (S3). The AC is one way Sustain has attempted to decentralize leadership. The AC role was designed to encourage sector leaders to exercise

leadership within the Alliance by providing strategic direction as a group and individually at the level of WGs, which AC members are encouraged to initiate and lead. Based on interviews, some AC members take this direction-setting role quite seriously (AC9, AC13, AC14), however reaching agreement on priorities and decisions during bi-annual AC meetings has been challenging for the large, diverse group. While many AC members are involved in WGs, only a few are led by AC members; some are led by other members or lack a designated leader. According to staff, in WGs with unclear leadership, staff and interns have played a more active leadership and support role than the constellation model suggests (S3, S4).

The evolution of the SC's role over the years has generated some internal confusion and mistrust. In an early funding proposal, the SC's role was defined in accordance with Tides Canada requirements as "providing strategic direction to the staff in areas of governance, financial sustainability, and initiative development" (Baker, L. 2010). At the April 2011 AC meeting, the AC identified the need for more clarity around the SC's role (Sustain Ontario, 2011b). In 2013, the SC's defined role focuses more on providing administrative support and strategic direction to the Director; the group is responsible for making decisions about the work, directions and development of Sustain (Sustain Ontario, 2013a). The SC is in more frequent contact with staff and two AC members indicated during interviews that they believed this group was making decisions that should be made by the AC (AC9, AC13). The Acting Director also indicated during an evaluation interview that he believed it was the SC's role to set strategic direction (Vu Nguyen, 2013) and he engaged the SC more actively than the AC.

Although the Co-Chairs of Sustain's AC are not widely referred to as leaders of Sustain internally, externally, the title 'chair' is widely considered a senior volunteer leadership role. Their role as spokespeople reinforces that impression, as does the role they have played in AC recruitment. In the Acting Director's strategic development and evaluation presentation to the AC, he indicated "the Co-Chairs are the most critical position in Sustain Ontario… [a] vital rural-urban link, providing legitimacy to the Alliance in the eyes of both institutional actors and decision makers" (McKay, 2013). Two policy makers representing a bureaucratic and political perspective indicated explicitly and indirectly that they assess an organization's legitimacy in part based on those who represent or speak for it (PM1, PM8). The current Co-Chairs are from rural communities and are seen as "having skin in the game" which two policy makers I interviewed indicated enhances Sustain's credibility (PM1, PM9). Their respective backgrounds, knowledge and continuity in the role appear to have contributed positively to Sustain's external legitimacy. This suggests the AC should give the selection of individuals for such a role careful consideration.

Sustain has had three Directors since 2009, including one 'Acting Director' hired in 2013. Each took a somewhat different approach to the role, and each contributed positively to Sustain's evolution and maturation. Despite their different backgrounds and approaches, the transition between the three was remarkably smooth. I think this is partly attributable to the decentralization of leadership; the SC, in particular, supported each of the transitions.

Although staff are the day-to-day face of Sustain, the Director's 'leadership' role is not clearly defined. Director Nuaimy-Barker noted that to date, she has exercised leadership on questions of organizational and network structure, governance, and policy development and advocacy with advice from the AC (S3). In an interview conducted as part of the evaluation process, the Director characterized staff as 'servant leaders' (Vu Nguyen, 2013). Five AC members I interviewed consider the Director to be the 'leader' of the Alliance (AC1, AC13, AC14, AC15, AC17), however one member suggested Sustain is, and should be, led by many (AC11). During interviews it was clear that AC members have different expectations of the Director and one interviewee acknowledged this explicitly (AC17). This is also true of SC members, according to the Acting Director (S5). This has likely contributed to the confusion that exists around authority and decision-making.

In 2012 staff engaged the AC in the exploration of several decision-making scenarios so the group could better understand the challenges in arriving at a decision when members' opinions diverge (Sustain Ontario, 2012d). The group was asked to identify principles for decision-making in such circumstances and these informed the draft decision-making process developed in 2013. When I conducted interviews in the summer of 2013, the AC had not yet approved a decision-making process.

Staff presented a draft process to the AC in March 2013, and the group offered a number of suggestions for improvement. In November, an updated document, "Proposed decision-making structures and processes" (Sustain Ontario, 2013d) and accompanying slide deck, "Decision making in Sustain Ontario" (Sustain Ontario, 2013h), was shared

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with the AC but not discussed. In this section I describe decision-making processes that Sustain has used to date, challenges encountered, and proposed processes.

Responsibilities associated with key organizational structures (i.e. the SC, AC, and staff) are broadly defined in Sustain's Terms of Reference. Some of the content hints at, but does not explicitly state, which groups have authority to make particular decisions. When I asked internal stakeholders who makes different kinds of decisions, some pointed to the Director and Project Manager, and others to the SC or AC. The lack of clarity and confusion around decision-making has caused some mistrust. Several internal stakeholders I interviewed indicated they were unclear about who was *actually* making decisions, even when some thought they understood who was *supposed* to make particular decisions (AC9, AC10, AC11). This was a source of frustration for several; one AC member reinforced that, "at some point, you have to get transparent about how decisions are made" (AC10). Reaching agreement on, and documenting, decision-making processes has been challenging.

An overarching challenge related to decision-making at Sustain appears to stem from a commitment to using consensus as a guide, with majority voting as a back-up option. Consensus is a concept that is interpreted differently by many, and at Sustain, the meaning of consensus was discussed periodically. At AC meetings I observed in 2012-2013, members periodically reminded the group that reaching consensus across the entire Alliance is not the goal, nor is it required for Sustain to take action.

The proposed decision-making process distributed in November 2013 contains a lengthy written description of steps in the consensus decision-making process. It states, "the objective of consensus decision-making is to implement proposals on which everyone agrees and everyone is included in the decision-making process" (Sustain Ontario, 2013h, p. 5). It reinforces the need for participation in decision-making and distinguishes between minor and major concerns which might block consensus. It suggests collaboration, compromise and capacity building as approaches for working toward consensus, time permitting.

The proposed process acknowledges and illustrates the complexity of decision-making in a diverse, cross-sectoral alliance. It outlines principles, that Sustain, "aims to make decisions in a way that is inclusive, spurs action, builds engagement and positive relationships, and is nimble and adaptable" (ibid, p. 1). These hint at a common network tension, between the desire for inclusivity and efficient, timely action. The process also reinforces that, "conflict is an important and valuable part of decision-making processes" (ibid, p. 1). The document contains a decision-making framework for two types of decisions: those concerning policy and advocacy, and operations. It also contains a "Decision Making Matrix" that outlines examples of the types of decisions each group may make along with a corresponding decision-making process. Although the document provides greater clarity and enhances transparency, it has not been finalized and it remains unclear if it will work in practice.

5.3 WEAVING THE NETWORK

In the remainder of this chapter, I explore two of Sustain's core strategies, 'Network' and 'Showcase' and related processes used to implement these and weave the network.

5.4 'NETWORK' STRATEGY

Sustain's Theory of Change articulates the following outcomes for the 'Network' strategy: "to build capacity at the ground level to implement sustainable solutions; focus energy and expertise on solving food system challenges; and generate the collective power to influence policy change" (Sustain Ontario, 2013i, p. 4).

The 'Network' strategy is implemented using a number of weaving processes, many of which are led by Sustain's staff. Weaving a network begins with attracting members – i.e. growing a diverse provincial network. After attracting members, a network organization needs to weave connections between network members. Staff at Sustain enacted the four weaver roles described by Holley (2011): connecting, facilitating, acting as network guardians, and coordinating projects.

5.4.1 Growing a diverse provincial network

Sustain's membership initially consisted of the 21 founders, most of whom participated in the 2007-2008 meetings Metcalf convened. As noted in Chapter 2, many were based in Southern Ontario. Sustain's first Director, Lauren Baker, was hired in June 2009. Shortly thereafter, she recommended the network adopt a provincial mandate and diversify membership by engaging small businesses and farms. Baker believed Sustain would need to create a big tent to gain the political traction needed to influence provincial food and

farming policy (AC7). The expansiveness of the tent refers to the diversity of actors from different geographic regions and sectors who have an interest in realizing Sustain's Vision: "a food system in Ontario that is healthy, ecological, equitable and financially viable" (Sustain Ontario, 2013i, p.1).

In 2009 Sustain's Director, SC and AC members started promoting Sustain informally through their networks. In 2010 they circulated the report "Menu2020" (Baker, Campsie, Rabinowicz, 2010), which outlined ten good food ideas for Ontario. The report contained an invitation to anyone working on related issues to join Sustain's network. Organizations and individuals registered to become members by signing up on Sustain's website; at the time, membership criteria were not defined. Those who registered as members received Sustain's e-newsletters and were invited to become more actively involved; they were also encouraged to support Sustain's efforts within their communities.

By late 2010, approximately 200 individuals and organizations had signed up as members. The majority were based in the GTA and south-western Ontario. Sustain's second Director, Ravenna Nuaimy-Barker, succeeded Baker in early 2011. Two AC members and one staff member I interviewed described her as 'a natural weaver' and 'relationship builder' (AC1, AC4, S2); in 2011 she spearheaded efforts to strategically expand the geographic diversity of the AC. She did this by reaching out to individuals she knew, or knew of, who worked in different parts of the province and asked others for suggestions. That year membership grew to approximately 285 (Sustain Ontario, 2013g).

By November 2012, Sustain had grown to approximately 380 members (ibid). Figure 5.2

below depicts the geographic distribution of network members at that time (Sustain

Ontario, 2013k). The map illustrates that the vast majority of members in late 2012 were

based in Southern Ontario, with nearly half (181) in the largely urban GTA.
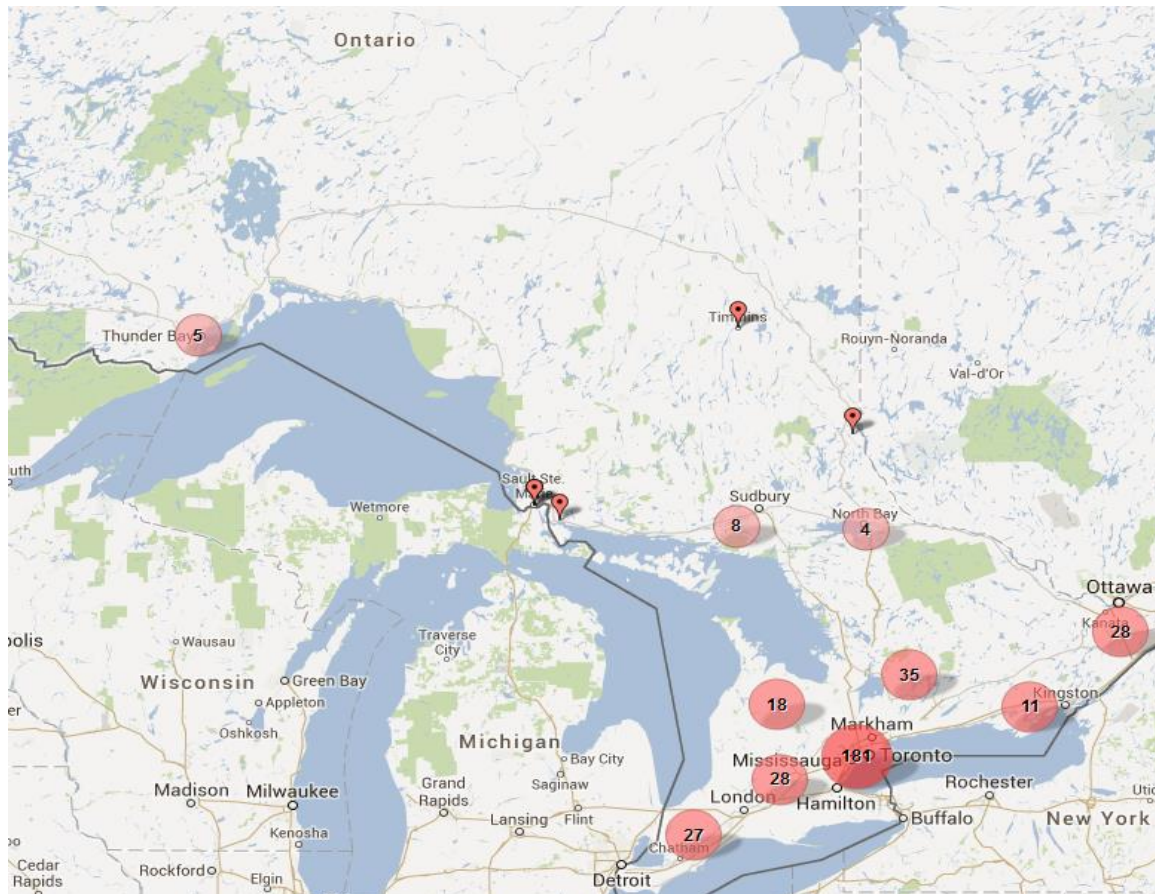
Figure 5.2: Geographic distribution of Sustain's membership in 2012

Ontario is Canada's second largest province geographically at more than $1,000,000km^2$

(Ontario government, 2014a). Although Sustain's membership has become more

geographically diverse, there are few representatives from the North; impediments

include distance and travel costs. One AC member from the North that I interviewed

speculated that others in the North prefer to invest their energy in regional networks

where they have pre-established connections (AC15). The map above may explain in part

why some AC members (AC10, AC15, AC17) and one former policy maker (PM9) questioned whether Sustain can claim to represent the broad spectrum of provincial food and farming interests.

According to Nuaimy-Barker (S3), without any formal process or active member recruitment efforts, Sustain's membership grew to 452 in 2013 (Sustain Ontario, 2013g, November). This growth may be a reflection of a growing interest in local, sustainable food and farming issues, and the profile that Sustain acquired through Bring Food Home conferences and work on the LFA (see Chapter 6).

An online member survey Sustain conducted in 2013 (108 responses) explored members' motivation for becoming involved in Sustain. The top three responses: 67% reported they 'wanted to be part of a recognized voice in the food and farming industry'; 65% 'wanted to support public education about food and farming'; 50% 'wanted to influence policy with advocacy support' (Nicoara, 2013).

Table 5.1 on page 131 contains a breakdown of members by sector. Six members commented during interviews that Sustain is somewhat GTA-centric and that AC members with urban food perspectives outnumber those with rural and farming perspectives (AC10, AC13, AC14, AC15, AC16, A17). Externally, policy makers on the bureaucratic and political sides (PM2, PM7, PM10) and another policy actor commented (O5) that Sustain appears stronger on the urban food side compared to the farming side. This is partly a legacy of the Alliance's roots as a southern Ontario network. Policy makers who have traditionally dealt with more conventional agricultural organizations

may not consider alternative, sustainable farming groups to be 'real farmers'. As one former policy maker from OMAFRA observed, "they do have some people with agricultural legitimacy… It's very important… if they're going to be recognized as a legitimate organization representing agricultural interests…" (PM9).

5.4.2 Introducing a membership model

Network boundaries are often described as porous (Katcher, 2010), however when network organizations have 'members', boundaries become more defined and less porous. More than once Director Nuaimy-Barker posed the question during an evaluation discussion, "is there an us"? It gradually became clear that the answer was "yes" – a network "looking at the four goals articulated in the vision statement" (Sustain Ontario, 2012, p. 3). Nuaimy-Barker expanded on this during an interview, "we're all parts of the food system… players who are active in the food and farming system who want that system to change… to become more sustainable on all fronts" (S3).

As Sustain's membership grew, AC members explored membership-related questions during meetings: "Should we have individual members?", "How do we define who is in and who is out?", and "What does it mean to be a member?" (Sustain Ontario, 2012a). These questions hint at another network tension, related to inclusion and exclusion, or boundary setting. I explore other network tensions identified by Provan and Kenis (2008) (e.g. flexibility and stability, and internal and external legitimacy) in Chapter 7, *Case Discussion and Analysis*.

In 2012 the Alliance's staff, SC and AC began to explore the merits of introducing a formal membership model. Membership models are complex to design and administer; for Sustain, designing a suitable model consumed significant energy over a period of more than one year. Objectives for introducing a formal model included strengthening engagement and relationships with members, more clearly articulating who Sustain represents, and increasing financial sustainability (S3).

In late 2013 Sustain was just starting to roll out its new membership policy and model which includes two categories of membership: 'members' – groups and organizations; and 'supporters' – "groups and individuals that want help advance the work of the Alliance, but that do not meet the criteria for Membership" (Sustain Ontario, 2013e, p. 4). Members will be asked to renew annually. The policy defines member eligibility, role and responsibilities; and encourages members to make modest annual contributions to Sustain on a sliding scale based on their annual organizational budget. Non-profit groups and organizations, food enterprises (e.g. food processing businesses or retailers and farms), and public sector agencies are eligible to apply to become members with voting rights.

In contrast, 'supporters' have no voting privileges. Supporters that want to make a financial contribution are encouraged to donate to one of Sustain's members. The intention of this is to help Alliance members access financial resources and reduce perceptions that Sustain is competing with its members for funding, something that associations and network organizations are sometimes criticized for.

Several years into Sustain's journey, access to funding is becoming more challenging. As noted in Chapter 2, the Alliance's primary funding comes in the form of foundation grants, generally tied to projects. For the first time in 2014, the Bring Food Home conference generated some revenue. Although the new membership fees, which range from $50-$1000 based on an organization's budget, are not expected to generate significant revenue (e.g. $10-15,000 annually), Sustain hopes this discretionary funding will enhance its sustainability. One internal stakeholder expressed concern that the introduction of membership 'fees' may exclude some potential members and negatively impact the overall network diversity (AC15); another suggested some narrowing of diversity might be beneficial (AC17).

Introducing annual membership fees required Sustain to more clearly articulate its value proposition. The Alliance's website articulates the benefits of membership as: "being part of a province-wide Ontario voice for support of food and farming systems that are healthy, equitable, ecological and financially viable"; "joining others working in the food, health and agriculture sectors to let our governments and other organizations know what we think it will take to transform Ontario's food system" (Membership policy, 2014). As a recipient of membership fees, Sustain will be expected to provide tangible value and more actively engage the broader membership. This may enhance internal legitimacy in the form of 'network as interaction' (Human and Provan, 2000) by clarifying and reinforcing the case for involvement. Sustain's Director commented during an interview (S3) on how she hopes the model will transform Sustain's relationships with members:

> *…actually having those relationships be alive will really add to the legitimacy of Sustain, to the conversations that we're having, to our power in reaching out, and in bringing in the message… this whole process of creating a different*

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> *form of membership was really about making systems and expectations around engagement… that we would be more engaged in listening, but they would be more engaged in doing.*

Sustain's most recent Terms of Reference defines members' role as supporting Sustain's vision and guiding principles (Sustain Ontario, 2013a, March). The new membership policy specifies three ways members are expected to support the work of the Alliance:

"1) communicate their support of the Alliance's work to their constituents…

2) participate in some aspect of activities a minimum of five hours/year…

3) members are assumed to endorse Sustain Ontario-led policy and advocacy

initiatives, but will be given the opportunity to opt out of broad policy positions.

All members will be notified of policy and advocacy activities for which member

support is wanted…. Members who are unable to participate in advocacy or have

strict advocacy limitations are able to state this restriction on their membership

application, and will automatically be assumed to opt out of any and all policy

and advocacy initiatives unless indicated otherwise for specific initiatives"

(Sustain Ontario, 2013e, p. 3).

This approach to endorsement is designed to enable the Alliance to be more nimble in communicating broad policy positions. It is not clear what mechanism is in place to communicate with those members who have opted out.

This new model clarifies the constituency Sustain represents for external stakeholders. Members will be asked to renew annually and this will enable Sustain to maintain and communicate a more accurate profile of its membership. During interviews two policy makers from OMAFRA and one politician (PM1, PM4, PM8) indicated they pay

attention to a group's membership composition. This suggests greater transparency in this area may enhance Sustain's external legitimacy.

Questions persist regarding the optimal size and diversity of Sustain's 'tent' and how the Alliance should relate to those in proximate tents who are not members. Sustain's guiding principles indicate it "bridge(s) differences and silos" (Sustain Ontario, 2013a, p. 4). One AC member indicated Sustain needs to reach out more widely to producers and organizations in the mainstream farming community, "if Sustain is going to represent themselves as a voice for food and farming, they need to be a voice for food and farming, not just *some* farming" (AC16). Five policy makers I interviewed from the bureaucratic and political sides concurred, suggesting that engaging conventional agricultural groups in dialogue would benefit both parties (PM1, PM2, PM3, PM4, PM7).

The implementation of a formal membership model is another example of how Sustain has institutionalized. Sustain's Director reflected, "We have trust and goodwill built between a small group of individuals that understood that they were on the same page...   But with increasing complexity and inclusivity… that wasn't going to be enough" (S3). Institutionalization in this and other areas should contribute positively to the Alliance's internal and external legitimacy. The membership model should assist Sustain in strategically expanding its membership and its legitimacy as a provincial voice for alternative food and farming. From the perspective of external legitimacy, a clearer definition of membership roles, mutual expectations, and support for Sustain's policy positions should be well received by policy makers.

5.4.3 Convening and connecting members

Instead of allowing networks to evolve without direction, successful individuals, groups and organizations have found that it pays to actively manage your network. ~ Krebs and Holley, 2002, p. 5.

Krebs and Holley (2002) note that convening and connecting are common network weaving processes. At Sustain, these processes are undertaken by staff and to a lesser extent by AC members who have helped attract new members. Sustain's most recent draft Terms of Reference indicates that staff "are responsible for convening the Steering Committee and Advisory Council"… [and] "will seek out "spaces" where there is energy to move forward on important issues and link emergent leaders to others interested in working with them" (Sustain Ontario, 2013a, March p. 10).

Within Sustain's network(s), some connecting takes place in-person, while in other cases it occurs virtually since Sustain's provincial membership is geographically dispersed. This virtual connectivity is something that may have been cost-prohibitive to many networks just ten years ago. Both options help connect and 'bridge' formerly unconnected members and facilitate the flow of information and ideas that are critical to a healthy network (McLeod Grant, 2010, Scearce, 2011). 83% of the 108 members who responded to Sustain's 2013 member survey indicate they see Sustain's ability "to bring together diverse groups to work effectively for problem-solving to be one of Sustain's unique contributions to bringing about a more sustainable food and farming system" (Nicoara, 2013, p. 5).

In addition to forging connections and increasing collective understanding, Sustain convenes for a variety of other purposes, to: facilitate collaboration and the exchange of

ideas; build capacity; engage members in dialogue and strategic thinking on issues and policy questions; find common ground; and set priorities. Key spaces for convening and connecting members and non-members in person include: AC meetings, the biennial Bring Food Home conference, and periodic forums (e.g. "Food, Farms, Fish and Finance" in 2013).

Convening and connecting demands considerable skill, energy and resources (Levkoe, 2014, he cited Li, 2007, McFarlane, 2009; also Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, and Allen, 2001). Staff convene the SC, AC, and WGs for in-person and virtual discussions. In their weaver roles, as connectors and network facilitators, staff invite members and others who are involved in issues to participate in educational webinars, forums and consultation processes (see Consulting with the network, page 159). Educational events are well-attended and Sustain's consultation processes have been effective in soliciting input from a range of communities. Three AC members I interviewed commented they value these opportunities to learn, share successes and challenges, and create new connections (AC5, AC9, AC15). In the 2013 member survey, 33% of respondents reported Sustain 'significantly' helped them to connect with others to improve the outcomes of their food systems related work. 50% reported they 'often' or 'sometimes' share ideas, innovations and resources within Sustain and its networks (Nicoara, 2013).

In terms of levels of engagement, members of the AC and SC are the most engaged and staff reported during interviews that nearly all are actively involved on some level (S3, S4). Many AC members engage on a one-on-one basis; sometimes this is self-initiated,

while in other cases staff reach out to individuals with specific knowledge and expertise. AC members I interviewed identified various ways they had been actively involved: one reported accompanying staff to meetings with policy makers (AC4); others helped develop policy backgrounders (AC4, AC6, AC9, AC10), while others participated on WGs (most), or assisted with operational work (e.g. articulating internal processes, conference planning) (AC5, AC7, AC12, AC16).

Members' ability to engage appeared to be partly a reflection of busyness, and for some a question of whether they were contributing as individual volunteers, or in an official capacity representing an organization. One member I interviewed (AC10), indicated that their willingness to contribute was influenced by a sense of whether providing input would have an impact. This reinforces the importance of developing processes that members trust and consider legitimate, or in the words of the Director, to "structure the trust" (S3). She continued, noting that in 2013 Sustain clarified decision-making and electoral processes to "create processes that people trust" and "enhance internal legitimacy".

Sustain's AC connects in-person at meetings and virtually via teleconference, web meetings, and email. The biannual AC meetings require significant up-front planning; the Acting Director indicated these are "taxing on Sustain Ontario's resources financially and also from a staff preparation perspective" (McKay, 2013). The meetings have packed agendas that include updates on work done by WGs and staff; discussion of emergent issues and tensions inside and outside the Alliance; and identification of policy-related issues, opportunities and priorities. A substantial background package is circulated

approximately one week in advance. Two AC members indicated that sharing these, and other materials that Sustain wants input on, further in advance would assist AC members in providing more thoughtful input and give them time to engage their respective communities in discussions (AC11, AC16).

The AC meetings I observed were facilitated by an outside consultant who has worked with Sustain since its early days; she also guided the Alliance's developmental evaluation process (see Chapter 7). It appeared the presence of an external facilitator introduced neutrality; it also freed up the Director and staff to present to the AC and participate more actively in discussions.

At AC meetings members explore different perspectives with a view to identifying common ground. The Acting Director observed that when he arrived in the spring of 2013, the AC seemed to be "on the same page about major issues" (S5); one of the Co-Chairs agreed (AC2). The group has often reinforced that Sustain doesn't strive for complete agreement, but to arrive at a consensus that members support and/or can 'live with'.

AC discussions I observed were often messy and a failure to call the question and reach a decision at the end frustrated some AC members and staff. One AC member commented, "I feel like we're always having these big mish-mash discussions" (AC13); another said, "we did all this talking, we had all these people in the room, we could have really made some firm direction and decisions, but we didn't" (AC16). An intern reflected on one meeting during which the AC explored questions related to Sustain's identity and

position-taking, noting that, at the end of the day there was "no conclusion" (S1). At some meetings the AC did make decisions and provide clear direction – e.g. in February 2012 (Sustain Ontario, 2012) the AC reinforced that Sustain needs to keep its energy focused on policy reform as opposed to program delivery. This led to a refocusing of staff activities and the cancellation of Sustain's 'City to Country' initiative (see page 166).

Members are vocal and participate actively during meetings, despite the large number of participants. According to one AC member, the growth of the AC beyond the original 21, has "given more depth to the conversation when focused on specific issues… but it has also resulted in more people's voices, although they're there, not being effectively heard" (AC6). Smaller break-out groups are used to give more members an opportunity to share their perspectives, however this means that not all members are exposed to them. Although necessary with such a large group, this may curtail opportunities to deepen collective understanding.

A 'dotmocracy' process, whereby participants vote on the topics that are of most interest to them, was sometimes used to create a shortlist of topics for discussion during AC meetings. One AC member I interviewed who works in the North observed that this process sometimes means less mainstream regional and rural issues are ignored since a substantial number of people need to be interested in a topic for it to make the shortlist (AC14).

Although many members I interviewed indicated the AC works reasonably well during and outside of meetings, several stressed the full group could be better engaged and

utilized. For example, "there needs to be a clearly defined role for advocacy and how the

AC is utilized on that" (AC4); "some people on the AC feel like they would like a little

more direct input" (AC15); "the AC has not been given enough opportunity to identify

policy gaps… has not been used to its capacity" (AC11). Others indicated they think the

AC is asked to provide feedback and 'rubber stamp' things, rather than set direction. As

one member noted, "sometimes I feel we come in after the fact… [staff say] 'this is what

we've been doing, and how do you feel about what we have done'… [it] feels like instead

of us providing the direction proactively, we are reactive" (AC5). One staff member

noted in an interview as part of the evaluation process, "we haven't figured out a protocol

on when to engage the full AC" (Vu Nguyen, 2013).

These concerns point to some weaknesses in Sustain's structure and processes. I think

nomenclature has contributed to confusion – e.g. 'Steering Committee' suggests a

direction setting role, one which has been assigned to the 'Advisory Council'; while the

terminology 'advisory' suggests the provision of advice, as opposed to decision-making.

Although AC meetings are a useful forum for exchanging ideas and diverse perspectives

to help the group better understand issues, it may be unreasonable to expect the AC to

make decisions and set direction in such a forum. In my experience such large and

diverse groups require a clearly defined and agreed-upon process for decision-making.

The documentation of decision-making processes may help.

Between meetings the AC discusses emerging issues via email or teleconference. Those

with knowledge and interest in a particular issue tend to be the most vocal; for other

members the discussion is largely educational. Email is useful for gathering input but not

ideal as a forum for discussion or when quick decisions are required. One member I interviewed suggested longer timelines and better framed questions would enhance the depth of analysis and volume of response from the AC (AC11). The Acting Director indicated during an interview that staff are still trying to determine how best to collect input from the AC. "We're trying surveys now, but we're getting so much feedback on survey design… there's a risk we'll miss our window of opportunity" (S5).

Compared to AC and SC members, levels of participation among Sustain's broader membership is limited according to the Director (S3). Some participate in WGs, webinars, consultation processes, or the biennial Bring Food Home conference. Sustain uses its website, blogs, weekly e-newsletters and social media to keep members and the general public informed of opportunities for involvement.

WGs, or 'constellations' as Surman (2006) defines them in the "constellation governance model", are important spaces within which smaller numbers of members and non-members can connect and take action on issues of interest to them. Continuing with the constellation metaphor, WG constellations are a sub-structure within Sustain's bounded 'universe'. In these spaces WG members exchange information and ideas, and some explore policy barriers and develop solutions. The WG structure was designed to decentralize leadership and support action by sub-groups, and to some degree they have done so; however the Acting Director expressed concern about relying on WGs to identify policy issues (S5).

These WG 'constellations' are sometimes referred to as the 'non-consensus based element' of Sustain (Bruce, 2013) since WG activities and positions are not always supported by the broader membership. The 'Flocking Options' campaign (Flocking options, 2014) developed by one WG to encourage the Farm Products Marketing Commission to offer more options for small scale farmers who don't have quotas generated some scepticism and mistrust internally. Despite the fact that the final campaign message was eventually framed as a need to have a conversation, it was a divisive campaign internally. One AC member noted "it was a touchy situation with us as one of the organizations [Sustain was] working with had publicly stated that they wanted to see [our organization] pulled apart; they weren't on the AC, I'm not sure if they were members [of Sustain] or not" (AC10). This campaign led one policy maker from OMAFRA to question Sustain's tactics and policy acuity, "there are other ways you could go after the marketing board with the same result...as opposed to going after the 300 chicken personal exemption" (PM7). This could be considered an example of a 'legitimacy set-back' (Human and Provan, 2000) as described in Chapter 3.

This element of Sustain's structure illustrates a network tension that exists between self-organization and flexibility, and direction or institutionalization (Provan and Kenis, 2008). Sustain's approach to WGs was experimental initially and staff supported different approaches in different WGs. In 2013, having gained a better understanding of what works and mindful of resource limitations, Sustain was considering introducing processes to provide WGs with more structure and guidance. The Acting Director suggested to the AC that "project initiation, roles and accountabilities, regular reporting and project evaluation need to be built into the working group and network model" (McKay, 2013, p.

10). This attempt to more effectively balance the tension by providing more direction is another example of Sustain's shift from flexibility to institutionalization.

Since Sustain has a large number of geographically dispersed members, staff have leveraged technology to create spaces for virtual discussions. The Alliance's capacity to host teleconferences and webinars enables AC and WG members to connect in real time in a cost-effective way. Staff and members acknowledged this technological infrastructure has been critical to the network's function, however they are not always accessible to members working in rural and remote parts of Ontario. Although these platforms are not optimal for large group discussions, two members I interviewed indicated they find them valuable for WGs (AC4, AC14); the value of conference calling was reinforced during the AC focus group (Sustain Ontario, 2013c). Other virtual engagement tools include online surveys, email, and Sustain's website which, according to some staff and one member I interviewed, has become a major destination for news, events, and commentary related to sustainable local food in Ontario and beyond (S5, AC11).

5.4.4 Consulting with the network

> *We're constantly looking for a process, or a way to get people's input without stopping our forward movement.* ~ Acting Director interview.

Levkoe (2014) notes that "…PNOs do not act unilaterally, but spend a significant amount of time and energy negotiating with, and responding to their constituents" (p. 160). This was apparent at Sustain, where staff consult with the AC on emerging and strategic issues during and between meetings. Periodically staff also facilitate more expansive consultation processes that engage the broader membership.

Interpreting members' perspectives and 'aggregating thought', or synthesizing diverse perspectives, is challenging and time consuming. In designing these consultation processes Sustain's staff reported they encountered the network tension that lies between a desire for inclusivity and good process and a need to be efficient to meet externally imposed deadlines (Provan and Kenis, 2008). As noted in the quote from the Acting Director above, Sustain hasn't found the ideal process yet.

In 2012 Sustain designed and implemented a broad-reaching consultation process to solicit member input on the components that should be included in an "Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy" (OFNS[q] see also Chapter 7), and what elements Sustain should advocate for inclusion in the LFA. The process involved the dissemination of a draft strategy to members who were encouraged to engage their communities in a discussion about it and submit feedback on-line. Staff developed resources to support members in consulting with their communities; this included a facilitator guide, presentation, and online feedback form. Staff offered to, and did, facilitate presentations and feedback sessions for some groups. Substantial feedback was provided and this informed the refinement of the OFNS and the set of LFA recommendations Sustain submitted to government (S3). Although technology was employed to capture feedback efficiently, the analysis and synthesis required significant staff time and resources.

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[q] Sustain is a member of the Ontario Collaborative Group in Healthy Eating and Physical Activity's (OCGHEAPA) Design Team. Sustain's Director represents the Alliance on this Team and acts as a co-lead. Sustain supports the Design Team in a similar way it supports other Working Groups. The Design Team has been developing a comprehensive food and nutrition strategy (OFNS) for the province which includes food production.

Another way Sustain consults with and engages its broader membership and members of the larger provincial food and farming movement is in planning, presenting at, and/or attending, the Bring Food Home conference. This conference, which Sustain hosts with support from multiple partners (including some members), was held in Waterloo in 2010, in Peterborough in 2011 and in Windsor in 2013. It is now hosted biennially. At the end of each conference, Sustain has convened a session to explore emerging issues in food and farming and identify priorities for Sustain and other groups to focus on. The session is promoted throughout the conference and anyone who is interested can attend. Despite being held on the last day of the conference when many participants are tired and/or travelling home, these sessions have attracted between 60-100 participants. Sustain is considering scheduling this session at an earlier stage of the conference to increase participation. According to the Director, in 2011 discussions during this session catalyzed the formation of multiple WGs (S3).

5.5 'SHOWCASE' STRATEGY

One of the assumptions Sustain articulates in its 2013 Theory of Change is that "solutions are emerging that can be shared, adapted and scaled once networks are strengthened" (Sustain Ontario, 2013h, p. 7). The Alliance's 'Showcase' strategy focuses on sharing these solutions by developing case studies and documenting successes and challenges to "inspire replication and lead to the development of a more common vision of what a sustainable food system can look like" (ibid, p. 5). I consider this strategy another aspect of 'weaving' as it assists network members in identifying and connecting with other groups working on similar issues. Showcasing also helps network members and policy

makers better understand the complexity and interconnectedness of provincial food and farming issues.

As noted above, the conference effectively showcases a range of solutions to members of the broader provincial food and farming network. The well-attended conference is a complex and ambitious undertaking which relies heavily on volunteers. The format combines the showcasing of innovations (e.g. sessions and tours of local projects) with opportunities to engage in large and small group dialogue on issues, and to socialize. Many members indicated during interviews that the conference is an important venue for establishing and strengthening connections. As one survey respondent commented, "The conferences provide a hundred contacts every time I attend" (Nicoara, 2013, p. 11). A member from Peterborough reported during an AC focus group that hosting the conference in Peterborough was a valuable opportunity to showcase the region and that it subsequently strengthened collaboration and regional networks (Sustain Ontario, 2013c). This reinforces the importance of hosting the conference in different regions; a conference planning committee spearheaded by Sustain, along with representatives from co-host organizations decided on locations in 2011 and 2013. Applications to host the 2013 conference were competitive and communities from across the province expressed interest. One AC member expressed frustration during the focus group that Thunder Bay was not selected and questioned the decision-making criteria and selection process used (ibid).

The 2013 conference in Windsor included nearly 200 speakers (Sustain Ontario, 2013f) in 54 sessions, with two plenary dialogues – one with four political representatives and

another with five funder organizations. The conference was supported by 17 sponsors and attracted 350-400 participants over each of the three days, despite the fact that most had to travel significant distances to Windsor. Everyone pays to attend and I met many attendees in 2013 who indicated they had not attended previously. As noted earlier, this was the first year the conference generated a profit. The 2013 theme was 'Building Bridges' and there was a strong presence of First Nations communities, many from Northern Ontario, as well as government representatives. The Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and Health sponsored the travel costs for some participants from northern Ontario. I think the success of the 2013 conference is another indication of Sustain's growing profile and legitimacy within the broader food and farming movement.

Another way Sustain 'showcases' solutions is through the publication and dissemination of reports and policy backgrounders internally to members and externally to policy makers. In Chapter 6, *Policy Development and Influence*, I explore how these materials have been received and how they have contributed to Sustain's external legitimacy. As noted previously, the 'Menu 2020' report, although it was published by Metcalf, has come to be associated with Sustain, in part because it was co-authored by Sustain's first Director (Baker, Campsie, Rabinowicz, 2010, Sustain Ontario, 2014). That, and subsequent solutions papers published by Metcalf, which were co-authored by some members of Sustain, profiled various organizations' solutions as "good food ideas" (Publications, 2014). The solutions highlighted in these reports, and on Sustain's website in early days, appear to share common elements: they are based in Southern Ontario and connected to founding members. Projects profiled online appear to have diversified since that time, however as we saw in Chapter 3, members that receive greater profile and

exposure may disproportionally benefit (Cooper and Shumate, 2012), for example, in the form of expanded access to funding and/or marketing opportunities. I think this is something any coalition needs to be mindful of as perceptions of disproportional benefit could erode internal legitimacy.

Ontario's sluggish economic recovery since the 2008 financial crisis means that government and other funders have cut back on their funding and the budgets of many non-profit organizations have shrunk. This has increased competition for funding; as one AC member noted, "everyone's fighting over a smaller pie" (AC17). This may put Sustain in the position of competing with its members for funding. Prins (2010) reinforces that such competition inhibits collaboration. Collaboration may be further inhibited, if, as a result of Sustain's 'showcasing' efforts some Alliance members are perceived to have benefitted disproportionately. Such a perceived inequity of benefits may erode trust and detract from internal legitimacy.

In addition to hosting the Bring Food Home conference and publishing reports, Sustain uses technological vehicles to showcase successes and promote solutions to internal and external stakeholders. Vehicles include Sustain's website (214,242 visits since 2009), e-newsletters (1,640 subscribers in 2013), social media (>10,000 Twitter and 2750 Facebook followers in 2013) and the 'Growing Good Food Ideas' video series (Sustain Ontario, 2013g). Technology extends Sustain's reach significantly, although the Acting Director indicated it is unclear who Sustain is reaching through these vehicles (S5).

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Sustain's website is the core of the Alliance's communication platform; a bilingual version was launched in 2011 and the site was re-designed in 2012 to assist internal and external stakeholders in better understanding the Alliance's vision, work and structures and to encourage involvement. The site profiles members and WGs, hosts video stories describing members' projects and innovations, and highlights policy campaigns and related research and resources. Electronic newsletters and blogs are archived on the site. Although most content is generated by staff and interns, members and guest bloggers from other organizations also contribute periodically. Because this content is public it has implications for Sustain's legitimacy. The Acting Director identified quality of communications as a potential reputational risk for Sustain during his November 2013 presentation to the AC (McKay, 2013).

Newsletter subscribers include members and others interested in staying informed about what's happening in Ontario related to sustainable, local food. Newsletters are emailed and link readers to more in-depth blogs and articles on Sustain's website. According to staff, click-through rates (i.e. the number of readers who click on a newsletter item to access the full story) suggest subscribers find the newsletters valuable. Two AC members I interviewed noted the newsletters are a very helpful way to stay apprised of provincial initiatives (AC5, AC12).

In 2012-2013 Sustain helped members document and share their stories by negotiating matching funding from OMAFRA for a 50-video series called 'Growing Good Food Ideas' (Videos, 2013). The series is hosted online and individual videos have been viewed 200-2000 times, the full series is also available for purchase on DVD. The videos

profile innovative food and farming initiatives from across Ontario; as one member

noted, they "capture the essence of the movement" (AC1). One AC member I

interviewed who participated in this project reported they found the videos a very useful

marketing and education tool (AC14); those who participated in the AC focus group

agreed (Sustain Ontario, 2013c). In April 2013, the Premier of Ontario, who was at the

time also the Minister of OMAFRA attended the launch of the 'Growing Good Food

Ideas' video series at Queen's Park (Kucharczyk, 2013). Bill 130, the LFA, was being

debated in the legislature around this time (Ontario, Official Report of the Debates of the

Legislative Assembly (Hansard), April 17 and 18, 2013).

One showcasing event that Sustain experimented with, but subsequently abandoned, was

a series of eleven "City to Country" tours hosted in partnership with Toronto Food Policy

Council, the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee, FoodShare Toronto,

the Foodshed Project and World Crop Research Project. The one-day 'mobile

conference' bussed participants to innovative food and farming projects in and around the

GTA. Venues included school gardens, community food programs, urban agriculture,

processing and distribution facilities. Descriptions and video records of the educational

tours are available as 'virtual tours' on Sustain's website (City to country virtual tours,

2012). At its February 2012 meeting the AC decided the initiative was "fun but not a

strategic use of time, energy, funds" (Sustain Ontario, 2012b).

5.6 IN SUMMARY

> *[Sustain is the] best opportunity going to meet different kinds of people*
> *engaged with food issues and bridge the divides of a huge province where*
> *many do their best to divide.* ~ Sustain Ontario 2013 Member survey comment.

Since 2009 Sustain has structured, attracted, connected and engaged a diverse provincial

food and farming network. The Alliance successfully implemented the 'Network' and

'Showcase' strategies and developed processes to weave and promote the network and

ultimately building legitimacy for network as 'entity'. The diversity of the network is an

asset for all involved, and contributes positively to external legitimacy, something that is

explored in more detail in Chapter 6.

Whether Sustain has sufficient membership diversity is unclear. The map (Figure 5.2) on

page 144 illustrates that the majority of Sustain's members are based in Southern Ontario.

Many of these members represent urban food perspectives. Although most of those I

interviewed who work in other parts of the province or who represent a farm perspective

indicated they feel their perspectives are heard, some external stakeholders suggested

finding a better balance between urban food and rural farming perspectives would be

useful. Doing so would likely enhance Sustain's external legitimacy, particularly in the

agricultural policy space.

Sustain's diverse network gives it unique access to good food ideas and innovations

underway across the province. Efforts to showcase these solutions expanded connections

within and beyond the network – many linkages and 'bridges' have been built. The

connections formed among network members facilitate the rapid dissemination and

exchange of information that will ideally seed continued adaptation and adoption of

solutions and innovations (Sustain's second long-term goal or outcome, see page 13).

Showcasing and convening has expanded awareness and collective understanding of

provincial food system issues and this understanding informed Sustain's policy solutions.

As a provincial network, continuing to expand Sustain's membership geographically

beyond Southern Ontario might increase the Alliance's legitimacy. Sustain's vision for

Ontario's food system challenges the status quo, so it is unlikely conventional farming

groups will become part of Sustain's 'formal' tent. External stakeholders did, however,

encourage Sustain to find ways to connect and engage such groups in dialogue, and

Sustain started to do this when recommending amendments to the LFA (see Chapter 6).

Sustain designed its network organization structures loosely based on Surman's

"constellation governance model". The Alliance subsequently refined structures and

introduced processes as the need for them emerged. Two factors suggest this approach

was practical. First, the network was attempting to do something new in the province, and

there was no recipe to guide them. A second factor relates to the network's capacity

limitations: Sustain relies heavily on volunteers and a small staff to convene, connect,

examine, research and develop policy recommendations. Despite these challenges and

limitations, the Alliance has made significant progress in structuring and weaving a

diverse network since 2009.

Only recently have the limitations of Sustain's experimental and flexible approach

become more apparent. This appears to be partly due to the growing number of members

and diversity of interests in the 'tent'. Satisfying the interests of all members has been

challenging. Furthermore, limitations stemming from immature or underdeveloped

processes such as decision-making and elections have been a cause for concern for some

members and staff. In response, Sustain has experimented and reflected on what has

worked and has begun to institutionalize processes such as decision-making and

formalize structures (e.g. by defining and documenting roles and responsibilities). The

Alliance has done this in the interest of greater clarity, transparency and accountability

(S3). As noted earlier, Sustain appreciates the need to retain some flexibility as the

network continues to evolve. Although this increase in institutionalization may negatively

impact network health by introducing controls which may inhibit self-organization,

continued institutionalization and maturation is likely to enhance Sustain's internal and

external legitimacy.

In the next Chapter, *Policy Development and Influence*, I explore the three externally

focused strategies and related processes Sustain used to develop and influence policy

reform.

CHAPTER 6 POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND INFLUENCE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

During the discussions that led to the formation of Sustain, Metcalf and some founding members researched the barriers and challenges in the food system to better understand the issues, policy intersections and innovations underway. Findings were documented in the 2008 Metcalf-published report, "Food Connects Us All: Sustainable Local Food in Southern Ontario" (Metcalf, 2008a). At an AC meeting, one participant acknowledged that this research paper "is the basis of unity at Sustain" (Sustain Ontario 2012b). The report helped open the door to discussions with policy makers in the premier's office underscoring the important role quality research and information can play in government relations and policy reform (Carden, 2004, Cugelman and Otero, 2010, Flicker, 2008, Lomas 2000a, Shields and Evans, 2008). Evidence-based policy is sometimes referred to as a 'rational' model because decision-makers are persuaded by the best, neutral information (Stone, Maxwell and Keating, 2001, Lomas, 2000a). Two policy makers I interviewed (one a current and one a former OMAFRA staff member) indicated they were committed to an evidence-based approach to policy making (PM1, PM4).

Since 2009 Sustain has shared research and solutions with policy makers and in doing so the Alliance has developed constructive relationships, particularly with individuals at OMAFRA. Sustain engages in policy conversations as "one voice and many voices" (Sustain Ontario, 2012b); the Alliance's spokespeople and members connect with government at municipal, provincial and federal levels (Nicoara, 2013).

In this chapter I describe Sustain's efforts to influence policy by exploring three of the Alliance's more externally focused strategies: 'Examine and research', 'Government relations', and 'Policy reform'. In Chapter 7, *Case Discussion and Analysis*, I assess Sustain's policy influence, and highlight factors that impacted the Alliance's internal and external legitimacy.

6.2 'EXAMINE AND RESEARCH' STRATEGY

One of Sustain's core strategies articulated in the Alliance's Theory of Change is to "Examine and research" in order to "identify barriers that stand in the way of the application of Good Food ideas and seek solutions to remove those barriers" (Sustain Ontario, 2013i, p. 6). This strategy includes a range of processes such as engaging in and supporting academic and community research partnerships; documenting barriers and solutions; and sharing research and information with a variety of internal and external stakeholders. Howlett and Ramesh (2003) reinforce the value of disseminating information when advocating for policy change. As noted in Chapter 3, ensuring this is done in a timely fashion is important (Shields and Evans, 2008).

Collectively, these activities and processes position Sustain as a 'knowledge broker' (Hargadon, 1998, 2002) as described on page 83. Sustain's efforts to "examine and research" support not only the Alliance's policy reform efforts, but also inform the work members do on the ground, contributing to Sustain's second long-term goal or outcome: "Ontario groups are adapting and adopting feasible, on-the-ground food system solutions, and innovations" (Sustain Ontario, 2013i, p.3). In the 2013 member survey, 61% reported

that "properly disseminating research and documentation of good food ideas and system issues" was one of the unique values Sustain contributes to bringing about a more sustainable food and farming system (Nicoara, 2013). Although I'm not sure all would agree, one long-term AC member commented during an interview, "Sustain's most fundamental, practical role is to ensure information is shared throughout the province" (AC13).

Canada's food and farming research space is populated by well-established and better resourced groups such as the University of Guelph, the George Morris Centre, the Pembina Institute, and Nourishing Communities – a 'sustainable food systems research project' (Nourishing Communities, 2014). Although Sustain has comparatively limited capacity to conduct primary research, the Alliance has established relationships with researchers and leverages research conducted in Canada and other jurisdictions. Sustain's network(s) makes it uniquely positioned to access and communicate fresh food system ideas and translate those ideas into policy solutions that can expand and reframe policy discussions.

Sustain's Acting Director indicated that because the Alliance has limited capacity to conduct research he worked to deepen Sustain's relationships with members of the academic community (S5). In 2013, approximately 10% of Sustain's AC members were actively involved in research projects and/or affiliated with academic institutions. Two are members of the Nourishing Communities Network, and one of the two suggested Sustain could better leverage its research which has a provincial and policy focus

(AC15). Other ways Sustain connects with the academic community is by participating in research partnerships and through student internships.

6.2.1 Aggregating thought

Although none of Sustain's staff members are exclusively focused on research, staff and interns regularly aggregate existing research and combine it with knowledge from experts within and beyond Sustain's membership. Two internal stakeholders, as well as two policy makers I interviewed, characterize these kinds of processes as 'aggregating thought' (AC1, S5, PM1, PM2). Sustain's network linkages give the Alliance easy access to a diverse range of experts doing innovative work in sustainable food and farming that may be of interest to those in other parts of the province and/or working in government. By sharing research and information with policy makers Sustain may trigger Gouldner's (1960, and Cialdini, 2008) principle of 'reciprocity' which indicates people are more willing to comply with requests from people who have given them something first.

Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) Michael Mantha acknowledged the value of Sustain's research contributions during parliamentary debates on the second reading of the LFA in April 2013 (Mantha, 2013). Sustain's work, which highlights innovations, barriers and potential policy solutions is documented and disseminated in various forms. The Alliance's publications, along with relevant research conducted by other groups, are available online for members and the general public. Sustain also shares materials directly with external stakeholders including policy makers; I explore this in more detail in the next section on government relations.

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Building on the positive reception of the Metcalf-published "Food Connects Us All" paper (Metcalf, 2008a), Sustain's first Director spearheaded the development of a second context paper published in June 2010, "Menu 2020: Ten good food ideas for Ontario" (Baker, Campsie and Rabinowicz, 2010). Baker, who co-authored the paper, had just completed her PhD prior to joining Sustain and she contributed strong research and writing skills. The paper offered thought leadership and a vision for sustainable food and farming in Ontario; it highlighted key policy gaps and innovative solutions, and reinforced the need for integrated thinking around food and farming. "Menu 2020" introduced the concept of a "Farm, Food and Health Act" and perhaps for this reason it garnered some positive media attention (Hui, 2010). Both context papers introduced new ideas and perspectives to a government that historically listened almost exclusively to producers and processors within Ontario's conventional agriculture system according to a representative from the Metcalf Foundation (O4). One of Sustain's Co-Chairs described the two papers as "very conversation-leading" (AC1).

In addition to these two context papers, Sustain documented and disseminated research and information in a variety of other forms. This includes the publication of six policy backgrounders which supported the Alliance's LFA recommendations (Good food policies – Backgrounders, 2012); six "Policies from the Field" working papers produced in collaboration with Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) (CELA and Sustain Ontario, 2013); multiple webinars which are archived on Sustain's website (e.g. Supply Management 101, Mobile Abattoirs, Beekeeping in Urban Ontario); fifty 'Growing Good Food Ideas' videos (Videos, 2013); and innumerable blog posts.

6.2.2 Research and legitimacy

Awareness of Sustain's publications was reasonably high among staff I interviewed connected to the premier's office and OMAFRA. Four interviewees (PM1, PM3, PM4, PM7) referred back to the two context papers, and six, including one politician (PM1, PM3, PM4, PM5, PM6, PM8) referred to the policy backgrounders. One policy maker commented that discussions with Sustain, along with the materials the Alliance produced helped him better understand "the opportunities… and [gain] more appreciation for the complexity and challenges for getting local food on the table, identifying whether food is local, and some of the supply chain challenges" (PM3).

Policy makers I interviewed appear to pay attention to the quality of information that advocacy groups produce when they assess a group's credibility and legitimacy. One noted that, before meeting with Sustain, "I had a positive impression of the quality of that [Menu2020] work" (PM1). Policy makers at OMAFRA and in the premier's office described Sustain's materials using generalizations such as 'pretty good', 'very good', and 'thoughtful' during interviews (PM1, PM3, PM4, PM7). One policy maker from OMAFRA suggested the inclusion of more quantifiable statistics and economic data around projected costs and potential return on investment would strengthen them (PM4); another indicated more comparative analysis is needed (PM7).

One indication that Sustain has acquired some legitimacy in government is the fact that OMAFRA funded the 'Growing Good Food Ideas' video series under its "Ontario Market Investment Fund" program. Government contracts tend to be rigorous and organizations must demonstrate they have the capacity to deliver on defined outcomes. According to

the Acting Director (S5) and three policy makers from OMAFRA (PM5, PM6, PM7) the successful fulfilment of government contracts such as these enhances an organization's legitimacy within government. One policy maker reinforced that building working relationships with government is important to build credibility, and that, "in agriculture there's a long tradition of agricultural organizations being contracted to provide services or perform developmental roles" (PM7).

Levkoe (2014) references Lofland (1996) and Staggenborg's (2011) findings that mobilization is the primary role of a social movement organization. In the next section I explore how network members used Sustain's research and other resources to engage in government relations and advocacy.

6.3 'GOVERNMENT RELATIONS' STRATEGY

Sustain's 'Government relations' strategy is designed to encourage "policy-makers and politicians to keep food systems reform at the top of their minds, and to understand their priorities and the issues they are trying to address" (Sustain Ontario 2013i, p. 7). Sustain does this mainly by liaising with policy makers. Working *with* government is referred to as an 'inside' strategy (Edgar, 2002, Gormley and Cymrot, 2006). Miller, Razon-Abad, Covey and Brown (1994) suggest that selecting such a strategy depends on having access to individuals in government, something that may be easier for agencies that receive government funding (Edgar, 2002). This underscores the need for an organization that engages in government relations to establish and nurture relevant relationships. According to the Alliance's Director, Sustain adopted an inside strategy in part because

many of the issues that Sustain advocates for (e.g. government procurement of local food) are not necessarily broadly popular among the general public even if they are interested in local food (S3).

As a new player in the food and farming policy space, Sustain was initially received by government out of a sense of curiosity according to a representative from the Metcalf Foundation (O4), and with some suspicion by conventional agriculture groups. As one agricultural association director noted, "[his members] don't think anyone else should speak on food and farming issues (O5). The ideas presented in "Food Connects Us All" and "Menu 2020" generated interest and helped open the doors of government. According to one policy maker and two civil servants at OMAFRA, Sustain arrived to "fill a void" at a time when interest in food sources and production practices was growing among the general public and especially urban constituents (PM5, PM6, PM7). According to one AC member and a policy maker from OMAFRA, The Ministry of Agriculture considers its client base to be farmers, rather than the urban population, and in 2009 it had few connections outside the conventional agricultural community (AC1, PM7). "[Sustain was] well positioned to offer value to government because they connect to a different audience…" (PM7).

Three internal stakeholders and one staff member I interviewed described Sustain's approach to government relations as experimental… acting and learning in parallel (AC1, AC2, AC7, S3). To date, the Alliance has not formally articulated an advocacy strategy, focus or tactics. During interviews Sustain's Co-Chairs characterized the approach taken when building relationships with government as 'non-partisan', 'constructive' and

'solution-oriented' (AC1, AC2). They endeavoured to bring all parties fresh perspectives, make unusual linkages between issues, and bridge urban and rural perspectives. One politician I interviewed reinforced the importance of talking to all parties, noting that unlike for-profit interest groups that meet with everyone, "The non-profit world tends to think they should meet with friends in government, rather than all parties. It's my understanding Sustain has done the hard work to build those bridges, that they talk to all parties" (PM8).

6.3.1 Representing Sustain

As the Alliance's official spokespeople, Sustain's Co-Chairs and Director are most actively involved in government relations, meeting with policy makers together and independently. In 2013, one of the Co-Chairs described the interaction with government as an 'ongoing conversation'; he noted policy makers at OMAFRA have called to seek his perspective on how to turn good food ideas into legislation and on specific issues such as pollinators (AC1 and email communication May 31, 2014).

Although some AC members indicated during interviews that they engage with local policy makers on behalf of their organizations, the Co-Chairs and Director are generally seen as the face and voice representing the Alliance. In the 2013 member survey, 64% of respondents identified "having positive working relationships with key stakeholders and decision makers" as one of the unique values Sustain contributes to bringing about a more sustainable food and farming system (Nicoara, 2013).

Both Co-Chairs have farming backgrounds and reside in rural communities outside the GTA. One is a successful grass-fed beef farmer who transitioned from a conventional farming model; the other is the Executive Director of a non-profit organization that supports the development of a sustainable rural economy in her community. In selecting the Co-Chairs, the AC considered that their backgrounds might help off-set perceptions that Sustain represents mainly urban food perspectives, since Sustain's office and staff are based in Toronto (Sustain Ontario, 2011b). One former policy maker from OMAFRA indicated the Co-Chairs enhance Sustain's agricultural credibility (PM9). The Co-Chairs have become skilled in bridging different perspectives and framing issues in a way government is receptive to (O4). These two individuals play the 'knowledge broker' role described on page 83. One Co-Chair indicated that, where practical, the Co-Chairs try to align Sustain's proposed solutions with government priorities such as economic development (AC1).

Cialdini (2008) identifies six 'principles of persuasion' or forms of influence, one of which includes 'similarity and liking'. His research indicates that people are more likely to be influenced by people they like and who are somewhat similar to themselves. Policy makers at OMAFRA have historically worked with conventional farmers from rural communities, so they may recognize more similarity in the Co-Chairs, compared to Sustain's urban-based staff. Two civil servants from OMAFRA I interviewed commented on the positive atmosphere and camaraderie they experienced when attending Sustain's events (PM5, PM6). I interpret this as an indication of Sustain's 'likeability'.

Sustain's spokespeople reported they attempt to accurately represent members' common interests but that figuring out whose interest, i.e. Sustain broadly, *many* members, or *all* members, has been a challenge (S3). When a coalition promotes policy solutions to government it is useful to be able to describe its constituency. While Sustain can refer policy makers to its diverse list of members, the Alliance has not yet developed an efficient and effective process for vetting positions. This has made it difficult to communicate exactly how many members support a particular position. Director Nuaimy-Barker reported she found this aspect of the relationship with members disconcerting (S3); it was part of the motivation behind the development of the new membership model (see Chapter 5).

6.3.2 Navigating the policy space

Sustain's Director and Co-Chairs initially focused their efforts at the political level, meeting with decision-makers in the premier's office and with members of all four political parties to explore ideas articulated in the two context papers. At the February 2012 AC meeting, the Co-Chairs provided an update on work related to the development of the LFA and reported that, "Sustain has developed a certain amount of legitimacy around Queens Park; government is starting to see Sustain as a constituency [i.e. representing the public interest] instead of just advocates" (Sustain Ontario, 2012b). One policy maker in the premier's office echoed this assertion during an interview, noting, "the broad, local engagement they have… gives them the reach to give them a significant enough voice for us to see them as a credible advocate" (PM3).

Two AC members who have extensive experience in policy development and advocacy commented that Sustain does not yet have sufficient understanding of how and where policy decisions are made in government and how to influence those decisions (AC8, AC17). As we saw in Chapter 3, this is true of most Canadian voluntary sector organizations (Wyatt and Bourgeois, 2011). I think this reflects not only a lack of skill but also the fact that decision-making processes are complex and government is influenced by multiple players with diverse interests. One former policy maker, in attempting to describe government's decision-making process, noted that in agriculture this includes the politics among commodity groups/concession road farmers, local food advocates, and processors. Policy decisions are further complicated by regional diversity considerations as well as who policy makers meet with most frequently: "there's not a science to [decision making]… it's a stew of stuff" (PM9).

The decision to hire an Acting Director from OMAFRA in 2013 while the Director was on leave, was partly an attempt to gain a better understanding of how government works. One AC member, who has studied and been actively involved in food movement advocacy efforts, commented that Sustain's initial approach of focusing mainly on the political layer is "based on old movement assumptions about what effects change" (AC8). He suggested that since most food and agriculture issues are not the subject of parliamentary discussions (the LFA was an exception), the Alliance should take a more tactical and long-term approach, investing time to understand and build relationships with bureaucrats since they typically outlast politicians. Two civil servants I interviewed at OMAFRA agreed, noting that ultimately civil servants are asked to assess whether policy ideas are good or bad (PM5, PM6).

Sustain's government relations consultant presented some principles for Sustain's future

government relations work at the November 2012 AC meeting. He indicated that a group

like Sustain needs to find champions inside government, and "equip bureaucrats to take

on your cause without you" (Sustain Ontario, 2012d). There are some indications that

three of the policy makers I interviewed might be considered 'allies' as they ensured

Sustain was invited to participate in key events and relevant consultation processes (PM4,

PM5, PM6). One of the three indicated he encouraged the Association of Municipalities

of Ontario to include Sustain in its consultation process on the development of a resource

guide for municipalities interested in supporting local food (PM4). Once inside

champions or allies are identified, Moore (2011a) suggests an organization can support

those individuals in championing a particular issue on its behalf. Regularly sharing

information and research is one way Sustain does this.

The longer-term, more bureaucratic-focused approach recommended by the AC member

above is aligned with 'strategic inquiry', a government relations process practised and

articulated by veteran Canadian lobbyist Sean Moore (Makhoul, 2011). This inquiry

process involves investing time getting to know influential individuals' priorities and

values and the public policy context and decision making process, and then gradually

deepening relationships based on this understanding. The Director reflected that, "we've

been trying to implement strategic inquiry… often in conversations [with government]

we get too quickly into offering advice, but we've been trying to listen" (S3). There are

some indications that Sustain has succeeded in using this approach; according to a

political staffer with knowledge of the file, "Sustain found a good balance of being

forthright about their agenda and wanting to know about our [government] agenda to see how constructively we could work together" (PM1). Engaging in dialogue enables Sustain to clarify whose perspectives it represents and the Alliance's objectives. It appears Sustain still has some work to do in this area as two civil servants from OMAFRA and one former policy maker I interviewed commented they were somewhat unclear about what Sustain really wants (PM5, PM6, PM9).

As the LFA concept gained momentum in 2012, Sustain expanded its government relations efforts beyond the premier's office to the bureaucratic level at OMAFRA. After the Acting Director started in spring 2013, he helped Sustain "scale up government relations" according to one Co-Chair (AC2), and establish new connections with bureaucrats (AC7, S5). The timing was ideal; one policy maker I interviewed indicated, "…we are trying to build more of our relationships with groups that have kind of a policy development capacity" (PM4). The stronger presence of OMAFRA policy makers at the Bring Food Home conference in 2013 may be a reflection of these new connections.

Sustain has been less successful in getting food on other ministries' agendas, however the Alliance have started to develop relationships that it hopes to leverage in future (S3). This is largely a reflection of the Alliance's resource limitations and the fact that other ministries do not yet appreciate how systemic food and farming issues relate to their priorities. There are some signs this is starting to change – the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care's Healthy Kids Panel is a cross-ministerial initiative. The group's report acknowledges the need to "change the food environment" in Ontario (Healthy Kids Panel, 2013). The Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy Design Team, which Sustain co-

leads, convened an inter-ministerial meeting in winter 2013 to brief different ministries on the draft OFNS and discuss each ministry's involvement in food and nutrition programming (OCGHEPA, 2013). Two civil servants at OMAFRA reported they assisted in convening this event (PM5, PM6); this suggests they appreciate how food issues extend beyond the scope of their ministry. According to the primary organizer, many of the participants met each other for the first time and indicated they had never previously engaged in a focused dialogue (AC4).

The Alliance's ability to convene a broad range of stakeholders is considered an asset according to four policy makers I interviewed (PM1, PM4, PM7, PM8). One from OMAFRA indicated Sustain represents a diverse provincial constituency of "smaller scale and alternative food and farming actors that OMAFRA lacks connections to" (PM7). Other policy makers made similar comments: "It's terrific to have a group that can be a bit of a one-stop shop" (PM4), and "[Sustain] allowed government to take action on files because they had done a lot of the brokering of different interests beforehand" (PM3). These examples suggest some in government consider Sustain a legitimate voice on issues related to local food and farming. OMAFRA also asked Sustain for input and assistance as part of two provincial consultation processes in 2012-2013.

Soon after the LFA was adopted, two representatives from OMAFRA consulted with Sustain's AC on the topic of provincial designations and opportunities for local food promotion at the November 2013 AC meeting in Windsor. This was part of a larger provincial consultation process the government undertook with 'local food champions and thought leaders'. The OMAFRA representatives described the AC consultation as an

incredible opportunity, however, based on my observations, the AC did not appear to have prepared a strategic response in advance. I do not know how much advance notice members received. While the depth of experience and diversity of perspectives in the room was evident, it was a fragmented discussion and more concerns were raised than possibilities and solutions. This illustrates the challenge Sustain experiences aggregating thought and crafting constructive policy solutions that reflect and respect members' diverse interests. In this instance, Sustain appears to have missed an opportunity to present a more constructive and strategic collective response and it may have detracted somewhat from external legitimacy.

6.3.3 Election campaigns

Sustain's first Director formed a Municipal Elections WG in 2010 to inform activities and processes leading up to that year's municipal elections. This group evolved into the GRWG and it has been instrumental in shaping and influencing Sustain's advocacy and government relations efforts. Sustain's 2010 campaign messaging focused on "Putting healthy, local, sustainable food on the municipal plate" (Baker, 2010b). Members were encouraged to ask local candidates to include farm and food issues in their election platforms. A "Municipal Elections Toolkit" developed in partnership with nine member organizations highlighted reasons farming and food should be an election priority, as well as challenges and opportunities related to the economy, food security and health (Ontario elections 2010 toolkit: Putting healthy, local, sustainable food on the municipal plate, 2010). Sustain advocated for five priorities: Healthy food for all; Viable, sustainable farming; Economic development, infrastructure and tourism; Community gardening and urban agriculture; and Municipal decision making and governance. The toolkit contained

suggestions for planning meetings with candidates and key questions to pose; ideas for

public events to raise awareness; a declaration for candidates to sign should they get

elected; and a basic report card. Members around the province engaged in various

activities including roundtables, panels, candidate debates and education sessions (Baker,

2010c).

In the lead-up to the 2011 provincial election, the GRWG met regularly to share

intelligence about what was happening in different parts of the province and design

campaign tactics. For the provincial election the group refined the 2010 municipal strategy

and toolkit, building on lessons learned. They articulated key messages around reasons to

"Vote ON Food and Farming" and questions for members to pose to candidates (see

postcard below). Director Nuaimy-Barker noted the 2011 election materials reflected

consensus positions that were widely vetted and supported by members (S3).

Figure 6.1 Vote ON Food & Farming postcard – front (Vote ON Food & Farming, 2011

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Figure 6.1 Vote ON Food & Farming postcard – back (Vote ON Food & Farming, 2011)

The 2011 campaign had stronger branding, including attractive design and an online presence thanks to a separate Vote ON Food and Farming website (http://voteonfood.ca/) that aimed to generate a dialogue and get food and farming onto every party's platform. The website has been maintained post-election as the issues have endured. Content includes a blog, educational resources, video messages, and a form letter for individuals to tailor and send to their Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP). Staff hosted webinars to orient members to the Vote ON materials and messages.

Sustain also surveyed the province's four parties during the campaign and reviewed their policy platforms. The results were incorporated into a report card outlining each party's policy positions (Sustain Ontario, 2011a). This activity, which could be construed as 'political' was one area in which Tides Canada provided guidance to ensure that

Sustain's activities and processes were non-partisan, in compliance with CRA's Policy

Statement on Political Activities for charities (CPS-022) (S3).

Prior to both elections, Sustain educated members on advocacy and government relations.

In addition to orienting members to the contents of the election toolkits, the Alliance

hosted webinars including one on public policy advocacy with Sean Moore in 2010

(Moore, 2010) and another on pre-election strategies in 2011 (Moore, 2011b). Three AC

members I interviewed indicated that they used the Vote ON materials to engage their

local politicians in discussions, one for the first time (AC5, AC12, AC14). As part of the

2011 campaign 11,000 postcards and 2,000 buttons were distributed and Sustain's

voteonfood.ca website received approximately 4000 visits; 610 pledges were made in 101

ridings; and 441 emails were sent in 86 ridings (Sustain Ontario, 2012b).

Sustain's Director and Co-Chairs met with members of all parties in advance of the 2011

election to promote the concept of a provincial 'Farm, Food and Health Act'. It is unclear

how many members engaged candidates locally, however a political staffer with

knowledge of the file and one politician I interviewed commented that Sustain's efforts

helped put local food on the government's agenda (PM1, PM2). One speculated that "the

inclusion of the LFA in the Liberal party's 2011 election platform was *probably* a direct

result of engagement with Sustain" (PM1).

Between election campaigns, it is unclear how frequently members communicate with

local politicians and policy makers; however 65% of members who responded to the

2013 member survey indicated their organizations "communicate sustainable food and

farming policy solutions to policy makers and decision-makers" (Nicoara, 2013). One AC member commented that thanks to his involvement with Sustain and the resources developed, in 2012 he was able to share a broader provincial perspective on the LFA Bill with his MPP than he had done previously. The discussion was productive and he reported Sustain's policy materials were well received (AC14). His MPP subsequently raised some of the issues they discussed in parliamentary discussion, praising Sustain's research and information gathering efforts (Mantha, 2013).

Since the 2011 election, the GRWG continued meeting to discuss strategic opportunities related to the LFA. The group shared regional intelligence and strategic insights and supported the Director and Co-Chairs' government relations efforts by helping frame key messages (AC7). By 2013 the GRWG was more staff driven although it consisted of approximately seven members from different sectors. While the group continued thinking strategically about emerging policy opportunities, it was not well-informed about policy work underway in other WGs as there was no defined process in place to facilitate information exchange between WGs (Sustain Ontario, 2013c). This has resulted in a disconnect between WGs and Sustain that stems partly from how Sustain has implemented the 'constellation governance model'. Since not all WGs have an AC representative, their primary linkage and accountability to Sustain occurs at the staff level. The Chair of the GRWG reported that the group's next piece of work involves developing a government relations strategy in preparation for an anticipated 2014 provincial election (AC7). This suggests Sustain is becoming more intentional and deliberate (Mintzberg, 1987, 1994) in its approach to strategy development, at least in this area.

6.4 'POLICY REFORM' STRATEGY

As noted previously, the enactment of new laws, regulations and policies that reflect Sustain's vision is one of Sustain's two long-term goals. Sustain's 'Policy reform' strategy states Sustain will create opportunities for dialogue about food policy (see Chapter 5); develop policy papers and positions; and engage in advocacy. In this section I focus mainly on processes Sustain has used to develop positions and policy papers since advocacy was addressed in the section on government relations.

Sustain's approach to policy development remains a work in progress. To develop integrated solutions to complex food system issues, Sustain engages individuals with diverse perspectives in discussion; considers research; identifies proven solutions; and aggregates thought. The Alliance promotes a diversity of good food ideas rather than advocating for the replication of any single solution. The Acting Director reinforced during an interview that Sustain needs to develop "workable solutions", considering what is achievable for government and other actors (S5).

Policy development at Sustain is a collaborative effort involving staff, interns, AC members and others. Only a few AC members have extensive experience in policy development and promotion. One policy maker observed that in food projects, "people are under so much pressure to deliver results to funders there's little time… [for] meeting with politicians let alone thinking how do you scale this up from a community initiative to public policy" (PM8). Although Sustain does not have a staff member exclusively dedicated to this important function, each of the three Directors indicated they were

actively involved in policy development (S3, S5, AC7). The Alliance augments its policy development capacity by creating internships for graduate students studying public policy and administration. Policy development is also undertaken at the WG level with support from staff and interns. One AC member expressed concern about Sustain's capacity in this area, "I worry about policy development and how strong that is… there isn't one person firmly in place focused on that" (AC16).

Sustain's policy development and promotion work gives the Alliance an opportunity to engage policy makers in discussion and enhances its legitimacy in the policy space. Despite the aforementioned capacity limitations, Sustain's contributions to date have given others confidence in the Alliance. One political representative noted, "Sustain has the capacity, skills and expertise to take what's being done from an advocacy angle and put it into draft policy proposals… A lot of organizations don't have the capacity to do it" (PM2).

The founding group's early discussions and subsequent discussions at the AC level (Sustain Ontario, 2010) generated strategies for policy development and promotion which included staying at a broad level, promoting a diversity of solutions, and focusing on big picture policy issues where the diverse network might find points of cohesion. The Vote ON postcard on pages 186-187 reflects this approach. Sustain uses AC meetings to identify policy priorities, but the large group format and diversity of perspectives makes it challenging to develop a short list.

The "Menu2020" report highlights ten good food ideas and policy-related issues and these informed Sustain's initial policy development efforts. During an interview, the Director indicated that the report was not a consensus document and did not capture all the nuances around the identified issues (S3). Since that time, Sustain has referred to the policy recommendations it promotes as 'good food ideas'. This positive branding may have helped distinguish the Alliance's ideas from others and make them memorable or 'sticky' (Heath and Heath, 2007). During a 2012 AC meeting participants suggested that Sustain should go "through a process to revise good food ideas to connect at a higher level of expertise and analysis" (Sustain Ontario, 2012a); based on the information gathered, it doesn't appear the Alliance followed through on this suggestion.

Over the last few years Sustain has been opportunistic in pursuing incremental change by focusing on provincial policy-related issues that have traction and that are connected to defined opportunities such as scheduled regulatory reviews and consultation processes (S3). One example of a regulatory review process that Sustain contributed to was the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) review discussions. The PPS, which is reviewed every five years, provides direction to the province on questions of land use planning and development. Staff from Sustain attended workshops, educated members about the process, and provided input to a senior policy advisor on a 2012 draft (Young and Yang, 2012). Sustain's staff and several member organizations made formal submissions requesting changes. In April 2013, Sustain submitted a joint letter outlining concerns about proposed revisions with 15 other environmental and agricultural groups. The letter was sent to the premier, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the minster of Natural Resources (Singh, 2013a).

One intern and two staff members commented that to date, Sustain's approach to policy development has been largely 'ad hoc' and reactive, driven by emerging external opportunities (S2, S3, S4). At this stage in Sustain's development, as relative newcomers in the policy space, focusing on such 'windows of opportunity' (Kingdon, 2003), seems to have been an effective tactic. The AC raised the question of whether Sustain should be more deliberate and focus on one issue rather than taking a piecemeal approach (Sustain Ontario, 2012a). I did not find any evidence that the Alliance adapted its approach in response to the AC's question.

The approach above reflects an 'emergent' approach to strategy, something that researchers such as Mintzberg (1987, 1994) suggest is important in an environment that is constantly changing. Sustain's broad network of members are well-positioned to identify shifts and opportunities so remaining open to what emerges may continue to be an important aspect of Sustain's approach to policy development. Sustain's Director and Acting Director both indicated during interviews that Sustain's approach lacks a more integrated and deliberate policy development strategy, such as an overarching map outlining which food and agriculture issues to intervene in over the short, medium and long term in order to transform the provincial food system (S5, S3).

The Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy (OFNS) Design Team/WG pre-dates Sustain. Originally the group consisted primarily of health sector organizations (such as the Heart & Stroke Foundation and Cancer Care Ontario) interested in developing a provincial strategy to improve the health and nutrition of Ontarians. The Team invited Sustain's

Director to participate, and shortly after, Sustain assumed a kind of secretariat role for the group. The Design Team has evolved into a form of WG (Sustain at times refers to it as such) although it maintains a distinct identity.

With the group's encouragement, Sustain's Director invited other members to participate and this expanded the group's diversity and collective understanding of the interconnectedness of nutrition and broader food system issues. The Design Team attempted to map out the diverse provincial food system issues requiring intervention, beyond nutrition as the 'Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy' (OFNS). Although the group solicited input on the strategy from Sustain's broader membership (Sustain facilitated this consultation), buy-in has been limited. It is unclear if the Design Team will be able to articulate a strategy that Sustain's members will be willing to support, or whether the OFNS might be used to focus Sustain's work and the work of its members.

In late 2013 the Design Team/WG was considering adopting Kania and Kramer's (2011) 'collective impact' approach. The authors define collective impact as: "the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem" (ibid: 36). Successful collective impact initiatives have five conditions: a common agenda; shared measurement systems; mutually reinforcing activities; continuous communication; and a backbone support organization. As noted in Chapter 5, as a PNO Sustain fulfills many of the functions of a backbone organization, particularly when supporting WGs.

6.4.1 Taking positions

Some long-term AC members have argued that to grow a large enough 'tent' for the Alliance, Sustain should hold no positions (S5). Rather than advocating for a particular position, some suggest Sustain should research and document issues to help others better understand the impacts of different options. During an interview as part of the evaluation process, the Director indicated, "Sustain can't really take positions on things, but sometimes it feels like that's the way to do things. Who gets to say what, when, where, why and how is a really big challenge" (Vu Nguyen, 2013). The Acting Director questioned this approach saying, "I don't know how you're going to be an effective advocacy group without holding positions" (S5).

The AC discussed the question of position-taking at the February, 2012 AC meeting and concluded, "we are a mixed model – constellations and consensus. Where there is agreement we take a position; where there is disagreement we create space for conversation and for groups to self-organize" (Sustain Ontario, 2012a). The "Our work" section of Sustain's website profiles WGs (some of which focus on policy issues such as meat regulations), as well as policy issues and campaigns that Sustain and other groups have advocated for. Up to 2013, Sustain promoted some broad policy recommendations which were widely supported, but shied away from formally articulating highly specific positions.

According to staff, Sustain lacks a clear and rigorous process for analyzing and articulating issues, developing a position, and assessing the degree of support among members, particularly those who are not part of the AC (S3, S4). In 2012 the AC

reinforced the need to support small groups in taking action without the support of all members, however at least one AC member thinks consensus is critical when it comes to taking positions. "I never could figure out how you could, how Sustain Ontario could, stand up and support particular policies if people weren't agreeing on those policies… We have to find a way to ensure that whatever policies are being promoted by Sustain in fact are being supported by all members" (AC13). This is an area where greater institutionalization around a position-taking process may be desirable from the perspective of internal legitimacy.

Position-taking to date has been largely ad-hoc as an effective process has not been identified and the ultimate decision-maker remains unclear. The Director noted, "I never know… do I get to make this call? Do I have to vet it again? Where does the vetting stop, who makes the final decision?" (S3). As an example, she described the development of the backgrounder on ecological goods and services. Sustain was unable to satisfactorily address the concerns of one member who had strong opinions. Sustain went through a process with a lot of people "to negotiate something that everybody could be on the same page with, but we didn't get it right… there was no directed process and there was no rule around how we had to come up with it, and in the end the member ended up publicly criticizing the policy position" (S3). This illustrates how difficult it can be to negotiate agreement among such a diverse group of members. In this instance, the absence of a defined process likely detracted from internal *and* external legitimacy.

When a provincial food and agriculture issue is acknowledged by government, in new research, or captures public attention, staff try to 'take the pulse' on the issue with

members to determine whether Sustain should take a stance on it, and what that position should be (S4). Director Nuaimy-Barker reported that efforts to get people on the same page is "of huge value… we often get to a place where we get to positions we agree on, [but] it takes a lot of doing, and dialogue, to get there" (S3). Levkoe (2014) reports that all the PNOs he studied spent significant time negotiating with members.

In some cases, emerging issues are not yet ripe for action inside or outside the Alliance. When there is limited awareness and understanding or disagreement on an issue, as was the case with raw milk (the question of legalizing the sale of raw milk received significant media attention in Ontario in 2011 – see for example, Abma, 2011), staff sometime create educational opportunities for members. This may take the form of webinars, the dissemination of information and research, or conference presentations. This approach reflects an assumption that education and dialogue leads to a more nuanced understanding and that through such a process members might eventually find common ground.

On issues that *are* ripe for action, but that are particularly divisive for members, Sustain sometimes opts for a neutral position. This can involve highlighting different perspectives and outlining where an issue needs to move without saying how exactly (S4); or standing back and leaving an issue to others (AC6). Other groups periodically approach Sustain to formally 'endorse' their campaigns and in some cases, Sustain has agreed to do so.

One example of this relates to a decision on whether Sustain should endorse Food and Water First's campaign to protect Class 1 farmland. OMAFRA describes Class 1

farmland as having "the highest capability to support agricultural land use activities" (OMAFRA, 2014b). This class of land represents a very small proportion of arable land in Ontario, most of which surrounds the GTA, an area at the greatest risk from urban sprawl. Given that the definition of 'prime agricultural land' includes at least Class 1 through 3 land (Provincial Policy Statement, 2005), and much of Ontario's food production occurs on land that is not Class 1, it could be argued that this is too narrow to represent the interests of stakeholders across the province. Prior to this Sustain had advocated more broadly for farmland preservation (see Vote ON postcard on pages 186-187).

After reaching out to AC members for guidance, rather than formally endorsing the campaign, staff opted for a compromise approach, profiling Food and Water First's campaign on Sustain's website under 'Related Campaigns' (Related campaigns, 2013). Other examples of related campaigns Sustain has profiled include "Fair Wages Now", "We Want Northern Chicken" and "Save the Bees". The range illustrates the diversity of issues Sustain's members are interested in.

Sustain does not define 'Related Campaigns' on its website. The content describing related campaigns typically replicates messages from the campaign source and includes links to more information and in some cases an opportunity to pledge support. Sustain does not provide context indicating why the Alliance has included a particular campaign, or Sustain's position vis-à-vis each campaign issue. This appears to be a missed opportunity to enrich the dialogue around each issue, many of which are more nuanced than they are framed in the campaigns. In the absence of an explanation, site visitors and

external stakeholders might mistakenly conclude that Sustain *does* endorse related campaigns (AC7, S5). Associating the Alliance even loosely with specific issues and related campaigns has potential implications for Sustain's internal and external legitimacy, both positive and negative.

One AC member and one former policy maker I interviewed suggested that obtaining support for Sustain's positions from groups that have more political power, such as large farm organizations, would demonstrate greater policy strength and increase Sustain's influence (AC5, PM10). Cultivating public support is another area of consideration. As one policy maker representing a political perspective noted, "You can write the best policies in the world, and they're not going to go anywhere if there is no political power behind them… that political power comes from the ability to move and influence votes" (PM2). Another policy maker suggested that if Sustain wants to shift a food system that is dominated by large conventional actors the Alliance might consider working more closely with those actors (PM3). He cited the example of American environmentalists that worked with large corporations (e.g. Adam Werbach, the former President of the Sierra Club, who consulted to Wal-Mart on sustainability; and The Environmental Defense Fund's collaboration with McDonalds to improve the sustainability of retail and fast food practices).

Sustain did find common ground with conventional farm groups on some issues, for example incorporating food literacy into the LFA. The Director noted, "it can be easy to be aligned with other groups until it gets to a certain point… [for example] sustainability has been defined in a way we and more conventional groups can agree on, but it breaks

down at the level of practice" (S3). Although the Alliance has engaged most agricultural groups in conversation, to date Sustain has not invested significant energy in trying to bring these groups into the tent. One AC member noted that "it can be hard to get some major agricultural voices to the table… they're not ready for the collaborative dynamic Sustain has created where you sit at the table and provide your best input, but there's no vote after" (AC6). He added that Sustain's consensus orientation contrasts sharply with the culture of traditional farm organizations that tend to "be majoritarian oriented… voting on issues". As noted above and in Chapter 5, some external stakeholders have suggested that finding ways to engage such groups in dialogue would benefit both sides.

6.4.2 The Local Food Act

The LFA is one example of an emergent opportunity that Sustain seized. Two policy makers suggested Sustain helped create this opportunity by promoting the concept of an Act in the "Menu2020" report and through efforts leading up to the 2011 provincial election (PM1, PM2). Sustain produced a series of 'good food policies' related to education, health and the economy and encouraged members to promote these in their communities (Good food policies by sector, 2011). The concept of a local food act, and the Act, once introduced, gave the Alliance a clear focus for its government relations and policy development efforts in 2011-2013. It was ideal because the Act was provincial in scope and all members could buy into it on some level and advocate for it in their own communities.

During the 2011 election, the Liberal party included the concept of a 'Local Food Act' in their 2011-2015 Plan (Liberal Party of Ontario, 2011). The Liberals subsequently won a

minority government and began working on the Act soon after. Then Minster of Agriculture, Ted McMeekin, eventually introduced the Act in October 2012 as Bill 130 "An Act to enact the Local Food Act, 2012".

In February 2012 two representatives of OMAFRA met with Sustain's AC to better understand Sustain and how the network might contribute to the development of the LFA. They encouraged Sustain to gather research and consult with provincial members to identify regional barriers and solutions. They requested Sustain submit recommendations on the LFA by late summer (Sustain Ontario, 2012a).

Sustain subsequently designed a process to engage its membership in an expansive online and offline consultation process. While the process was ultimately effective from the perspective of engaging members and gathering input, it was challenging to implement given available time and resources. In addition to being time-consuming to aggregate and integrate the diverse feedback received, distilling it into recommendations that all could support was a significant challenge. The inclusivity of the process enhanced legitimacy internally and externally, however with limited resources, staff acknowledged future processes must be more efficient and effective (S3). This desire to balance inclusivity and efficiency is another example of a common network tension identified by Provan and Kenis (2008).

During the summer of 2012, staff assembled writing teams to develop six 'policy backgrounders' on issues identified through the consultation process. Topics included ecological goods and services; food literacy, student nutrition and food services in

school; institutional procurement; land use planning; and forest and freshwater foods (the last backgrounder was developed in collaboration with the True North Community Co-operative, Ontario Nature, and Environment North). Teams included a draft writer (an AC, staff member or intern), and 5-10 content experts and thought leaders (mainly AC members). The draft writers solicited input from experts, reviewed literature, sought out examples of innovative solutions in Ontario and beyond, and developed a draft document for their team and the Director to review and refine. The six backgrounders had a similar format and were produced in approximately two months. Drafts were posted on Sustain's website for visitors to comment on (Good food policies – Backgrounders, 2012); feedback was incorporated into the final versions disseminated to policy makers.

One of Sustain's AC members is the Executive Director of Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA). Her involvement led to an extended collaboration between Sustain and CELA on policy development and promotion around the LFA (AC3). Staff from the two organizations worked together on the development of a 'Statement of purpose' for the Act (Sustain Ontario, 2012c) which was endorsed by ninety groups/organizations out of Sustain's then approximately 380 members (many of whom were individuals), and an accompanying set of 'Drafting notes' to inform government discussions (Sustain Ontario and CELA, 2012). This collaboration leveraged Sustain's members' knowledge of food and agriculture issues and CELA's knowledge of the legislative drafting process and experience writing content for government. The collaboration was described by both parties as mutually beneficial: it extended Sustain's policy development capacity while CELA's staff expanded their understanding of the complexity and range of food system issues (AC3, S3). In early 2013, CELA and Sustain co-published a series of six 'Policies

from the Field' reports profiling promising policies from other jurisdictions (CELA and

Sustain Ontario, 2013). According to two representatives from CELA, the topics were

identified through the consultation with Sustain's members above (O2, O3). These

included increasing access to local food; innovative financing for food and farm; and

preserving agricultural land for local food production. Both organizations posted the

documents on their website which expanded their accessibility and visibility.

In February 2013, supported by a grant from Metcalf, CELA drafted a substantive

'Model bill' that reinforced the need for targets, accountability, public participation, and

government coordination of local food (CELA, 2013). Their mandate was to create a

politically feasible bill (O2, O3). Short timelines made a second consultation with

Sustain's membership impossible and so although the model bill drew on the

foundational work done with Sustain, it was not co-branded with, or endorsed by,

Sustain. Despite this, according to two CELA staff members, in meetings with

government CELA acknowledged its collaborative relationship with Sustain (O2, O3).

6.4.3 Perspectives on Sustain's policy work

Responses to Sustain's materials and policy recommendations were mixed. On the

positive side, all interviewees described Sustain's materials as generally good; one

commended Sustain for being 'more evidence- than ideologically-based' (PM1). When

asked to comment on the viability of the Alliance's policy recommendations, those I

interviewed indicated they were 'mostly viable'. One policy maker in the premier's office

noted that Sustain was "one of the top three groups" government went to on the

development of the LFA. When I asked about others, he said, they really were "the go-to group" (PC3).

Some policy makers indicated there is room for improvement. One noted that some of the content proposed for the LFA might have been better matched to other policy levers (PM4). For example, he suggested food literacy issues might be more appropriately addressed at a programmatic level than a legislative level. Another former policy maker commented that one of Sustain's recommendations related to procurement was seen as potentially conflicting with interprovincial and international trade rules (PM10). Later in the interview he noted that, Sustain in some cases:

> *communicated ideas that are sort of non-starters with the government… [that can give] government the impression that they don't understand policy making, that they don't understand the government's limitations. And to a certain degree, any good advocacy NGO pushes things that might be non-starters with government… but you only do that when you have to do it, when the government is at odds with your agenda and you have no other choice.*

These examples may explain why two civil servants and two policy makers raised questions about Sustain's policy acuity during interviews (PM5, PM6, PM7, PM9). Other policy makers were more forgiving, acknowledging that Sustain is new to this kind of work (PM3, PM4). This suggests Sustain, as new actors in the policy space, may have benefitted from a kind of 'honeymoon period'.

Although Sustain was aware that some 'asks' were aspirational and extended beyond the scope of an Act, the Alliance choose to use the opportunity to highlight five major issues along with a range of related solutions. Director Nuaimy-Barker described the process of identifying what to advocate for as a "really careful balancing act, because we don't want

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to delegitimize ourselves" (S3). She indicated Sustain attempted to articulate asks that were reasonable but which would move government somewhat "beyond their comfort zone", and "seed ideas for the next round". One policy maker noted that some of Sustain's ideas have been "placed on the policy shelf… until another window of opportunity opens" (PM4). I think this is an indication that Sustain's approach of presenting a broad range of solutions may eventually bear fruit.

Two civil servants and two policy makers I interviewed, including one political representative, indicated government expects advocates to be clear about their priorities, ideally bringing their 'top three' asks (PM7, PM8, PM9, PM10). The civil servants reinforced that government has difficulty dealing with groups that are "trying to be all things to all people" (PM5, PM6). Sustain was not willing to reduce its 'asks' to three, and that left two policy makers (PM7, PM9) and two civil servants (PM5, PM6) I interviewed wondering what Sustain *really* wants.

According to the Director, Sustain found it challenging to restrict the number of LFA recommendations because priorities shifted continuously as new input and advice was received from diverse members and other advisors concerning issues and tactics (S3). She explained that draft recommendations were first reviewed and refined by the AC; the group provided critical feedback on clarity, language and helped assess the degree of consensus. The Alliance also engaged a government relations consultant to help frame its final recommendations and staff reported the guidance he provided was valuable (S3).

Following a Liberal leadership race[r], in March 2013 the Liberal government re-introduced the LFA as *Bill 36 – An Act to enact the Local Food Act, 2013*. Shortly after, Sustain and ten other organizations (including two large conventional agricultural associations) collaborated on a submission of recommended amendments. Committee hearings were held in the fall of 2013 and several amendments were subsequently introduced such as "a requirement that the Minister shall establish goals or targets to aspire to in the areas of improving food literacy in respect of local food…" (Singh, 2013c). Targets were something that Sustain had advocated for inclusion from the start (S3).

Another amendment formally acknowledged forest and freshwater food in the definition of 'local', an issue First Nations groups had tried unsuccessfully to bring attention to for years. At the November 2013 AC meeting that I observed, one member credited the Alliance's efforts for this 'win' as he believed that without Sustain's support, forest and freshwater foods might have been overlooked again. It seems possible that Sustain's collaboration with other groups on a policy backgrounder about this topic (see page 202) demonstrated broad support and reinforced the case for this amendment.

Sustain and its members engaged politicians from all parties and policy makers at OMAFRA in discussions about possible content for an Act in 2012-2013. The amended Act was passed by a unanimous vote on November 5, 2013 (Bill 36, 2013). In a blog post, Sustain heralded this as a victory for local food (Singh, 2013c). The LFA does not address the sustainable

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[r] The Liberal Premier, Dalton McGuinty resigned in October 2012 and the Liberals subsequently initiated a leadership race to replace him. During that time Ontario's Legislative Assembly was prorogued and all bills in process 'died', including Bill 130, Promoting Local Food Act, 2012.

dimensions of local food, so many members considered it only a partial victory. Despite that shortcoming, the Act is widely considered an enabling platform upon which to implement a variety of solutions (Sustain Ontario, 2013c). According to one Co-Chair the definition of sustainability remains a topic of ongoing discussion with government (email communication May 31, 2014). One AC member commented, with respect to the LFA, "it made us realize collectively as a sector, movement, network, we can put things out there and they will be considered, if we have ideas, and if we frame them properly, they will be picked up" (AC7).

6.5 IN SUMMARY

This chapter illustrates some of the interconnections that exist between structures, strategies and processes as illustrated by the infinity symbol in Figure 4.1. Sustain's 'Examine and research' strategy contributed positively to the Alliance's external legitimacy with policy makers. Efforts in this area helped the Alliance acquire positive external profile and assisted Sustain in bringing diverse perspectives to the policy table. This work was foundational to the development of viable policy solutions and it contributed to the adaptation and implementation of solutions and innovation on the ground (Sustain's second long-term goal or outcome).

Although research is an important foundation for policy development and government relations, by 2013, Sustain's capacity to 'conduct' research remained limited from a structural (i.e. member and staff) perspective. To date, much of what the Alliance characterizes as research might more accurately be termed knowledge translation. Other organizations and institutions in Ontario (e.g. Nourishing Ontario and universities) have significantly greater capacity to conduct research. As noted previously, the Acting

Director was attempting to expand and strengthen relationships with external researchers; this might prove to be a useful strategy leading to mutually beneficial partnerships. Researchers might be interested in working with Sustain's members to better understand local food system challenges and innovations. This local data, in the hands of highly skilled, better resourced researchers, might produce research that policy makers would consider highly legitimate.

The Alliance's campaign work on the 2010 municipal elections in various communities and the 2011 provincial election expanded awareness of Sustain's vision for local, sustainable food and farming in communities around Ontario and among municipal and provincial candidates. One policy maker, a political representative (PM8), reported that while he regularly hears from industry groups during campaigns and between elections, he rarely hears from representatives of non-profit organizations. Sustain's campaign work encouraged and enabled members to engage local politicians and policy makers in constructive dialogue informed by research.

Sustain's approach to government relations exemplifies an emergent process and strategy characterized by ongoing learning and adaptation. Sustain's staff and GRWG regularly reflected on what worked and the shifting environment, and adapted strategies and tactics. This illustrates how some choices may be more appropriate under certain conditions and points in time than others, and that choices may need to be re-made periodically. The issue-focused and government relations education Sustain delivered to members, along with research findings strengthened members' motivation and capacity to engage in advocacy and government relations work. One Co-Chair noted, "Members

are not quiet, they do their own advocacy. I think the value of Sustain, [of] coming out to the AC, and conference, helps them contextualize [their work] and tell a better story" (AC1).

Sustain's large, diverse provincial membership played an important role in its policy development and government relations strategies. As Sustain formalizes its membership model, the number, and possibly the regional distribution, of its membership is likely to shrink. Come future elections, Sustain may find it more challenging to have a local presence in communities around the province. Sustain may need to develop new processes to enlist the help of former members (i.e. those who are no longer eligible for membership) and other 'supporters' in future government relations and policy development work.

The Alliance took advantage of the interest Sustain's publications garnered at the political level to get local food and farming on the government agenda and then leveraged subsequent opportunities to engage policy makers in dialogue. After the concept of a LFA took root, Sustain responded to feedback received from internal and external 'experts' and shifted the focus of its government relations work from the political level to the bureaucratic level. This approach seems to have served the Alliance well and has kept Sustain's members engaged in government discussions on local, sustainable food and farming.

Sustain's ability to aggregate thought is valued, however this work depends on the Alliance's ability to develop efficient and effective processes to consult with members,

find common ground or consensus, and craft viable positions. To date, agreeing on positions has been challenging, and it is not yet clear if the new decision-making process (see Chapter 5) will facilitate this. From a structural point of view, the 40-member AC may be too large and diverse a group to set priorities and make decisions in a timely way.

The LFA consumed much of Sustain's attention and energy from 2010-2013 and it focused the Alliance's government relations and policy development work. Thanks in part to work related to the LFA, government (and bureaucrats at OMAFRA) increasingly looks to Sustain as an aggregator of thought, and to Alliance members for perspectives on local food and farming issues. Having a clear focus for government relations and policy development was useful given Sustain's capacity limitations and learning curve as new actors in the policy space.

The LFA primarily concerned one Ministry, OMAFRA, and this allowed Sustain to focus its government relations efforts in one place as the Alliance experimented and learned how to navigate the policy space. While Sustain appreciates that sustainable food and farming issues need to be addressed by other ministries, time and resource limitations precluded Sustain from developing extensive relationships with other government ministries. To enhance the sustainability of Ontario's food system Sustain will need to leverage its experience working with OMAFRA and expand its government relations efforts to other ministries in future. Since different ministries have different cultures and values, Sustain may need to adapt its strategies and processes.

The LFA appears to have been a 'glue' that unified, at least to some extent, Sustain's membership and helped align their collective interests. Going forward, government, and particularly OMAFRA, will likely expect Sustain to have a position on a wide variety of food and farming issues. These issues may be more regional or niche-like than the LFA and be relevant only to a sub-set of members (as was the case with flocking options). Whether Sustain will have the right, or sufficient numbers of members involved to take informed positions on these issues is unclear. Sustain may need to develop relationships with, and enlist the support of, a broader range of expertise outside its formal membership. In 2013 Sustain was just developing a process to understand and communicate which members endorse particular positions. This process will need to be inclusive and efficient so Sustain can respond in a timely way.

During these formative years, Sustain experimented continuously and reflected on and evolved it strategies and processes related to policy development and promotion. The Alliance's member consultation processes needs to continue to evolve to more optimally balance inclusion and efficiency. Designing effective processes for establishing priorities and defining positions requires additional experimentation and continued negotiation. Whether consensus will be the most appropriate approach to decision-making in every instance is unclear, it may not always be necessary. Greater clarity around such processes will give members more confidence in Sustain, enhance internal legitimacy, and assist the Alliance in more clearly communicating its priorities and positions externally.

Sustain's ability to frame ideas, support them with evidence, and align them with government priorities enabled government to 'hear' them. As one policy maker in the

premier's office stated, "The way they develop policy is helpful… their tone and tenor is helpful… the way they develop their pieces, their policy work and communications is just a very user-friendly approach" (PM3). A political staffer with knowledge of the file noted that Sustain's 'social enterprise' mindset and framing was well-aligned with the Liberal government (PM1). Carter (2011) reinforces that being philosophically aligned with the party in power is helpful.

One policy-maker indicated government is interested in bridging urban and rural interests, and Sustain appears well-positioned to help (PM7). To date, Sustain has not emphasized consumer and urban perspectives, perhaps because the Alliance has tried to position itself as a provincial network concerned with sustainable food and farming. Or perhaps it is because at this stage, its members are concerned about addressing issues that are less consumer-oriented. Adopting more of a consumer focus going forward represents a strategic choice, one that may be more difficult to make after the new membership model is introduced, since individuals will only be eligible to become non-voting 'supporters'.

Swings in public interest and opinion related to local, sustainable food will continue to affect government's interest in the issues Sustain and its members are working on. Whether public interest remains high is not clear, however Sustain seemed to benefit from this when first entering the policy space. This suggests in future it might be helpful, or even necessary, to develop strategies and processes to engage the public to help keep local, sustainable food and farming top of mind and on governments' agendas.

The Director, in reflecting on how conversations have evolved, inside and outside of Sustain, since she arrived, said, "I think we've successfully changed the way people understand food systems… [there is a] different understanding, a more expansive understanding of food systems…" (S3). This, in and of itself, is a significant accomplishment which represents a solid foundation for Sustain to build on.

CHAPTER 7: CASE DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

My research examined Sustain's formation and formative years. Sustain structured and

wove a diverse, cross-sectoral network as a vehicle to influence public policy related to

food and farming in the province of Ontario. Because Sustain is a network, and a network

administrative organization (Provan and Kenis, 2008, see page 52), it is important to

analyze the network as a whole. Plastrik and Taylor (2006) suggest the evaluation of

networks should consider progress in network development as well as in network-related

outcomes.

In this chapter I assess Sustain's network development and progress toward the

Alliance's long-term policy reform goal or outcome, "New laws, regulations and policies

are enacted and implemented that reflect Sustain's vision" (Sustain, 2013i, p. 3). I do so

by examining the Alliance's policy contributions in an attempt to assess its influence on

policy reform. As Sustain's overarching objective of positive food system change is a

long-term outcome and it is still early days, I do not attempt to assess the Alliance's

success at that level.

Table 7.1, Framework for discussion, on the next page is an adaptation of Plastrik and

Taylor's work on network evaluation (2006) and their Network Health scorecard (2009).

The table outlines the flow of the discussion and analysis in this chapter. Plastrik and

Taylor's scorecard evaluates network health in four dimensions: network purpose,

performance, operations and capacity. Although this appears to broadly address most

dimensions of network health, I added 'strategy' to purpose and 'response to tensions'

based on Provan and Kenis' (2008) work as it seems Sustain's response to tensions

impacted the Alliance's network health and development. In my analysis of these

dimensions I introduced some factors that were not identified in the scorecard – e.g. staff

skills and adaptive capacity as part of capacity.

Table 7.1, Framework for discussion

PROGRESS IN NETWORK DEVELOPMENT	NETWORK CONNECTIVITY	Network structure and evolution Linkages Information flow	
	NETWORK HEALTH	Purpose and Strategy	Clarity Strategy
		Capacity	Members – skills and connections Staff – skills Funding – sustainability Adaptive capacity
		Performance	Joint work New knowledge and insights Value created Achieving more than a single organization
		Operational Processes	Internal communication Engagement Accountability mechanisms Decision-making
		Response to tensions	Flexibility vs. stability Efficiency vs. inclusiveness Internal vs. external legitimacy
PROGRESS IN NETWORK-RELATED OUTCOMES	POLICY INFLUENCE	Forms of influence LFA Other policy areas	

Approximately four years into its journey Sustain has experienced a variety of successes

in terms of cultivating a healthy network, generating internal and external legitimacy, and

influencing public policy. In this chapter I explore the factors in the right side of the chart above to assess Sustain's progress in both network development and network-related outcomes. In chapters 5 and 6 I identified factors that contributed to, and detracted from, Sustain's internal and external legitimacy. Although Sustain does not identify legitimacy as an outcome, the literature I reviewed indicates it impacts a coalition's ability to have influence. In this chapter I analyze whether Sustain employed 'inside-out' and/or 'outside-in' strategies to build legitimacy since Human and Provan (2010) indicate both are important. In Chapter 8 I go on to identify key factors that other policy-focused coalitions and networks should be mindful of based on Sustain's experience.

7.2 DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Growing academic and community interest in social networks reflects, in part, a recognition that networks offer some distinct benefits compared with other forms of organizing. Some characterize this as the potential to generate 'network effects'.

> *We have seen, for instance, that some networks unleash effects that have great power to innovate, disturb, ignite, and dramatically change systems. This power depends on balancing the underlying tensions of networks in ways that do not settle permanently on too much order or too much chaos, but instead "spiral" between these states…. most people seem to want to build networks that they can control, stabilize, and use instrumentally for their own ends. Thus, they may end up sacrificing much of the power that networks can unleash. Their more "conservative" networks tend to become more like organizations over time.* ~ Plastrik and Taylor, 2010, p. 24.

The ability to achieve network effects appears related to network connectivity and health. As noted in Chapter 3, Plastrik and Taylor (2010) identify four network effects that non-profit networks may want to pursue: rapid growth and diffusion, small-world reach, adaptive capacity, and resilience. I highlight evidence that suggests the Alliance achieved

these effects. Sustain selected and implemented structures, strategies and processes to establish and strengthen connections between members. There are indications that the network is reasonably healthy. I also revisit some of the network tensions that Sustain encountered and how the Alliance responded to those.

7.3 PROGRESS IN NETWORK DEVELOPMENT: NETWORK CONNECTIVITY

In Chapter 5, I described Sustain's 'network organization structure' to illustrate the roles, responsibilities and interconnectedness of different network structures. In this section, I analyze the Alliance's 'network structure' as defined by researchers who study social networks (Granovetter, 1973, Burt, 1992) and social movement networks (Diani, 2003, Krebs and Holley, 2002, Plastrik and Taylor, 2006). I examine how choices Sustain made in structuring the network, and the weaving and convening strategies and processes the Alliance implemented, enhanced network connectivity.

Plastrik and Taylor (2010) use the word 'connectivity' to describe a network's structure, as well as the things that can travel through established 'linkages' or relationships in this structure, such as information and resources. Levkoe (2014) uses the metaphor of a 'rhizome' to describe the structure of Canada's food networks. He characterizes these networks as "heterogeneous, decentralized and deeply interconnected" (Figure 1.1, p. 10). My data supports this characterization of the Alliance's network structure.

As noted in Chapter 2, prior to the formation of Sustain, Ontario's provincial food movement was quite fragmented and decentralized. Many involved in the movement were connected to others that worked in a similar interest area (e.g. food security or

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organic farming) or who were proximate geographically. These actors connected periodically at local and regional events or conferences. I think the structure of the overall provincial food network at that time could be characterized as 'scattered clusters' (Krebs and Holley, 2002) or 'segmented/decentralized' (Diani, 2003).

Through its 'Network' strategy, Sustain has woven diverse actors from the sustainable food and farming movement together. New connections established within and beyond Sustain's network represent linkages and in some cases, 'bridges' to other networks (Burt, 1992, Granovetter, 1973). By 2013 these linkages connected individuals from all parts of the food system in communities across the province. Sustain's network structure exhibits some characteristics of a 'star/wheel' (Diani, 2003) or 'hub and spoke' model (Krebs and Holley, 2002), with Sustain as the central 'hub', convening and connecting formerly unconnected members in multiple on- and off-line spaces. Without Sustain as a network 'weaver', few in its broader membership might have connected. Krebs and Holley (2002) suggest the 'hub and spoke structure' is a common phase in network evolution and development, and that the prominence of a central hub can be a vulnerability. As we saw in Chapter 3, they indicate network weavers have an important role to play in actively evolving network structures. Sustain's staff and some members have played these roles (see Chapter 5).

Some evidence suggests the Alliance's network structure is evolving beyond the 'hub and spoke' model. In 2013 several AC members I interviewed indicated they directly contact other members to access information and seek support around particular issues (AC5, AC12, AC14). This indicates at least some members no longer rely on Sustain as the

'hub'. WG chairs and Sustain's staff and interns have taken on weaving roles in the WGs facilitating connections and collaboration. So, although most WGs are still 'spaces' hosted by Sustain, some appear to be examples of discrete hubs. In more sophisticated WGs, members appear better connected to each other than to Sustain. The Ontario Edible Education Network WG attracted significant interest from members and non-members of Sustain and is now quite self-sufficient with a dedicated staff coordinator. One intern and one staff member I interviewed described it as a 'mini Sustain' (S2, S3); another staff member characterized it as a WG that had become a network (S5). The image this brings to mind is one of a fractal, or a pattern that repeats at different scales. Krebs and Holley (2002) suggest this is a positive structural evolution and this may indicate that Sustain's network structure is evolving toward a 'multi-hub small-world' model. Such a model might enable Sustain to extend and strengthen its presence in different regions, and/or establish robust WGs focused on strategic food and farming issues, as it did with the Ontario Edible Education Network. If, like that network, these WGs become largely self-sufficient, Sustain might be able to reallocate resources to policy development and external relations.

Below I examine how Sustain's weaving and convening efforts strengthened network connectivity. By 2013 Sustain appeared to be a network of networks; members' personal and professional connections assisted the network in attracting new members and establishing linkages with other networks in and beyond Ontario. The size and diversity of Sustain's membership contributes positively to the Alliance's legitimacy in the minds of policy makers (see Chapter 6).

Sustain experienced fairly rapid growth in membership; this is generally considered to be a positive network effect and an indication of a healthy network (Plastrik and Taylor, 2007). There appear to be a number of explanations for this growth. As noted in Chapter 5, in 2009-2011 the founding members of Sustain, and its first two Directors helped convene (Gray, 1991a) and grow the size and diversity of the network by using their professional networks and 'informal relationships' to attract new members (Takahashi and Smutney, 2001). 59% of the members who responded to Sustain's 2013 member survey indicated they first learned about membership by word of mouth (Nicoara, 2013). If members did not consider Sustain to be legitimate (in the form of network as 'entity' and 'interaction' – Human and Provan, 2000), it is unlikely they would expend their social capital to attract new members to the Alliance.

Also noted in Chapter 5, network growth continued in 2012-2013 without any formal outreach process or active effort. In *New Rules for the New Economy*, Kevin Kelly (1999) uses examples such as the internet and the fax machine to illustrate that, "The value of a network explodes as its membership increases…" (p. 25). Sustain's growth may have achieved this kind of momentum by 2012, with its increasingly diverse membership helping attract new members from different parts of the province. Additionally, I think Sustain's continued growth and diversification of membership is a reflection of the visibility and legitimacy Sustain ('network as entity' – Human and Provan, 2000) has acquired over the last few years, thanks in part to its 'Showcase' strategy.

Network boundaries are often described as porous, as opposed to defined and 'bounded' (Scearce, 2011). Initially Sustain's membership was loose and unbounded (see Chapter

5), however the introduction of a formal membership model in late 2013 defines clearer network boundaries through the establishment of membership criteria and expectations. In combination with fees, this model introduces greater mutual accountability.

Sustain will preserve some porousness by encouraging individuals who are no longer eligible for membership to register as 'supporters'. Another way Sustain maintains porous boundaries is at the level of WGs. Non-members have always been encouraged to participate, and through these groups Sustain's members have engaged and collaborated with a broader community of practice which expands the Alliance's access to information and expertise. Actively promoting the benefits of membership to WG members may be a useful tactic for growing Sustain's membership.

As noted in Chapter 5, a clearer definition of membership may enhance Sustain's internal and external legitimacy. As one 2013 survey respondent commented, "Boundaries - we can't keep thinking that including everyone in a big tent is a good idea. We need to be clear about what Sustain stands for - and that will exclude some organizations - but only if we have that clarity can we hope to have an impact…" (Nicoara, 2013). At the time of writing it was unclear how the new membership model will be received by current members and prospective member organizations; Sustain's membership profile will likely look very different. Under the new model, only organizations will be eligible for membership, and members will be expected to participate in various ways, contributing financially and otherwise. This will likely translate into a drop in numbers and possibly diversity. Smaller, younger, organizations in less well-resourced parts of the province may be less likely to join and so Sustain may need to find other ways to engage and learn

from these groups that may be innovating at the edges of the food system. After the

model is implemented, Sustain will be able to more accurately describe its member

composition and this may enhance the Alliance's legitimacy in the eyes of policy makers.

The camaraderie and discussions I observed at AC meetings suggest useful connections

have been established among diverse members. Several interviewees (AC4, AC12,

AC14) and survey respondents commented that their networks had evolved and

diversified as a result of their involvement with Sustain; another indicated long-standing

relationships had deepened (AC6). One survey respondent, whose organization is based

in northern Ontario noted they connected to a member in southern Ontario who "helped

them understand how large-scale produce operations could work in the north" (Nicoara,

2013). Another member, based in southwestern Ontario, accessed training opportunities

for their staff through a new connection with a member in their region (AC5). These

examples of members connecting with other members suggests Sustain has achieved the

'small-world reach' network effect (Granovetter, 1973, Milgram, 1967, Plastrik and

Taylor, 2010), at least among some members. Although I did not formally analyze the

'density' of ties that exist in Sustain's network (Granovetter, 1973), based on my

observations and comments made in interviews, ties appear densest among AC members

who connect in person periodically.

Communication is considered by some 'the lifeblood' of a network (McLeod Grant,

2010) and the linkages established between network members facilitate the flow of

information and diffusion of ideas (Granovetter, 1973, Plastrik and Taylor, 2007). While

some information flows informally between individual members, as noted in Chapter 5,

Sustain has created on- and off-line spaces that enable members to access and exchange information and knowledge.

Sustain uses technology effectively to facilitate the exchange and dissemination of information and ideas. This includes social media and an interactive website which has become the hub for everything related to local, sustainable food and farming (S5); as well as webinars and web-based conference calls. These vehicles enable Sustain to rapidly disseminate information within and beyond Sustain's membership. Scearce (2011) reinforces that digital tools are important channels through which network members can "…share information with new and old colleagues and coordinate action" (p. 5). These physical and virtual spaces have contributed to Sustain's second long-term goal of spreading on-the ground adaptations and innovations. As one member commented anonymously in Sustain's 2013 member survey,

> *I am informed of and can advocate for initiatives that support my work and broader food systems change, but that I would not otherwise have the knowledge or capacity to be aware of. For example, Student Nutrition was NOT on my radar until [Sustain] shared information in a way that made it meaningful to me.* (Nicoara, 2013, p. 16)

Members' willingness to share information with other members and provide input when requested suggests a level of trust has been established and that members have some degree of confidence in Sustain's organizational structures, strategies and processes. While almost all AC members and staff I interviewed indicated levels of trust within the Alliance seem to them relatively high, one noted that they had started to hold back because they didn't feel their input made a difference (AC10). I later discovered that trust in the Network may be more precarious than my 2013 interviews suggest. When I

checked back with interviewees in 2014 to confirm permission to include paraphrased comments and quotations, I was asked to drop some content. Concerns were expressed about lack of anonymity with the interview codes attached, and there was a feeling the content might damage relationships.

This hints at a lack of confidence or trust in Sustain's processes – 'network as interaction' (Human and Provan, 2000). During an interview conducted by an intern as part of Sustain's evaluation process, Director Nuaimy-Barker expressed concern about continuing to rely on person-based trust as the network grows, indicating she felt the need to: "[create] systems that people understand and processes that they can trust" (Vu-Nguyen, 2013). This suggests greater formalization or institutionalization may help improve internal legitimacy.

The first two Directors brought Sustain's network organizational structure to life. During an interview as part of Sustain's developmental evaluation process, Director Nuaimy-Barker described the first phase of her time at Sustain in early 2011 as "figuring out how the constellation model worked" and the next as "experimenting… particularly around Working Groups" (Vu-Nguyen, 2013). She sensed Sustain was just concluding this experimental phase when she went on leave in early 2013, with Sustain moving towards a "systemization phase", which involved "creating better systems and rules and structure" (ibid).

7.4 PROGRESS IN NETWORK DEVELOPMENT: NETWORK HEALTH

Sustain's network composition is critical to its ability to aggregate thought, identify

barriers and solutions and cultivate the external legitimacy required to influence policy.

By 2013, Sustain's network included diverse, sustainable food and farming leaders from

multiple sectors. Researchers have described networks as dynamic, living, evolving

entities (Katcher, 2010, Kearns, 2003), so the notion of assessing the 'health' of Sustain's

network resonates for me. As with any living entity, the health of a network is complex

and multi-dimensional (Plastrik and Taylor, 2007), and constantly shifting. In this section

I assess Sustain's network health by analyzing the network's purpose and strategy,

capacity, performance, operational processes and response to tensions.

7.4.1 Purpose and strategy

> *We have trust and goodwill built between a small group of individuals that had*
> *understood that they were on the same page... But with increasing complexity*
> *and inclusivity, for example, of geography and different individuals coming to*
> *the table, that wasn't going to be enough, this relationship-based common*
> *understanding that we're all fighting for the same thing.* ~ Director Nuaimy-
> Barker interview.

Gray (1989) reinforces the importance of collaborative groups, networks and coalitions

articulating and agreeing on a common purpose. Sustain's purpose is articulated in the

Alliance's 'Terms of Reference': "Sustain is working towards a healthy, ecological,

equitable and financially viable food system for Ontario" (Sustain Ontario, 2013a, p.1).

Initial statements articulating Sustain's purpose and vision were drafted by the first

Director, informed by founding members' discussions. At an AC meeting in 2012 one

member commented, "whether or not we have a common story about the food system or

common values isn't clear at this time" (Sustain Ontario, 2012a). Based on my

observations at the March 2013 AC meeting, the language used to describe Sustain's vision for the food system doesn't resonate with, or completely satisfy, all members. My own experience assisting collaborative groups and associations to develop purpose statements suggests this is not uncommon. Finding language that resonates for all is particularly challenging when a group has diverse interests and comes from different sectors with different values and language. Levkoe (2014) identifies significant overlap in the visions of the PNOs he studied, which suggests that most are quite broad.

The Alliance has gradually clarified its purpose through AC dialogue about Sustain's strategies and processes, and development of the Theory of Change including the outcomes map (see Appendix B). The Theory of Change is a living document which has evolved, and will continue to evolve to reflect changes in understanding. Today it articulates Sustain's vision, and its role and strategies for achieving this vision (discussed in more detail below). The theory helps ensure activities and processes undertaken by staff are aligned with Sustain's vision, and to some degree it informs work done by WGs. The new membership model clarifies Sustain's purpose by articulating the value the Alliance offers members. The continued growth of Sustain's membership suggests its purpose and vision are sufficiently clear and compelling to attract new members.

As noted in Chapter 5, Sustain's members were motivated to get involved in the network to be part of a recognized voice; to support public education; and to influence policy. The first and third reasons are aligned with the work Sustain has been engaged in to date, while the second is less aligned since Sustain's educational efforts have focused mainly

internally on members and those working in food and farming rather than the general public. Later in this chapter I assess the Alliance's influence on policy reform.

While Sustain's purpose may be reasonably clear internally, as noted in Chapter 6, some external stakeholders are unclear what Sustain is all about. The name, 'Sustain', leads some to see the Alliance as strictly an environmental group (O5 and Vu Nguyen, 2013). One policy-maker and two civil servants from OMAFRA suggested Sustain needs a stronger 'elevator pitch' to succinctly communicate what the Alliance is all about (PM5, PM6, PM9). As the Acting Director observed in an interview as part of Sustain's evaluation process, "…it's not easy to explain [a] cross-sectoral organization working on multiple outcomes (Vu Nguyen, 2013). More effectively communicating Sustain's purpose might enhance the Alliance's ability to connect to, and enhance its legitimacy with, external stakeholders.

Although Sustain, like Sustain UK, reflects the perspectives of eaters or 'consumers', to date the Alliance has not emphasized this perspective. One staff member and one policy maker from OMAFRA reflected during interviews (S4, PM7) that it might be beneficial for Sustain to more explicitly articulate and promote this consumer perspective in its work. Doing so might assist the Alliance in attracting attention and support from members of the general public, i.e. voters, who, at the end of the day, influence actions taken by government (PM2).

Sustain's "Theory of Change" articulates five broad strategies: 'Network', 'Showcase', 'Examine and research', 'Policy reform' and 'Government relations' (Sustain, 2013i).

The first two are focused internally on network and organization development, while the other three are more external, related to policy development and promotion. These 'deliberate' strategies (Mintzberg, 1987, 1994) were roughly defined during Sustains' early meetings, however other aspects of Sustain's strategies (e.g. specific tactics and related processes) have been emergent. Each strategy was explored in Chapters 5 and 6. Collectively these strategies focus Sustain's 'organizational network' work on weaving and nurturing a network with the capacity, and I argue, the legitimacy, to influence policy. Much of the implementation of these strategies relies on staff to initiate and actively engage and coordinate members.

As a pioneering network, determining how to achieve Sustain's vision was unclear initially, and the broad strategies Sustain articulated enabled the Network to respond to emergent opportunities, such as the LFA. An emergent approach to strategy is increasingly recognized as valuable for organizations working in a continuously changing environment where the future is unpredictable (Mintzberg, 1987, 1994). It requires ongoing monitoring of the external environment and recalibration of priorities, something that was challenging for the AC (see Chapter 6). Despite that, the combination of deliberate and emergent strategies Sustain adopted appears to have served the Alliance well in its formative years.

Strategies for which the 'what and how' to implement were particularly unclear initially included 'Government relations' and 'Policy reform'. As noted in Chapter 6, staff and AC members experimented, reflected and adapted strategies and processes in these areas. In mid-2013, the GRWG chair indicated the group was planning to develop and articulate

a government relations strategy (AC7). Capturing some of Sustain's learnings (i.e. successes and challenges) related to government relations and policy reform in the form of more detailed strategies and tactics might be beneficial in educating new members.

By 2013 the Alliance had not articulated a tactical roadmap outlining what needs to change over the short, medium and long term to transform Ontario's food system (S3, S5). As noted in Chapter 6, the OFNS represents a starting point for such a map, something that could form the basis of a 'meta-strategy' for Sustain and the broader movement (Huxham and Macdonald, 1992). Engaging the broader provincial food and farming movement in this kind of discussion would be beneficial, and it is something that Sustain could do at the Bring Food Home conference. A 'map' could assist network members and others in better understanding how the work they do intersects with work being done by other actors. It might also assist Sustain in identifying short-term priorities and specific issues for WGs to focus on. To date, Sustain's WGs are not clearly aligned with Sustain's provincial vision for food system transformation. Since staff support WGs, this suggests not all are an optimal investment of Sustain's limited resources.

Although legitimacy-building is not articulated as a strategy, Sustain has employed a 'dual legitimacy-building' strategy, engaging a combination of 'outside-in', and 'inside-out' strategies (Human and Provan, 2000) and processes as described in Chapter 3 (see page 80). Prior to the formation of Sustain, Sustain UK's example contributed positively to the legitimacy of 'network as form' and 'network as interaction'. The UK experience demonstrates that collaborating in a big tent network 'form' is not only possible, but powerful. The Metcalf Foundation also legitimized 'network as form' and 'network as

interaction' by convening leaders from different sectors to consider the possibility of working in a network and funding the development of the first paper, "Food Connects Us All" (Metcalf Foundation, 2008a).

After Sustain was formed considerable work was undertaken to give Sustain's growing membership confidence in network as 'form', 'entity' and 'interaction'. The Alliance's first two Directors introduced structures, strategies and processes to support the network. Sustain's 'Network' strategy represents an 'inside-out' strategy because it focuses on cultivating a connected, healthy network with confidence in 'network as form' and 'network as interaction'. As illustrated in Chapter 5, Sustain invested significant resources in weaving the network and this helped build internal legitimacy. Members, and particularly AC members, learned what was involved in working in a network and most came to appreciate how connecting, dialoguing and collaborating in joint initiatives delivers benefits on different levels, legitimizing 'network as interaction'.

Sustain's 'Showcasing', 'Examine and research', 'Policy reform' and 'Government relations' strategies could be characterized as 'outside-in' *and* 'inside-out' strategies as they helped Sustain build legitimacy in the form of 'network as entity', by establishing an identity and presence for the network which was recognized externally. For example, Sustain's website and the "Menu 2020" paper (Baker, Campsie, Rabinowicz, 2010) showcase not only barriers and solutions, but also position Sustain as a network of diverse leaders seeking change. These strategies contributed positively to internal legitimacy in the form of 'network as interaction' since members engaged in collective action through the development of papers, policy backgrounders, and election campaigns.

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This joint work enabled members to accomplish significantly more than any single member organization could, while the publications enhanced Sustain's external legitimacy.

During Sustain's early years, the Alliance initially focused on building internal legitimacy. By doing so Sustain was able to attract and retain members that could collaborate and help cultivate external legitimacy. It appears Sustain expanded to a dual legitimacy building strategy around 2010, possibly prompted by the development of "Menu 2020" and the 2010 municipal election campaign. Human and Provan (2000) suggest such a dual 'inside-out' and 'outside-in' approach to legitimacy building is key to long-term network sustainability. This approach seems to have worked for Sustain as there is evidence members and policy makers consider the Alliance to be legitimate.

7.4.2 Capacity

In Plastrik and Taylor's scorecard, capacity refers to the members involved in a network and whether they possess the skills and connections to advance network goals. Since Sustain is also a network 'organization', I also assess its organizational capacity in terms of staff and funding. I analyze one other dimension of capacity and that is 'adaptive capacity'. Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, and Allen, 2001 indicate that the capacity to learn and change in response to what is learned is a factor in network success. Adaptive capacity too, is in part dependent on Sustain's membership since members enable the network to monitor and respond to opportunities in the external environment.

Sustain's founding members were mainly Metcalf grantees or otherwise part of the Foundation's network since Metcalf catalyzed the formation of Sustain (see Chapter 2). Most were based in Southern Ontario and represented urban food perspectives; it is unclear if many of those who participated in discussions in 2007-2008 have extensive backgrounds in farming. Since Sustain's membership expanded initially through the founding group's extended networks, despite efforts to diversify, by 2013 Sustain was still perceived by many to be more interested in urban food issues than farming. This has detracted somewhat from the Alliance's internal and external legitimacy. As noted in Chapter 5, some members expressed concern that urban perspectives dominate discussions while some external stakeholders questioned whether Sustain really understands agriculture in Ontario. This *may* explain why the Alliance has not emphasized its consumer perspective.

Sustain's membership composition and engagement processes are described in Chapter 5, along with the network organization staff structure. Because the Alliance has a lean staff team, designing and implementing strategies and processes relies on members' willingness to lend their knowledge, expertise and energy as volunteers. Members, and especially AC members, have been actively involved and have extended Sustain's policy development capacity significantly. Members have also been instrumental in planning events such as the biennial Bring Food Home conference and topical forums. As noted in the section on network connectivity above, members' networks helped the Alliance attract and diversify its membership.

It appears there is potential for continued membership growth, based on the number of people I met at Bring Food Home in 2013 whose organizations were not members and/or who were attending the conference for the first time. Strategically recruiting leaders from around Ontario that support the Alliance's vision for the food system could enhance Sustain's capacity, legitimacy and power. The new membership model and clearer value proposition should assist Sustain in attracting new members and filling gaps or 'structural holes' (Burt, 1992) such as farm perspectives. Whether the newly introduced membership fees will dissuade organizations from continuing their involvement or becoming members remains to be seen.

A network's ability to monitor, interpret and adapt to the changing environment depends partly on its membership. The capacity to 'sense' opportunities is a critical input to emergent strategy (Kania, Kramer, Russell, 2014). Simo (2009) reinforces that the active participation of diverse stakeholders can enhance a group's sensitivity and ability to respond to shifts in the external environment. As sector leaders, most AC members are well-connected in their professional and geographic communities and this gives them access to a range of information and insight about their environment. I observed formal and informal information exchange during all of the AC meetings I attended. 50% of respondents in the 2013 member survey indicated they often or sometimes "shared ideas, innovations and resources within Sustain Ontario and its networks". Another 44% indicated they rarely or never did so, although they did not say why (Nicoara, 2013 p. 12). This may indicate Sustain should consider developing additional channels or more effective processes to encourage and facilitate knowledge exchange. WG participants I interviewed indicated they valued the opportunity to learn from others about what was

happening in different parts of the province, something that was particularly true for those involved in the Municipal Regional WG. Such information sharing has contributed positively to individual and collective learning. As one respondent commented in the member survey, "My own awareness of food issues has grown exponentially" (Nicoara, 2013, p. 17).

Sustain's developmental evaluation process was designed to encourage reflection, learning and adaptation, something those who study networks identify as important (Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, Allen, 2001, Scearce, 2011). The Evaluation group, which I participated in (see Chapter 4), provided a space to reflect on, and question, Sustain's structures, strategies and processes. During the development of Sustain's 'Theory of Change' and outcomes map the group engaged the AC in discussion periodically. The group designed a member consultation process and drafted related consultation tools in 2012-2013; data gathering began in winter 2013 and extended into November. In addition to a consultant, the process relied heavily on interns and volunteers, and this significantly extended the data collection and analysis timeline.

The Acting Director presented some preliminary evaluation findings at Sustain's November 2013 AC meeting (McKay, 2013). His presentation characterized Sustain's constellation WG structure as "a work in progress… the most poorly understood component of Sustain Ontario's work… Project initiation, roles and accountabilities, regular reporting and evaluation need to be built in" (ibid, p. 10). As stated in Chapter 5, many WGs rely more heavily on staff/interns than was originally intended.

Plastrik and Taylor (2010) note that resilience under stress, or the ability to respond to changes and disruptions, is another desirable network effect. Sustain's smooth transition between its three Directors is an indication of Sustain's resilience (AC7) and underscores the benefits of Sustain's decentralized leadership model (see Chapter 5). During each transition, SC members and staff provided additional support. Sustain's focus shifted somewhat with each Director; one founding AC member I interviewed described this as a shift from a high-level provincial policy focus, to a more programmatic focus, and then back to a focus on policy and government relations (AC13). The AC exercised leadership in redirecting Sustain's focus back to policy reform, however the detour may have detracted somewhat from Sustain's internal legitimacy. Despite this, three AC members indicated Sustain's work evolved and benefitted from the different knowledge, expertise and experience each Director brought to the role (AC1, AC2, AC15).

Sustain's work as a 'network organization' is multifaceted, and is both internally and externally oriented. Staff develop processes and implement Sustain's strategies in collaboration with members. Staff and interns play important weaver roles, convening, connecting, communicating with and engaging members (Sustain's 'Network' strategy). They also document and promote member projects, innovations from around the province and research findings (Sustain's 'Showcase' strategy). Sustain augmented its capacity to conduct research by participating in research partnerships with academics and other organizations. These partnerships resulted in the production of research papers which assisted Sustain in gaining an audience with policy makers and enhanced the Alliance's external legitimacy.

Staff members are also actively involved in Sustain's policy development, promotion and government relations efforts. All staff play multiple roles, with some degree of specialization. Interns are recruited for specific knowledge, but because Sustain is often their first opportunity to work in their field of study, most have research skills but limited practical experience. This means Sustain must rely on and leverage members' expertise in mission-critical areas such as policy development. While this approach engages members and generates a sense of ownership, Sustain did consider hiring a staff member dedicated to policy analysis and development (Vu Nguyen, 2013). One AC member I interviewed suspected this "could pay off in spades" (AC16); however it was not an option within Sustain's 2013 budget. In 2013 this was $378,596, approximately 55% of which was allocated to salaries, 10% to Tides Canada for their administrative support, 10% to office expenses, and the remainder for program expenses such as meetings, travel, and research (email communication with the Director, November 14, 2014).

Sustain generates modest revenues hosting webinars for members and doing contract or consulting work for members, other groups, and municipalities. For the first time in 2013 the Bring Food Home conference generated revenue through a combination of fees and sponsorships (approximately $12,000 of which came from members). Staff estimated 2014 membership fees might range from $10-15,000 (ibid).

Ultimately, Sustain's organizational sustainability is tied both to its ability to attract and retain members, and secure sufficient grant funding. There are limited sources of funding to support the substantial work involved in weaving and nurturing a network, and policy development and promotion, despite the fact this work is considered valuable. Private and

government foundations are a common source of network funds (GEO, 2013, McLeod Grant, 2010, Scearce, 2011), and support from the Metcalf Foundation, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, The Greenbelt Foundation, and the Heart & Stroke Foundation has been critical during Sustain's formative years. This funding enabled Sustain to establish, evaluate and develop the network and undertake research, policy development and promotion.

Sustain's Director and Program Manager develop the Alliance's budget, then refine it in consultation with Tides Canada's finance person; the budget is then reviewed and approved by the SC (email communication with the Director, Dec. 1, 2014). Sustain's SC also approves the topics of funding proposals developed by the Director and other staff. The Director anticipates that future funding will be less flexible and tied to more clearly defined projects and outcomes (S3). That may force Sustain to divert resources from network development and engagement which could negatively impact network health and the Alliance's capacity to engage in research, government relations, policy development and promotion.

7.4.3 Performance

In Plastrik and Taylor's (2009) scorecard, the questions related to performance assess whether joint work is taking place, new knowledge and insights are generated, and value is being created; and whether the network is achieving more together than organizations could alone – such as influencing policy reform. In each of these dimensions, there is evidence to suggest Sustain is 'performing' reasonably well.

Joint work in a network refers to collaborative work undertaken by members which contributes to a shared vision. Joint work is most evident at the WG level where groups examine, and, in some cases, take collective action on issues of interest. Although few WGs reflect the full diversity of Sustain's membership, two staff members and one intern indicated during interviews that cross-sectoral collaboration does occur at the WG level (S2, S3, S4). The development of policy backgrounders and advocacy efforts during election campaigns (see Chapter 6) are other examples of how Sustain engages its broader membership in collective action.

Sustain's efforts to convene discussions with members, engage the broader provincial food movement (e.g. at Bring Food Home) and educate members (e.g. via newsletters, the website and webinars) generates new knowledge and insights. My observations of AC discussions suggests that as diversity increased, the complexity of food and farming issues became more apparent and perspectives on those issues diverged. This was reflected in the comments of one AC member who commented, "divisions between rural agriculture and urban mindsets became more prominent" (AC17). Scharmer (2007) describes differences in world views and values as 'social complexity'. This social complexity appears to have made it more challenging for Sustain to establish priorities and identify solutions that reflect and respect members' disparate concerns and interests. At the same time, the dialogue, augmented by educational opportunities, may have contributed to a better understanding of systemic issues. 43% of member survey respondents in 2013 indicated that members of their organization "have a better understanding of the barriers and challenges to implementing Good Food Ideas as a result of their involvement with Sustain" (Nicoara, 2013, p. 6).

The 2013 survey asked members to comment on the unique values Sustain contributes to bringing about a more sustainable food and farming system. 83% identified Sustain's "ability to bring together diverse groups for problem solving"; 63% noted "having positive working relationships with key stakeholders and decision-makers"; 62% said "properly disseminating research and documentation of Good Food ideas and system issues" (Nicoara, 2013). Survey comments also identified the strength of membership numbers, and staff's ability to work on policy issues that other organizations are unable to spend significant time on.

The continued participation of network members at various levels (e.g. on the AC, SC and in WGs) suggests members also receive something of value. Part of the value lies in the opportunity to make new connections: 29% of survey members identified "business networking opportunities" as a motivation for their involvement. One survey respondent, in commenting on their motivation for becoming involved noted, "Mainly, to be a part of a strong and united voice on Ontario food and farming issues; and to learn and share best practices and opportunities happening across the province" (Nicoara, 2013, p.4).

The interviews I conducted and other member survey responses highlighted examples of how Sustain achieves more as a network than members could alone. As discussed in Chapter 6, members reported they made use of Sustain's election toolkit materials, policy backgrounders and letters to engage local and provincial policy makers in dialogue. Members' collective advocacy and government relations efforts helped get food on the policy agenda and embed the concept of a local food act into provincial party campaign

platforms in 2011. The Alliance's work also informed government deliberations before and after the LFA was introduced in 2012. I assess Sustain's influence on policy reform later in this chapter.

7.4.4 Operational processes

In Plastrik and Taylor's (2009) scorecard, the questions related to operations focus on processes such as internal communications, engagement, accountability mechanisms and decision-making. These processes were described in Chapters 5 and 6. In this section I discuss the efficacy of these processes and highlight how they impacted the Alliance's legitimacy. Since many of these operational processes are internally focused, most impacted Sustain's internal more than external legitimacy.

As illustrated in Chapter 5 and the section on Network Connectivity above, Sustain's internal communication processes facilitate the exchange of information among diverse network members. Sustain effectively leverages technology platforms to disseminate information and facilitate connections among geographically dispersed members. Virtual communication platforms complement the network's less frequent opportunities to connect and engage in dialogue in person. Sustain disseminates most information and communications electronically, including newsletters, social media updates and publications.

The geographic reach of Sustain's network means that in-person meetings are an expensive proposition for the Alliance as convenor and host, and for some members. While Sustain recognizes that in-person dialogue is important and valued by members, it

is costly to convene the AC twice annually. In his November 2013 presentation to the AC, The Acting Director acknowledged that biannual meetings may no longer be financially viable (McKay, 2013). In addition to AC meetings, some WGs, periodic forums, and the biennial Bring Food Home conference are other spaces where members connect for in-person dialogue.

Opportunities to engage in dialogue and discussion, in person and electronically, have been critical to keeping members informed and evolving collective understanding. As part of the 2013 member survey, some respondents suggested additional and more frequent opportunities to engage in dialogue would be helpful. Ideas included: more targeted strategic sector-wide events and forums; discrete websites for each WG; problem-solving webinars; regional meetings between conferences; and monthly web-based update meetings (Nicoara, 2013).

One apparent weak link in Sustain's internal communication processes relates to WGs. Although staff provide brief updates on each WG's activities at AC meetings, those biannual updates are inadequate for keeping Sustain's AC and larger membership apprised of their activities. In addition, no defined communication process has been established to link policy-focused WGs with the GRWG that has been guiding Sustain's overall government relations efforts. This means WGs may inadvertently pursue activities that detract from Sustain's legitimacy.

Sustain's internal feedback processes also appear somewhat underdeveloped. Over time AC meeting minutes have become more formal and detailed, identifying decisions, ideas

or proposals, and action items. Limited resources or timing mean that not all suggestions and ideas are acted on, and one interviewee suggested that Sustain sometimes fails to 'close the loop' and let the AC know the status of activities not acted on (AC11).

Another communication process that could be improved is the way Sustain consults with its broader membership. As noted in Chapter 6, Sustain has not yet designed efficient and effective processes to gather and interpret input from the broader membership. Staff are often left to interpret and aggregate diverse input and craft a position or recommendation that reflects that input. After doing so, there is no process for the position or recommendation to be affirmed by members or even the AC or SC before being publicly communicated. This appears to be a gap in Sustain's communication process which may detract from internal legitimacy.

A healthy network is fueled by engaged members who contribute time, expertise and other resources including financial ones (Mizrahi and Rosenthal, 2001, Pasquero, 1991). As noted in Chapter 5, AC members (including the SC and Co-Chairs) tend to be the most actively engaged segment of Sustain's membership. Although Sustain relies heavily on the contributions of members as volunteers, its membership does not represent a major source of financial resources, something I revisit below.

As the core of Sustain's leadership, the AC's active engagement enhances Sustain's internal and external legitimacy. Nearly all AC members are actively involved, whether lending their expertise at meetings, on ad hoc committees (e.g. the conference committee, governance committee) or in policy development. AC members have different

expectations for engagement, derived partly from their own organizational cultures. Although almost all interviewees indicated they found AC meetings useful, some expressed concern about the quality and content of the group's dialogue, while four indicated they thought the AC could be engaged more effectively (AC11, AC13, AC14, AC17).

Sustain alerts all members of opportunities to get involved and provide input. According to two staff members (S3, S5), compared to the AC, Sustain's larger membership engages sporadically and contributes less in terms of time, expertise and resources. If Sustain could mobilize more members, particularly during municipal and provincial election campaigns, they could potentially amplify Sustain's messages and increase its external legitimacy and influence.

As an engagement vehicle, Sustain's WGs have been somewhat successful in encouraging and enabling smaller groups of members and non-members to take action on issues. Some focus on provincial policy issues, while others are essentially a forum for information exchange. The WGs have been somewhat less effective as spaces for individual members to exercise leadership. This may be because staff initially assisted groups in getting started (e.g. scheduling meetings and communicating on behalf of the WG) and in doing so, unintentionally created dependence. The growing number of WGs Sustain was supporting in 2012-2013 started to put a strain on Sustain's small staff team.

In terms of financial resources, a few member organizations have contributed financially in the form of conference and event sponsorships. As noted in Chapter 5, going forward,

all members will be asked to pay a sliding scale membership fee based on their organizational budget. This expectation reflects Sustain's need to achieve financial sustainability as a network organization, however as noted above membership fees are expected to generate only a small percentage of Sustain's budget. The broader membership's willingness to contribute financially may be an indication of the value they think Sustain has delivered to date to their organization and the broader sustainable food movement. This too may prove to be an indication of Sustain's internal legitimacy.

Contracts typically define Sustain's external accountabilities. For example, as a Tides Canada Initiatives project, Sustain is accountable to Tides Canada. According to the Director, Tides' reporting expectations are fairly rigorous (email communication, Nov. 14, 2014). The Alliance is also accountable to its various funders for fulfilling the terms of funding agreements, and reporting back on work undertaken and results. Sustain's SC is responsible for ensuring external compliance and it provides oversight of staff reporting.

Accountability mechanisms related to Sustain's constellation governance structure and internal processes are less clearly defined. As noted in Chapter 5, the lack of clarity around the roles and responsibilities of the SC and AC has generated a degree of confusion and mistrust. The institutionalization of processes may help address these concerns that have detracted from internal legitimacy. Another example of a gap in accountability mechanisms is evident in the relationship between WGs and Sustain. Currently, WGs that Sustain supports are connected only loosely to Sustain and the

Alliance's broader strategy; expectations around alignment, reporting and external communications are not clearly defined.

Sustain's new membership model and a documented decision-making process (to be approved in 2014) should enhance internal and external legitimacy and accountability. The new membership model more clearly defines accountabilities by setting out expectations for members and outlining the value Sustain offers members (see Chapter 5). Sustain's decision-making process should improve accountability and internal legitimacy by increasing transparency.

As Sustain's network grew and diversified from 2009-2013, negotiating the different interests involved when making decisions became increasingly challenging. The lack of clarity and resulting confusion around who makes different decisions and how decisions are made generated some frustration for staff who are unsure whether and when they are able to make decisions, and mistrust on the part of some members. This appears to have detracted from internal legitimacy.

The Alliance's original intent was to allow for independent, non-consensus-based decisions and action, specifically at the level of WGs. This approach gave rise to some internal tensions, as was the case with the Flocking Options WG (see Chapter 6). Because actions taken by Sustain's WGs reflect back on the network as a whole, they potentially detract from the network's internal and external legitimacy.

Despite periodically stating the Alliance is not about consensus, as noted in Chapter 6, when it comes to taking action and articulating positions, such as articulating recommendations on the LFA, Sustain did seek, and reached, consensus. When I asked the Director whether Sustain really is about consensus, she reflected that maybe they want to be… but to date have relied more on "whoever 'shows up at the table', since consulting with everyone to confirm agreement requires substantial time and energy" (S3). This is understandable when timelines for acting on opportunities are short and consulting broadly might mean missing out on an opportunity. This illustrates the tension Sustain experiences between efficiency and inclusivity, something Provan and Kenis (2008) identify as a common network tension. Sustain does not appear to have achieved a balance that satisfies all network members, so staff will need to continue to be mindful of this tension when consulting with members. Other examples of network tensions Sustain experienced are discussed in the section below.

As noted in Chapter 5, Sustain developed a decision-making framework in mid-2013 to document examples of the kinds of decisions different groups within Sustain are responsible for. While the framework provides greater clarity and should enhance transparency, the document is quite detailed, illustrating the complexity of decision-making in a diverse, cross-sectoral network. The process defines Sustain's decision-making approach as consensus-based, and reinforces this does not mean that everyone agrees. Such a framework should be helpful for staff who are frustrated by the lack of clarity and give members greater confidence in the process. The Acting Director questioned the functionality of the process as it was defined (email communication to the

evaluation group October 24, 2013). If it works in practice it should enhance internal legitimacy.

Another means by which Sustain has clarified decision-making is through Sustain's new membership model. The model specifies that support for Alliance positions will be assumed, unless members specifically object. This approach will be significantly more efficient, and it is broadly inclusive. This puts the onus on members to pay attention to draft positions Sustain shares and respond if they have concerns. Although this approach is more transparent, members who participate in other associations that vote and rule by majority (a common approach in conventional farm associations), may not consider such a process to be legitimate.

7.4.5 Response to tensions

As noted in Chapter 4, Provan and Kenis (2008) identified three tensions that networks need to respond to: flexibility versus stability, efficiency versus inclusiveness, and internal versus external legitimacy. These tensions exist in a dynamic, shifting balance. Each side of the tension has value in different circumstances so both need to be maintained to some degree. Plastrik and Taylor (2010) suggest, "Each tension presents network decision-makers with key choices that are present and evolve throughout a network's lifespan" (p. 10).

These tensions were evident in Sustain's approach to WGs, consultation and decision making, and the formation of policy recommendations. I explore how Sustain experienced and responded to these tensions below. Sustain's experience suggests

networks should attempt to maintain a dynamic balance rather than continually emphasizing one side of the tension over the other.

The 'flexibility versus stability' tension appears to be a common pressure in maturing organizations. "As organizations grow, they tend to further institutionalize policy and strategic decisions. The organizational structure creates drag and the groups begin to move more slowly and adapt to change less quickly." (Kearns, 2003, p.4). This suggests institutionalization provides greater stability, but at the expense of flexibility and nimbleness. Flexibility and adaptability are desirable network effects, and stifling those may detract from network health and impact. At Sustain this tension was evident in a desire to encourage experimentation to discover what works, and the sense the Alliance needs to institutionalize processes and practices (i.e. formalize organizational policies). From the perspective of legitimacy, because institutionalization provides greater clarity and transparency, it might enhance legitimacy, particularly internally.

This tension was evident in Sustain's approach to WGs. As noted in Chapter 5, after a period of experimentation, in 2013 Sustain was considering providing WGs with more direction in the form of expectations and criteria for forming a new WG. According to the Acting Director, staff were somewhat resistant to the idea of auditing WG activities and imposing expectations, expressing concerns that such an approach might stifle energy and motivation (S5). At Sustain, most issue and policy-focused WGs were initiated by members or non-members, although Sustain created some more operational WGs to support its work as a network organization.

"RE-AMP", a US-based national energy network, opted for a more directive and deliberate strategy, establishing working groups to advance specific levers for change identified by the network (McLeod-Grant, 2010). That strategy reportedly served RE-AMP well, however it might be less suitable for Sustain where the WG constellations are designed to be nimble vehicles that assist the network in understanding and responding to emerging issues and issues of interest to members. Resource limitations suggest Sustain might benefit from being more strategic in allocating staff support to existing and new WGs.

Staff at Sustain experienced the 'efficiency versus inclusiveness' tension not only in the Alliance's approach to decision-making, but also in consulting with, and gathering input from, the broader network. As one member commented about Sustain in the 2013 survey, "Cumbersome processes, can get caught in dialogue and unable to respond quickly when needed" (Nicoara, 2013, p. 23). The consultation process that informed Sustain's LFA recommendations emphasized inclusivity and consumed significant time and resources (see Chapter 6). The initial consultation process was well communicated and transparent; however what was less clearly communicated was how input would be incorporated into the final LFA recommendations. As noted previously the final recommendations were challenging to frame and limit in number. In addition to ideas collected through the consultation process, Sustain's recommendations were informed by tactical input on advocacy and government relations strategies. I think that the inclusive initial consultation process contributed to internal legitimacy, but that the back-end of the process may have detracted somewhat from internal legitimacy.

Tight deadlines sometimes forced Sustain to prioritize efficiency over inclusiveness. For example, to pull the policy backgrounders together quickly staff established and engaged small groups of subject matter experts (see Chapter 6). Although staff invited the larger membership to comment on drafts, limited feedback was received, possibly because members deferred to experts' perspectives. This approach to consultation seemed to more effectively balance the efficiency-inclusiveness tension. While designing consultation tools such as a member survey is significant work the first time around, refining such tools is substantially less work. Regularly scheduled consultation processes, such as an annual or biennial member survey, or a policy priorities poll, might give members a sense of confidence, knowing they will have an opportunity to provide input.

Tensions related to 'internal and external legitimacy' also emerged periodically. When crafting LFA recommendations for government, Sustain attempted to balance members' expectations to have their issues represented, with government's expectations that the Alliance present a small number of priorities. As noted in Chapter 6, policy makers I interviewed indicated that government expects advocacy groups to bring government their top three asks. Sustain opted to present a larger number of solutions to provide government with a more holistic picture of required food system changes, but also because they were attempting to be responsive to members' diverse interests. The Alliance's multiple 'asks' led some policy makers to question what Sustain really wanted. In this instance, Sustain's desire to be responsive to members – i.e. to be internally legitimate, was in tension with, and may have detracted from, the Alliance's external legitimacy in the eyes of policy makers.

7.5 PROGRESS IN NETWORK-RELATED OUTCOMES: POLICY INFLUENCE

Since policy reform is one of Sustain's two long-term goals on the way to transforming

the food system, in this section, I assess the Alliance's efforts to influence and reform

public policy. The data I gathered suggests the choices Sustain made about policy

development and promotion related strategies (i.e. 'Examine and research', 'Government

relations', and 'Policy reform') and how to implement these strategies (i.e. the processes

used), enabled the Alliance to influence policy reform in some areas, particularly the

introduction and content of the LFA. I outline evidence that suggests the Alliance's

ability to influence the LFA benefitted from the 'coupling' of Kingdon's (2003) three

'streams' as described in Chapter 3. I identify factors that indicate Sustain has acquired

some legitimacy in the food and farming policy space.

On November 5, 2013, the Ontario government passed Bill 36, the Local Food Act, 2013

with a unanimous vote by 101 MPPs (Bill 36, 2013). The passage of the Bill was

announced in a news release from OMAFRA (2013b):

> *The Local Food Act will benefit people by making the connection between*
> *buying local and helping grow an important Ontario industry. If we increase*
> *demand for homegrown food, we will create jobs and boost the agri-food*
> *sector's contributions to our economy…* ~ Minister Kathleen Wynne.

In a blog post, Sustain heralded the passage of the LFA, as a "major victory and step

forward for Ontario's local food movement" (Singh, 2013c). The notion of a farm, food,

and health act for the province was something Sustain had worked toward since

promoting the concept in the lead-up to the 2011 provincial election. While it is

impossible for an advocacy group to take sole credit for any public policy change, evidence suggests the Alliance's efforts contributed to the passage and content of the Act.

74% of 2013 member survey respondents identified Sustain's ability to advance policy as "a unique capacity Sustain contributes to food system change" (Nicoara, 2013). This suggests many members, who admittedly may be biased, consider Sustain to be a legitimate actor in the policy space. Accurately measuring influence around public policy change is particularly challenging given the many players and interests involved in the policy space. Long-time lobbyist Sean Moore (2005), in a report prepared for the Muttart Foundation, defined various forms of influence, most of which Sustain has demonstrated to some degree. These include:

- motivating government to "initiate/modify/sustain/continue/terminate/limit something by way of law, regulation, policy, program or other expenditure";
- being 'at the table' for consultations;
- being acknowledged by media, government and other organizations as a 'player';
- successfully gaining funding or a mandate from government;
- influencing the definition of criteria;
- increasing decision-makers' understanding (2005, p. 9).

Chapter 6 illustrates that much of Sustain's government relations and advocacy work to 2013 focused on working with government on the introduction and content of the LFA. This 'inside' strategy (Gormley and Cymrot, 2006) was selected in part because Sustain had established relationships with individuals in the premier's office. It was also because, according to Director Nuaimy-Barker, "The kinds of issues we're dealing with are not

popular issues" with the general public (S3), even those related to the LFA, such as whether government sets targets, or forest and freshwater foods are included in the definition of 'local'. Individuals I interviewed inside and outside of Sustain cited factors that suggest Sustain had influence, starting with its efforts to get food and farming issues on the political agenda (Kingdon, 2003) in 2010-2011 with the Alliance's Vote ON Food & Farming election campaigns.

Sustain entered this policy space at an ideal time. As noted in Chapter 2, public discourse around where food is produced, how it is produced, and food insecurity was growing in the mid-2000s, particularly in large urban communities. Government recognized a problem existed (Kingdon's (2003) first 'stream': a problem is recognized) and wanted to respond, but lacked connections to the diverse set of actors involved in local, sustainable food and farming. When Metcalf and Sustain published the two context papers in 2008 and 2010 highlighting barriers and solutions, government recognized the Alliance could help policy makers understand diverse perspectives and possibly bridge urban and rural food and farming interests.

Policy makers I interviewed indicated they were receptive to Sustain as a new voice for a variety of reasons: Sustain appeared knowledgeable; the Alliance was respectful of regional issues; and Sustain gave voice to perspectives government wanted to better understand (PM1, PM5, PM6, PM7, PM8). Miller, Razon-Abad, Covey and Brown (1994) note that "inside allies" are crucial to achieving policy change and enhancing the legitimacy of coalitions inside government. As illustrated in Chapter 6, Sustain appears to

have developed productive relationships with at least some policy makers who might be characterized as allies.

During interviews, some policy makers indicated they reached for Sustain prior to the introduction of the LFA to help them better understand regional food and farming issues and the broader political landscape (PM1, PM2, PM3). This suggests Sustain fulfilled the role of 'knowledge broker' as described by Hargadon (1998, 2002). The Alliance also offered policy makers a variety of solutions to identified problems, evidence of Kingdon's (2003) second 'stream': policy solutions are available. One policy maker indicated he sought Sustain's assistance in analyzing proposed policies (PM8). As we saw in Chapter 6, one policy maker in the premier's office indicated Sustain was "the go-to group" on the LFA. I think these examples demonstrate that Sustain 'increased understanding' which is another indicator of policy influence (Moore, 2005). These examples support MacRae's (2009) contention that CSOs possess the information and in-depth knowledge to inform the details of policy and program design. Policy makers' efforts to seek out Sustain's perspective suggests that they consider Sustain to be a credible and legitimate player in the policy process with relevant knowledge and insights.

Moore (2005) and MacRae (2009) reinforce that understanding *how* the policy process works is important for those wanting to have influence. Although we saw in Chapter 6 that some policy makers questioned Sustain's policy acuity, Sustain learned through doing and adapted its government relations strategy and tactics. Spokespeople initially engaged government on the political side as some individuals in the premier's office were receptive to the ideas presented in the two context papers (see Chapter 2). These

relationships, along with the Alliance's work with all parties in the lead-up to the 2011 provincial election helped get local food on the government's agenda. After the Liberals were re-elected in 2011 (making the possibility of a local food act more real) Sustain shifted its attention to developing relationships with policy makers at OMAFRA. Recruiting an Acting Director from OMAFRA assisted Sustain in better understanding the ministry and expanding its network of relationships there.

Kingdon's (2003) third 'stream' specifies a political climate that makes action possible. I think the provincial political climate contributed to the passage of the LFA in 2013. In the 2011 election, the Liberal party retained power but lost its majority, ceding seats to the Progressive Conservatives and the New Democratic Party (NDP), mainly in South-western and Northern Ontario (Lupton, 2011). Some speculate this was partially due to an urban-rural divide exacerbated by the Liberal's 2009 Green Energy Act and anger in some rural communities over plans to erect wind turbines (Howlett and Ladurantay, 2011). In October 2012, the Liberals introduced Bill 130, an Act to Enact the Local Food Act, and shortly thereafter, premier McGuinty resigned as party leader (Howlett, Morrow, Waldie, 2012). The Legislature was prorogued during the Liberal leadership race and Bill 130 died.

Kathleen Wynne succeeded McGuinty as premier after winning the Liberal leadership race in early 2013. Both premiers appreciated the key role food and farming plays in Ontario's rural and urban economies. Wynne assumed the role of Minister of Agriculture and Food and re-introduced the LFA as Bill 36 in March 2013 (OMAFRA, 2013a). During legislative discussions of the LFA in 2013, premier Wynne reinforced her

commitment to local food. Her April 9, 2013 address to the Legislative Assembly of

Ontario highlights some of the reasons the issue stayed on the government's agenda:

> *Wherever I go, I see that more and more people are joining the local food movement, and it's doing great things for Ontario: It's supporting our farmers, it's strengthening our communities and it's building our economy. From my perspective, that's what the agri-food sector is about. It's about making sure that we understand how important the agri-food industry is to Ontario…. I chose to take on the role of Minister of Agriculture and Food because I wanted to raise the profile of this important industry.* ~ Premier Kathleen Wynne.

Local food was one area where all political parties were able to find common ground in

2013. Each was mindful of the public and media attention local food was receiving and

appreciated food and agriculture's role as a significant economic contributor. Post-

recession, its growth potential appeared to be one of the few economic bright spots in

Ontario. On April 17, 2013, Toronto-based NDP MPP Jonah Schein delivered a speech in

the Ontario Legislature entitled "Put Food First" (Schein, 2013). He argued the need for a

stronger LFA and reinforced the importance of supporting farmers and increasing access

to sustainable local food. He referenced Sustain and its recommendations related to food

literacy.

By 2013, OMAFRA appeared to be looking to Sustain as a kind of 'one-stop shop' for

alternative perspectives on issues related to local food and farming. As noted in Chapter

6, OMAFRA invited Sustain 'to the table' for discussion on several occasions, another

indication of influence according to Moore (2005). Three 'allies' ensured Sustain was

involved in relevant consultation processes (see Chapter 6). These examples too,

reinforce Sustain had come to be seen as 'a player' in the food and farming policy space

(Moore, 2005).

Shortly after the reintroduction of the LFA as Bill 36, some of Sustain's recommendations were reinforced in a joint letter submitted to the Premier and Minister of Agriculture and Food on March 28, 2013 by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), and the Ontario Fruit and Vegetables Growers Association (OFVGA), Sustain and several of its network members (Sustain Ontario, 2013b). The OFA and OFVGA are both large conventional agriculture associations that are significant actors in the agricultural policy space, and both have lengthy historical connections to OMAFRA. These actors drafted an initial letter responding to Bill 36 and asked Sustain if the Alliance would support it. This is an indication that even some conventional agricultural actors are starting to see Sustain as 'a player' in the policy space.

Sustain agreed to sign onto the letter, and requested OFA and OFVGA incorporate content the Alliance's staff drafted reinforcing the importance of improving basic food literacy and food access (S2). Sustain's proposed content was included in the letter which also reinforced that the LFA should incorporate measures to address regional economic development and provide incentives for environmentally sustainable practices. Food literacy was eventually incorporated into the final Act, along with annual government reporting, something Sustain had advocated for all along (S3). Researchers such as MacRae (2009) and Leach and Mazur (2013) reinforce the power of forming alliances with 'strange bedfellows' when attempting to influence policy. In this instance, the submission of the joint letter with the OFA and OFVGA likely enhanced their collective influence. This may explain why, as we saw in Chapter 6, several policy makers encouraged Sustain to engage traditional farm groups in dialogue.

During legislative discussions of the second reading of the LFA in April 2013, members on all sides of the House referred to Sustain, some Alliance members (e.g. Just Food and RAIN – the Rural Agri-Innovation Network), and Sustain's recommendations (Singh, 2013b). The language used by policy makers when debating the LFA reflected some of Sustain's recommendations, e.g. on food literacy, food hubs, and forest and fresh water foods (Mantha, 2013). The adoption of advocate's language by government is another indication of influence according to one former policy-maker I interviewed (PM10). Some of Sustain's members were subsequently consulted on the definition of local used in the Act. As noted in Chapter 6, at the November 2013 AC meeting, one member credited Sustain's efforts for the inclusion of 'forest and freshwater foods' in the definition of local used in the final Act.

While some of Sustain's recommendations were incorporated in the final LFA passed on November 5, 2013, it does not specifically address the 'sustainable' dimensions of local production. Consequently the final content of the LFA was not entirely satisfactory to members, many of whom consider it a partial win. It is unclear whether an over-emphasis on internal legitimacy as discussed in the previous section affected the Alliance's ability to present a clear, focused ask to government. Although the absence of references to sustainability in the LFA may suggest Sustain's influence was limited, most of those I interviewed consider the Act something to build on. The Act did establish a Local Food Fund investment fund which will inject $30 million over three years into local food initiatives around Ontario. Sustain and many of its members are eligible to apply and may benefit from this investment. The decision-making process has been slow due to the large number of applications government received (S3). An update on OMAFRA's site

indicates they are reviewing the program after receiving more than 300 applications totalling $60 million in requests by June 30, 2014 (OMAFRA, 2014c).

Sustain's Acting Director, who had previously worked in government, suggested Sustain and its members could have done more to acknowledge steps government took – e.g. by writing policy makers to express their support for decisions made and the LFA (S5). One policy maker I interviewed reinforced the value of doing this, noting that government appreciates positive media and opportunities to publicly celebrate success (PM8).

In its first five years Sustain made significant progress establishing relationships with policy makers. It appears Sustain's work with government and OMAFRA on the LFA was constructive and it may have helped establish the Alliance as trusted advisors. OMAFRA's website page on local food includes a link to Sustain as a resource (OMAFRA, 2014a). If Sustain continues to grow and engage its membership in developing viable policy solutions, I think the Alliance is well positioned to have greater influence on Ontario's food system in future.

In addition to the LFA, a few other policy changes *may* reflect work undertaken by Sustain and/or Sustain's WGs. Sustain's Community Compost WG attempted to influence changes to composting standards. In September 2012 the Ontario Ministry of the Environment introduced a new Composting Framework that updated standards from 1991 and 2004 (ECO, 2013). Prior to this change, Sustain had raised awareness around community composting issues. In 2011 Sustain's Director and its now Operations Manager (who at the time worked for a Toronto-based food security agency) contributed

to the development of a paper published by Toronto Food Policy Council that highlighted issues related to composting in Toronto (Vidoni, 2011). Later, in 2012, Sustain and Community Compost WG members presented on composting at the Urban Agriculture Summit where they identified a need for exemptions for small scale composters (Young, 2012). The Framework, which was updated in 2013, addresses some of the issues identified by Sustain in Reg.347 (Section 3 (2) 25 and 26) under the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) which states, "no approvals are required for transport and use of compost if standards are met".

Campaigns initiated and promoted by other WGs have also been issue-specific; e.g. the 'Flocking options' campaign focused on expanding options for small chicken producers (Flocking options, 2014) and a meat-focused campaign began by highlighting challenges stemming from the closure of provincial abattoirs. OMAFRA held consultations on proposed changes to meat regulations in 2013 and Sustain's Meat and Abattoirs WG made a formal submission on the proposed amendments. To date these more issue-specific initiatives appear to have been successful in bringing attention to specific challenges within the provincial food system, however it is not clear they have influenced policy reform. This suggests Sustain should consider how to adapt its strategies and tactics to move such issues forward in future.

Although Sustain's work highlights the interconnections between food system issues and priorities in other ministries such as education and health, the Alliance has been less successful in engaging policy makers in these ministries. Staff indicate this is partly a reflection of a lack of resources, as well as the fact that these ministries do not yet fully

appreciate how food and agriculture relates to their desired outcomes. We saw in Chapter 6 that Sustain, as co-lead of the Ontario Collaborative Group in Healthy Eating and Physical Activity's (OCGHEAPA) Design Team/WG, helped organize a successful inter-ministerial dialogue to orient ministry staff to the OFNS in 2013. This meeting expanded awareness about how food system issues impact other issue areas and established new connections between policy makers and civil society groups. These connections should facilitate future dialogue.

Two policy makers I interviewed reinforced that policy change ultimately comes about in response to public pressure (PM2, PM7). Sustain entered as a new, alternative voice in what is a crowded policy space dominated by large conventional agricultural groups that are interested in maintaining the status quo. As noted above, Sustain's entry appears to have been well-timed given the rising interest in local food issues, a void in voices and the political climate. Sustain's Vote ON Food election campaigns attempted to leverage this public interest by encouraging members and their community networks to engage local politicians throughout the province. 65% of members surveyed in 2013 indicated their organization communicates sustainable food and farming policy solutions to policy makers and decision makers at various levels of government (e.g. the LFA, Flocking Options, the ONFS, and municipal and regional issues). Although not directly aimed at the general public, Sustain's ongoing social media outreach and 'Growing Good Food Ideas' video series educates broader audiences about food and farming issues and innovations. Sustain appreciates the importance of building public support, but due to resource and capacity limitations has not focused significant effort outside government

on public education and communications. Whether to shift tactics (and resources) to build public support represents a strategic choice for future consideration.

Sustain's 'Growing Good Food Ideas' video series was co-funded through an OMAFRA grant. Moore (2005) suggests that successfully securing government funding is another indication of influence. In Chapter 6, we saw that several policy makers agreed. One from OMAFRA suggested that awarding Sustain this small pool of funding may have been a test of the Alliance's ability to work with government (PM7). In the fall of 2013 the Alliance applied for a larger grant as part of the province's $30 million Local Food Fund.

Several internal stakeholders acknowledged progress made by Sustain. One SC member interviewed mid-2013 characterized this as 'a new moment' for the Alliance, noting that Sustain's relationship with policy makers has evolved and the Alliance is shifting away from advocacy into more of an advisory role (AC7). Sustain has established some external legitimacy, and now needs to expand on its work with OMAFRA to other government ministries, and other levels of government to influence policy reform.

7.6 IN SUMMARY

Sustain has structured and woven a diverse provincial network that reflects all parts of the food system. Actors in Ontario's sustainable food and farming movement are better connected and informed than they were prior to the establishment of Sustain. Network organizational structures, strategies and processes introduced to date appear to have been

largely appropriate for Sustain's early years. Together, these have enabled network members to connect, lend their expertise and take action on issues of common interest.

According to the four dimensions of network health examined in this chapter, i.e. purpose and strategy, capacity, performance and operational processes, Sustain's network appears reasonably healthy. This is important as the network is the vehicle Sustain uses to cultivate legitimacy and implement its strategies to achieve policy reform. There appears to be room for improvement in some areas of network health such as clarity of purpose, and communicating Sustain's objectives externally. In terms of capacity, continuing to access and engage committed volunteers with relevant skills will be important going forward. Sustain may also want to secure resources to hire staff to focus on policy development and analysis, since that is such a core part of the Alliance's work. Continuing to refine strategies and formalize processes related to decision-making, priority-setting and strategy development and implementation should contribute positively to internal legitimacy and enhance overall network health.

Sustain has started to become more institutionalized; however the impact of this on network health is not yet clear. The Director and one Co-Chair are mindful of what might be lost if institutionalization stifles flexibility (S3, AC1), so continuing to maintain a balanced approach in this and other network tensions will remain important.

Sustain encountered a number of contradictions which proved challenging to resolve. Malinsky and Lubelsky (2011), in their guide to network evaluation, note this is not uncommon in networks. At Sustain, contradictions often appeared in the form of

questions framed as "should we do X or Y". We saw examples of this in Chapters 5 and 6: should we allow individuals to be members, or restrict membership to organizations? Should Sustain take positions, or not? Are we about consensus, or not? Such 'either/or' framing can be divisive. Malinsky and Lubelsky (ibid) found that, for the networks they studied, "Framing these paradoxes as pairs of complementary tendencies rather than as either/or choices proved to be helpful" (ibid: 29). They suggest networks may be better served by framing questions in a 'both/and' way. Although some at Sustain initially framed membership questions in an either/or way, others attempted to reframe the question by asking, "what would be lost if individuals were excluded"? In Sustain's case, the questions above could be reframed as, 'how can we define membership based on organizations, *and* continue to include individuals who are not connected to an organization?' Sustain eventually arrived at such a 'both/and' solution, formally establishing two membership classes with different rights and responsibilities, one for organizations (members with voting rights) and one for individuals (supporters without voting rights). This may be a useful approach to engage in future.

When confronted with such contradictions, Sustain may also want to ask what choice makes sense now, in the broader context. It can be helpful to remember that after a choice is made, a network can implement it, study the impact, and if necessary make another choice. This is particularly useful to keep in mind when the choice does not require a significant investment of resources. This might expedite decision-making and enable the Alliance to maintain momentum and learning.

From 2009-2013 Sustain invested substantial energy internally, growing, structuring, weaving and nurturing a legitimate, healthy network. In parallel, the Alliance worked externally, engaging in research, brokering knowledge, establishing relationships with government, and cultivating legitimacy in the policy space. The Alliance's dual internal/external legitimacy building strategy, which Human and Provan (2000) reinforce is important, assisted Sustain in cultivating legitimacy and contributed to policy influence.

On the policy reform side, Sustain entered the policy space at an opportune time. The Alliance's chosen strategies and processes, to reform policy by examining and researching issues and working with government (an 'inside' strategy), were somewhat successful. The Alliance's ability to aggregate thought and develop thoughtful policy got Sustain invited 'to the table'. The Alliance made effective use of the expertise of individuals and groups from different sectors to document research and develop largely viable solutions and recommendations for policy makers' consideration. In doing so Sustain established constructive relationships with some policy makers on the political and bureaucratic sides.

Sustain benefitted from the public interest in food and farming over the last few years and this, to some degree, legitimized the Alliance's place at the table. Whether public interest in local food and farming will wax or wane is unclear. As Sustain's network reach continues to grow, more communities can be engaged in the conversation. Continuing to support and mobilize network members to share and amplify sustainable food and

farming solutions in communities across the province may help maintain and magnify public interest.

As noted in Chapter 6, it appears Sustain has emphasized the interests of actors in sustainable food and farming (many of whom are members) over consumers' (i.e. eaters') perspectives on food and farming. While this may have been done in the interest of internal legitimacy or in an attempt to legitimize the Alliance as a voice in the agricultural policy space, one wonders whether highlighting the perspectives of the province's consumers would reinforce that Sustain is acting in the public interest. This would require Sustain to shift to more of an 'outside' government relations strategy (Gormley and Cymrot, 2006) with greater emphasis on public education and engagement. Doing so would require new tactics and related processes. A shift in this direction might enhance the Alliance's legitimacy in the eyes of government; increase the general public's understanding of the importance of moving to a more sustainable food system; and convince Ontarians, many of whom live in urban communities, to cast their vote for sustainable, local food and farming. The ability to mobilize public support and bring voters to the table would increase Sustain's power and influence in the policy space.

Ontario's food system is dominated by conventional agricultural actors and institutional players, many of whom are invested in, and interested in maintaining, the status quo. These actors have long-standing relationships with OMAFRA and represent large numbers of conventional producers of all sizes. As a comparatively smaller network of mainly alternative actors, Sustain's ability to influence policy reform in such a system may be limited. Sustain has started to engage in dialogue with some conventional groups

on some issues, however deeper and more frequent dialogue might enhance understanding on both sides. If Sustain could find common cause with conventional farming groups, their collective voice could be difficult for government to ignore. As we saw earlier, the joint submission on the LFA in the spring of 2013, appeared to influence content in the final Act. Bill 36 was amended so that the definition of local food includes "forest and freshwater food"; the amended Bill also specifies the Minister will establish goals or targets in three areas: "improving food literacy in respect of local food", "encouraging increased use of local food by public sector organizations", and "increasing access to local food" (Ontario government, 2013).

Sustain has positioned the Alliance, and is considered by some policy makers, as an aggregator of thought. For government, it is helpful to have such a group convene and synthesize the perspectives of diverse alternative actors in the food and farming system. Sustain's Director reinforced in an interview that doing the hard work of negotiating and distilling recommendations that most network members can support is important (S3). Sustain needs to design more efficient and effective processes to facilitate that challenging and time-consuming work. By 2013 Sustain's visibility and profile had grown; members and external stakeholders will likely expect the Alliance to have a position on more emerging local food and farming issues. If Sustain does not have an informed and timely response or defined position it may detract from the Alliance's external legitimacy, influence and power.

Interviews with policy makers suggest coalitions can play a valuable role in policy reform. One policy maker suggested that a group like Sustain "that produces reports and

compiles statistics and supporting documents related to specific public policies can help a political party… and other organizations to mobilize public support" (PM2). Another former policy maker commented that government dislikes surprises and the value of a coalition can be "in anticipating for government where the pitfalls and the issues might be around a policy" (PM10). If, as was suggested in chapter 6, Sustain engages in more dialogue with conventional agricultural groups, the Alliance might be in a better position to communicate how proposed policy solutions might be received by different groups.

CHAPTER 8 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

In an attempt to answer my research question, I focused on Sustain Ontario: the Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming as a case study. In this Chapter I outline key findings and conclusions related to my research question: **how does a non-governmental, cross-sectoral policy coalition's choices related to structures, strategies, and processes, affect its ability to cultivate legitimacy and influence public policy?**

8.1 FINDINGS

Sustain built a diverse cross-sectoral alliance and cultivated internal and external legitimacy by selecting and employing a combination of five strategies: two focused internally on network- and organization-building, and three focused externally on research, government relations and policy reform. Although it would be impossible to replicate Sustain's experience exactly, other coalitions may benefit from taking the following findings into consideration when making choices about structures, strategies and processes.

Sustain's ability to have a modest, but still significant, influence on public policy stems from:

1. The Alliance's network organizational structures and membership that enabled Sustain to engage and leverage requisite skills and knowledge.

2. Two network- and organization-building strategies and related processes that fostered internal relationships and facilitated widespread member engagement and enabled Sustain to aggregate thought.

3. The development and dissemination of materials such as research reports, education and election materials, and policy recommendations to policy makers and the public that filled a gap and were well received.

4. Three interconnected policy-related strategies and processes that enabled the Alliance to establish relationships with policy makers grounded in mutual respect.

I elaborate on each of these findings below.

Network organizational structures and membership: Sustain's network organizational structures, consisting of the AC, SC, WGs, staff and the membership are described in Chapter 5 (Table 5.1 on page 131 provides an overview). As noted in that chapter, these structures are a variation on the constellation governance model articulated by Tonya Surman (2006). Founding members hoped the model would facilitate active participation and dialogue, and collaboration on areas such as policy development and promotion. Sustain's organizational structures enable interested members from diverse sectors to participate in a variety of ways and spaces.

Members with significant interest and commitment can apply to participate as an AC or SC member; these two groups provide leadership for the Alliance. AC and SC members and the AC's Co-Chairs invest substantial time and energy in Sustain's work, lending their diverse expertise and engaging their communities and professional networks on Sustain's behalf. Many of these members are considered sector leaders – their collective knowledge and expertise have helped shape Sustain's strategies, and policy development and promotion work.

The AC and SC structures decentralize network leadership by sharing it among approximately 40 members (the SC is a sub-set of AC members). The SC focuses more on operations and administration, while the AC provides strategic guidance and policy direction. Although decentralization of leadership is useful in a network, the large size and diversity of the AC makes it difficult for this group to identify policy priorities for the Alliance. At the same time, AC members individually and collectively enhance Sustain's external legitimacy; this is particularly true of the Co-Chairs who act as spokespeople for the Alliance. Paradoxically, the lack of clarity of the respective roles and expectations of these two overlapping groups sometimes detracts from internal legitimacy.

The Alliance's WG structure enables members and non-members to take action on issues of common interest. WGs provide an opportunity for individuals and groups from different parts of the province and from different sectors to engage in discussion and action. This structural element was designed to decentralize leadership and promote self-organization, however staff provide more support to these WGs than originally anticipated. This porous structure does, however, extend Sustain's reach and access to knowledge and expertise beyond its membership and enhances the Alliance's ability to respond to emerging policy issues.

One of the challenges related to WGs has been in maintaining connectedness with other WGs and Sustain as a whole. Another challenge relates to ensuring strategic alignment between issues addressed by WGs and the Alliance's broader vision and strategy. We saw in Chapter 6 that when a WG promoted a position that was not widely shared, it caused confusion and detracted somewhat from internal and external legitimacy. It

remains unclear if the benefits of self-organized WGs outweigh a more strategic approach to organizing and resourcing WGs around priority policy issues that are clearly aligned with Sustain's vision for a sustainable local food system.

Sustain's staff fulfill many of the key 'backbone' support roles identified by Kania and Kramer (2011). They weave and support the network by connecting and convening members, showcasing solutions, facilitating dialogue, and aggregating thought. Sustain's two Directors and Acting Director each brought different skills and expertise that have contributed to Sustain's evolution and internal and external legitimacy. With a lean staff complement, all staff play multiple roles. Sustain supplements its staff capacity with interns who extend the Alliance's capacity in areas such as public policy development. Questions concerning staff capacity limitations in the areas of research and policy development might benefit from additional consideration. Although between staff and interns, members and volunteers, Sustain appears to have the capacity and processes in place to develop and promote viable policy solutions in a non-partisan way, there are indications that in future, processes may need to be adapted so that Sustain can be more proactive and respond rapidly to fleeting windows of opportunity.

As with the AC, external stakeholders such as policy makers pay attention to individual staff and volunteer leaders. Sustain's Co-Chairs and Directors cultivated constructive relationships with policy makers by taking a solutions-oriented approach, sharing relevant research and information, and engaging them in dialogue. Although the Alliance's approach has been largely well-received, as discussed in Chapter 6, some policy makers questioned the extent to which urban-based staff understand the realities of

agriculture in Ontario. In contrast, the fact that Sustain's Co-Chairs have 'skin in the game' enhanced the Alliance's legitimacy in the eyes of some policy makers.

From 2009-2013 Sustain cultivated a diverse membership that grew beyond the Alliance's largely urban roots in Southwestern Ontario to approximately 450 members. Although most in the broader membership are not active participants, members represent a constituency that engages periodically in dialogue about how to cultivate a more sustainable food system in Ontario. Although not members of Sustain, a much larger community is connected to Sustain via social media (e.g. more than 9000 Twitter followers). The size and diversity of the Alliance's membership and larger constituency assists Sustain in promoting policy solutions and generally enhances the Alliance's external legitimacy.

In 2013 Sustain developed a new paid membership model that was to be launched at the end of the year (see Chapter 5). Once implemented, this model will enable Sustain to more clearly define and engage its members (and supporters) and generate some revenues to support its work (as well as that of its members). Although Sustain's staff anticipate the new model will reduce the number and diversity of the membership initially, the formalization of membership will enhance accountability and internal legitimacy by clarifying mutual expectations. The additional transparency concerning who is 'invested' in Sustain's work will likely enhance the Alliance's legitimacy in the eyes of policy makers who pay attention to coalition composition.

Staff and members periodically reflected on what has worked well and less well with respect to the Alliance's initial structures. As noted in Chapters 5 and 6, increasing connectivity between structural elements, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and

addressing some gaps in Sustain's network structures and related processes while continuing to balance network tensions (Chapter 7), would help enhance the Alliance's internal legitimacy, keep members actively engaged and contribute to network health.

Overall, Sustain's network organizational structures and related processes have served the Alliance reasonably well to date. They enabled the Alliance to attract and engage a diverse network and to leverage network members' skills and expertise. Within these structures, those who are actively involved have implemented the five core strategies and related processes described below.

Two network- and organization-building strategies and processes: The Alliance defined and implemented two strategies which I characterize as network- and organization-building: "Network" and "Showcase" (see Chapter 5). Through these strategies and related processes Sustain attracts and engages diverse members in dialogue and collective action, and promotes good food ideas being implemented in different parts of the province. These two strategies contributed positively to Sustain's internal and external legitimacy.

The "Network" strategy involves reaching out to prospective members, and convening and connecting members in various on- and off-line 'spaces'. In implementing this strategy, Sustain's staff play many of the "weaver" roles identified by Krebs and Holley (2002): convening, facilitating, acting as network guardians, and coordinating projects. The Alliance convenes members to facilitate collaboration and the exchange of ideas, and to build capacity to implement sustainable food system solutions. Dialogue in these

spaces enhances collective understanding of the interconnectedness of food, health, social justice, environmental, and farming issues and helps identify common ground. This strategy and related weaving processes appear particularly important given that Sustain has such a diverse, cross-sectoral membership.

The network's collective knowledge and expertise assists the Alliance in identifying windows of opportunity (Kingdon, 2003) and articulating viable solutions informed by innovative work being done on the ground. Staff develop and implement processes to consult with members on emerging issues, priorities and draft policy solutions. These processes remain a work in progress. In late 2013 Sustain was in the midst of more clearly defining its decision-making and priority-setting processes and a strategic planning initiative was on the horizon.

The Alliance's "Showcase" strategy involves identifying and promoting emerging solutions – i.e. "good food ideas" – underway in Ontario and beyond. Sustain documents successes and challenges in various forms to expand understanding, inspire adaptation and replication, inform a common vision, and highlight the need for policy reform. I consider this strategy internal because it enables members of the network to identify others working on similar issues and it expands awareness and understanding of complex food system issues. In some respects, however, it can be considered an external strategy in the sense that 'showcased' solutions are ultimately shared with the general public and policy makers.

The Alliance's biennial conference, Bring Food Home, is a key vehicle through which Sustain, its members, and others showcase their experience and ideas. The conference has grown in size and sophistication, attracting members, non-members, and policy makers from across the province. It has become a useful space for those interested in sustainable food and farming to meet and connect with others to explore innovative solutions and make sense of complex problems. The conference highlights Sustain's ability to convene diverse members of the provincial food and farming movement and this likely contributes positively to the Alliance's external legitimacy.

Ontario's vast geography means that technology is critical to Sustain's ability to reach out to and engage members, the public, and policy makers in different communities. The Alliance uses its website, social media, teleconferencing, webinars and videos (see 'Growing Good Food Ideas' videos on page 165) to communicate with and engage members and others, disseminate reports, and showcase solutions. Although collaborating virtually can be challenging, these tools are critical as they enable Sustain to solicit input from members and assist the Alliance in finding common ground.

These two strategies are interconnected and contribute positively to Sustain's internal and external legitimacy. Sustain's ability to convene and actively engage a highly diverse membership allows it to produce a range of materials (see below) including policy recommendations that are generally considered viable. These strategies also enhance the legitimacy of the network as 'entity', 'form' and 'interaction' (Human and Provan, 2000) for internal and external stakeholders.

These and the three policy-related strategies described below were to some degree deliberate but also emergent. Broad strategies were defined at a high level. More detailed strategies, tactics and related processes evolved or were developed as Sustain learned from experience and responded to opportunities.

Development and dissemination of materials: As noted above, Sustain documents challenges and solutions in various forms and often uses technology to disseminate materials. Materials the Alliance and its members have developed include case studies, research papers, educational webinars, policy papers and election materials. Most are available on Sustain's website for members, the general public and policy makers to access. Internal and external stakeholders alike can, and do, assess the quality of the content. In general, these materials are valued and have contributed positively to Sustain's internal and external legitimacy. Sustain paid attention to framing (e.g. with the 'good food ideas' branding) and invested in design and this appears to have helped some of the Alliance's materials 'stick' (Heath and Heath, 2007) over time.

Network members are invited, and have, contributed to the development of Sustain's materials. This is particularly true in the case of policy documents, such as the briefs and backgrounders Sustain produced to inform the LFA. Some more operational WGs, like the Government Relations WG, assisted in the development of election materials, which members disseminated in communities across the province in advance of municipal and provincial elections. Staff's attention to content, framing and design enhanced the professionalism of these materials which in turn contributed to Sustain's internal and external legitimacy.

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As discussed in more detail below, Sustain also shares relevant materials directly with individual policy makers. The first two Metcalf-funded Solutions papers (Baker, Campsie and Rabinowicz, 2010, Metcalf Foundation, 2008a), which have come to be associated with Sustain, were critical to opening doors to discussions with policy makers. These papers were well-received in part because they are research-based and told a story that reflected the public's growing interest and concern about local food and sustainable food production. Although these papers didn't contain recommendations, they mapped out interconnected issues, profiled 'good food ideas' and gave voice to actors that the government previously had limited connections to. These context papers helped communicate and to a certain extent 'brand' Sustain's interests and they established a platform for longer-term dialogue.

Three interconnected policy-related strategies and processes: Sustain's policy-related strategies include: "Examine and research", "Government relations" and "Policy reform" (see Chapter 6). In combination, these strategies implemented by members and staff enabled Sustain to develop productive relationships with policy makers. Focusing efforts on these three strategies assisted Sustain in getting local food on the provincial agenda and influencing the content of the LFA.

During the discussions that lead to the formation of Sustain, founding members began identifying barriers to a sustainable food system, interconnected issues, and innovative solutions. Research was undertaken to better understand the provincial context and findings were documented in the first of a series of five Solutions papers sponsored by

Metcalf between 2008 and 2010. Since that time Sustain has published other research

reports including six working papers in 2013 entitled, "Policies from the Field". A

number of these reports were developed in collaboration with other researchers and

organizations, and this approach extended Sustain's research capacity. Sustain uses

research and reports to document what is happening in the field, showcase local and

international solutions, and expand understanding. Sustain's ability to aggregate thought

from researchers and experts in the field and translate those into viable policy

recommendations is valued by policy makers and made the Alliance a "go-to" group for

some.

Sustain's materials helped position the Alliance as 'knowledge brokers' (Hargadon 1998,

2002). Sustain's spokespeople and members used research and other materials Sustain

produced as an opportunity to reach out to and engage policy makers in discussion. While

in some cases the research the Alliance shared confirmed what government already

believed or suspected, in other cases it introduced new perspectives; policy makers

reported that both types have value. The literature I reviewed indicates that some policy

makers value information, research and evidence more than others and interviews with

policy makers affirmed this. Sharing quality research and information may have triggered

the principle of reciprocity described by Cialdini, (2008) and made policy makers more

receptive to Sustain's ideas and recommendations.

Research reports were an important ingredient in Sustain's "Government relations"

strategy. As noted in Chapter 6, the Alliance selected an 'inside' strategy that involved

building relationships and working with government (Gormley and Cymrot, 2006).

Spokespeople initially cultivated relationships with representatives from all political parties; more recently they have engaged more policy-makers working in the bureaucracy (mainly in OMAFRA), something researchers such as MacRae (2009) reinforce is important. When meeting with policy makers, Sustain's spokespeople employed positive, constructive approaches with a view to gaining a better understanding of government priorities and constraints while helping deepen policy makers' understanding of food system challenges.

Sustain's spokespeople and its members engaged all political parties in the lead-up to, and between, elections in 2010-2013. The Alliance first developed election materials to motivate and support members in engaging municipal candidates in 2010. That experience informed the more robust Vote ON Food campaigns launched in advance of the 2011 and 2013 provincial elections. Members' efforts in 2011 may have contributed to all parties including local food in their electoral platforms, and to the Liberal Party proposing a 'local food act'. After the Liberals introduced Bill 130: an Act to enact the Local Food Act, 2012, Sustain engaged representatives from all parties in discussions about the intent and content of the Act. Spokespeople were transparent about Sustain's non-partisan government relations approach and this appears to have enhanced the Alliance's legitimacy in the eyes of policy makers. Sustain's solution-orientation also appears to have served the Alliance well.

Sustain's 'Policy reform' strategy was guided by the knowledge and expertise of network members and available research. This enabled the Alliance to identify policy gaps and possible solutions informed by work underway in the field (in Ontario and beyond). In

the case of the LFA, Sustain consulted broadly with network members to identify priority 'asks'. The interconnectedness of local food issues and the diversity of members made it challenging to distill the number of asks into the three that government expects. Sustain opted to go with more than three, to more accurately communicate members' diverse interests, and in the belief that discussions would continue. This decision left some in government wondering what Sustain really wanted. I was unable to discern from interviews with policy makers how problematic this lack of clarity was, as those I interviewed appeared interested in continuing to engage in dialogue with Sustain. Some policy-makers indicated they value having a go-to group to help them understand the growing number of alternative actors working in food and farming. I sense Sustain, in the early days, benefitted from a kind of 'honeymoon period' where the Alliance was given the benefit of the doubt by some in government who appreciated Sustain was learning and had potential.

These three policy-related strategies are interconnected and together they enabled Sustain to enter the policy space at a time when there was a void in the area of sustainable food and farming. Few of Sustain's members have the capacity to develop and promote policy independently and some that are charitable organizations might have been otherwise reluctant to engage in advocacy in the midst of the advocacy chill (Kirkby, 2014). Working as part of the Alliance, members were able to share their knowledge and expertise and lend their voice to a coordinated effort to reform public policy. This part of Sustain's work, when it reflected members' diverse interests, enhanced the Alliance's legitimacy internally. The quality of Sustain's research, materials, and the Alliance's

solutions-oriented approach contributed positively to Sustain's external legitimacy and enabled the Alliance to achieve a degree of influence.

While many aspects of Sustain's interconnected structures, strategies, and processes worked well and contributed positively to the Alliance's legitimacy, a number of factors detracted from internal and external legitimacy. These factors too, underscore the interconnectedness of structures, strategies and processes as illustrated by the infinity symbol (see Figure 8.1 below). Structurally, confusion related to roles and responsibilities within the constellation model detracted from internal legitimacy *and* contributed to complex and unclear decision-making processes. This in turn made it challenging for Sustain to agree on whether and what positions to take, which some internal stakeholders indicated is problematic when advocating for systemic change. Another structural issue concerns the disconnects and limited alignment between Sustain's WGs and the rest of Sustain. In some instances a WG's related campaign detracted from internal legitimacy, creating divisions between members. Externally some of the policies promoted as part of these campaigns were seen a 'non-starters' politically, which detracted from external legitimacy. Another structural issue appears to be the limited involvement of members (and staff) with a 'farming' perspective, despite Sustain's efforts to diversify. Some external stakeholders pointed this out when questioning the Alliance's policy acuity. Finally, Sustain lacks specific goals and priorities for transforming the food system. Mapping the pathway to a more sustainable local food system might enable Sustain and its members be more focused, proactive and prepared to respond to emerging opportunities for policy reform.

Sustain's choices in its formative years were informed by the expertise and understanding available at the time as it was pioneering. During this early life cycle stage, the Alliance experimented, took calculated risks, and reflected on the impact of its choices. Sustain gradually adapted some of its structures, strategies and processes in response to how these impacted legitimacy and influence. In late 2013, concurrent with the passage of the LFA which had been a focus the Alliance's efforts for the previous two years, Sustain was nearing the end of a developmental evaluation process. I agree with the member that characterized it as a 'new moment' for Sustain. The Alliance appears to be on the verge of a new stage of development. It seems an opportune time for Sustain to pause, and make new choices informed by its experience – i.e. to refresh structures, strategies and processes while continuing to monitor, and respond to, emerging policy windows and shifts in the external environment.

My research into Sustain's journey and these findings confirmed the initial conceptual model that I hypothesized based on my literature review (see Chapter 3), that a policy coalition's structures, strategies and processes are interconnected and choices related to these are important and strategic as they impact legitimacy and policy influence. Figure 8.1 below presents an update of the original model detailing how Sustain's choices related to structures, strategies and processes positively impacted, and in some cases detracted from, the Alliance's legitimacy. The diagram identifies additional external factors that impacted Sustain's legitimacy and also indicators of Sustain's policy influence.

Double-headed arrows have been introduced between the three core constructs (i.e. Sustain's choices, legitimacy and influence) in Figure 8.1 to reinforce the importance of monitoring the external environment and how choices made about structures, strategies and processes impact legitimacy and influence – positively or negatively. Such feedback information can alert a coalition to the need to make new choices and adapt structures, strategies or processes. Choices, in and of themselves, are not good nor bad, and should be considered temporary rather than static. In other words, choices related to these interconnected variables *should* change over time.
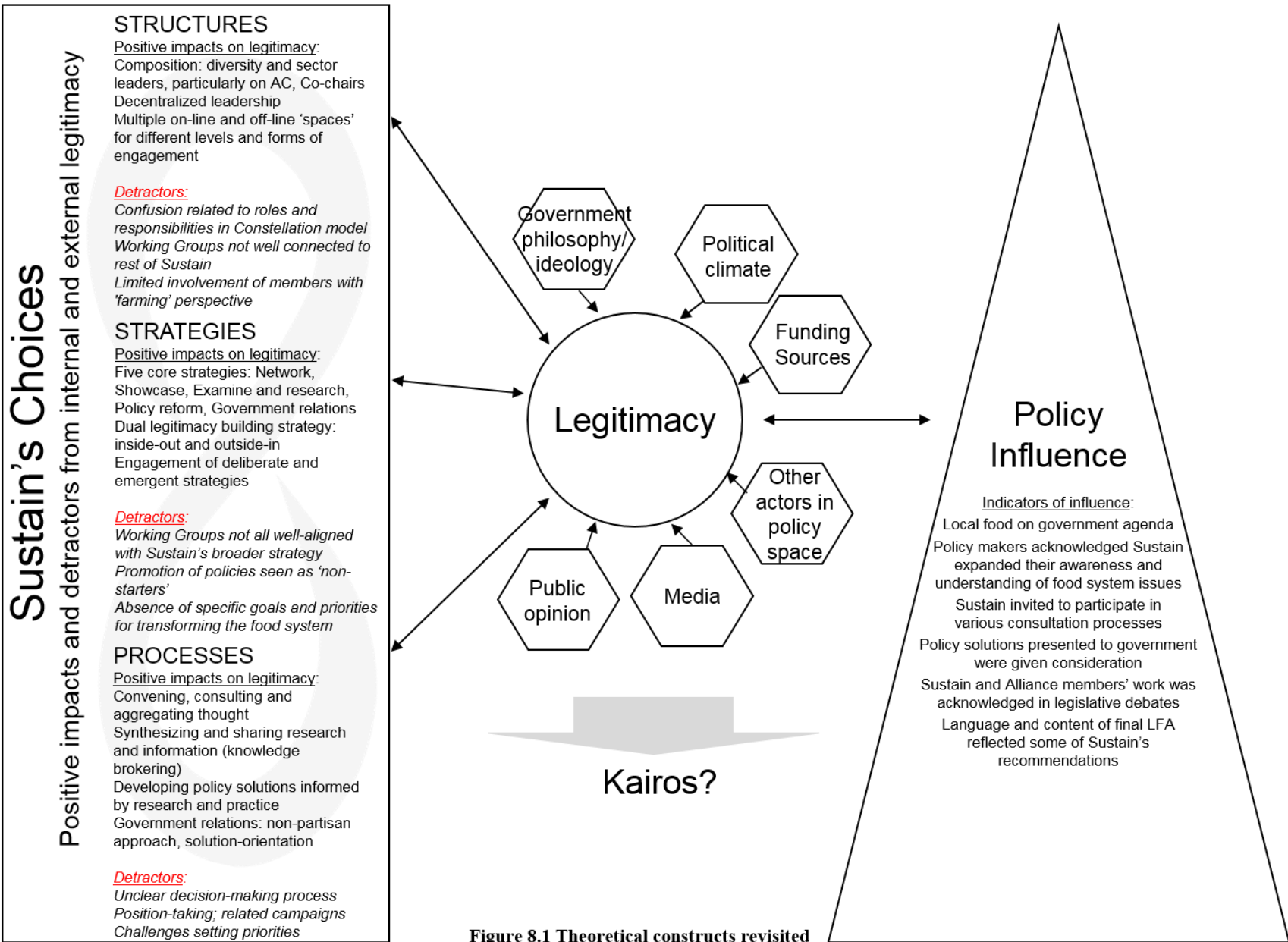
Sustain's Choices
Positive impacts and detractors from internal and external legitimacy

STRUCTURES
Positive impacts on legitimacy:
Composition: diversity and sector leaders, particularly on AC, Co-chairs
Decentralized leadership
Multiple on-line and off-line 'spaces' for different levels and forms of engagement

Detractors:
Confusion related to roles and responsibilities in Constellation model
Working Groups not well connected to rest of Sustain
Limited involvement of members with 'farming' perspective

STRATEGIES
Positive impacts on legitimacy:
Five core strategies: Network, Showcase, Examine and research, Policy reform, Government relations
Dual legitimacy building strategy: inside-out and outside-in
Engagement of deliberate and emergent strategies

Detractors:
Working Groups not all well-aligned with Sustain's broader strategy
Promotion of policies seen as 'non-starters'
Absence of specific goals and priorities for transforming the food system

PROCESSES
Positive impacts on legitimacy:
Convening, consulting and aggregating thought
Synthesizing and sharing research and information (knowledge brokering)
Developing policy solutions informed by research and practice
Government relations: non-partisan approach, solution-orientation

Detractors:
Unclear decision-making process
Position-taking; related campaigns
Challenges setting priorities

Government philosophy/ideology

Political climate

Funding Sources

Legitimacy

Other actors in policy space

Public opinion

Media

Kairos?

Policy Influence
Indicators of influence:
Local food on government agenda
Policy makers acknowledged Sustain expanded their awareness and understanding of food system issues
Sustain invited to participate in various consultation processes
Policy solutions presented to government were given consideration
Sustain and Alliance members' work was acknowledged in legislative debates
Language and content of final LFA reflected some of Sustain's recommendations

Figure 8.1 Theoretical constructs revisited

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8.2 CONCLUSION

Sustain was established at a time when public interest around local and sustainable food and farming was trending, and there was a void in the policy space (see Chapter 2). The provincial government appeared interested in responding to the growing public interest, but lacked relationships with leaders in the local, sustainable food and farming movement. Whether or not they paid attention to all the different external factors surrounding legitimacy in Figure 8.1, founding members convened by the Metcalf Foundation recognized 'kairos' was at play and seized the moment. The group determined that forming an Alliance and working as a network would enable diverse leaders to exchange perspectives, better understand systemic barriers, and develop and promote sustainable food and farming policy solutions. Sustain was formed in late 2008.

For Sustain to do its network development work and influence policy, it must access a range of skills, expertise and financial resources all of which potentially contribute to Sustain's legitimacy. Metcalf's initial investments enabled Sustain to begin structuring and weaving a diverse cross-sectoral network with the capacity to develop and promote policy solutions. The Acting Director commented that he expects Metcalf's continued investment in Sustain would enhance Sustain's legitimacy in the eyes of policy-makers (S5). In Chapter 6 we saw that several policy makers commented that working with government in a contractual arrangement and successfully fulfilling contracts (such as for the "Growing good food ideas" videos) enhances an organization's legitimacy.

This research highlights that legitimacy has been an important factor in Sustain's ability to engage in the policy space and influence policy reform. The five core strategies

described above assisted Sustain in cultivating legitimacy internally with members, and externally with other stakeholders, in a relatively short period, 2009-2013.

As discussed in chapters 5-7, when assessing legitimacy, internal and external stakeholders pay attention to a network's composition, activities and processes; as well as decisions, materials, and communications. As a result, perceptions of internal and external legitimacy fluctuate constantly. I assert that the cultivation of legitimacy is something policy-focused networks need to consider when choosing and implementing structures, strategies and processes. Additionally, because choices made at one point in time may or may not endure, it is critical for networks to monitor the impact of choices made and changing conditions in the external environment. This information will help a coalition determine if it is time to make new choices.

Sustain's combination of deliberate and emergent strategies served the Alliance well in a policy environment where 'windows of opportunity' open and close quickly (Kingdon, 2003). Because the Alliance, and its products and actions, were trusted and respected by internal members and external audiences alike, Sustain achieved a degree of policy influence particularly in relation to the LFA (see Chapter 7). Other organizations aiming to create change through policy reform might draw on Sustain's experience with respect to both internal network- and organization-building, and external policy-focused, strategies and processes.

Significant effort, skill and resources are required to weave, convene and consult with network members on an ongoing basis. A network organization's approach to this

internal work affects a network's health, ability to generate desired network effects, and capacity to develop and promote viable policy solutions. Sustain's network appeared reasonably healthy in 2013, however maintaining the network's health and effectiveness will require continued attention. At the same time, Sustain needs to continue to focus on its desired outcome – transforming the food system – and ensure that work done to weave and nurture the network does not detract from the Alliance's externally focused policy reform efforts.

This study has demonstrated that there are important connections between a policy network's structures, strategies and processes and its ability to influence policy reform. This suggests that choices in each of these areas are strategic in nature and need to be continually examined and refreshed over time. As external conditions change, different choices will need to be made concerning how to structure and weave a network and the specific tactics and processes used to influence policy reform if a network is to maintain and enhance its legitimacy and influence.

8.2.1 Considerations for nascent networks

Achieving systemic change is complex and often requires government intervention at a policy level. Systems transformation cannot be achieved by any single organization, nor by government acting in isolation. Non-governmental organizations and civil society actors have significant knowledge and expertise to inform policy discussions. Because social issues are complex and often interconnected, working as a network or coalition can expand collective understanding and enable a group to exert more influence than the same set of organizations acting independently.

It appears that cross-sectoral coalitions and alliances such as Sustain can offer policy makers distinct value compared to a single issue organization. Such groups can help those working on interconnected issues and policy makers understand the broader landscape including the interests of diverse actors. Convening diverse actors in dialogue and conducting research enabled Sustain to identify barriers and formulate policy solutions. Adequate skills and effective processes enabled the Alliance to aggregate thought and develop informed, viable solutions that reflected diverse interests compared to single issue or sector coalitions. Coalitions like Sustain appear to be in a better position to demonstrate they are acting in the broader public interest.

Although working in a cross-sectoral network or coalition can produce positive network effects (see Chapter 7), the work of bringing together different perspectives, culture and language is challenging. Networks can attract many by offering a broad vision, but as we saw at Sustain this can make it difficult to find common ground and balance the interests of diverse members. Designing a network that can attract and effectively engage the right mix of actors and finding ways for them to work together effectively is an important aspect of a network's strategy that will impact its ability to effect change. Some groups expend a great deal of time and energy on collaboration and dialogue with few tangible results. By virtue of its composition and issue focus, each network is unique, nevertheless, this study demonstrates that networks need to consider the interconnectedness of structures, strategies, processes and outcomes and make, and re-make, deliberate choices in these areas. It appears a network can benefit from having a

backbone support organization (Kania and Kramer, 2011), such as Sustain had, to coordinate and facilitate its work and evaluate the results.

Public policy decisions are influenced by multiple actors and external factors. Networks wanting to influence policy need the capacity to monitor the changing environment and identify windows of opportunity. Although government generally sets the agenda, and Kingdon (2003) suggests influencing what is on the agenda is often more challenging than responding to what is already on it, Sustain was credited with having influenced the agenda on local food. Sustain's experience suggests understanding what is on the agenda and then evolving policy reform strategies by blending deliberateness and emergence is useful. Maintaining sufficient flexibility and nimbleness to respond to emergent opportunities is critical since windows of opportunity often close quickly (ibid). Sustain relies heavily on its members and volunteers to do policy development work and network connections enable the Alliance to engage members with specific expertise as opportunities arise. A coalition's capacity to sense and seize opportunities is dependent on members, and Sustain's diverse, cross-sectoral members were an important factor. Cultivating active, committed members and designing processes to efficiently and effectively collect, analyze and act on member input is also important.

Working in networks is messy and, as illustrated in Chapter 7, fraught with contradictions and tensions. Network tensions such as flexibility and institutionalization, inclusivity and efficiency, and internal and external legitimacy exist in a dynamic balance that shifts continuously in response to choices made and actions taken. Focusing strictly on one dimension is not recommended as each has complementary value. Responding to, and

representing the interests of, diverse members is challenging; through dialogue, listening and negotiation Sustain in some cases arrived at solutions that satisfied most members. Sustain's desire to be inclusive meant the Alliance at times tried to be all things to all people and this stretched available resources and detracted somewhat from external legitimacy. When Sustain was unable to satisfactorily integrate or resolve diverse interests it appeared to detract from internal legitimacy. It is helpful if network members are comfortable working with ambiguity and are willing to listen, experiment, reflect and adapt. Sustain's developmental evaluation process reinforced the value of experimentation, reflection and being open to the unexpected.

8.2.2 Research limitations

To develop a detailed case study of a cross-sectoral policy coalition, I examined one alliance that is not strictly policy-focused. Therefore some of the choices Sustain made about structures, strategies and processes were designed not strictly to cultivate legitimacy and influence policy reform but to foster connections required to spread and implement innovations on the ground.

Additionally, this study represents a snapshot of Sustain's formative years. The Alliance continues to reflect, learn and evolve and already it looks different than the story documented here. While Sustain's experience is singular and cannot be replicated exactly, I think the Alliance's choices may offer insights for other policy-focused networks, particularly those in the early stages of development.

In studying Sustain, I focused my attention on the Alliance's leadership (i.e. AC members and senior staff), rather than on members at the periphery who are less actively involved. I felt it was important to connect with those who are most actively involved on the large AC. This means I may have missed out on the perspectives of some less engaged members. Consequently, the broader membership's part in, and perspective on, Sustain's story is not well represented here, with the possible exception of member survey comments.

Finally, because I was concerned with understanding Sustain's structures, strategies and processes and how they impacted the network and its policy reform efforts, I did not interview many conventional actors engaged in the policy space. Doing so might have provided a more nuanced understanding of the Alliance's legitimacy in the policy space and the potential for Sustain to form unusual alliances in future.

8.2.3 Thoughts on future research

As cross-sectoral policy coalitions are a relatively new phenomenon, I think more and/or comparative studies of other Canadian coalitions would help determine whether specific structures, strategies and processes are particularly suited to such groups. I also think a closer examination of the types of policy solutions cross-sectoral coalitions generate compared to those developed by less diverse interest groups, and their respective influence would be instructive.

While I think Sustain's diverse network enables the Alliance to develop informed and viable policy recommendations, Sustain's efforts during its first five years focused

mainly on one Ministry, OMAFRA. Although the Alliance appreciates multiple ministries have a role and interest in transforming the provincial food and farming system, Sustain had limited resources to engage other ministries in policy conversations during its formative years. It remains unclear whether Sustain will be able to build bridges between ministries and persuade them to develop and implement integrated policy solutions. Different strategies and processes may be required to promote integrated policy development and that too might be useful to understand.

Although member diversity is an asset for Sustain on many levels, it also presents challenges. The Alliance's new membership model is expected to, at least temporarily, shrink the size and diversity of the tent. How that will impact Sustain's legitimacy and ability to develop systemic solutions to complex, interconnected issues remains unclear. I continue to wonder how cross-sectoral coalitions can determine whether they have engaged an optimal level of diversity.

Research by Creech and Willard (2001) suggests it takes approximately five years to establish a productive and influential network as it is a new way of working for many. Sustain turned five in 2013 and so the fact that the Alliance has experienced some success in influencing policy reform is encouraging. Sustain is a diverse network of skilled leaders in sustainable food and farming, with the capacity to develop and promote viable policy solutions, constructive relationships with policy makers, and internal and external legitimacy. This represents a promising foundation that will enable the Alliance to achieve its potential and increase the sustainability and innovation of Ontario's food system in the interest of all Ontarians.

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APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Advocacy: "the act of speaking or of disseminating information intended to influence individual behaviour or opinion, corporate conduct, or public policy and law." (Moore, 2005, p. 8 attributed to VSI Paper "Working Together"). See also 'public policy advocacy'.

Advocacy coalition: "people from a variety of positions (elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers, etc.) who share a particular belief system – for example a set of basic values, causal assumptions and problem perceptions – and who show a non-trivial degree of coordinated activity over time" Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993, p.25)

Agenda/political agenda: Kingdon (2003) defines the political 'agenda' as "the list of subjects or problems to which government officials and those around them are paying serious attention" (p. 3).

Agenda setting: government determines or 'sets' the agenda, however others may influence the issues that receive government attention/the consideration of policy makers.

Alliance: similar to a coalition, in that it involves groups working together to advance shared interests.

Backbone organization: A separate organization with dedicated staff that creates and manages collective impact initiatives. Skilled staff "plan, manage, and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative to function smoothly. (Kania and Kramer, 2011, p. 40).

Bridge in a network: a node that connects parts of the network that are otherwise unconnected; this node may connect the network to other networks. Individuals who are 'bridges' are sometimes referred to as 'boundary spanners'.

Civil society organizations (CSOs): non-profit and charitable organizations that work to address a range of societal issues.

Coalition: "a group of people, groups, or countries who have joined together for a common purpose" (Merriam Webster dictionary online). Although a coalition is often considered short-term or temporary, the term is sometimes applied to groups that work together over longer periods; some develop formal agreements outlining the terms of their cooperation. See also 'policy coalition'.

Collaboration: "a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited visions of what is possible" (Gray, 1989, p. 5).

Collaborative capacity: the resources and conditions to support and facilitate collaboration towards common goals.

Convenor: an individual or organization that identifies the need or opportunity for collaboration. The convenor's role in a collaboration is "to identify and bring all the legitimate stakeholders to the table" (Gray, 1989, p. 71).

Design (in a coalition): intentional decisions made regarding how a coalition is structured (see structure), what it focuses on (see strategy) and how it undertakes its collective work (see processes).

Government relations: "...the service function associated with leading, advising or assisting an organization to achieve its political and public-policy objectives." (Moore, 2005, p. 8)

Governance: "the purposive means of guiding and steering a society or community"… comprised of "a particular set of organizational arrangements." (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998). Governance agreements are often defined through terms of reference, membership criteria, policies and practices governing interactions (e.g. decision-making, conflict resolution, accountability).

Hub: A dominant node in a network, and the central node in an ego-centered network (Burt, 1992).

Influence: "The capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behaviour of someone or something, or the effect itself" (Oxford Dictionary online). In the context of a policy-focused coalition, the goal is to influence decision-makers in government.

Issue networks: "Shared-knowledge group[s] having to do with some aspect (or, as defined by the network, some problem) of public policy" (Heclo, 1978, p.103).

Knowledge broker: "Knowledge brokers work within many different domains, and routinely recombine past experiences in new ways and for new audiences" (Hargadon, 2002, p. 43). An individual, organization or network may fulfill this role.

Knowledge transfer: "the process by which knowledge is transferred to people and organizations that can benefit" (Shields and Evans, 2008 cited Zarinpoush and Gotlib's definition).

Legitimacy: "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are socially desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, value, beliefs and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574).

Link: A relationship or connection between network actors or nodes. A link may be identified by the presence of information flows or other forms of exchange.

Lobbying: "…direct communications with public office holders and their advisors as part of an effort to influence a decision of government." (Moore, 2005, p. 8)

Network: multiple definitions exist, the following emphasize different dimensions.

- "…a structure involving multiple nodes – agencies and organizations – with multiple linkages." (McGuire and Agranoff, 2007 p. 1).
- "People connected by relationships" (Scearce, p. 5) "vehicles for motivating people to act and mobilizing collective action" (ibid, p. 8).
- "…systems of relatively autonomous actors that are working in concert to achieve shared goals or pursuing individual goals within a shared system." (Malinksy and Lubelsky, 2008, p.12)

Network boundary: in a 'bounded' network, boundaries are clearly defined and participants are known (Scearce, 2011). In 'unbounded' networks, boundaries are fuzzy and it may be unclear who is, or is not, a member of the network. Beyond a network boundary there are no linked nodes (Plastrik and Taylor 2010).

Network weaver/weaver: "A Network Weaver is someone who is aware of the networks around them and explicitly works to make them healthier (more inclusive, bridging divides)" (June Holley, 2010). An individual or organization that "knit[s] together networks by introducing people to one another, encouraging new people to join, brokering connections across differences and helping participants identify and act on opportunities" (Scearce, 2011, p. 16).

Node: a network member connected by relationships to other members; a node may be a person, group or organization within a network (Krebs and Holley, 2002).

Non-governmental, cross-sectoral policy coalition: a group of organizations (i.e. issue-focused organizations that may operate on a non-profit or for profit basis) and possibly individuals from different sectors that join forces to advocate for changes to public policy.

Policy coalition (or policy network): a group that engages in coordinated, collective action to influence policy decisions and raise awareness of issues with government. I use the terms policy coalition and policy network interchangeably in this paper since the definition of policy network varies. One broad definition is:
- Börzel (1997) defines a 'policy network' as: "a set of relatively stable relationships which are of non-hierarchical and interdependent nature linking a variety of actors, who share common interests with regard to a policy and who exchange resources to pursue the shared interests acknowledging that co-operation is the best way to achieve common goals" (p. 1).

Policy entrepreneur: "people who seek to initiate dynamic policy change" (Mintrom, 1997, p. 739 cited Baumgartner and Jones 1993; King 1988; Kingdon 1984; Polsby 1984)

Processes (in a policy coalition or network): for the purpose of this research, processes refers to activities undertaken by a coalition or network to develop and engage their members in joint work, e.g. convening, connecting, engaging, consulting, developing strategy and policy, promoting policy, and decision-making.

Public Policy: "Public policy refers to decisions taken concerning the selection of goals for society and the means of achieving them. It consists of the approaches agreed upon by governments, as the custodians of the collective resources and rules, to address particular

problems or circumstances." (Carter, 2011, p. 428). Public policy decisions may take the form of legislation, regulations, by-laws, etc.

Public policy advocacy: the approach, strategies and tactics employed by external interests to influence decisions of government. (Moore, 2005, p. 8)

Public policy development: relates to the process and substance of exploring and creating options for government action or policy (Moore, 2005, p. 8)

Resilience: the ability to withstand and endure stresses, or shocks to a system

Strategic inquiry: "a process of informal but methodical inquiry into the political and public-policy environment surrounding an issue prior to – and, in the course of – an advocacy initiative"; "an analytical framework designed to produce insight and intelligence relevant to formulation of a specific "ask" of Government and the advocacy strategy and plan to advance it" (Moore, 2010, p. 15).

Strategy (in a coalition): this refers to the choices a coalition makes regarding how best to invest its available resources. A coalition's choices may be 'deliberate', identified and articulated in a strategic framework (e.g. vision, mission, strategic priorities and directions) and other plans that guide the coalition's work. Strategy also refers to emergent strategies, which may not be formally articulated. These are identified and pursued in response to changing conditions and opportunities not anticipated in the strategic framework.
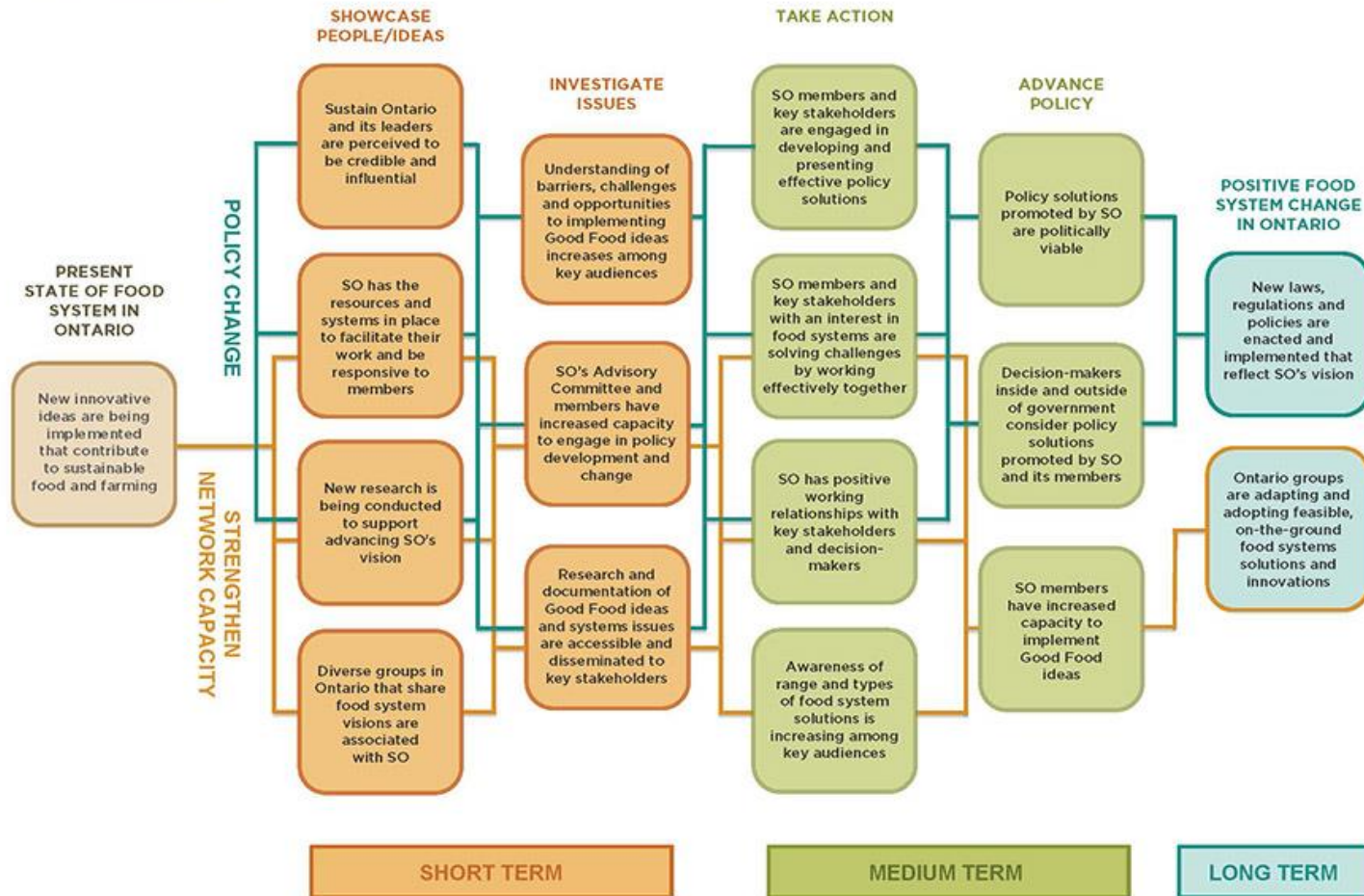
Structure (in a coalition): in the context of this research, structure refers to the composition, roles, and sub-structures or group (e.g. defined governance structures) a coalition designs to organize and accomplish its work

Weaver: see 'network weaver'.

APPENDIX B: OUTCOMES MAP

APPENDIX C: LIST OF INTERVIEW CODES AND DATES

I conducted 39 semi-structured interviews in total with 38 internal and external stakeholders. Two were joint interviews with two participants. I conducted two follow-up interviews and one two-part interview. Chapter 4, *Methodology* contains additional information about the interviews and participants, including sampling.

5 Staff and Interns, 7 interviews

ID	Format	Date
S1	In-person	July 3a, 2013
S2	Telephone	July 8a, 2013
S3	In-person	July 9, 2013 & February 4, 2014
S4	In-person	August 7a, 2013
S5	First in-person, second by telephone	August 7b, 2013 & May 13, 2014

17 Advisory Council Members, 17 interviews
Note: includes both Co-Chairs and four Steering Committee members

ID	Format	Date
AC1	Telephone	June 10, 2013
AC2	Telephone	June 11, 2013
AC3	In-person	June 26a, 2013
AC4	Telephone	June 26b, 2013
AC5	Telephone	July 2, 2013
AC6	Telephone	July 3b, 2013
AC7	In-person	July 4a, 2013
AC8	In-person	July 4b, 2013
AC9	Telephone	July 5a, 2013
AC10	Telephone	July 8b, 2013
AC11	Telephone	August 8, 2013
AC12	Telephone	August 13, 2013
AC13	Telephone	August 16, 2013
AC14	Telephone	August 22, 2013
AC15	Telephone	September 24, 2013
AC16	Telephone	November 5, 2013
AC17	Telephone	November 12, 2013

10 Policy Makers, 10 interviews
Note: included one joint, and one two-part interview

ID	Format	Date
PM1	In-person	June 18a, 2013
PM2	Telephone	June 18b, 2013
PM3	Telephone	June 18c, 2013

PM4	In-person	June 19a, 2013
PM5 PM6	In-person, joint interview	June 19b, 2013
PM7	Telephone	June 26c, 2013 & July 4c, 2013
PM8	In-person	July 3c, 2013
PM9	In-person	July 5b, 2013
PM10	Telephone	July 8c, 2013

6 Other Stakeholders, 5 interviews

ID	Format	Date
O1	In-person	August 21a, 2013
O2 O3	Telephone, 3-way call/joint interview	August 21b, 2013
O4	In-person	September 17, 2013
O5	Telephone	November 4, 2013
O6	Telephone	April 25, 2014

APPENDIX D: SUSTAIN'S HISTORICAL MILESTONES

2008: Metcalf published "Food Connects Us All"; in late 2008 Sustain was formally incorporated, established as a project of Tides Canada with a Steering Committee and an Advisory Council (the 21 individuals convened by The Metcalf Foundation).

2009: First Director, Lauren Baker, hired. Sustain adopted a provincial mandate. Baker started to structure the network and engaged some AC members in operational working groups (e.g. elections, governance). CCs appointed by SC in discussion with larger group.

March 2010: First Bring Food Home Conference hosted in Kitchener-Waterloo. CCs endorsed by the AC.

June 2010: Metcalf published context paper, "Menu 2020: Ten Good Food Ideas". Director Baker was lead author. Paper proposed a new policy framework for Ontario to align food systems policies with public health policies.

June-October 2010: Sustain created municipal election-focused campaign. "Ontario elections campaign 2010: Putting healthy, local, sustainable food on the municipal plate".

September 2010: First official in-person meeting of Advisory Council (AC). Broad strategy articulated.

January 2011: Second Director, Ravenna Nuaimy-Barker, hired. Program Co-ordinator hired shortly after.

Summer-fall 2011: Sustain created provincial election-focused campaign. "Vote ON Food and Farming".

October 2011: Bring Food Home Conference hosted in Peterborough. Closing session led to the formation of multiple issue-based Working Groups.

Fall 2011: Local Food Act (LFA) incorporated into Ontario Liberal party's election platform, "Forward Together: The Ontario Liberal Plan 2011-2015" (2011: 34). Liberals won a minority in the October 6, 2011 election.

June-July 2012: Sustain conducted expansive consultation on LFA recommendations and Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy (OFNS).

July-August 2012: Development of Statement of Purpose for the LFA, endorsed by 155 member organizations. Development of six "Policy backgrounders".

September 2012: Submission of LFA recommendations in form of a Briefing Note.

October 4, 2012: *Bill 130: An Act to enact the Local Food Act, 2012 and to amend the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Act with respect to program creation and other matters.* Introduced by The Hon. T. McMeekin, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

February 2013: Publication of six "Policies from the Field", most in collaboration with CELA.

March 25, 2013: *Bill 36: An Act to enact the Local Food Act, 2013.* LFA re-introduced by The Hon. K. Wynne, Minister of Agriculture and Food.

March 2013: Director left on 1-year leave; Acting Director, Brendan McKay, hired (on leave from OMAFRA).

November 2013: Conference hosted in Windsor. New membership model launched.