

ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Guelph Minor Hockey Association 2023



Authored by:
Daniel Wigfield, PhD
Alexandra Davidson

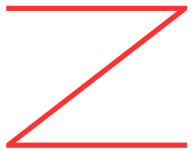




02.
Executive Summary



04.
Methodology



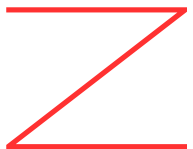
06.
Current State of Hockey



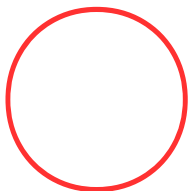
08.
Current State of the GMHA



10.
Strategic Recommendations



11.
Recommendations -
Culture



15.
Recommendations - Player
Development



22.
Recommendations -
Organizational & Administrative
Practices

29.
A Note on Finances

30.
Concluding Thoughts

31.
References & Resources

32.
About the Researchers

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the end of the 2022-23 hockey season, the GMHA's Board of Directors (BOD) sought to chart a course to transform the organization into one of the province's exemplar hockey clubs. To date, the GMHA has maintained a consistent and stable operation of offering a variety of hockey programming to the Guelph-Wellington Region; however, resounding belief exists amongst the GMHA's leadership that the organization has the capacity to become a model for the OMHA and OHF. To accomplish this lofty goal there is a necessity for GMHA leadership to understand the organization's current strengths, weaknesses, as well as trends in the broader minor hockey environment of Southern Ontario in order to devise a strategy that will see the organization's operations and offerings to members enhance through improved resource deployment over the next five years.

The GMHA's BOD commissioned researchers in the International Institute for Sport Business and Leadership at the University of Guelph to conduct both the internal assessment of the GMHA as well as an environmental scan of the greater minor hockey marketplace in Southern Ontario. The internal assessment of the GMHA was completed through interviews with staff members of the BOD (n=10) and surveying the membership (n=501). The environmental scan was completed through interviews with leaders and administrators of hockey organizations around Southern Ontario who are similarly sized and structured as the GMHA (n=4). **The analysis revealed three central areas of improvement for the GMHA: Culture, Player Development, and Organizational Administration and Practices.**

As it pertains to organizational culture, the GMHA must work to instill a culture of unity and positive connection across the organization. This involves updating the organization's mission and vision to better resonate with both its leaders and membership. Additionally, the organization is called to actively pursue opportunities that both build and demonstrate community both within the GMHA and the City of Guelph.

With respect to player development, there is significant opportunity and demand from members to enhance skill development opportunities across all ages, competition levels, and positions. Currently, the GMHA's player development model has significant gaps that have left members from across the organization—especially, goalies, house league, and lower-rep level players—feeling underserved. Closing such gaps in the player development model will put the GMHA on par with neighbouring organizations and decrease player movement to other clubs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lastly, the GMHA's administration and practices would benefit from commitments to improving professionalization. Enhancements to professionalization would directly improve the level of service and the decision-making taking place within the organization. The professionalization of the organization can be enhanced by hiring more paid staff to handle to day-to-day hockey operations and strengthen the level service delivered to members. This addition of staff and commitment to service enhancement will allow the board to be more focused on governance and strategic direction. Enhancing the board's ability to focus on the strategic direction of the organization should also be coupled with improving the impartiality and expertise of board members in order to eliminate persisting trust issues that pockets of the membership have voiced; thus, allowing the GMHA to progress positively into the future as a leading minor hockey organization in Ontario.

In closing, the non-profit and volunteer-based nature of the GMHA's operations is not ignored. The efforts and countless hours given to the organization by its volunteers are commended and this report should not be considered an indictment of their work. This report is designed the offer some insights on where the GMHA can direct its resources to further support and expand the impact of its volunteers while also improving the hockey experiences of registrants.

Thank you to all of those who took part in this project in the form of an interview or completing a survey response. The time and insights all participants offered to the project are greatly appreciated.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to inform decision-making process of GMHA leadership as the organization embarks on developing a new strategic plan. Specifically, the purpose of the project was to conduct an internal assessment of operations and programs as well as an environmental scan using multiple research methods on behalf of the GMHA. From this assessment, organizational goals and key performance indicators have been established to guide both the current and future governance of the GMHA. The data collection for this project was divided into three phases: Administrative Interviews, Benchmark Organization Interviews, and GMHA Membership Survey.

The Administrative Interviews were conducted in June and July, with 10 administrators (9 Board of Director Members and 1 paid staff member) participating. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a thorough understanding of the strength and weaknesses of the GMHA's internal operations and culture.

For the Benchmark Organization Interview process, eight organizations were identified as 'benchmark' for being similarly sized and structured as the GMHA. The president and/or administrator of each of the benchmark organization were contacted to participate in an interview. From this pool, four organizations agreed to participate in an interview for the assessment. The focus of the benchmark interviews was to identify perceived problems that exist across minor hockey organizations in Southern Ontario, and what tactics organizations are doing to mitigate these problems.

Lastly, a survey of the 1,500 GMHA members was conducted between July 27, 2023, and August 22, 2023. The focus of the survey was to gather information on how members assess the GMHA's club management, program offerings, return on investment, and overall culture of the association. The survey received 501 usable responses (33% response rate), including 461 from Parents/ Guardians and 80 Head Coaches and/or Assistant Coaches. The most represented age groups in the sample were U12, U13 and U15. The breakdown of respondents by the level of competition they represent is as follows:

AAA – 21%
AA – 15%
A – 16%
AE – 15%
House league – 16%
ADP/SD/Skating School – 17%

Other notable demographic characteristics of the survey respondents include the majority of respondents (i.e., 57%) identifying as men with 35% identifying as women. Additionally, 83% of respondents noted being Caucasian with Indigenous, Filipino, Chinese, Black, Latin American, and East Asian backgrounds also being represented. Lastly, the majority of respondents reported being in the early to mid 40s and having a household income of over \$150,000 per year.

Data analysis revealed three central areas of improvement for the GMHA: Culture, Player Development, and Organizational Administration and Practices. Recommendations to improve specific organizational features or functions within each of these areas were established using the Weakness, Implication, and Recommendation (WIRs) Principles. This involves using the data to identify and describe organizational weaknesses, determining the central implications of each weakness as it pertains to the GMHA's central functions, and providing a recommendation to mitigate or address this issue. Within this report, the focus areas are labeled pillars of improvement as they are central to the operation of any amateur sport organization.

The following sections offers detailed insights on assessment of the GMHA as well as its position within the greater hockey community of Ontario that was conducted through this study.

CURRENT STATE OF HOCKEY

Across Canada, there has been an evident shift in the way hockey is perceived. Fewer Canadians believe that hockey is a part of the Canadian identity and there are increased concerns about the safety of the sport¹. Furthermore, the sexual assault and coverup scandal that has engulfed Hockey Canada has forced much of the Canadian public to acknowledge the need for radical change as it pertains to hockey culture². In addition, contending with a national governing body that has lost the trust of the general public in its ability to govern the sport, minor hockey organizations must also contend with rapidly rising inflation as demonstrated by the Canadian Consumer Price Index. Sport and recreational opportunities have been one of the most impacted areas by inflation; thus, decisions regarding participation in high-cost sports like hockey are frequently being re-evaluated by households³. Issues regarding governance, safety, and cost coupled with the consistently evolving demographics of the Canadian population raises a number of questions regarding the stability of the hockey.

As a result of the broader hockey environment in Canada, minor hockey organizations, especially across Southern Ontario, have or are in the process of rapidly ushering in changes to their programming, organizational structure, and commitment to safety and inclusivity in an effort to maintain their longstanding stability.

Organizations with a long history of being successful on the ice and well-managed off ice have seen notable decreases in their registration due to an inability to effectively replenish large graduating classes of players with new registrants in their youngest age groups. In order to combat the significant decreases in registration, organizations like Whitby, Oakville, and Kitchener have begun pursuing alternative revenue streams. Specifically, the aforementioned organizations have adopted a mantra of **“we don’t care how people play hockey, as long as they are playing it.”** This mantra has led these organizations to expand their program offerings by working with school boards and/or city facility operators to create opportunities for drop-in floor hockey/ floorball in the community, as well as drop-in hockey focused on encouraging new participants to try the sport and uniting players across all levels of play.

In addition to introducing alternative programming designed to encourage new registrants to participate in hockey, minor hockey organizations are also putting **engagement with non-traditional hockey families at the forefront of their revenue generation planning**. Specifically, several minor hockey organizations neighbouring Guelph actively work with their municipalities and other local non-profits to take part in multi-cultural events that allow for the organization to engage directly with families who have never engaged with the sport. Such efforts have been successful marketing tools for the organizations as by being visible to the greater community, it gives more children the opportunity to get excited about hockey, and parents the ability to gather essential information and resources to pursue the sport.

Furthermore, organizations in the Greater Toronto Area have also begun pursuing board members from dominant racialized and/or religious groups within their communities

in order to gain insights on what could be done to entice non-traditional hockey groups to take up the sport. Indeed, minor hockey organizations have recognized that their preservation and the broader cultural changes needed across the sport are linked to making significant inroads into non-traditional hockey playing groups.

The pursuit of alternative revenue streams and diversifying participants has been coupled with drastic shifts in the organizational structures of minor hockey organizations in Southern Ontario. Over the last decade, leading organizations like Burlington, Oakville, Kitchener, and Whitby have **invested in shifting their board of directors from being operational-focused to governance-focused**. This shift is a result of an acknowledgment that due to the hockey hotbed nature of the Southern Ontario market; families are paying significant sums of money to pursue the sport. Therefore, hockey families should be serviced like valued customers rather than contributors to a non-profit. As such, these organizations have adjusted their internal practices to enhance the professionalism in the service they provide across the organization. This has been done by increasing the number of paid staff (both full and part-time) who are skilled in business operations and/or have hockey-specific backgrounds to focus on the organization's day-to-day operations. This shift has allowed the board of directors in these organizations to prioritize long-term strategies for revenue generation (see above), risk management, and succession planning—all areas in which non-profits servicing youth sport typically struggle.

Lastly, to better serve members, the aforementioned organizations have also focused on **enhancing the impartiality** of their board members. Some leading minor hockey organizations have even invoked minimum targets like 25% of the executive committee must not be a parent or coach within the organization. Many of these same organizations have also begun ensuring that the members of their executive committee reflect the skill and specialization matrix that indicates good governance in non-profit organizations.⁴ The efforts to enhance the professionalization of minor hockey organizations has been prioritized as a strategy to combat attrition rates and enhance the membership's trust of the decision-makers in each organization.

Speaking more broadly about the state of hockey in Ontario, some of the leaders of the province's largest hockey organizations have identified three threats that all organizations regardless of size should be working to address them with their membership and alumni:

- **Coaching shortage** — organizations are experiencing consistent difficulty in recruiting coaches for house league and non-AAA teenage age groups.
- **Referee shortage** — few organizations are introducing and funneling players referee programming.
- **Rapid growth of “outlaw leagues/organizations”** — of particular interest in the Greater Toronto Area are the Ontario Rep Hockey League and Klevr Hockey. Such organizations are having significant success in recruiting players in the U8-U10 age range due to parents' displeasure with Hockey Canada's half-ice development rules.

CURRENT STATE OF THE GMHA

Currently, 1,500 youth are enrolled in GMHA programming. Specifically, the GMHA's programming consists of skate school (i.e., introductory programming), house league (i.e., recreational team-focused programming), and rep programming ranging from BB to AAA classification (i.e., high performance development programming). These programs range in age offered from U6 to U18. Furthermore, the daily operations and governance of the GMHA are managed by a volunteer-based BOD and three-person administration staff. By undertaking this assessment of operations, the executives of the GMHA hopes to establish consistency and clarity in governance that will transform the organization into a model minor hockey association.

Overall, the vast majority of GMHA members (i.e., 77%) noted that they have had an overall enjoyable and positive experience with the organization. This level of satisfaction is derived from several notable strong points in organization administration and program delivery, including:

- **Strong communication from office staff** regarding policies, scheduling, and news. Coaches and team managers routinely acknowledged the work of the GMHA office administrator—Bryan Smith—for being timely and organized in the delivery and posting of essential information so that it can be easily distributed to team members. Coaches are particularly appreciative of the support demonstrated by the GMHA in navigating the acquisition of necessary credentials, certifications, and permits.
- Much of the positive experience noted by members comes from the GMHA appointing people into coaching positions that are committed to delivering safe and fun hockey experiences to team members. Indeed, elements of the coach selection process can be improved (see recommendations section); however, to this point, GMHA has consistently picked appropriate individuals to engage with youth on and off the ice. Members regularly pointed out the **friendships that their child(ren) have been able to establish due to the team environments being created** across the organization.
- The GMHA's **partnership with the Athletic Department at the University of Guelph is recognized as a key contributor to maintaining the organization's credibility.** Opportunities may exist to further enhance the impact of this partnership—especially, in the areas of resource sharing and player development.
- The **effort and long-term commitment of GMHA volunteers** is widely acknowledged by members. Additionally, the **level of engagement and investment by parents/guardians** in wanting to see the organization succeed (as witnessed by delivering a 33% response rate to this project—typical response rates are below 15%). Given many comparable organizations are struggling to drive member engagement in order to recruit and retain an effective group of volunteers focused on ensuring stability and safety, this directly contributes to the GMHA being in position to enhance operations and offerings rather than focus on survival.

Based on components identified as highly satisfactory by membership, GMHA currently operates in a state of stability compared to the situations discussed by other similarly sized organizations. Despite its current stability, the GMHA faces the same threats as its neighbouring counterparts including:

- Rampant player movement—especially in the AAA category
- The rapid growth of outlaw leagues and clubs
- Coaching and volunteer retention
- Strategic and succession planning that encompasses the entire organization

The recommendations discussed in the following section highlight essential key improvements in Culture, Player Development, and Organizational Administration that will allow the GMHA to avoid the complacency that has plagued many across minor hockey.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The following pages present specific recommendations to address key areas of improvement as identified by data analysis in the areas of culture, player development, and organizational administration. Each recommendation is presented using the 3-step WIR Principle structure:

- First, an organizational weakness is described.
- Second, the implications of the weakness are noted.
- Third, one or multiple recommendations based on current actions being taken in other hockey and/or sport organizations are offered to address the weakness.

In some cases a quote from interviews and/or survey responses is shared to offer more context about the area of concern and recommended solution



CULTURE

The first pillar of improvement within the GMHA is Culture. This pillar focuses on ensuring GMHA members feel safe and welcomed in their hockey experiences. Strengthening the sense of community both within the GMHA and its relationship with the greater Guelph community is also a focus.



Organizational Mission

Weakness

The current GMHA mission statement does not resonate with the organization, as demonstrated by a variety of different responses given by GMHA stakeholders when asked to describe the organization's mission and direction.

Implication

Without a clear mission statement, it is difficult to create strategic goals that align with the operations of the organization. As such, the reasoning behind key organizational decisions can be lost, which could lead to stakeholder confusion and distrust.

Recommendation

Update the GMHA's mission statement, to align with the organization's current state and priorities. An updated mission could be derived from answering the question: **What does it mean to be a Gryphon?** Based on responses from both interviews and the survey, potential pillars for an updated mission statement could include: **fun, teamwork, discipline, professionalism, and athlete development.**

*"Outside of regional restrictions, there is no complete answer as to why someone should play for Guelph. Maybe we need to **ask ourselves what it means to be a Gryphon**, so we know what to deliver."*

- Board Member

Expanding Visibility in the Community

Weakness

GMHA has been a figure in the Guelph community for over 60 years, however, with the exception of some fundraising efforts by some rep teams there is minimal evidence of GMHA pushing its visibility and strengthening its connection to the community.

Implication

As registration for hockey decreases nationally, it is becoming increasingly important to engage with the broader Guelph community, especially, non-traditional hockey families. Without this engagement, there is a risk that the GMHA will not be able to diversify its membership nor will the organization be able to maintain or improve upon current registration rates.

Recommendation

Become more visible in the Guelph community, by working with the city and other local non-profits to take part in **events attended by non-traditional hockey families (i.e., multi-cultural festival)**. This will present an opportunity to share GMHA information, allow prospective families to ask questions about hockey, and get kids excited about the game.

*"[We are prioritizing] efforts to **engage communities of new Canadians**... we are trying to reach them to make sure that they feel like that there isn't a barrier to participate"*
-Benchmark Organization

Building a Unified Gryphon Community

Weakness

The majority of individual team environments seem to be positive across the GMHA; however, the organization lacks a sense of unity and community across all teams and competition levels.

Implication

Without establishing a unified sense of community across the GMHA, it will become more difficult for the organization to retain players and essential volunteers; thus, challenging the longevity of the club.

*“Why are the U14-U18 AAA teams not on the ice for the U8-U12 tryouts? Why can’t there be an **obligation for these players to give back** for an hour a week?”*
-Board Member

Recommendation

- The introduction of Gryphon Days is an excellent building block for establishing unity across the organization. Additional opportunities seen in other organizations include **establishing an ice-buddy program that pairs an organization’s oldest teams with its youngest for on-ice sessions**. Volunteer hours for high school graduation are commonly used to encourage additional involvement in the organization from the U14-U18 age groups.
- **Establishing an alumni network** where graduated players are given updates about the organization and shared calls for coaches/volunteers through newsletters and other forms of communication. Specifically, for players in the U18 age group, the GMHA needs to be proactive in communicating with the graduated players about opportunities to stay involved in the organization after graduation, especially those remaining local for their post-secondary education.



Sense of Division between AAA and non-AAA Players

Weakness

Several GMHA members reported in the survey that there is an apparent division between AAA and non-AAA players based on the perceived skill level of the two groups. This division has resulted in various forms of bullying becoming prevalent during tryouts—specifically noted for U10-U12 age groups.

Implication

Bullying victims may become discouraged in their self-image and in their hockey abilities, which may cause them to quit the sport all together.

Recommendation

- Supplement the number of coaches responsible for tryout supervision with **additional GMHA representatives**.
- Institute **mandatory end of season Safe Sport protocol reviews** (i.e., supervision and reporting requirements) for coaches and those assisting with tryouts prior to their commencement (i.e., 1 month before first tryout date).
- Be proactive in reminding parents/guardians (e.g., newsletter) about the available resources and reporting processes for dealing with an issue like bullying both prior to tryouts and throughout the season.

“Bullying is very present with the kids - mostly higher level players towards lower level players. It has been seen multiple times in dressing rooms, in the arena. Kids being very mean/verbally abusive to other players during tryouts.”

-Parent

*“If your kid doesn't make the AA or AAA when they are very young, when they do decide to tryout **they aren't accepted or welcome or even given a chance.**”*

-Parent

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

The next pillar of improvement for the GMHA is Player Development. This pillar is important, as the overall mission of any minor hockey organization is linked to developing hockey players of all skill levels. Ultimately, the assessment of a parent/guardian's satisfaction with the organization and overall intent to return is driven by their assessment of their child's improvement season after season. Additionally, given the significant cost of playing hockey, it is essential for a minor hockey organization's player development program to demonstrate a strong return on investment in order to mitigate the need for members to access additional external training or pursue opportunities with other organizations. This section offers insight on how the GMHA can mend gaps in its player development programming.



Return on Investment

Weakness

Members from all age groups and skill levels are frequently accessing external training for their development due to the present shortcomings in the GMHA's development plan. Average spending for external player development per season is noted on the right.

Average spending on external player development per season:

AAA - \$2,730

AA - \$2,090

A/BB - \$936

HL/SD - \$843

Implication

As a result of the current player development model, families from across the GMHA – especially, those in AAA and AA – noted a willingness to join other organizations where they perceive that registration and rep team fees would better contribute to player development.

Recommendation

- There is a strong demand from all GMHA members to **incorporate powerskating in the player development programming for all teams, including house league.**
- Support for **off-ice and position specific training** (i.e., defenseman instruction) would also be appreciated, especially by U14-U18 age groups.
- It has become common for organizations around the Greater Toronto Area to work with their skill development vendors to establish programming and pricing for teams that encompasses an "all-in-one" model to mitigate families having to spend on external player development (see Burlington Eagles).



Expectations in Rep Hockey

Weakness

The GMHA player development plan lacks key performance indicators. As a result, a large portion of the membership perceive the player development plan as failing based on the records of GMHA teams.

Implication

Amongst lower-level rep teams there is a sense that they are forgotten about when it comes to the GMHA's player development program because there is a lack of understanding of how player improvement is being accomplished and assessed. This has led to feelings of frustration and stagnation as it has become very difficult for these players to move up in levels of more competitive hockey. Feelings of limited opportunity for advancement can lead to players leaving the organization.

Recommendation

- Rather than uphold blanket teaching and skill development points across several age groups and skill levels, the GMHA needs to transition to introducing skill development and performance targets that are **specified and measurable by age, skill, and competition level**. For example, the development plans for AA/AAA players should be easy to differentiate from A/BB players based on the goals and expectations for player development over the course of a season.
- Player development goals and expectations should be updated and communicated by those responsible for skill development on a season-by-season basis.



Developing a Robust House League Program

Weakness

House league members have strongly indicated that their desire for player development—especially skating skills—is not met by the current structure of house league programming.

Implication

Investing in a strong development program at the house league levels promotes a sense of internal competition by providing them with the skills and confidence to move to playing rep hockey. Additionally, it has been identified across benchmark organizations that house league needs to be prioritized to maintain a strong participant network.

“More **emphasis** needs to be placed on **house league hockey development** and to make the games **more exciting and engaging** for players (i.e in-game music)”
-Parent

Recommendation

Demonstrating a strong return on a family’s registration fee for recreational programming has been shown to lead to long-term commitments to the organization. Therefore, creating a **player development program that emphasizes the development of house league players**. Specifically, **skating development and in-game spatial awareness** need to be prioritized in order to graduate more house league players to rep hockey.

Goalie Development

Weakness

The GMHA lacks organization wide goalie development. Over 50% of parents/guardians who identified their child as a goalie noted paying for external training (average cost per season \$2,457) because they feel their child is underserved by the current player development program.

“**Goalie training** at all levels. It should be a **foundational piece of the GMHA**”
-Parent

**Note: Similar quotes was provided numerous times by survey respondents.*

Implication

Due to the lack of internal goalie development, goaltenders have been forced seek external support, which has resulted in families needing to absorb increased costs. Failure to address goalie development in future player development plans will result in these families seeking opportunities in other organizations. Further, failure to successfully develop goalies internally will result in poor rep team performances and a greater chance that goalies will not sign up for house league.

Recommendation

Goalie development needs to be prioritized by those tasked with instituting an updated player development model for the organization. The organization could also subsidize teams looking to hire their own goalie coaches or sending their goalies to camps.

Scheduling the Tryout Process

Weakness

The tryout process, specifically the scheduling of tryouts immediately following the season for most age groups, was routinely noted as a pain point for members, some even noting it triggering burnout.

Implication

As the tryout model currently stands, it has triggered wide-spread frustration amongst membership. Frustration is mainly derived from two points:

- With the tryouts taking place so close to the end of the season, there is perception that this limits opportunity for new players to be selected for a team.
- The scheduling can cause burnout in some families as they try to balance this important process and while also starting spring activities (i.e. baseball, soccer, etc.).

Recommendation

Due to the tryout process of the GMHA being heavily regulated by the rules of the OHF, and the limited spring ice offered by the City of Guelph, an opportunity exists for responsible parties to establish alternative means to better accommodate families. Two suggestions to combat similar issues experienced outside GMHA are:

- **Explore joint evaluation and skill sessions** with neighbouring organizations (including girls hockey associations) who have access to more ice time.
- Players interested in moving up in competition level are encouraged to declare their interest to the following season's coach for the particular level in which they are interested. The coach and/or GMHA's skill development partners are encouraged to attend at least 1 of the newly interested players end of season games and incorporate it in their evaluation prior to tryouts. This practice is often used by girl's hockey associations.

"The tryout process is quite gruelling for kids—especially for kids on the bubble of teams. Going through a week of tryouts only to be cut at the end and have to do it all over again is not great. Also, that child may be exhausted after multiple tryouts, and then have to get going again with the chance of having this exhaustion impact them all the way into BB tryouts."

-Parent

Team Selection & Player Evaluation Transparency

*“GMHA needs to move to **greater transparency in how players are placed on rep teams**, how other decisions are made. Our children have had some confusing and stressful tryouts as a result of lack of transparency”*

-Parent

Weakness

Linked to the lack of KPIs for player development, there is a lack of understanding of the criteria used to evaluate and select players from rep teams.

Implication

There is perceived limited turnover in teams due to a lack of transparency and impartiality in player evaluation criteria, thus leading to players not playing at the appropriate level of competitions. This has triggered a number of families to pursue opportunities in other organizations.

Recommendation

- **Consistency must be established across all coaches detailing their philosophy and expectations for their teams prior to tryout.** Expectations should be aligned with the GMHA's player development KPIs for the respective age group and competition level. An example to disseminate this information can be through a “Meet the Coaches” webinar and/or detailed newsletter/website post specific to a coach's corresponding age group.
- **The process in which players receive feedback from player evaluations must be made universal** and all coaches must be held accountable to completing this important task in similar levels of detail.

Player Import Rule

Weakness

There is rising concern amongst AAA members that coaching staffs are overly relying on the OMHA's updated player import rule to build teams.

Implication

Overreliance on the import rule limits roster spots for residents of Guelph and Wellington Region, which has often resulted in these highly-skilled players to play outside the GMHA.

Recommendation

The GMHA BOD is called to **set a clear direction for roster construction in the AAA program and ensure that coaches abide by this decision.** Is the organization prioritizing winning in this category? Or, is the organization prioritizing the development of Guelph-Wellington Region residents in the highest level of rep hockey?

*“By the time players become 14, so many of the AAA players have left Guelph. So, coaches feel like they have no choice but to rely on the import rule to build competitive teams... **The import rule has created a trickle down effect for GMHA developed kids to be pushed out of rep hockey and hockey in general.**”*

-Parent

Coach Evaluation Processes

Weakness

Across the GMHA there is a perceived lack of transparency in the expectations for coaches.

Implication

The lack of touch points for selected and prospective coaches with GMHA decision-makers has raised questions regarding impartiality and deterred applications and potential renewals for coaching positions.

Recommendation

- Commit to a **more robust assessment of coaches and team staff** rather than relying heavily on the end-of-season coach evaluation survey. Instituting a mid-season check-in for coaching staffs and increasing the detail offered in post-season evaluations would aid the organization ensuring player development KPIs are being meant as well as coach retainment and recruitment.
- To enhance the transparency of coach selection decisions, when announcing selected coaches, consider **publishing** an accompanying short bio and **credentials** (see Tennis Canada⁵ model).
- Within the Coaches Resource Library on the GMHA website, create an accessible resource folder for all prospective coaches that **clearly details the evaluation process for selection including who is accountable for the selection decisions**. The folder should also include details on key player development and team-based KPIs in which the GMHA will hold coaches accountable.

*“It would be helpful to have **more feedback or discussions with board members around coach and team performance** to make sure we [team staff] understand the requirements and expectations going into the season. Also, **follow up after the season to see what went well or what could be improved in the future, to help guide decisions on whether applying for head coach**, as a sense based on the expectations for try outs, etc.”*

-Coach



ORGANIZATIONAL & ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES

The third pillar of improvement for the GMHA is Organizational and Administrative Practices. This section focuses on detailing improvements that would improve decision-making practices, servicing members, and the overall professionalization of the organization.



Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Weakness

Currently, the GMHA operates with limited KPIs and specific details on how to meet them.

Implication

Without having defined KPIs, it can be difficult to determine whether the organization is being successful, both in the short and long-term. Currently, there is a perception that the organization is solely focused on maintaining the status quo, rather than improving for the future.

Recommendation

- **Develop specific KPIs for both overall organizational performance as well as key targets for specific programs.** For example, benchmark organizations have identified broad KPIs such as breaking even, increasing registration, or being able to contribute a specific sum of money to reserve/saving funds. These organizations also institute specific performance-based accomplishments in their rep programs, or in specific age groups.
- In an effort to **enhance transparency on organizational performance offer an annual report at the end of each season which highlights key organization successes from both on and off the ice** while also sharing insight on organizational goals for the following season. Such a report can be coupled with the offering on annual audited financial statements and follow a marketing format similar to those shared by national governing bodies.

*“For the time I’ve been involved in the organization, **it seems that we regularly operate in ballpark figures or projections rather than finite certainties** when trying to project break-even points for various registration groups. This needs to change so we can better focus marketing and recruitment efforts as well as for rostering”*

-Board Member



Governance vs Administration

Weakness

The GMHA has lacked advancement and innovation in both strategy as well as policy development by maintaining a BOD attempting to focus on both operations and governance.

Implication

The BOD may be unable to properly focus on the governance aspect of the organization, as too much time is spent on mundane administrative work. This could lead to poor organizational performance in servicing stakeholders, as well as high turnover/ problems recruiting to the board.

Recommendation

- **Increase the number of staff tasked with servicing members and completing the day-to-day operation duties of the GMHA.** Similarly sized organizations rely on an average of 5 staff members (mix of full-time and part-time) handling day-to-day duties that allow the respective board of directors and committees to focus on future planning and strategy.
 - Seek out paid staff who specialize in areas of customer service, recreational program administration, event management, and sponsorship/partnership management.
 - In order to maximize the return on investing in staff while also being mindful of the organizations financial position, it is common for minor hockey organizations to work with the plethora of post-secondary schools offering sport business programs to offer co-op positions, MITACS internships, and Canada summer job placements.
- Develop and maintain the practice of **consulting administrative staff on all strategic decisions** to ensure members remain properly serviced in all future planning.

*“The **Board of Directors** themselves need to be **given more time to deal with governance issues** rather than deal with operational issues.”*
-Board Member

*“Wait, your Board is managing 1,500 players with only **one full-time staff? That doesn’t seem like enough.**”*
-Benchmark Organization

*“We’re just **run by volunteers, and I don’t think that’s realistic anymore.** I think we need to have more paid staff”*
-Board Member

Hockey Specific Executive

Weakness

The GMHA's BOD and administration lack expertise in the area of hockey specific program development and management.

Implication

Duties including the oversight of teams, coaching development and skill development sit with the BOD. This not only causes lag time in other decision-making aspects, but can cause perceived gaps in the development plan to appear and become exhaustive.

Recommendation

Invest in a paid hockey specific executive who can remove the responsibility of development and coaching oversight from the BOD. Comparable organizations have created a Director of Hockey Operations or General Manager of Hockey position and recruited an executive that has both extensive hockey experience and local roots (see Burlington, Whitby, and Kitchener).

*"We **created** an **executive position for hockey development** for the sole purpose of **giving the Board more time to focus on big picture items** and to bring on a former local pro which enhances our **credibility.**"*
-Benchmark Organization



Board Duties & Transition Process

Weakness

GMHA lacks clarity in the specific responsibility for each role on its BOD. Additionally, reporting structures and transition processes between out-going and new members are inconsistent.

Implication

Without formal published duties for each role on the BOD, it makes it difficult for both members and the executive committee to identify and uphold expectations. Furthermore, without formally published duties, it makes it difficult to recruit as well as maintain a transition process that preserves or continues the work of previous boards.

Recommendation

- **Formal job descriptions and expectations for board members should be developed** and added to the organization's bylaws.
- It should be the **responsibility of each board member to track progress, key contacts, and other necessary information for GMHA projects** in a format that can be easily updated and transferred to new board members upon a term ending.
- Comparable organizations reported creating a board member welcome package, that includes key responsibilities, contacts, and progress reports for projects. **Outgoing board members are responsible for initiating new board members** with this information.

Recruiting Processes for Board of Directors

Weakness

As identified in the interviews with the GMHA's BOD, with the exception of the Treasurer position, there is a reliance on word-of-mouth recruiting for new board members rather than a formal recruiting and identification process.

*"We need some more **rigor** around what will **qualify you to be on the Board of Directors**"*
-Board Member

Implication

Without a formal recruiting process, it leaves the GMHA susceptible to lacking specific skills in its administration. A lack of appropriate skills can lead to additional strain on the already limited staff and resources. Further, reliance on word-of-mouth recruitment can cause members to further question the impartiality of the board. Additionally, through only word of mouth, it becomes more unlikely that impartial volunteers from the community will join the Board.

Recommendation

Create a committee focused on board member recruitment. This committee should be **bound by an agreed upon skills matrix** that best services the organization. Benchmark organizations have used such committees to recruit board members from non-traditional hockey groups in their communities. The GMHA adopting a similar practice is strongly encouraged to help improve the level of diversity within the organization.

Perceived Lack of Impartiality by Board

Weakness

There is a lingering lack of trust in the BOD displayed across all membership groups due to pre-pandemic issues and a perceived lack of impartiality. Currently, only one BOD member does not have an active player in the organization.

Implication

These types of perceptions of a BOD limit the ability for the organization to achieve total buy-in for decisions. As a result, the organization will remain stagnant in terms of efforts to improve and innovate. This type of environment can lead to wide-spread dissatisfaction and ultimately attrition amongst members.

Recommendation

Comparable organizations have **committed to a recruiting process that sources at least 25% of its BOD to be impartial**, with the executive committee being prioritized. The greatest source of impartial volunteers comes from families of graduated players, thus emphasizing the importance of establishing a strong alumni network.

*“From my experiences, **board members have their own agendas** and they are out for the interests of their kids/friends kids or kids friends. **No trust whatsoever**”*

-Parent

*Note: Similar quotes was provided numerous times by survey respondents.

*“It seems that the **board continues to struggle overcoming the controversies of past boards**. This leads to an ongoing battle with rumours that are out with the membership. These struggles continue... I don't think there's this universal fear of change, but more so **parent members fearing board members are continuing to push personal agendas which have hurt the organization** in the past.”*

-Board Member

Capturing Membership Feedback & Dispute Resolution Practices

Weakness

The chain of communication to bring an issue forward to GMHA administration is unclear to the majority of the organization’s members. Members have reported incidents of feeling unheard by the GMHA because responses to complaints and feedback were either delayed or never addressed.

“I have *no idea how GMHA handles issues with parents or bullying*”

-Parent

*Note: Similar quotes was provided numerous times by survey respondents.

Implication

There is perceived lack of understanding in who is accountable for addressing complaints and disputes filled with the GMHA. Without a clearly defined chain of communication and indication of who will be accountable for resolving disputes, major issues/ incidents (i.e., bullying) can go unreported.

Recommendation

- Commit to a **robust and transparent annual process of capturing feedback from members**. This should go beyond Coach Evaluation Surveys. The process should ensure that members feel heard (i.e standardized, universal response time for addressing feedback and concerns) and can see tangible updates being made to the organization that addresses their feedback.
- Specific to dispute resolution, the GMHA should update and publicize its reliance on the convenor model (i.e., include names of convenors on website). Rather than only rely on a fillable complaint form, **publish a flow chart with who is responsible for addressing complaints**.
- Benchmark organizations have added convenors for rep programming within their model, **where the role of the convenor is to act as a buffer between the complainants and the BOD, with one “Head Convenor” seat being on the BOD**. The Head Convenor reports to the Risk Management Director (see Whitby and Burlington). Adding greater emphasis to the convenor roles also provides a great start for volunteers who may be interested in becoming a future member of the BOD.



A NOTE ON FINANCES

While the purpose of this evaluation was not to financially audit the GMHA, it is worth noting that the organization maintains a strong financial position as registration and additional revenues have remained stable since returning from the pandemic. In fact, the 2023-24 season sees the GMHA expecting to increase its number of teams. However as discussed in the opening sections of this report the GMHA's stability is likely to be threatened by similar factors impacting comparable organizations around Southern Ontario. These threats must be addressed in the coming seasons, to preserve the financial stability of the organization. Across the province and nationally, hockey organizations have taken up a commitment to enhance the diversity of hockey at the grassroots level and curb the attrition taking place in the game.

In order to remove barriers to entry, a number of organizations have begun to leverage the financial capital they have been able to save due to years of stability in an effort to make the sport as attractive as possible. Some strategies that have been implemented and could be adopted by the GMHA include:

- Using the organization's reserve fund or decrease annual contributions to the fund in order to limit cost increases for house league and entry level players.
- Structuring the use of some revenues to further aid rep teams in covering some tournament and/or equipment costs as well as opening up roster spots for players who may be financially disadvantaged. There is particular interest by GMHA members to see the organization cover more costs with respect to jerseys and team apparel.

In order to supplement such expenditures, organizations have looked to add tournament hosting, alternative programming, and even off ice revenue streams. Opportunities for GMHA include:

- Hosting a house league tournament.
- Developing floor hockey or floorball participation opportunities (pay what can at the door as a charitable donation).
- Leveraging partnerships with the University of Guelph's varsity hockey teams to monetize extra skill development sessions.
- Off season fundraising through charity tournaments. The majority of members noted active participation in golf, baseball, and/or soccer; thus, charity tournament opportunities exist across multiple sports.

In the current environment, where youth sport organizations—especially, hockey organizations—are challenged with the attrition rates of their athletes and volunteers as well as the necessity to institute necessary culture changes the stability that GMHA has displayed should be commended. To maintain such stability, successfully implement the necessary culture changes, and become a model hockey association the GMHA must establish a future direction that sees the organization invest in enhancing its current levels of professionalization. The present evaluation of the GMHA’s internal practices and its position amongst other Southern Ontario minor hockey organizations is an excellent first step in enhancing the organization’s professionalization and overall future direction. Now, this essential first step towards becoming a model organization must be followed by action and a commitment to alternative thinking by GMHA leaders in order to successfully usher in change for hockey in Guelph.

As regularly demonstrated by notable studies, books, and popular press articles (see Ken Campbell^{6,7,8} and Scott Fitz Gerald⁹) minor hockey—particularly, in Southern Ontario—is big business. Hockey families, including those who participated in this project, annually report paying exuberant costs in order for their child(ren) to play the game. Therefore, expectations of these families have commonly shifted from simply pursuing recreation experiences to demanding the experience be coupled with the service levels displayed by companies producing premium products. Organizations that are regularly acclaimed as excelling in their service are regularly those who **seek and act** upon the consumer feedback they receive. As demonstrated by those who participated in this review of the GMHA, the organization holds a strongly committed and engaged membership group that wants to see the club improve for the future. This level of commitment and engagement is rare in most non-profit amateur sport organizations; thus, it would be a shame for this key resource to not be leveraged. GMHA leadership must determine how to leverage the heightened level of engagement within its organizations to further the expertise in leadership, creation of novel ideas to pursue, and access previously unattainable resources in order to better distinguish itself from the continuously rising number of organizations offering youth sport opportunities.

Routinely, amateur sport organizations who distinguish themselves based on service standards and/or unique program delivery are those that are able to chart a course for long-term survival in the ever-cluttering youth sport landscape. The recommendations offered in this report offer ideas that if implemented correctly will raise the standard of GMHA’s operation and programming above its direct competitors for the foreseeable future.

REFERENCES & RESOURCES

1. Angus Reid Institute. (2021, May 5). Game Misconduct: Canadians may love their hockey, but they also see serious problems with its culture. Retrieved from <https://angusreid.org/hockey-culture/>
2. Peter, A. (2022, Sept 14). Toxic masculinity is part of elite hockey. We need a culture shift. Canadian Broadcast Corporation. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/opinion-hockey-culture-toxic-masculinity-1.6580188>
3. Lehto, R. (2023, June, 20). An analysis of the 2023 Consumer Price Index basket update, based on 2022 expenditures. Statistics Canada. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/62f0014m/62f0014m2023003-eng.htm>
4. Canadian Olympic Committee. (2023). Canadian sport governance code. Retrieved from <https://nso.olympic.ca/canadian-sport-governance-code/>
5. Tennis Canada. (n.d.). Your coaches' credentials shouldn't be a mystery. Retrieved from <https://www.tenniscanada.com/safe-sport/>
6. Campbell, K. (2019, Jan 15). Kicking three seven-year-olds out of their league is a prime example of how screwed up minor hockey can be. The Hockey News. <https://thehockeynews.com/news/kicking-three-seven-year-olds-out-of-their-league-is-a-prime-example-of-how-screwed-up-minor-hockey-can-be>
7. Campbell, K. (2017, Sept 28). Minor hockey, major uproar: Controversy over cross-ice vs. full length for house-league kids. The Hockey News. Retrieved from <https://thehockeynews.com/news/minor-hockey-major-uproar-controversy-over-cross-ice-vs-full-length-for-house-league-kids>
8. Campbell, K. & Parcels, J. (2013). Selling the dream. How hockey parents and their kids are paying the price for our national obsession. Penguin Group.
9. Fitz-Gerald, S. (2019). Before the lights go out: A season inside a game on the brink. McClelland & Stewart.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

Daniel Wigfield, PhD

Daniel is a Postdoctoral Research Associate within the International Institute of Sport Business and Leadership at the University of Guelph. His research program and teaching focuses on organizational behaviour as it relates to optimizing the performance of amateur sport systems — especially, those servicing youth athletes.

Alexandrea Davidson

Alexandrea is a University of Guelph graduate, who has completed a Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting, and a Graduate Diploma in Accounting. While completing her studies, she competed on the University of Guelph Women's Varsity Ice Hockey team.

