



Standing Committee on Student Recruitment (SCSR)

OURF Chair's Report

Date of Report: November 22, 2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2023, the Ontario Universities Regional Fairs' (OURFs) comprised of 42 events across five Regions: Northwestern, Northeastern, Ottawa & East, Southwestern, and Central Eastern. We welcomed approximately 14,000 guests, a slight increase over our 2022 offerings. In addition to planning and implementation of these events, the OURF-WG worked to update existing and create new documents. These documents aided this year's WG in their planning and will streamline the process for future OURF-WGs.

This year's OURF structure incorporated much of the feedback from 2022, as we explored yet another iteration of the pilot initially proposed for the 2020 cycle. While that pilot recommended we offer fewer, larger events in central locations, the feedback from last year led to an increase in the number of events we offered (from 32 in 2022 to 42 in 2023) in response to concerns about access in some regions (Northwestern, Northeastern, and Ottawa & East) and capacity issues in others (Southwestern and Central Eastern). As a result, we were able to visit more Francophone communities and offer safer, less crowded events throughout the province.

The increased event offerings came with additional pressure on the OURF-WG, particularly Coordinators and the OUAC, who were left juggling multiple contracts for venues, hotels, chartered busses, etc. The cost of the OURFs also saw a notable increase, primarily due to the cost of chartered buses, which were added back to all regions, based on feedback from last year.

Daytime events were added in cities that were over-capacity in 2022. While this made evening events more manageable, there were still issues with volume at daytime events because of buses of students arriving at the same time. In many cases, teachers/counsellors pre-registered, but individual students did not; as a result, the expected number and actual number of attendees were vastly different, causing long lines at understaffed tables.

While we saw an increase in attendance overall, we experienced significant challenges with data collection using the OUEvents Pass (StriveScan). Overall, event scans were low due to a combination of factors, including, but not limited to: students being hesitant to sign up for StriveScan, limited buy-in from university reps, and issues with volume at busy fairs.

Below you will find a detailed summary of this year's OURF events and suggestions for future iterations.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as the OURF-WG Chair. Working alongside our provincial and OUAC colleagues has been extremely rewarding, and I am proud of the work we have accomplished together to support our students.



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OURF EVENTS – BY THE NUMBERS*

		Attendance (approx.)	Data Collection	Data Collection Participation Rate
Northwest				
Red Rock	9 – 10 a.m.	69		
Marathon/Terrace Bay	1 – 2 p.m.	122		
Hearst	9 – 10 a.m.	114		
Geraldton	1:15 – 2:15 p.m.	77		
Atikokan	9 – 10 a.m.	80		
Fort Frances	12:30 – 1:30 p.m.	182		
Kenora	9 – 10 a.m.	230		
Dryden	12:30 – 1:30 p.m.	168		
Thunder Bay	9:30 – 11:30 a.m.	574		
Northeastern				
Sturgeon Falls	10:30 – 11:30 a.m.	34		
Mattawa	2:15 – 3:15 p.m.	26		
North Bay	6 – 8 p.m.	100		
New Liskeard	11 a.m. – 12 p.m.	36		
Kirkland Lake	2:30 – 3:30 p.m.	26		
Timmins	6 – 8 p.m.	160		
Chapleau	10 - 11 a.m.	24		
Wawa	1:15 – 2:15 p.m.	16		
Sault Ste. Marie	9:30 – 11:30 a.m.	260		
Blind River	1:45 – 2:45 p.m.	70		
Sudbury	6 – 8 p.m.	500		
Ottawa and East				
Hawkesbury	8:45 – 10:15 a.m.	150*		
Casselman	12 – 2 p.m.	200*		
Orléans	5 – 8 p.m.	350*		
Cornwall	10 a.m. – 1 p.m.	250*		
Gloucester	5 – 8 p.m.	475		
Perth	10 a.m. – 1 p.m.	275*		
Nepean	5 – 8 p.m.	850*		
Pembroke	10 a.m. – 1 p.m.	300*		
Kanata	5 – 8 p.m.	550*		
Southwest				
Windsor	5 – 8 p.m.	393		



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London	10 a.m. – 1 p.m.	345		
London	5 – 8 p.m.	737		
Kitchener/Waterloo	10 a.m. – 1 p.m.	1194		
Kitchener/Waterloo	5 – 8 p.m.	780		
St. Catharines	10 a.m. – 1 p.m.	1201		
St. Catharines	5 – 8 p.m.	435		
Central Eastern				
Kingston	5 – 8 p.m.	467		
Belleville	5 – 8 p.m.	303		
Peterborough	10 a.m. – 1 p.m.	397*		
Peterborough	5 – 8 p.m.	266*		
Alliston	10 a.m. – 1 p.m.	900*		
Alliston	5 – 8 p.m.	641		

*numbers for event are approximate, as we did not have volunteers as door counters.

Region	Cost of Buses (bus + hotel for driver)	Total Cost (incl. bus + hotel)	Bus % of Total Cost	Number of Universities on the Bus
Northwestern Ontario	\$16,355.00	\$17,219.11	95%	22
Northeastern Ontario	\$11,236.92	\$13,496.92	83%	22
Ottawa and Eastern Regions	\$12,250.23	\$14,763.25	83%	19
Southwestern Ontario	\$10,198.85	\$21,462.77	48%	19
Central Eastern Ontario	\$10,069.71	\$18,020.50	56%	19
Total Cost	\$60,110.71	\$84,962.55	71%	

WHAT WE LEARNED:

LOCATIONS AND TRAVEL

Overall:

- Frequent expressions of appreciation that we visited these communities!
- Most events were very well attended across the province. Counsellors in Northern communities were, for the most part, thankful for the opportunities for their students.

Feedback, Suggestions and Things to Consider:

- **Northwestern:**
 - Running the Thunder Bay event during the day received criticism. Supporters



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were upset they were unable to attend and counsellors were upset they were responsible for bussing students to the event.

However, feedback from Coordinators was that the daytime event was busier than last year's evening event.

- Consider adding Kapuskasing back to Northwestern week. Hearst was added this year, but counsellors in Kapuskasing expressed concern about the ability to bus students to Hearst.
- Hotel blocks at chain hotels posed a challenge, meanwhile, concerns about safety/security at other hotels were expressed by reps.
- Bussing worked well and should continue to be the method of travel for future OURF events in this region.
 - However, the bus driver was concerned about driving hours and drove erratically to make up time, which is a huge concern.
- **Northeastern:**
 - Espanola and Manitoulin Island schools would like to be included on the OURF.
 - Running the Sault Ste. Marie event during the day received criticism from counsellors. Perhaps Timmins and Sault Ste. Marie could rotate hosting an evening event every-other-year.
 - Bussing worked well and should continue to be the method of travel for future OURF events in this region.
- **Ottawa & East, Southwestern, and Central Eastern:** Buses were added back to these regions based on feedback from last year that buses were preferred. However:
 - None of these weeks saw 100% participation in bussing from university reps
 - Rep contact information was only provided by those on the bus; therefore, the Bus Captains were unable to share information with all reps attending the events in advance.
 - Reps driving to events on their own often arrived later than the bus, and in some cases, after the event had started.
 - In some cases, the number of reps on the bus by the end of the week was approximately 50% (Central Eastern had 12 reps on the bus back to Toronto at the end of the week).
 - Schedules were built to fit bus driver hour allotments per day. In some cases, this meant inefficient scheduling, later than desired start times, etc.
 - In Central Eastern in particular, the bus driver was uncooperative, rushing reps off the bus, leaving during the events despite being asked for access to the bus for materials, etc.).
 - Some reps expressed frustration about an inability to leave the venue or being restricted to specific meal options between fairs (particularly in Southwestern and Central Eastern regions with daytime and evening fairs on the same day).
 - Some reps expressed concern that people on the bus were visibly sick, but not masking.
 - Bussing required that materials be shipped to each venue in advance. We saw issues with shipments arriving too early, being sent to the wrong location, too many boxes being shipped, boxes going missing, etc.
 - Some venues asked for a list of which schools had shipped items, but we were unable to provide that as the OURF-WG, given that each school was responsible for their own shipping.
 - The cost of chartering buses was substantial; in all cases, the bus and hotel



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costs for the driver totaled approximately 50% of the total cost of the week or more.

- Recommendation:
 - For the reasons noted above, the OURF-WG recommends we remove buses from the Ottawa and East, Southwestern, and Central Eastern regions. Bussing should remain the standard for Northwestern and Northeastern regions given the extensive driving and unique conditions.

VENUES

Overall:

- Venues generally served our purposes, but there were some challenges relating to the initial booking process in some cases.

Feedback, Suggestions and Things to Consider:

- **Ottawa and East:** The mix of high schools and community venues seemed to work well within this region. In response to feedback from 2022, the schedule better served both Anglophone and Francophone communities.
 - Recommendation:
 - Daytime events in high schools were less busy than anticipated and could be shortened in future years.
- **Southwest:** Daytime events were generally much busier than evening events, due to schools bussing students in to attend. Days with two events (daytime and evening) were met with mixed reviews. While the split schedule allowed the crowds to disperse across two events, the timing meant reps were working during both lunch and dinner, with an “awkward” break in between events (often unable to leave the location because of the bus).
 - Recommendations:
 - In regions where two events are deemed necessary (London, Waterloo, and St. Catharines), consider shortening the evening event to 6 – 8 p.m.
 - In St. Catharines the volume of people during the daytime event warranted a larger space. Partway through the event, the space was opened up from one court of the gym to two, which helped with crowds. In the future, a larger space should be used from the outset.
- **Central Eastern:** Events were quite slow, with the exception of the daytime event in Alliston. This region was visited last (mid-November) and lower attendance could be attributed to timing/students already having accessed information.
 - Recommendation:
 - The Nottawasaga Inn in Alliston was a significant improvement over the Barrie venue in 2022. However, the volume of people we saw during the daytime event could still warrant a larger space. The Coordinator for this region exhausted all venue options within Barrie, so a larger space at the Nottawasaga Inn is recommended.
- **All regions:** Allowing universities in the regions we visited to have first right of refusal to host was introduced this year, based on positive experiences hosting at universities in 2022. In total, we hosted 15 events at 11 universities across the Northwestern, Northeastern, Southwestern, and Central Eastern regions. The day-of event experience at all university venues was well-received; however, booking these spaces presented



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some challenges.

- Recommendations:
 - A point person from that University's Recruitment team should be designated to facilitate booking to avoid dealing with multiple units (e.g. Athletics, Parking, Catering, Custodial, Legal, etc.). In cases where there was someone in Recruitment facilitating these booking, the process was much smoother and could be completed quickly. Where the Coordinators/OUAC were dealing with multiple departments within a University, we saw significant delays and miscommunication.
 - A hard deadline for confirmed space should be set for March 2024, at the latest. This year we saw Universities who agreed to host, but were unable to confirm space until late summer. In the event the space fell through, we would not have had time to book another space of adequate size, and the delayed timeline directly impacted our ability to promote these events.

COMMUNICATION AND DATA COLLECTION

Overall:

- Large crowds indicate that people found out these events were happening – that's good! There were some gaps in understanding regarding the size, scale, and scope of these events in some communities.

Feedback, Suggestions and Things to Consider:

- **Communication:** Despite increased efforts from the OUAC to clarify size/scale of these events, there still seems to be confusion as attendees were expecting the events to have OUF-level staffing dedicated for their region. Some feedback received indicated disappointment that the event was simply one/two rep(s) per school at a table providing general information.
In other cases, counsellors expressed that they found out about these events too late to coordinate busing, despite a save-the-date being sent in May directly from the OURF-WG and multiple communications from the OUAC in late-summer/fall.
 - Recommendations:
 - If these events, in the format we are able to realistically offer, are not meeting the needs/expectations of guests, should they continue to be offered?
 - If we choose to continue the events, the OURF-WG Chair could use spring Dialogue as an opportunity to promote the events and set reasonable expectations for size/scale.
- **Data Collection:** The OUEvents Pass (StriveScan) was also used to collect registrations for all Regional Fairs events. The OUAC provided one pop-up banner per region advertising StriveScan and encouraging guests to sign up, which was posted at the entrance to each event space. Where possible, volunteers at the door encouraged people to sign up as they were entering. Table-top tent cards were also provided for each university's table, to allow guests to sign up once inside the event, if necessary. Each university rep was expected to have StriveScan setup on at least one device for the duration of each fair so students could have their QR codes scanned when visiting



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their booth. Some challenges were noted:

- Inaccurate pre-registration data, particularly at daytime events where a teachers/counsellors would register themselves, but arrive with a whole bus of students
 - In some cases, pre-registrants were as low as half the number of people we saw attend a given event.
- Last year's report recommended a data collection method that allowed for pre-registration data to be collected/shared. While StriveScan had this capability, in practice, it did not meet our needs as expected.
- A lack of registration from students
 - Students unwilling/unable to sign-up when asked (some cited a lack of data/wifi on their device)
- Busy fairs made it difficult to scan after each interaction (problem with volume)
- Varied "buy in" from universities; some did not use the platform at all
- Lack of training among reps/confusion as to how to use StriveScan

PLANNING PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall:

- In general, those who provided feedback were happy with the OURFs and the work that was done by coordinators, bus captains, and the OUAC to make these events happen. Still, some areas for improvement have been identified to streamline the process and deliver a better experience for all involved in planning and implementation.

Feedback, Suggestions and Things to Consider:

- **OURF-WG Involvement:**
 - Moving forward, we should make a point of setting clear expectations for what is involved in sitting on the OURF-WG as a Coordinator. The lift is becoming increasingly more onerous, and requires frequent/timely communication with other Coordinators, the OURF-WG Chair, and the OUAC.
 - This year we saw a few OURF-WG members find new jobs, which meant they could no longer fulfill their Coordinator roles.
In the future, a plan should be in place for individuals who leave the OURF-WG. At minimum, that individual should provide a status update of their responsibilities to the OURF-WG Chair and work with the other Coordinator for the region to ensure all responsibilities are covered.
- **Scheduling:**
 - If hosting daytime events:
 - Explore a plan to stagger bus arrival times. In almost all cases, there was a rush of people at the start of the event, causing long lines. The end of the daytime event was often quite slow, after all buses left around the same time.
 - Consider reducing the evening event to 2-hours given smaller crowds.
 - Ensure volunteers are available at each venue to staff doors, count attendees, encourage data collection, etc.
 - Some locations had volunteers, others relied on reps taking turns at the door when they had additional staff available – thank you for doing that!



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- Establish a “set-up required by” time for each event.
 - In some cases, crowds were lined up 30+ minutes early, but reps were not arriving until 5 – 10 minutes prior to event start.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- This year we avoided booking OURFs/OUIS events on the same night, which worked well for staffing. Additionally, Ottawa & East, Southwestern, and Central Eastern weeks were scheduled later in the fall, after OUF and busy PIE weeks, with staffing considerations in mind; however, we did see lower attendance in some areas, which could be due to the later dates.
 - Recommendation:
 - Book two regions in the same week, beginning in mid- to late-September. This change would allow for all OURF events to be done before the busy PIE calendar and could also allow universities to use OURFs as a training opportunity for new reps.
- While some schools sent multiple reps to handle large crowds, many did not, causing long lines/wait times for students at busier events.
 - Recognizing this may not be possible given staffing considerations at individual institutions, it is worth determining how we can disperse the crowds, reduce wait times, etc.

Sincerely,

Courtney Keogh -- OURF Chair, Standing Committee on Student Recruitment