

The Rebrand Process Summary

- Rebranding OMAA has been an objective since 2021.
- Summer-Sept 2025 New draft Strategic Plan developed by the Board.
- Oct-Nov 2025 Rebrand Working Group Formed.
- 14 Nov 2025 RFP issued and sent to 17 firms with municipal or NFP experience. Q & A forum held 25 Nov. RFP closed on 3 Dec with 12 submissions. Initial evaluation/ short-list (Don Shropshire and Scott Vokey) 3-8 Dec. Rebranding Working Group starts evaluation 12 Dec. Video interviews with three shortlisted proponents 16-18 Dec. Winner ([Pilot PMR](#)) selected Dec 22.
- Jan 2026 revised strategic plan approved by the Board.
- Jan 2026: Kickoff/ Brand Discovery. Discovery revealed the following:
 - Strengthening OMAA's public presence means ensuring that the Association reinforces the trusted, peer-based value that members rely on most.
 - The Association is no longer simply a professional network. It is becoming a career-long anchor for leaders navigating transition, disruption, and reinvention. OMAA must design itself not just around roles, but around *careers in motion*.
 - Growth cannot be accidental. OMAA must actively signal who belongs, who is welcome, and what kind of leadership community it is becoming.
 - If OMAA is to carry influence beyond its immediate membership, it must position itself around leadership outcomes rather than job descriptors.
 - OMAA must actively reflect and support the next generation of leadership or risk becoming aligned with a version of the profession that is already receding.
 - Education must be seen as a core mechanism through which the Association sustains leadership quality, confidence, and relevance over time.
 - The name must change: the acronym, especially Administrator, are problematic.
- Feb 2026: Website Survey finds site is a utility not a destination.
- Feb 2026: Brand Positioning Development and Review.
- 9 Mar 2026: Board met to approve new name in principle.
- 26 Mar 2026 Visual identity reviewed by RWG → requested additional options. Revised visual identity approved by RWG 10 Apr 2026.
- 15 Apr 2026 Brand Book Developed. Apr-May 2026 book, visual identity, and key messages refined. Video developed.
- 21 May 2026 Rebrand Presentation and Special Name Change Resolution approved by the membership at the AGM.

Civic Ontario builds upon the rich legacy of OMAA and extends itself to those operating at the centre of civic systems. The core functions remain in place. New items to be added.

The Rebrand Process Explained in Detail

Rebranding OMAA was an objective in the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan. It was carried over as the top priority in the new strategic plan

Strategic Goal #1, Objective #1 Set Standards for Leadership in Ontario's Broader Public Sector:

Rebrand OMAA to reflect its leadership authority. OMAA will engage in a full rebrand - including updated naming structures, visual identity, and marketplace positioning - to reflect the Association's evolution into the premier institution for executive leadership. This rebrand will signal clarity, confidence, and a bold new presence within the public-sector ecosystem.

A Rebrand Working Group reflecting the array of members and career stages was established in Fall 2025 to guide this work. Second VP Daniel Kostopoulos acted as Chair and was joined by Antonietta Minichillo (ACAO, Member), Brad McRoberts (Retired Member), Elana Arthurs (CAO, Member), Lori Bowers (ACAO, Member), and Rob Adams (CAO, Board Member).

After a competitive RFP Process, Pilot PMR was selected to lead this project in late 2025.

Pilot PMR conducted a discovery process in January and February 2026. This consisted of an extensive environmental scan, review of existing brand collateral, plus lengthy interviews with members of the Working Group and a representative sample of these key stakeholders:

- Aspiring CAOs
- Members In Transition
- Members
- Members/ Interim CAOs
- Retired Members
- Academics
- Association Partners

The Brand Discovery presented in late February 2026 found six defining realities shaping OMAA's future:

- 1) Municipal leadership is becoming more exposed, complex, and consequential
- 2) Career paths are shorter, more mobile, and increasingly intentional
- 3) Leadership education is now continuous — not episodic
- 4) A generational and demographic transition is reshaping the profession

- 5) OMAA's distinct value lies in trusted peer leadership, not technical scope
- 6) OMAA's current public expression — including its name — no longer reflects this reality

These realities point to a clear conclusion: choosing not to act is itself a strategic choice. In a period of heightened pressure and transition, standing still risks limiting OMAA's influence.

Brand transformation, why now

The ambitious and forward-looking strategic plan signals a desire to elevate its role, strengthen its relevance, and extend its influence.

A profession that carries the weight of everyday life

Unlike many executive roles, municipal leadership cannot choose its lines of business. It must manage dozens of unrelated, complex, highly regulated services — transparently, publicly, and under constant scrutiny. This reality gives the profession a unique authority and an equally unique vulnerability.

The paradox of invisibility and responsibility

The term “CAO” lacks public meaning, and “Administrator” creates cognitive dissonance when compared to more familiar leadership titles such as “CEO.” As a result, the distinction between governance and operations is often blurred by elected officials and the public alike. At the same time, public servants have experienced a long erosion of reputation: caricatured as risk-averse, bureaucratic, or disconnected, despite working under conditions that demand resilience, judgment, and ethical leadership.

This tension is intensifying — not easing.

Several forces are reshaping the municipal leadership landscape. The introduction of Strong Mayor powers has altered long-standing governance dynamics, increasing political pressure on operational leadership and compressing decision-making timelines. Public expectations for service delivery continue to rise, even as fiscal constraints, staffing shortages, and regulatory complexity increase. Freedom-of-information requirements, public scrutiny, and social media amplification mean decisions are not only made in public — they are replayed, dissected, and second-guessed.

This is not a profession becoming simpler. It is becoming more exposed, more demanding, and more consequential.

Average time in role is declining, in many cases to under four years. Career paths are increasingly marked by movement, disruption, and uncertainty. Contract negotiations, political turnover, and shifting council dynamics mean stability cannot be assumed.

Municipal leadership is no longer a linear career with long tenures and predictable progression. It is a turbulent leadership journey that requires resilience, support, and continuity beyond any single role.

External research by CAMA, Colliers, StrategyCorp, and Thomas Thayer (MPA) underscore three realities:

- 1) Leadership pressure is increasing, not stabilizing
- 2) Career volatility is now structural, not episodic
- 3) The need for trusted peer institutions grows as formal protections weaken

A generational transition is underway

Ontario is on the cusp of a significant leadership turnover across municipalities. A large cohort of senior municipal leaders is nearing retirement, while a new generation is intentionally preparing to step forward. This emerging cohort differs in important ways:

- They are more formally educated, more intentional about career development, and more confident in their leadership identity.
- They expect mentorship, peer connection, and leadership development — not just technical guidance.
- They are more diverse — in gender, background, and worldview — and they expect to see themselves reflected in leadership spaces.
- They are not “falling into” municipal leadership. They are choosing it.

Diversity is no longer a peripheral issue

Women and younger leaders described navigating environments that still reflect an older, male-dominated leadership culture. Representation matters — not symbolically, but practically. At the same time, this is not about exclusion or displacement. It is about evolution — ensuring the profession remains relevant, attractive, and credible to the leaders municipalities will depend on next.

The Association’s core value is human, not transactional

OMAA matters because it is a safe, trusted peer environment — a place where leaders can speak candidly, learn from shared experience, and find support in moments of pressure, transition, or failure. Education, programming, and events are also central to OMAA’s value — and members are looking for ongoing professional development that keeps pace with

change, addresses emerging issues, and reflects the realities of modern public sector leadership. The members value practicality, clarity, and action.

The municipal association space is crowded. The opportunity is not to compete head-to-head. It is to differentiate by focusing on leadership, judgment, peer counsel, and a system-level perspective.

Organizations that represent senior public-sector leadership increasingly avoid defining themselves by job function. Instead, they position around leadership, public value, and system-level impact. Organizational names signal relevance, authority, and openness in crowded, acronym-heavy environments.

Strategic Implications

Strengthening OMAA's public presence does not mean shifting away from members. It means ensuring that the Association's outward leadership reinforces — rather than replaces — the trusted, peer-based value that members rely on most.

The Association is no longer simply a professional network. It is becoming a career-long anchor for leaders navigating transition, disruption, and reinvention. OMAA must design itself not just around roles, but around *careers in motion*.

Growth cannot be accidental. OMAA must actively signal who belongs, who is welcome, and what kind of leadership community it is becoming.

If OMAA is to carry influence beyond its immediate membership, it must position itself around leadership outcomes rather than job descriptors.

To remain relevant and credible, OMAA must actively reflect and support the next generation of leadership — including greater diversity in voice, perspective, and representation — or risk becoming aligned with a version of the profession that is already receding.

Education must be seen as a core mechanism through which the Association sustains leadership quality, confidence, and relevance over time.

When institutions outgrow their signals

The primary signal of an organization is its name. Sixty years ago, descriptive names worked. Today, they do not. The context in which OMAA operates has shifted materially. The current name reflects an era when labeling was sufficient. In a crowded, acronym-heavy landscape, names must now work harder: to signal relevance, intent, and distinction.

The word “administrator” no longer reflects how senior municipal leaders see themselves — nor how OMAA intends to engage beyond CAOs. It narrows perception at precisely the moment the Association is seeking to extend its influence into the broader public sector leadership ecosystem. It creates friction with executive directors, commissioners, and public-sector leaders who do not identify with administrative framing.

“Association” implies a closed membership group. As OMAA seeks to engage partners, collaborators, and adjacent leaders, this framing becomes limiting.

The future name must:

- Signal leadership, not administration
- Support engagement across the broader public sector
- Be credible to current CAOs and aspirational to future ones
- Stand apart from acronym-driven institutional sameness
- Feel contemporary without being casual
- Enable influence, partnership, and visibility

OMAA Member Website Survey

A survey conducted to gather input to better understand how members use the site, what works well, and where improvements may be helpful in February 2026 revealed the following:

- Most members visit the website 1-3 times a month, primarily for events, the job board, and general info. Site seen as a utility not a destination.
- Satisfaction scores are moderate.
- Many noted *The Observer* newsletter is their primary touchpoint with strong satisfaction scores.
- Desire for the site to reflect the community not just the organization. Include member spotlights, initiative profiles, photo galleries, and community boards.
- Existing website is utilitarian.
- New website should feel more like a leadership institution that leads with identity not navigation. Bolster the career stages content.

The Brand Strategy document prepared by Pilot PMR at the end of February 2025 recommended the following:

The Association is being called to:

- Clarify the leadership role of CAOs

- Strengthen governance literacy
- Support leaders through turbulent career cycles
- Sustain leadership continuity across communities
- Broaden engagement with other public-sector apex roles

This is not a departure from the Association’s roots. It is a maturation of them.

Core Narrative

We represent and strengthen the executive leadership that sustains communities as functioning, accountable public institutions. We provide a professional environment where senior municipal executives can engage with peers who understand the scope of that responsibility. We support leaders through transition, reform, and complexity, contributing informed perspective shaped by experience rather than ideology.

When executive leadership is strong, these institutions remain resilient — even in periods of economic strain, governance reform, or crisis. Decisions are informed by experience, stability is preserved, and the services residents depend on continue without disruption.

Distinct from elected officials and technical professional bodies, we are dedicated to the practice of executive leadership: leading complex organizations, advising councils, sustaining institutions, and ensuring communities operate reliably and effectively.

Pilot presented two names for the RWG to consider. The RWG deliberated on this for a while before endorsing **Civic Ontario. Executive Leadership for Strong Communities**

The Strategic Rationale

Civic Ontario names the civic responsibility at the heart of executive municipal leadership.

It serves as a clear institutional frame for the breadth of that role — civic in scope, structural in consequence. Executive leaders operate at the intersection of governance, infrastructure, finance, risk, service delivery, and public trust. The name reflects the scale of that mandate within Ontario’s public landscape.

Civic speaks to the architecture of public life — the systems, institutions, and shared responsibilities that allow communities to operate with stability and integrity. It reflects governance, institutional continuity, and community well-being without entering partisan terrain. It situates the Association within the enduring public structures that outlast electoral cycles and policy shifts. The word signals seriousness, responsibility, and structural leadership.

The tagline, **Executive Leadership for Strong Communities**, clarifies scope and consequence. It grounds the name in the practice of executive leadership — not political

direction, not technical specialization, but the system-level responsibility to lead organizations, advise councils, sustain institutions, and ensure communities work. Together, the name and tagline communicate institutional maturity, professional legitimacy, and long-term relevance.

Civic Ontario is the leadership home for Ontario's senior municipal executives — those responsible for ensuring communities work. Its members lead the institutions at the heart of daily life: delivering essential services, safeguarding public trust, and sustaining continuity across electoral cycles. Civic Ontario strengthens executive leadership practice through disciplined peer exchange, practical learning, and governance insight — reinforcing the institutional leadership communities depend on.

This is why connection at the executive level matters. Connected to peers. Connected to broader perspectives. Connected to how decisions move across systems and into communities. Decisions are stronger. Perspectives are broader. And leadership is better equipped to meet the complexity of the systems it serves. Because the strength of communities depends on the strength of the systems behind them — and the leaders who guide them. Because the strength of Ontario's communities depends not only on institutions — but on the judgment, alignment, and capability of the leaders who guide them. Civic Ontario exists to support that leadership.

Approving the New Name

The Rebrand Working Group made a few changes to the brand strategy and recommended Civic Ontario to the Board for consideration. The Board approved the new name in principle on 9 March 2026. Appropriate domains were secured and the proposed name was kept confidential to prevent any bad actors from causing disruption. A special resolution was added to the Annual General Meeting, and members approved the name change on 21 May 2026.

Next Steps

The new visual identity including website and social media channels will be launched in summer 2026.

Members will be consulted about how to best implement the other objectives in the strategic plan over summer and fall 2026.