



WHERE THE CITY'S TOP EXECUTIVES GO TO TALK

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Ottawa's most exclusive networking clubs

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It's lonely at the top. That's the sentiment repeated over and over by Ottawa's top business networking clubs, though each prefers not to be labeled as such.

These organizations offer members the chance to spend time with their peer group and share business secrets they wouldn't tell anyone else, even their spouses. Confidentiality is key.

Some of what goes on behind closed doors has nothing to do with business. It's about developing as an individual and a family member as much as a businessperson.

This focus on personal support means some organizations actually prohibit members from doing business with each other. Other groups actively promote – and even track – deals between members.

OBJ took a closer look at some of the city's leading networking organizations, each of which has varying levels of exclusivity and guidelines for member behaviour, providing a glimpse of what goes on behind closed doors.

BUSINESS NETWORK INTERNATIONAL: WHERE 'GIVERS GAIN'



"If I give business to you, you'll give business back to me."
– *Jocelyne D'Aoust*, executive director of BNI Eastern Ontario/Western Quebec, sales representative with Coldwell Banker Coburn Realty.

Founded in: 1985 in the United States; 1995 in Ottawa.

What is it: BNI is an international professional marketing organization specializing in word-of-mouth referrals. Presently, BNI has more than

135,000 members in more than 45 countries, with 285 chapters across Canada.

Who can join: Members must be certified, licensed or trained in the field they represent, and must be working full-time. Anyone can apply to be a member, but not everyone who applies is accepted.

What they do: There are approximately 20 chapters in Ottawa to accommodate for duplicate professions – only one real estate agent, for example, can be in each chapter to prevent internal competition. Members meet to exchange business referrals and are expected to generate business for their chapter members.

What sets them apart: Members attend mandatory weekly meetings and can have their membership revoked after missing three meetings in six months. Substitute members are permitted to attend in their absence. Business between mem-

bers is encouraged, expected and monitored every month.

Local head count: Approximately 700 members in eastern Ontario and western Quebec.

Membership dues: Would not disclose because it changes regularly.

High-profile members: Denis Brisson, senior manager of Send Out Cards.

Fun facts: BNI's philosophy is "Givers Gain," and each member carries around the business cards of their chapter colleagues. When BNI first began, it provided the option to attend either weekly or biweekly meetings. After realizing that biweekly meetings generated 52 per cent less business, weekly attendance became mandatory.

ENTREPRENEURS' ORGANIZATION: BUSINESS CONFIDENTIAL



"Our vision is to create the most influential community of entrepreneurs in the world." – *Govindh Jayaraman*, president of EO Ottawa Chapter, CEO of GreenStop Inc.

Founded in: 1987 in the United States.

What is it: EO is a global business network of more than 8,000 business owners in 121 chapters and 40 countries.

Who can join: Members must be the owner, founder or co-founder of a company with more than \$1 million in annual sales, and must currently hold that position. If they exit or lose their job, they must find another applicable position within two years before their membership expires.

What they do: EO allows members to share experiences, lessons and challenges about their business and personal lives, creating a community of entrepreneurs. Members attend monthly forum meetings and the chapter organizes about 10 learning events a year. Regional, national and

international conferences also happen periodically.

What sets them apart: Members are divided into sub-forums of between six to 10 people who meet monthly and are forbidden from doing business with each other. This is to promote open discussion of threats and challenges to their mutual businesses. Complete confidentiality is required of all discussions.

Local head count: 37 members whose combined annual sales add up to more than \$222 million.

Membership dues: \$1,350 with a one-time initiation fee of US\$800.

High-profile members: Mia Hempey, president of CTE Solutions; Terry Appleby, founder of PowerScout Hockey; Trevor Cook, CEO of Ezipin.

Fun facts: The average member is 42 years old and leads a company with 23 employees and average annual revenues of \$6.1 million. MIT hosts an entrepreneurial master's program in which only EO members can enrol. EO offers an accelerator program for businesses with more than \$250,000 in annual sales, with the goal of promoting the company until it can reach \$1 million and above in sales.

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (TEC): DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP ACROSS THE COUNTRY



"There are conversations not safe to be had with board members or spouses about the isolation, the dark nights, the big decisions." – *Carlos Fox*, chair of TEC Ottawa, president of Intento International Inc.

Founded in: 1957 in the United States; 1985 in Canada.

What is it: TEC is an executive leadership development program for professional and personal

growth. Its international community includes more than 14,500 members in 16 countries.

Who can join: Membership is by invitation only. Business leaders, senior executives and entrepreneurs are welcome to contact TEC to inquire about membership.

What they do: "We're trying to develop leadership across the country," Mr. Fox says. Monthly full-day group meetings feature guest lecturers and problem-solving sessions. Members are divided into forums depending on their position; Mr. Fox runs four separate groups in Ottawa. Business is discouraged between members of the same forum and all discussions are confidential.

What sets them apart: Members have access to an international database of TEC contacts to make global connections and are also granted one-to-one mentorship with their chair member each month.

Local head count: More than 80 members.

Membership dues: Would not disclose, but Mr. Fox says CEOs of larger companies pay around \$15,000 annually.

High-profile members: Bruce Lazenby chaired two groups before taking his current position as CEO of Invest Ottawa.

Fun facts: TEC was recently renamed Vistage in the United States to avoid confusion with the word "tech." Mr. Fox says TEC Ottawa hopes to add more chair members to accommodate forums for small business owners.

OTTAWA EXECUTIVES' ASSOCIATION (OXA): FOR DECISION-MAKERS ONLY

"Our members use meetings as opportunities to build trust. You tend to refer people that you know and trust." – Jennifer Baker, executive co-ordinator of OXA, administrative manager of Documents Etcetera.

Founded in: 1936.

What is it: OXA is an elite networking organization founded to share confidential business leads and information among member firms. It is affiliated with the International Executives Association.

Who can join: Only one member firm can represent each of the business classifications specified by OXA. Only one real estate agent may be part of the group, for example. Members must be business executives with decision-making power. "When you talk business with them, they have the power to strike a deal," Ms. Baker says.

What they do: Members meet weekly for networking. Attendance is not mandatory, but 75 per cent attendance is expected. Business between members is encouraged.

What sets them apart: OXA claims to be the longest-surviving business association in eastern Ontario.

Local head count: Between 65 to 70 members.

Membership dues: A one-time initiation fee of \$500 is followed by annual dues of \$303.85 and a monthly fee of \$113.30 to accommodate meetings and lunches.

High-profile members: Member firms include Browns Cleaners, Armstrong and Richardson, Emerald Links Golf & Country Club and Jubilee

Fine Jewellers.

Fun facts: Members meet each Thursday from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Once a month, the meeting is held in the evening at one of the member firms' offices.

THE RIDEAU CLUB: OTTAWA'S FIRST MEMBERS' CLUB

Founded in: 1865 by Sir John A. Macdonald and George-Étienne Cartier, predating Confederation by 22 months.

What is it: The Rideau Club is a meeting place for leading men and women from business, government and other parts of the community.

Who can join: Current members must propose and second any new memberships. Prospective members must also have two reference letters from current members.

What they do: The club hosts a variety of events including guest speakers, panel discussions, book launches, embassy evenings, musical performances, dances and culinary demonstrations.

What sets them apart: Members have access to private meeting, dining and banquet rooms, a billiards room, a card game area, a library and a YMCA Fitness Club.

YOUNG PRESIDENTS' ORGANIZATION: FOR THE YOUNG AND MIGHTY



"It's the anti-Chamber of Commerce. Members need to understand it's not a business network. It's a place that's going to help you develop yourself." – Francis

Pomerleau, chapter chair of YPO Ottawa, senior vice-president of Pomerleau.

Founded in: 1950 in the United States.

What is it: YPO is a global network of young chief executives, connecting 18,000 members in more than 100 countries.

Who can join: Members must be under the age of 45, must be the chief operator of a company, must supervise at least 50 employees and have an enterprise value of US\$10 million.

What they do: "Leadership through education" is its slogan. Chapters organize various social, training and educational activities. YPO also hosts several international events and conferences. Members are divided into forums of 10 that meet monthly to exchange ideas and work on developing the three pillars of YPO: the individual, family and business.

What sets them apart: After turning 50, members can no longer be part of YPO but can graduate to the World Presidents' Organization, founded in 1970.

Local head count: Around 40 members.

Membership dues: Would not disclose.

High-profile members: Jeff York, CEO of Farm Boy; Ron Tomlinson, president of R.W. Tomlinson.

Fun facts: YPO Ottawa was established only five years ago, and Mr. Pomerleau says it hopes to eventually expand to 50 local members.