

## WHY THIS INITIATIVE? WHY NOW?

Waterloo Region has one of the most dynamic non-profit communities in the country, part of a national sector that is larger than Canada's construction and hospitality industries combined. Hundreds of small and large organizations strengthen our region, bringing smiles to our children, culture to our diverse community, hope to the less fortunate, and opportunities to our citizens. Non-profits touch a part of all of our lives, each and every day.

The work of these multi-faceted organizations could have an even greater impact if they had better support. Non-profits are vastly under resourced. Most lack the funds for professional development that could improve the skills needed to cultivate long-term change and innovation. And compared to their for-profit counterparts, there is less encouragement or opportunity to take the kind of risks that lead to growth and success. The current economic climate only exacerbates the challenges. Recent reports predict that as many as 20% of Canadian non-profits will close due to the downturn; some because of funding, many because they will fail to adapt and innovate.

The timing has never been more critical to invest in the future capacity of non-profits, social ventures, and the people that lead them. Capacity Waterloo Region (CWR) will fill the gap with a five-year pilot project to support our community changemakers. In one of Canada's most prosperous regions, we believe social innovation should benefit from the same type of resources that have helped cultivate our for-profit sector's notable innovation culture. By building an enabling environment that strengthens, connects and celebrates our social leaders, we will help them realize their full potential.

The timing is right. Funders are encouraging new approaches to tackle persistent sectoral challenges. The Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation are early investors. Other organizations including the United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries, the United Way of Kitchener-Waterloo & Area, the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation and the Volunteer Action Centre are strong supporters. Our business and education communities are listening too, ready to participate in results-oriented solutions. RIM has endorsed the project and Communitech, our regional association for technology companies, will play a vital role providing in-kind support and helping to forge links with the business sector. Wilfrid Laurier University is our other major partner, delivering a professional and practical education program to build the capacity of our local boards.

## BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN LEADERS, BOARDS AND SECTORS

CWR is a new project to fuel social innovation in our non-profit sector by delivering resources to support the people and ideas that lead to social change. Hundreds of diverse non-profits and social enterprises will benefit from new cross-sectoral collaborations, enhanced leadership skills and networks, and improved resiliency and sectoral impact.

The project consists of three main initiatives. Each does not stand alone. With the Executive-Director-in-Residence as the anchor, all three form an integrated capacity building model that research shows to have greater and more sustained results than stand-alone approaches.

RIM is committed to ensure that Waterloo Region non-profit organizations have the support they require to continue to serve our community. **Capacity Waterloo Region** is addressing this need head-on. We enthusiastically support their endeavours.

*Dave Jaworsky, Senior Director,  
Corporate Relations, RIM*

1. **Executive-Director-in-Residence (EDIR)** – Part coach, mentor and sounding board, the EDIR will utilize a depth of leadership experience to offer non-profit leaders and social entrepreneurs advice and connections to a crucial support system that can accelerate organizational innovation and personal growth. Supported by a small fund to access specialized external resources, a cross-sectoral advisory panel, volunteer project teams, and a mentorship initiative. *Partners to date: Communitech. Launching fall 2009.*
2. **Peer Learning Network** – Providing focused learning environments for peers to identify and support concrete approaches to increase collaboration, innovation and leadership in the non-profit sector. Supported by peer gatherings with for-profit CEOs and featuring a Social Innovators Roundtable. *Partners to date: Communitech, Volunteer Action Centre. Launching fall 2009.*
3. **Board Governance Education** – Improving the quality and performance of non-profit board governance through practical training that identifies best practices, applies them to the boardrooms of participating non-profits, and promotes the value of innovation and leadership for organizational wellbeing. Supported by a tuition assistance program delivered by Governance experts. *Partners to date: Wilfrid Laurier University. Launching November, 2009.*
4. **Social Ventures** – offering unique programming geared to enabling the launch and growth of social ventures – both non-profit and for-profit. This is a one-year complementary initiative to our three main programs, featuring educational events, outreach activities and expertise to support the many innovative ideas being developed by our community’s entrepreneurial individuals and organizations. *Partners to date: Communitech. Launching August, 2009.*

Capacity Waterloo Region is an innovative initiative. I know that as these programs are developed, they can be shared and replicated in other parts of the province.

Ginny Dybenko  
Dean, Laurier School of Business  
& Economics

All of this work will be done by collaborating with key organizations to avoid duplication and develop complementary resources. A five-year focus will allow us time to demonstrate meaningful change, capture knowledge, and share it widely. We see great potential for a successful model to be adopted by other communities in Ontario and across Canada.

## BACKGROUND

The idea for CWR was seeded by community leaders and local funders (Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation, Ontario Trillium Foundation and United Way of Kitchener-Waterloo & Area) who recognized a need to build on our community’s strengths to achieve more innovative breakthroughs and ensure the ongoing vitality of our growing community.

In 2008, CWR was accepted as a project of Tides Canada Initiatives, a Canadian charity and leader and innovator in philanthropy. CWR is led by a three-member steering committee of Tim Jackson (Partner, Tech Capital Partners), Steve Farlow (Executive Director, Schlegel Centre for Entrepreneurship at Wilfrid Laurier University) and Stephen Swatridge (CEO, KidsAbility), together representing the business, education and non-profit sectors. Our work to date has involved countless others: more than 50 community interviewees, focus groups, curriculum specialists and several support organizations. CWR has completed an initial feasibility and partnership exploration phase and is now moving in to a new and exciting stage of development and implementation with secured initial funding.