



Strategic Plan

2021-2024

1.0 Introduction

The Social Development Centre Waterloo Region was created in 1967 with the goal of cultivating community knowledge and advancing social justice in the region. With the increase for basic needs supports and responses to complex individual and community challenges such as mental health and addictions, social justice work and community based social planning have been regarded in two contradictory ways: as a non-essential service in terms of investment and as a necessary litmus test for equity in decision-making. A challenge or an opportunity? We see it as an opportunity to transform the ways in which we work together, deepen the understanding of the context we live in and ensure presence and representation of voices traditionally excluded from decision-making due to marginalization, stigma and exclusion.

This three-year strategic plan outlines the core goals, activities, metrics, and actions for the SDCWR to create this transformation and amplify voices with lived expertise. The plan begins with an overview of the SDCWR's core value and goals, an assessment of the current state of the SDCWR, the aspirational future state of the SDCWR three years from now, and the indicators and action plan required to move from the current to the aspirational state.

1.1 Core Value

We embody the phrase “nothing about us without us”. We believe that lived experience should be the basis for policy and decision-making, and that grassroots and community-based solutions are the foundation of social justice and collective action.

1.2 Core Goals

1. Lived experience voices are heard, valued, and incorporated into local policy and program decisions that affect them.
2. People with lived experience have access to the information and support they need to begin sharing their voices.
3. Grassroots organizations have access to support and shared space that are necessary for them to operate and grow.
4. The Social Development Centre as an organization is resilient, healthy, adaptable, and accountable to its mandate and members.

Where do you think the SDCWR has the most impact?



The top 5 answers were:

- Raising voices
- Supporting unsheltered folk
- Community research
- Advocacy
- Disability justice

2.1 Current Activities and Projects

- Shared Platform: providing a communal financial platform for grassroots organizations so that they may grow, build partnerships, and succeed. For example: donations processing for A Better Tent City.
- Lived Expertise: fostering lived experience groups and supporting those with lived expertise to thrive. For example: eviction prevention support for precariously housed people.
- Social Enterprise: developing an enterprise model where people with lived expertise are paid for sharing their expertise in a sustainable manner.
- Civic Hub: creating a shared space for grassroots organizations to sustainably operate, connect, and grow.
- Social Infrastructure: building infrastructure to foster connection and community. For example: Festival of Neighbourhoods.
- Information and Technology: making community information more accessible and complete through technology. For example: managing the local Healthline database.
- Community Research: partnering with academic institutions to create accurate and actionable research that supports the community. For example: mapping of displacement study.
- Income Supports: providing one-on-one support to those requiring assistance with income supports. For example: tax clinics, OESP administration.

2.2 Operational Assessment

What are the Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses & Dangers of our current operations?

Strengths:

- SDC leadership is extremely strong. ED comes with knowledge, drive, diplomacy, and strong mentorship skills
- SDC board members are highly engaged and supportive.

- All staff and board members have a clear understanding of the mission and are driven to support it.
- The relationship landscape is strong. Building partner relationships, particularly with grassroots and community groups is a key strength. Building trust and operating with diplomacy. This landscape results in a high reputation in the community.
- Subject matter expertise, such as community information.
- Several board and staff members bring a strong institutional history due to long-term involvement with the SDC.
- SDC operations are adaptable and flexible to changing community needs. Staff are open to creativity and taking the hard road if necessary.
- SDC operates with passion, respect, caring, drive, and fearlessness.

Weaknesses & Dangers:

- Opportunities for additional projects often exceed available staff. There is a risk of burnout and turnover. Significant time is allocated to 'fighting fires' rather than planned and sustainable operations.
- Hiring is often reactionary rather than proactive before a crucial need. This continually puts SDC behind the curve.
- Marketing and communication, fundraising, grant-writing, and business skills need improvement.
- SDC's broad mandate and wide-mesh project filter stretch the organization thin.
- The difficulty in explaining the SDC affects recruitment and retention of volunteers.

Opportunities:

- A social enterprise builder on staff could help with improving SDC's business mindset and fundraising to improve capacity. Social enterprise and social investment venture capital are potential future funding options.
- A communications/marketing staff member could improve community engagement and potential funding opportunities.
- An office manager could reduce administrative burden on ED and other staff.
- Professional development opportunities for staff. Potentially aligning with other organizations that have a similar focus and facilitating shared learning.

3.0 Aspirational Future State



Where do we want to be in three years, and how will we get there?

The SDC's Core Goals remain the same:

1. People with lived experience have access to the information and support they need to begin sharing their voices.
2. Lived experience voices are heard, valued, and incorporated into local policy and program decisions that affect them.
3. Grassroots organizations have access to support and shared space that are necessary for them to operate and grow.
4. The Social Development Centre as an organization is resilient, healthy, adaptable, and accountable to its mandate and members.

In three years, we will have accomplished the following for the core goals:

Core Goal 1: Lived experience groups supported by the SDCWR are thriving, have access to sustainable funding to support consultation, and are engaged in decision-making processes by local power players.

Core Goal 2: Projects to improve accessibility and navigation of community information are established and growing, SDG engages with community research projects through academia and local governments.

Core Goal 3: The Civic Hub and Shared Platform are sustainable, accessible, and established resources for grassroots organizations across Waterloo Region.

Core Goal 4:

- Commitment to Indigenization and anti-racism: The SDCWR has deep engagement with Indigenous peoples and anti-racist organizations, including staff, board and volunteer members, and partnerships. The SDCWR continuously transforms its operations, practices, minds, and hearts to include Indigenous principles and knowledge systems and anti-racist principles.
- Financial sustainability: The SDCWR operates as a social enterprise, generating sustainable revenue and reducing dependency on grants.

- Capacity: SDC staff are compensated fairly for their work, have access to professional development, have a reasonable amount of work, and enjoy their work. Communications, office management, and fundraising capacity is increased to a sufficient level.
- Community engagement: SDCWR has significant operations in Cambridge and the Townships. The SDCWR is visible and recognized by local power players and grassroots organizations as a crucial community connector.

4.0 Indicators and Action Plan



How will we reach our goals and measure progress towards them?

Core Goal 1:

- Year 1: 3 lived experience groups, minimum \$2000 in funding for peer internships and lived expertise. Background research for social enterprise.
- Year 2: 3 lived experience groups, minimum \$5000 in funding for peer internships and lived expertise. Model developed for social enterprise.
- Year 3: 3-5 lived experience groups, successful social enterprise pilot and on track for sustainability.

Core Goal 2:

- Year 1: Support system navigation app is finalized, Healthline database continues to be accurate and accessible. Community research background work and applications.
- Year 2: Support system navigation app in use, new community research project(s) begin.
- Year 3: Support system navigation app updated and continues to be in use, community research project(s) complete and results disseminated.

Core Goal 3:

- Year 1: Civic Hub reconvenes to pre-pandemic level, Shared Platform grows to 5 members
- Year 2: Civic Hub grows membership by 15% and is financially sustainable, Shared Platform grows another 5 members, based on the results of the feasibility study.
- Year 3: Civic Hub is sustainable and grows membership if space available, Shared Platform grows to 15 members.

Core Goal 4:

- Indigenization, anti-racism and anti oppression
 - Continuous: Ongoing education, reflection, and action to Indigenize and engage with Indigenous peoples.
 - Creation of safer space at SDC and Civic Hub and ongoing engagement and training around 2SLGBTQ+ groups and communities.

- Financial sustainability
 - Year 1: 1.5 times higher revenue compared to previous year. Social enterprise research and plans complete.
 - Year 2: 2 times higher revenue than baseline year. Social enterprise is in pilot phase.
 - Year 3: 3 to 5 times higher revenue than baseline year. Social enterprise is operational and approaching sustainability.
- Capacity
 - Year 1: Funding generated to sufficiently support existing positions, pilot initiatives to focus operations and streamline activities.
 - Year 2: Funding generated to temporarily support communications, fundraising, and administrative support, develop policy for acquiring new projects.
 - Year 3: Permanent communications & fundraising position established. No staff member is underpaid or working excess additional hours. Sustainable capacity.
- Community engagement
 - Year 1: SDCWR begins operations in Cambridge, conducts first post-pandemic Festival of Neighbourhoods.
 - Year 2: SDCWR grows operations in Cambridge and begins operations in the Townships, grows community engagement events and activities such as the Festival of Neighbourhoods.
 - Year 3: SDCWR operations are equitably distributed across Waterloo Region, SDCWR is approached by grassroots organizations and power players for support and collaborations.

4.1 Issues Tracking

In line with the operational assessment and survey to members, here are the top 5 issues to track, externally and internally, to ensure the SDCWR is addressing the most pressing community needs and maintaining organizational health. Every six months the three-year strategy cycle, a workshop among staff, board, and volunteer members will occur to discuss these issues and a brief report will be developed for tracking.

Internal

- Seeking funding and grants
- Putting out fires – reactive rather than proactive
- Applying a business mindset to operations
- Wide filter for taking on new initiatives
- Limited capacity

External

- Affordable housing
- Food security
- Addictions
- Social Isolation
- Anti-racism