

Civic Engagement and Grassroots Organizing through the COVID-19 Pandemic

A CASE STUDY OF
CIVIC HUB WATERLOO REGION

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are deeply thankful for the participation of members of the Social Development Centre Waterloo Region (SDCWR) community and Civic Hub Waterloo Region (Civic Hub) partner groups in this project. Without your many contributions, this work would not have been possible. The input of the project Advisory Committee was crucial in sharpening our focus and keeping us on track. We appreciate your ongoing engagement and commitment over many months, and your patience with our learnings as we navigated this process together.

The work of Civic Hub and its partners takes place on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee Peoples, and on land marked by the broken promise of the Haldimand Tract, treaty territory pledged to Six Nations of the Grand River by the British and sold to settlers. The dynamics of colonialism are deeply rooted in the systems of exclusion and oppression, and we hope through this work to highlight the work community members are doing to challenge these systems.

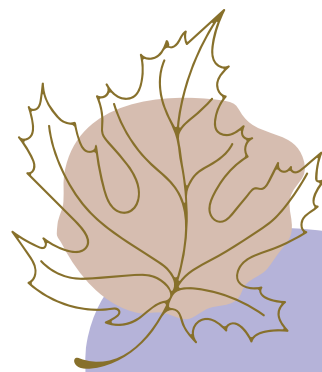
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Thanks to Joel Thomson for designing this report.



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Civic Hub Waterloo Region (Civic Hub) is a grassroots social justice hub housed within the Social Development Centre Waterloo Region (SDCWR). Civic Hub's membership includes over 30 grassroots groups and small not-for-profits. Partner groups do diverse work united by a commitment to growing civic engagement and social inclusion among the communities they serve. In this report, 'civic engagement' refers to the work of grassroots groups to advance the demands of equity-deserving communities that experience exclusion from political and social systems. Civic engagement is crucial in supporting social inclusion, through representation, capacity building, resource sharing, and advocacy.

This community-engaged research project was developed to respond to a need to document the important work being done by partners through Civic Hub and to understand better how equity-serving grassroots groups have been affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The project included an Advisory Committee and a core research team. The research team completed semi-structured interviews with 20 individuals representing 26 Civic Hub partners, asking questions about partners' activities, their use of Civic Hub, experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and future aspirations and goals of partner groups. This report highlights major findings from this research including:

Partner groups are doing essential community-building work across a range of social justice areas, especially among communities often excluded from social, political, and economic systems. The work of partners is rich in scope, encompassing advocacy, events and performances, community building, and direct service provision.

Civic Hub is a space where partners can connect through shared values including equity, social justice, community knowledge, and diversity. The presence of shared values has provided the foundation for collaboration among Civic Hub partners, addressing several ongoing needs of partner groups, including fiscal and governance support, as partners navigate challenges common to grassroots organizing.

The impacts of COVID-19 were different for partner groups depending on their mandate and the social location of members. For some partners and for the Civic Hub itself, COVID-19 launched a period of intensified activity, marked by a shift towards new forms of mutual aid and community-building, particularly among equity-deserving groups left out in the pandemic response. For other partners, necessary activities, projects, and goals were put on hold. For everyone, the emergence of the pandemic created heightened stress, uncertainty, and loss mixed with new opportunities for action.

Partner groups and Civic Hub need each other to realize their significant aspirations and goals. The partners are looking to the future with hope, with diverse plans spanning from long-term aspirations to more immediately achievable goals. Partners have specific and practical suggestions regarding how Civic Hub can effectively support their necessary work in the future.



CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
CONTENTS	6
CIVIC HUB: A SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT HUB AT THE HEART OF THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE	8
From Community Council to Civic Hub	9
How the Civic Hub Works	9
THE FILLING THE GAP RESEARCH PROJECT	10
Research Process	11
FINDINGS	12
Partner Groups are Doing Essential Community Building Work	12
Activities	13
Successes and Challenges for Grassroots Groups in Waterloo Region	15
CIVIC HUB IS A SPACE WHERE PARTNERS CAN CONNECT THROUGH SHARED VALUES	16
Sustaining Connection with Civic Hub	17
Civic Hub Challenges	18
The Role of Partnership in Civic Hub	19
WORKING THROUGH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC	20
Disruptions for Partner Groups	20
Disruptions for Civic Hub	22
Adapting to New Realities	22
GRASSROOTS GROUPS ARE LOOKING TO THE FUTURE WITH HOPE	23
Partner Group Hopes	24
Partner Group Plans	24
Recommendations	25
APPENDIX 1: REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH	28
APPENDIX 2: PARTNER GROUPS OF THE CIVIC HUB WATERLOO REGION	29
APPENDIX 3: ADVISORY COMMITTEE LIST	31
APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	31



CIVIC HUB: A SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT HUB AT THE HEART OF THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

The Social Development Centre Waterloo Region (SDCWR) is a not-for-profit organization located in Waterloo Region. The mission of the SDCWR is to advance social justice in Waterloo Region through the core values of participatory democracy, community knowledge, diversity, and relationship building. SDCWR was built by community leaders dedicated to improving support and services for underserved populations, such as youth, families, seniors, immigrants, and ethnocultural communities. This work has resulted in the incubation of organizations such as Community Legal Services, Meals on Wheels and More, and OneROOF.

Civic Hub Waterloo Region (Civic Hub) is a grassroots social justice hub housed within the SDCWR. At the heart of the Civic Hub program is support for social change through autonomous

community-led initiatives, rooted in lived experience and expertise. Civic Hub's membership includes over 30 grassroots groups and small not-for-profits that work across a range of fields such as environmental justice, democratic reform, arts and culture, anti-poverty, anti-racism, human rights, newcomer support, peace and nonviolence, spirituality and wellbeing. Civic Hub has a specific focus on supporting the civic engagement of people with lived experiences of social inequality toward the achievement of equity and social justice. The goal of this research project is to document the important work happening through Civic Hub and its partners and provide some useful information for SDCWR and Civic Hub to support future planning in a world changed by COVID-19.

// What is Civic Engagement?

Civic engagement refers to how individuals, groups, and communities participate in the governance of social, political, and economic systems. Often researchers measure civic engagement through individual actions like voting, donating to a political party, or signing a petition. But civic engagement includes collective activities that contribute to the reinvigoration of community capacity and social transformation. This type of civic engagement, which advances the demands of equity-deserving communities, includes activities that impact social services and public policy. Collective forms of civic engagement are linked to the concept of social inclusion: the full participation of individuals and collectives in the social, economic, political, and cultural systems of society, necessary for realizing the rights of citizenship. Civic engagement hubs, like Civic Hub, are crucial in supporting social inclusion through capacity building, shared resources, and the development of outreach and educational tools. Social engagement hubs like Civic Hub also support grassroots and activist initiatives working to 'fill the gaps' in social support created by unjust and unequal systems.



From Community Council to Civic Hub

The Civic Hub program is the “brainchild” of former SDCWR Executive Director, Trudy Beaulne. Between 2014 and 2016, the SDCWR ran a program called the ‘Community Council’ where community leaders met with the SDCWR Board of Directors to discuss common issues and foster collaboration. The Community Council’s Leadership Table met monthly to discuss urgent issues affecting the work of community leaders, like homelessness, racism, and human rights. Many of those who attended these meetings found them valuable as spaces to learn about others engaged in similar work, collaborate, and develop actionable steps to achieve common goals. Through these conversations, it became clear that there was a need for a free, accessible space and shared resources among grassroots organizers. Two key needs identified early were the cross-recruitment of membership and cross-promotion of activities to increase the visibility of work being done in the grassroots community.

Building on the concept of the Community Council, in collaboration with advocacy groups and initiatives, in June 2019, SDCWR secured federal seed funding to launch Civic Hub as a pilot project.

The goal of the Civic Hub was to provide resources to partner groups to build capacity through knowledge sharing, cross-promotion of activities, cross-recruitment of membership, and low-cost space for events, meetings, and work. Partner groups remained independent and responsible for their own governance, but through Civic Hub, partners could book space at SDCWR’s office in St. John the Evangelist Church, and access SDCWR resources. From the perspective of the SDCWR Board, Civic Hub could grow into an umbrella program to support collaboration, capacity building, and development among social justice-oriented groups at the grassroots level.

During the first year of the Civic Hub program, SDCWR made significant developments to the Civic Hub program. Some previous activities, like monthly meetings called Partner Exchange, continued, but there was also the development of new practices including formal onboarding for new partners and the development of a membership and governance model.



How the Civic Hub Works

The structure of the Civic Hub is flexible to accommodate partner group needs. Partner groups fill out a short partnership agreement. Partners agree to contribute to the Civic Hub through financial and/or non-financial means, commensurate with their capacity. Partner groups who use the Shared Platform program pay an administrative fee, which goes directly to its

operation. Importantly, no partner is excluded from Civic Hub based on their ability to contribute. There are currently 33 partner groups of the Civic Hub. They range from recent start-ups to well-established community advocacy organizations. Each partner is unique in the work they do, and their approach to social justice in the Waterloo Region.

¹The Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo was established in 1967. In December of 2015, the Social Planning Council decided to change its name to the Social Development Centre of Waterloo Region.

²<https://www.waterlooregion.org/content/about-us>

³<https://www.waterlooregion.org/lived-expertise>

⁴See Appendix 2 for a full list of Civic Hub partners.

⁵The language of “filling the gap” is indebted to conversations about the work of Civic Hub and partner groups with Heather Majaury and Aleksandra Petrovic.

⁶SDCWR 2019 Activity Report: <https://www.waterlooregion.org/sites/default/files/2019ActivityReport.pdf>

// Shared Platform

The Shared Platform program is supported through the SDCWR's financial infrastructure with fiscal sponsorships and/or charitable donation partnerships. A fiscal sponsorship is a model of collaboration between partners, one of which has charitable status and the other does not. This relationship allows grassroots groups and not-for-profits without charitable status to access funds from large funding bodies, while the sponsor, at the same time a partner on the project, has the fiduciary responsibility. Charitable donation partnerships benefit partner organizations, as donations are distributed towards mutually agreed activities, while donors receive charitable tax receipts. Groups and organizations that choose to be part of the Shared Platform, are not required to become partners of the Civic Hub program; however, most decide that there are many benefits to joining Civic Hub such as the opportunity to amplify their impact and become more connected to other grassroots groups.

THE FILLING THE GAP RESEARCH PROJECT

In March 2020, less than a year into the launch of the Civic Hub, the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the globe, creating significant and ongoing challenges for the Civic Hub program and the Civic Hub partners. The closure of physical meeting spaces disrupted regular work. Necessary Public Health measures meant that partners had to adapt their activities and adjust to an ever-changing regulatory context. Moreover, the closure of social services, even if temporary, created significant gaps in social support for people living on low income, people with disabilities or chronic health conditions, those experiencing homelessness, newcomers, and other communities. These gaps directly affected the work of the Civic Hub and individual partner groups, both as members of equity-deserving groups and as collaborators working on local social justice initiatives.

This community-engaged research project was developed to respond to a need to document the important work being done through the Civic Hub program and to understand better how grassroots partner groups of Civic Hub have been affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The project was funded through a 12-month Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant. The grant funding enabled a project coordinator, Lia Forma, to join the research team of Laura Pin and Aleksandra Petrovic for the grant's duration. All the research team members had engaged with Civic Hub in some way before the project started, through partner groups and/or their work at SDCWR.



Filling the Gap: Timeline

Funding received	Jun 2022
Project coordinator hired	Aug 2022
Advisory Committee established	Sep-Oct 2022
University research ethics approval	Oct 2022
Research interviews	Nov 2022–Jan 2023
Collaborative analysis	Mar-Jul 2023
Community report	Sep 2023

Research Process

The research team relied on an Advisory Committee consisting of four representatives of the partner groups and, and two individuals whose groups were not part of the Civic Hub. Advisory Committee members met regularly during the project and were paid for their advice and guidance. The Advisory Committee provided valuable feedback on the research process every step of the way, and the research team is incredibly grateful for their ongoing support.

In collaboration with the Advisory Committee, the research team developed a semi-structured interview guide, asking questions about Civic Hub partners' activities, their use of the Civic Hub, their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and future aspirations and goals of partner groups. Interviewees were recruited by the project coordinator through the Civic Hub email list and by the coordinator speaking with potential participants. In total, 20 interviews were completed with individuals representing 26 of the 33 Civic Hub partners, as some interviewees were active

with more than one group. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The research team then reviewed a small number of transcripts and used this information to develop a codebook of emergent themes which were validated with the AC. Once the codebook was finalized, the open-source program Taguette was used in coding the interviews. Preliminary results were presented to the AC for discussion and a draft version of this report was shared with both the AC and all interviewees for feedback. The input of the AC was valuable in ensuring that the findings reflected the diverse experiences of partners with Civic Hub, as well as drawing the research teams' attention to aspects of the findings to emphasize in the project report. Further details about the research can be found at the end of this report in Appendix 1: Reflection on the Research, Appendix 3: List of Advisory Committee Members, and Appendix 4: Interview Guide.

FINDINGS

Consistent with the four themes of the interview questions, we have grouped our findings into four sections. The first section shares information concerning the activities of partner groups. The second section discusses how partner groups engage with Civic Hub. The third section discusses how COVID-19 affected the work of Civic Hub and

the partner groups. Finally, the fourth section of our findings explores some hopes for the future of Civic Hub, as well as some specific suggestions for future planning of supports and programs.

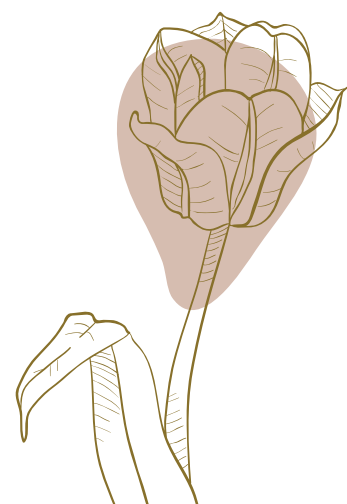
Partner Groups are Doing Essential Community Building Work

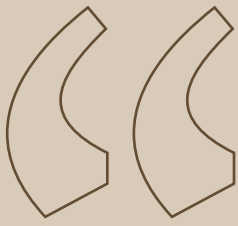
Many of the partner groups identified having a core membership of 3-5 people. They defined this as the most consistent “working” members. However, they also indicated that if all members were included (volunteers, partnerships, staff, board of directors, etc.), the groups would be much larger (30-50 people). As funding is an ongoing struggle for grassroots groups, most, if not all members said that they were not paid for providing support and organizing activities.

Civic Hub partner groups are active in diverse areas, which we have grouped into four clusters:

1. Social Justice and Equity – partners with a focus on racial justice, disability justice, anti-poverty, homelessness, or reducing other forms of social inequities for equity-deserving groups.
2. Arts and Culture – partners with a focus on supporting expression through visual arts, film, music, performance, and other types of creative expression, including those focused on cultural expression and intercultural exchange.
3. Environmental Sustainability - partners with a focus on climate justice, food security, and/or environmental protection.
4. Community Wellbeing and Support – partners focused on supporting people and communities through the provision of educational services, income security services, conflict management, settlement support, low-barrier counseling, and other similar activities.

These four clusters often intersected in the activities of several partner groups. For example, the Waterloo Region Community Garden Network is part of the environmental sustainability cluster and focuses on addressing food insecurity issues directly by providing opportunities for people to grow their own food. They also offer opportunities for intercultural exchange, with diverse ethnocultural groups sharing food growing practices, while working towards a more environmentally sustainable community. The Waterloo Region Community Garden Network also provides settlement support through the participation of newcomers in shaping its gardening projects. In another example, Kaleidoscope is a community theatre laboratory, falling into the arts cluster. At the same time, Kaleidoscope adopts a feminist framework through which people with lived experiences of homelessness develop stories to revisit and rescript experiences using anti-oppression theatre techniques. Thus, in addition to falling into the arts cluster, the work of Kaleidoscope intersects with the social justice and community wellbeing clusters as well. The overlapping and intersecting aspects of many Civic Hub partners speak to the richness of the work partner groups do in the community.





I feel like, the system is so broken that grassroots is where it's at, like, we want something to happen

- Mary Neil, KW Junk Music

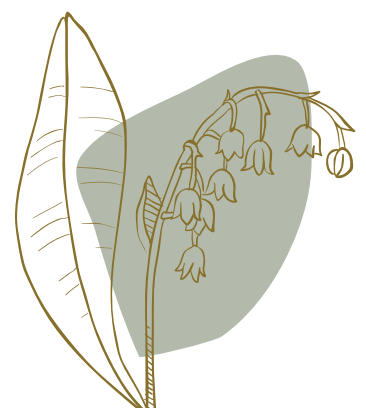
Activities

As mentioned above, Civic Hub partner groups engage in a diverse range of activities. These activities support civic engagement and social inclusion for people underrepresented in formal social and political systems through public advocacy, service provision, events and performances, and community building.

Advocacy: Partner groups engage in public advocacy in a variety of ways. Some types of public advocacy work that Civic Hub partners are engaged in include initiating and supporting campaigns, holding rallies, petitioning, canvassing, developing and distributing advocacy materials, participating in consultations, writing letters to politicians, educating politicians and policymakers, and hosting events to share information and inform the public. For example, as one interviewee from Basic Income Waterloo Region explained:

When there are elections, that's when we're busy if you want to call it that because we do send out literature to every person that's running, and if they want more information, we would go speak to them. We did do a thing where we reached out to every Liberal Member of Parliament for our Region and we had a meeting with all of them and explained what basic income was and tried to determine their level of support.

In another example, the Unsheltered Campaign hosted a town hall before the 2022 municipal election, inviting all candidates for the municipal elections to attend and share with the public their plans for addressing unsheltered homelessness.

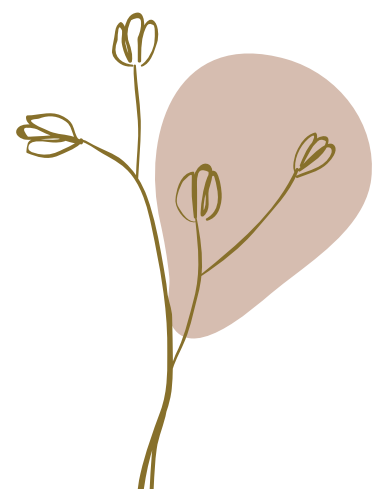


Service Provision: Partner groups engage in direct service provision such as providing free and low-cost counseling, income security services, food, clothing, educational opportunities, and age-based programming for youth and older adults. Some partner groups have created new spaces for shared learning, developing tutoring programs, hosting formal classes, and hosting informal learning opportunities. For example, as part of their mandate to provide short- and long-term support to people who are Black-identifying and/or racialized, Kind Minds Family Wellness offers a variety of free services and educational opportunities. In the wake of the wave of attention to anti-Black racism in early 2020, an interviewee from Kind Minds Family Wellness described how the group held space for Black-identifying community members, explaining, “We started off with counseling, right? And then we went to culturally grounded groups because not everyone wants to do one-on-one.” Kind Minds Family Wellness also offers cooking classes, art classes, leadership workshops, and a book club for caregivers and youth focused on Black authors. Other groups including ALIV(e), Food Not Bombs, and the Unsheltered Campaign shared stories about providing direct support to people in need through the offering of food, clothing, and other necessities.

Events and Performances: Partner groups discussed hosting many types of events, some designated for their own members/community, and some public. Types of events include festivals, exhibitions, shows, celebrations, conferences, workshops, and arts-based performances. For example, Waterloo Region Climate Initiatives hosts film screenings on topics related to adopting a plant-based lifestyle and mitigating climate change. KW Junk Music diverts items from landfills to make instruments and create songs, “as a way to bring forward marginalized voices in a more compelling medium.” Songs produced by Junk Music have then been performed at local festivals and featured in museum exhibitions. In another example, members of the partner group ALIV(e) performed in the play “Living Below the Line”, which hosted five free performances in the Waterloo Region to disrupt stereotypes and share stories about living below the poverty line.

Community Building: Finally, partner groups described many activities designed to build connections and mutual support networks. For some groups, this was a part of their mandate. For example, the African Women’s Alliance Waterloo Region was created to respond to a need for a collective space for African women resettling in the Waterloo Region, to talk about common barriers and share resources. This led to initiatives by the African Women’s Alliance, in partnership with Peace for All Canada, focused on uplifting the African community including homework support, cultural navigators for families in schools, and a cooking program in collaboration with KW Community Coop Kitchen. Similarly, an interviewee from the Sudanese Canadian Association of Waterloo Region and Wellington County discussed how the group fostered community building through regular events, to assist Sudanese newcomers to Canada:

So, we try to help them overcome the various cultural shocks. And we do have some social like community gathering, we celebrate our religious events. So, in two months, we have Ramadan. So, we have a potluck where the community gathers and eats together and we introduce each other, especially for the new arrivals to our area....[also] a program for the kids and youth, women as well, and men, just like entertainment programs and education as well, to get them ready for work and involving them in the community in general.



Successes and Challenges for Grassroots Groups in Waterloo Region

The brief overview above is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the wealth of activity emerging through the work of the Civic Hub partner groups. Partners are engaged in necessary community-building work that contributes to the wellbeing of diverse constituencies in Waterloo Region, while also elevating perspectives often excluded from social and political structures. Many Civic Hub partners are led by people with lived experience of poverty, homelessness and housing insecurity, racial exclusion, disability, and migration to name a few areas of activity.

In interviews, partners shared about their successes. They were particularly proud of the external recognition they received. For example, multiple groups have been nominated for (and won) community awards in recent years. Kind Minds Family Wellness was nominated for an Outstanding Agency award by United Way Waterloo Region after only three years of service. In recent years, members of the People's Action Group received the Colin Plant Award and the Kindred Spirit Award. Other interviewees discussed internal successes that helped support and expand their group's work. The Age of Majority Singers have successfully completed fundraisers to cover studio and guest performer costs. The Community Company has created an "enterprise fund", which is a seed fund that they fill from their own surplus funds for grassroots groups with charitable status to start up social enterprises. Other successes include building membership, sustaining important activities, and creating spaces for community engagement. Many groups were able to identify learnings from past activities, that perhaps did not go as well as they had hoped. These learnings allowed them to grow their practice and helped them gain success in future activities.

At the same time, partner groups were open about shared challenges. Partner groups noted an absence of stability, including fluctuations in group membership, group funding, and activity level as well as reliance on unpaid labour. Groups navigated these challenges through flexibility, adaptability, and cooperation, for example by pooling resources or adjusting programming. However, the lack of stability impacted partners' ability to take on, and sustain, all the work they wanted to do.

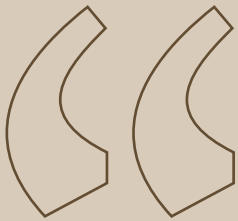
Some partner groups identified homogeneity among their members as a challenge they were working through. For example, an anti-poverty group noted their group did not reflect the diversity of people living with poverty. They believed they needed to diversify to gain a more well-rounded perspective on the issues they were most concerned with. Moral stress, conflicts between partner groups' own values, and external values held by institutions or society at large, also came up in many interviews. Funding criteria were a source of moral stress for some groups, particularly requirements from funders to meet measures of success that may have little to do with the partner group's own values and goals. As mentioned previously, grassroots groups often don't have "deep pockets [full of funding]." As a result, partners are reliant on the small grants they do receive, which creates a power imbalance between groups and funders. For example, one interviewee discussed how in meetings with funders it was hard to explain that "I can only do my part. I can't force people from their houses. It is better to give us money to experiment than you know, just be open to honest to God results. But if you're going to tell me my group must deliver 100 people I can't... and I'm not able to do this, so I'm not going to. It's not about the money." For this interviewee, reporting requirements concerning participation numbers created a great deal of stress, as these were prioritized over other measures of value and success like the inclusion of diverse participants or how participants themselves reported benefits from an activity. Other groups shared the struggles of navigating sensitive topics where their values and the values of other organizations did not necessarily align: "Negotiating different opinions on it, you know, part of the learning and just you know, trying really hard not to make enemies because I figure after this is over, we still have to work together."

The final challenge groups discussed was burnout. As with many grassroots spaces, the topic of burnout was nearly universal. Burnout is related to the intensity, passion, and whole-heartedness driving partner groups' work. This intensity, combined with the turbulence and uncertainty of the grassroots ecosystem, was a source of stress. Despite the challenges grassroots community groups face, including burnout, every interviewee shared their hopes for the future, which will be discussed later in the report.

CIVIC HUB IS A SPACE WHERE PARTNERS CAN CONNECT THROUGH SHARED VALUES

The grassroots ecosystem is a difficult one to navigate and sustain. The need for collaboration and governance support is vital within this community. That is why many groups joined the Civic Hub. Partner groups primarily found out about Civic Hub in three ways. The most common way was through a previous relationship with a staff member at the SDCWR. Some partner groups heard

about Civic Hub through other partner groups. And finally, some partner groups heard about Civic Hub through their social networks. No group indicated they found out about Civic Hub solely through the media, social media, or website. Rather, personal networks and relationships were important in developing initial awareness of Civic Hub.



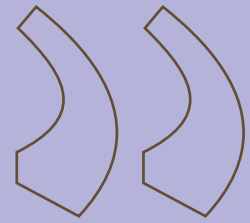
It's so beautiful because that sustains us because we can share resources, we can collaborate on certain projects and initiatives together. And they've been doing this for many [years]... So, it's good to connect with people who have been doing this for a long time

- Ajirioghene Evi, Kind Minds Family Wellness



The research team noted three themes in the discussion of Civic Hub: sustaining connection, shared challenges, and partnership building. Sustaining connection refers to the aspects of Civic Hub that kept partners engaged after the initial process of joining. The challenges section discusses

what partner groups struggled with regarding engaging with Civic Hub. Finally, partnerships refer to the collaboration between groups who are involved with the Civic Hub.



**If you need help with something,
here's a place to come**

- Louise Murray, ALIV(e)

Sustaining Connection with Civic Hub

Once groups joined Civic Hub, several aspects of the hub were important in keeping partners engaged in the collective. We are describing these in three clusters: belonging and shared values, connections, and resources.

Belonging and Shared Values: Partners frequently described the sense of belonging they derived from being part of Civic Hub through the opportunity to connect with others with similar principles working towards similar goals. This in turn reduced some aspects of moral stress for groups, providing a space where they find shared values. One interviewee who was part of the Waterloo Region Community Garden Network explained that in joining Civic Hub they recognized,

These were people that were of shared values that are working on the same thing we're working on. And that is like finding ways to help people to feel as if they can make a difference in their own lives. Finding ways to help people to take advantage of that belief that they can make a difference in life and have the opportunity to make a difference.

Other groups discussed the relationship between shared values and the ability of group members from equity-deserving communities to feel welcome at Civic Hub. An interviewee from Kind Minds Family Wellness explained, "They're very inclusive, right? Not many organizational spaces

are welcoming to persons or communities like ours, right, that are equity-deserving, that have been pushed to the margins." In this interviewee's account, the presence of shared values was crucial in creating a safe and welcoming space.

Connections: Partners discussed how the ability to connect with similar organizations and develop partnerships was a key benefit they gained from participating in Civic Hub. There was a shared desire to be connected to "something bigger." An interviewee from the Sudanese Canadian Association of Waterloo Region and Wellington County explained, "As much as you engage people, get to know them and they get to know you, you share your experiences and them too, so you get more knowledge and skills. So, you can use it to help yourself and others." Similarly, a member of Divest Waterloo noted, "It's just a great way to meet people and to share ideas... it really helped to do the connecting of environmentally focused or climate focus groups with justice-seeking initiatives." Specific ways that Civic Hub helped connect partners are through email updates and exchange and networking potlucks, which many noted helped facilitate information sharing and connection between partners. Also, when partner groups organized activities and events, all the groups got invited and had many opportunities to meet and learn from each other.

Resources: Partner groups also described the importance of resources available through Civic Hub, including the physical space, availability of technology, and the Shared Platform program. A Divest Waterloo member explained how before Civic Hub, “All of the grassroots organizers were meeting in coffee shops and people’s living rooms, and getting our printing done commercially... it was really challenging... So having access to the Civic Hub’s shared space and the resources was a real gift.” Building on this, an interviewee from Kind Minds Family Wellness noted the importance of “have[ing] a space that we can use, that would not

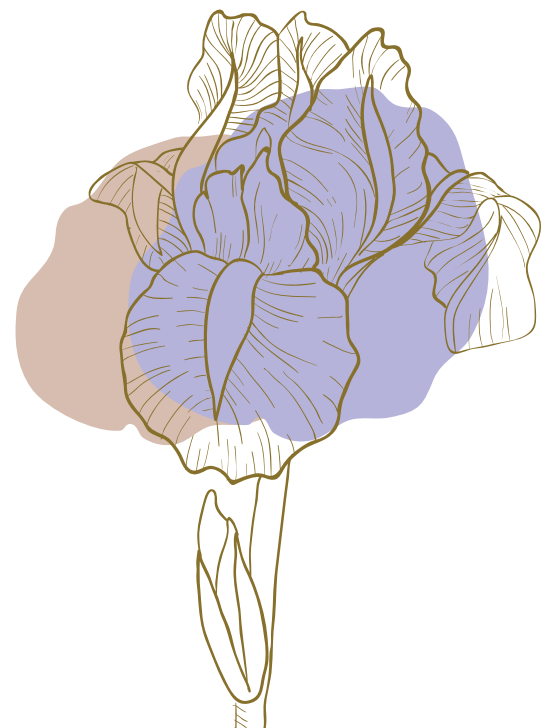
cost us an arm and a leg.” Other interviewees noted the importance of a space with access to a kitchen and well-served by public transit. Many partners discussed how the Shared Platform program provided crucial benefits to organizations that may not have the financial infrastructure to process and manage donations. Other resources mentioned included printing, knowledge sharing on grants and other resources, access to the Internet, and hybrid meeting infrastructure like microphones, cameras, and projectors.

Civic Hub Challenges

Partner groups described some of the challenges in their engagement with Civic Hub. These can be divided into challenges about resources and challenges about communication.

While all partners were deeply appreciative of the support provided by Civic Hub to their organization, several noted that Civic Hub operates on a shoestring budget, without a dedicated full-time staff person to support the hub. As such, partners pointed out that more funding and support for Civic Hub would enhance its capacity to support grassroots groups in their work. While partners were appreciative of the free space, some raised concerns with the size of the space, the lack of natural light, temperature regulation, and the limited ability of SDCWR to modify the space to suit the needs of the partner. Some partners noted that a Christian church basement may not be the most comfortable space for people from a diversity of faiths, Indigenous, racialized, 2S and LGBTQ+ populations, or people who previously had negative experiences in church environments. Other partners pointed out that the location has limited parking and some accessibility issues (for example, no curb cut at the entrance door) and some raised safety concerns about using the space at night.

A second cluster of challenges is related to communication difficulties and resultant disconnection. Some partners noted that they had only limited knowledge of other partners and/or the rules governing the use of the Civic Hub space. Some partners were unaware of all the resources available to them through Civic Hub. While many partners appreciated Civic Hub email updates, some partners felt that emails could be better targeted to the interests/needs of different groups. Challenges in connection and communication have been exacerbated by COVID-19, as discussed further in the COVID-19 section.



The Role of Partnership in Civic Hub

Partnership building was a key concept discussed by grassroots groups who worked with Civic Hub, and part of the way joining Civic Hub contributed to the growth and development of groups, in sharpening goals, fostering new collaborations, and undertaking new actions. Partnerships led to organizational growth, cross-recruitment, recognition, and cross-promotion, as discussed below.

Organizational Growth: Joining Civic Hub helped partner groups grow through new relationships, new activities, new funding opportunities, and through consistent access spaces of mutual support and learning between groups. A member of Age of Majority Singers explained how the networking opportunities provided by Civic Hub, with its wide range of different grassroots groups, gave them the opportunities to get to know who is active in the community. These opportunities often led to partnerships and collaboration that may not have occurred otherwise. Another interviewee from Kind Minds Family Wellness shared how partnership and collaboration enabled their group to benefit from the expertise of others who had been doing this work for many years and fostered their expansion into new areas of service provisioning.

Cross-Recruitment: Civic Hub also created opportunities for information, resources, and skill-sharing among partners. Upon joining Civic Hub, a member of ALIV(e) shared how the hub introduced them to other partners: “They set me up to go to a few groups, like they let me know about groups that are you know, newer groups or whatever that I think I could go and check out if I want.” Sometimes awareness of the work of other groups brought about greater integration through shared membership or joint projects. An interviewee described this as an opportunity to work “in relationship” with lots of groups at the Civic Hub through informal and formal connections. Kind Minds Family Wellness, for example, works with other partner groups such as Community Justice Initiatives, Peace for All Canada, and African Women’s Alliance to better align what each of them is doing and to complement each other’s work towards a common goal. Partner groups also shared how they participated in Civic Hub or SDCWR projects in a mutually beneficial fashion. A member of Home Range Story Kitchen explained,

We also supported the 50th anniversary of the Social Planning Council celebrations with an oral history project. This is actually where we applied the intergenerational model because this became something that both our high school and college student placements and our older volunteers worked on. What we set out to do was document just testimonials from people that the Social Planning Council selected that could speak about their history over the 50 years, with user-friendly audio and video equipment acquired through grant support from the New Horizons for Seniors program.

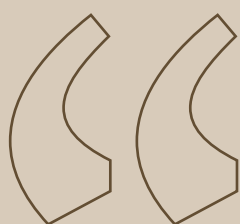
Here, Home Range Story Kitchen was able to work with SDCWR to further their model of intergenerational and interdisciplinary “learning by doing” programs, while also providing SDCWR with material for its oral history project.

Recognition and Cross-Promotion: Finally, collaboration opportunities nurtured through the Civic Hub provided important opportunities for partners to be recognized by other community members for their knowledge and skills, which in turn led to new opportunities. Explained one interviewee: “I don’t have to struggle all the time to validate my skills or my knowledge, or my lived experience, people will see it. And you know, people reach out to say, “You have this, you can be part of this.” These moments of recognition helped to foster reciprocal exchanges between partners for mutual benefit. An interviewee with the Sudanese Canadian Association explained, “All those groups have different experiences. As much as you engage people, get to know them and they get to know you, you share your experiences and them too so you get more knowledge and skills. So, you can use it to help yourself and others.” Both moments of recognition, as well as moments of reciprocity, were important for small organizations struggling with amplifying their work, building a public profile, and growing funding.

WORKING THROUGH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In interviews, the major impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were discussed, not only in how it affected the Civic Hub and SDCWR but also to better understand how the partner groups fared through it. All partners we spoke with were affected by the pandemic in some way. The pandemic's

impact depended on the goals and activities of partner groups and the health and socio-economic capacity of its members. Through our conversations, three themes emerged: disruptions to the work of partner groups, disruptions to the work of Civic Hub, and adaptations to the COVID-19 pandemic.



It's moved us online and so the way I put it is that COVID has thrust us into an inevitable future... but we have an incredible loss that we haven't understood yet. And it's the loss of the connection we make to each other when we're in person

- Doug Jones, Waterloo Region Community Garden Network

Disruptions for Partner Groups

There was a consensus throughout the interviews that the pandemic put an initial pause on the activities of partner groups and in-person gatherings, and decreased membership. Groups expressed a desire to adjust practices consistent with public health measures – as one individual put it, “We couldn't gather physically because it was dangerous to our health and others. We didn't want to put someone else's [health] at risk.” At the same time, partner groups struggled with the

unknowns of the pandemic, including constantly changing public health measures and isolation. A member from Divest Waterloo explained, “We did lose some people without having events to bring people together. I think the movement lost some momentum too.” Similarly, an interviewee from the Waterloo Region Community Garden Network explained how COVID-19 fundamentally shifted practices, even for outdoor activities:

Like, for a while [we thought] the public health is going to shut down the garden. So we had to argue to keep the gardens open. We had to go through all of those fears about the transmission of COVID that were those vulnerable people in our communities and washing of tools and everything. We couldn't hold the shared lunches together the same way we haven't had a baking day all year at Queens Green where I garden.

There was also a change in the type of activities partners engaged in, with a shift towards more mutual aid work. One consequence of the pandemic was less support for many equity-deserving communities, as government and non-profit organizations temporarily shut down or scaled back activities. In response, there was an explosion of activity –as an interviewee put it, grassroots groups “blew up” and “people started be like guys, we need to do something right now.” Along with this explosion of activity came a rise in general social awareness of human rights violations and anti-racism work in the region. A member of the People's Action Group found that the COVID-19 shutdown led people to become more aware of how pervasive homelessness is becoming. Several interviewees mentioned that after the visible murders of unarmed Black people, there was more awareness of anti-black racism both within Canada and the United States.

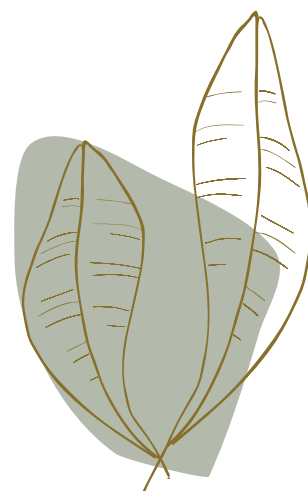
COVID-19 also led to a major shift from in-person to online activities and meetings, with mixed responses to this change from many partner groups. For example, some interviewees acknowledged that the pandemic pushed society into an inevitable technological future with positive environmental spin-offs. A member of the Waterloo Region Community Garden network framed it as, “The best opportunity you could imagine for reducing travel costs in terms of fossil fuel as well as time. It's a bloody amazing medium and it's and it's been so incredibly reliable.” Others found the shift to online meetings and activities challenging: “Then everything was on Zoom. And so we couldn't do all that much because we were all getting used to Zoom... nothing was getting done.” Some groups were unable to meet regularly due to technological barriers for members meeting online, especially groups that had a membership of primarily low-income individuals and/or others with barriers to accessing technology. Another individual shared, “It's harder for people to feel connected when you can't meet in person.

You can't interact with the public to get our message out.” Another transition point was moving from online to in-person once pandemic restrictions were lifted. For partner groups that started up during the pandemic, and therefore began with completely virtual meetings and activities, the challenge was how to change their fully virtual practice to hybrid or in-person with few resources.

Many groups identified feeling exhausted throughout the pandemic due to the constant changes in public health measures and the impact they had on the communities they serve. There was forced social isolation, fear of transmission of the COVID-19 virus, mass uncertainty, and loss of community. Online interactions could not fully replace in-person activities. As one interviewee explained, “I think it's just...well anything when it's mediated right? There's a screen between us and not connecting the same way you do, I think. You know, so much of communication has to do with being present.” Others shared feeling defeated by the pandemic because of an inability to complete their activities as they did before or have a visible impact on their advocacy work. Another interviewee noted, “It's kind of exhausting and there are things that I've simply stopped doing because without that [in-person] connection, it just isn't working for me.”

Throughout the pandemic, safety remained a large concern, with consideration of Public Health protocols. A member of Waterloo Region Climate Initiatives explained it was complicated to negotiate between COVID-19 transmission risks, public health guidelines, and meaningful group activities, and this tension led to conflicts. Sometimes these conflicts were an additional contributor to burnout. Another interviewee explained,

I did a lot of community work in the pandemic like, so much that I don't even know how I did it because we weren't coming together. So, so, there's a lot of coordination that has to go in the community, that did, that went into the community work that happened in a pandemic, and quite frankly, I'm a little burnt out.



Disruptions for Civic Hub

Like the partner groups, the pandemic forced Civic Hub itself to navigate new conditions of uncertainty and new public health expectations. The use of the physical Civic Hub space initially stopped, with no in-person events, meetings, or gatherings of any sort permitted. The use of the physical space of Civic Hub continued to be low while pandemic restrictions were in place, leading to some concern that Civic Hub would struggle to remain relevant even once COVID-19 restrictions were lifted.

SDCWR succeeded in securing funds to equip Civic Hub with the technology to host virtual and hybrid meetings before the pandemic restrictions were put in place. ALIV(e) and the Unsheltered Campaign, for example, have used the Civic Hub's Zoom account for all their virtual meetings since March 2020. Fair Vote Canada Waterloo Region relied on the Civic Hub staff and the hybrid support to be able to host multiple group meetings throughout the pandemic.

While the physical space was less active during the COVID-19 pandemic and the virtual space was more active, overall partner groups indicated the importance of maintaining connection and communication with the Civic Hub and other members. Regular communications through shared

emails or the monthly e-blast kept partner groups aware of each other's movements and a means to connect to one another. However, many also shared feeling as though they did not connect as much as they would have liked. One interviewee explained that even as pandemic restrictions have lifted,

People don't come unless they have like, you know, there's the occasional scheduled event that they come out for but... at least my impression from when I hear from other people was [that] there was more informal stuff that would happen in this physical space.

Along similar lines, another Civic Hub member noted that the pandemic has been challenging for maintaining "the kind of energy and spirit that I engaged with or met when I first came here."



Adapting to New Realities

As mentioned above, the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the Civic Hub and the partner groups in the ways they interacted with the community, organized their activities, and stayed connected. The ways in which they were able to do this was through adapting to the changing environment and maintaining flexibility with innovations.

Changing circumstances throughout the pandemic resulted in adaptations in virtual spaces and physical spaces. Groups shared following the guidelines put in place by Public Health through social isolation, outdoor activities, and the use of proper personal protective equipment where appropriate. One interviewee active with the Unsheltered Campaign explained that the Civic Hub, along with the partner groups had to adapt, "we had to learn policies and what we're allowed to do and what we weren't allowed to do. Like, within like 24 hours."

These were significant challenges, though groups and Civic Hub were able to adapt to the environment and meet the community's needs. For example, Kind Minds Family Wellness adapted by creating cooking and art classes whereby materials would be sent to people's homes, then they would join virtual meetings and complete the activities at home. Age of Majority Singers were able to continue rehearsing their music, recording, and completing shows virtually through Zoom and in-person using special masks that would not interfere with singing. Some groups shared only having survived the pandemic with the virtual support of Civic Hub to remain connected to one another. Others shared that their connection to other groups would have been all but lost without the e-blasts and Zoom connecting meetings through the Civic Hub.

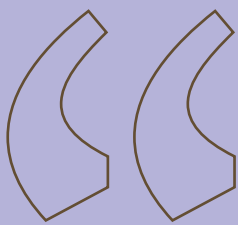
Many partner groups were able to fill in gaps in social support for equity-deserving groups that were not being filled by institutional services and systems. For example, individuals were delivering food and providing basic supplies and connection to those who were unhoused, things that might have been done mostly by social agencies pre-pandemic. A member of The Sudanese Canadian Association stated that outreach became a larger focus during the pandemic, intentionally connecting with their members and ensuring they were receiving what they needed (food, connection, technology, etc.), especially those with limited family support. The Unsheltered Campaign emerged as a group during this time to engage in outreach to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and provide material support. As one member explained: “We had to learn policies and what we’re allowed to do and what we weren’t allowed to do it.... we had food the next time anyone had a chance to think about it, we were handing out 200 meals a night.”

All of these adaptations came at a cost, both financially and emotionally. Those doing direct service work did so often out of their own personal funds and on their personal time. Some said this was due to acknowledging the need and having a moral obligation to complete the work, regardless of remuneration. Personal Protective Equipment (hand sanitizer, masks, shields, etc.) was offered through Civic Hub and available for the groups to use to complement what the groups acquired themselves with personal funds.

GRASSROOTS GROUPS ARE LOOKING TO THE FUTURE WITH HOPE

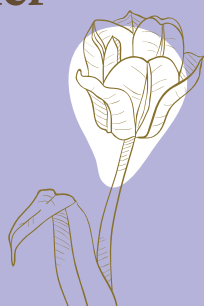
As groups shared their stories of surviving through the pandemic, the conversations shifted toward the future. There was excitement and joy, as hope was coming through. Interviewees shared their groups’

goals, their groups’ current or soon-to-be projects, and their suggestions for the future of the Civic Hub.



**There’s still value and important things
that happen with people coming together**

-Heather Majaury, Kaleidoscope Productions



Partner Group Hopes

There were many hopes and dreams mentioned by the group representatives. This was identified as longer-term aspirations and goals. Responding to pandemic-related challenges to group membership, cohesion, and diversity, there was an interest in growing membership among several partners. New members could bring innovative ideas and new connections. A few groups also identified hopes for organizational stability through permanent space, adequate funding, and staffing. One respondent explained the value of funding for grassroots groups,

Yes, the support for the big organization is very important. But more important, is the support for the grassroots organization because we are the people that live in the community, connect with the people, and we are the actually the 'go between' the big organizations and the community that these organizations serve.

Throughout the pandemic, groups noted that certain topics of concern were highlighted such as

homelessness, income inequality, and anti-Black racism. Despite this, people in positions of power were so busy with the COVID-19 pandemic, that grassroots advocacy went unheard. Some partner groups shared a hope to do more activities as the restrictions were lifted and some shared an interest in getting more seen or heard by the community. There was a consensus that there is a desire to be more visible within the community and to continue to "stir the pot."

SDCWR is known for its advocacy with institutions and for community-based research relevant to the demands of equity-deserving groups. There was recognition by the partner groups of the importance of continuing this work. For example, an interviewee mentioned an interest in accurate, representative research on the strengths and challenges of the Black-led communities in the Waterloo Region. Others shared an interest in continued learning opportunities through active involvement in research.

Partner Group Plans

As interviewees shared their hopes, they identified immediate actions and activities through which partners are continuing to have an impact on the communities they work with. All groups shared an interest in greater engagement with Civic Hub. Some partners shared wanting to make hands-on, direct contributions, others identified partnership as their large goal, and many stated an interest in greater engagement with diverse communities. Hands-on, direct work looks different depending on the group, and groups are growing in diverse ways. The Community Company is expanding its social enterprise support to more grassroots groups. The Sudanese Canadian Association is creating a calendar of this year's events to participate in as many as possible. Kaleidoscope is completing multiple 2-minute play community laboratory workshops around housing precarity with various groups. Groups shared wanting, and acting on, more collaboration with groups or institutions they're already partnered with, but also a willingness to collaborate with new partners. Home Range Story Kitchen is working on creating a tool-sharing

program with other partners of the Civic Hub. Waterloo Region Climate Initiatives are partnering with other groups and participating in other groups' events this year to meet their united goals of educating the public. Many groups are looking to network with partners of the Civic Hub to reconnect and collaborate.

The most common response regarding group plans was simply more! More activity, more engagement, more visibility. A member of the People's Action Group shared plans to get more visible within the community by connecting with councillors and others in positions of power. They said, "So remember us, take us into consideration when you're moving forward, and these are some of the issues that we're passionate about and we would like to, you know, be involved with you on." Some groups identified wanting to be more politically involved. Others stated wanting more engagement in diverse communities.

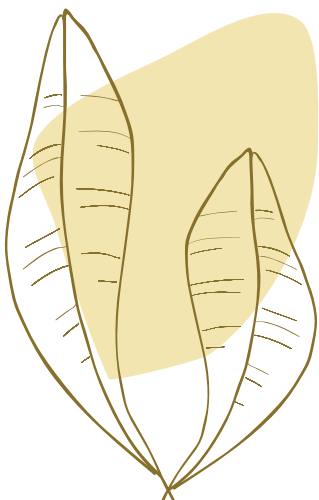
Recommendations

Throughout the interviews, partner group representatives shared many suggestions for the future of Civic Hub. Some recommendations were for the Civic Hub to continue to do certain things that have been working well or have worked well in the past. Other recommendations are for activities

that require minor adjustments to practices or minimal resources to implement. Finally, some recommendations are more aspirational and would require more effort to come to fruition.

Right now, Civic Hub Should Continue To:

- ◇ Provide opportunities for partner collaboration
- ◇ Host networking meetings and leadership roundtables
- ◇ Facilitate themed events and training opportunities for partners
- ◇ Be a “brave space for all” grounded in shared values
- ◇ Share information through e-blast emails
- ◇ Develop website content highlighting partner groups’ activities and accomplishments
- ◇ Provide hybrid and virtual meeting support
- ◇ Explore ways to improve the accessibility of the physical Civic Hub space
- ◇ Maintain in-person drop-in hours and a shared meeting calendar



In The Short-Term, New Changes Civic Hub Could Consider Are:

- ◇ New onboarding support for new groups focusing on training funding, partnerships, mentorship
- ◇ Integrating regular opportunities for feedback from partners on Civic Hub activities
- ◇ New trainings and workshops to help with common challenges like organizational governance, financial independence, and online management
- ◇ Creating pathways for mutual aid between groups, such as skill sharing, resource pooling
- ◇ Expanding the website to meet partner needs
- ◇ Clarifying expectations between Civic Hub staff and partners when using the physical space
- ◇ Developing new community-campus collaborations to support partners, including new mutually beneficial research relationships

In The Long-Term, New Changes Civic Hub Could Consider Are:

- ◇ Creating and/or hosting a tool-share program
- ◇ Developing new opportunities for partner recognition
- ◇ Working to increase public awareness of Civic Hub and/or the work of partners
- ◇ Flexibility to adapt and respond to emergent community needs
- ◇ New revenue streams to support permanent full-time staffing
- ◇ Possibilities for a physical space that can accommodate the continued growth of the hub and accessibility needs

These recommendations by partner groups of Civic Hub are varied and specific. As reflections of partner and community needs, the recommendations are taken seriously. The implementation of new training and workshops to support partner groups was mentioned as a top priority for many interviewees. It was discussed that many of the skills partner groups could benefit from, could be found among members of the SDCWR and Civic Hub community

already. Also, creating opportunities for groups to share their skills was identified as a low-cost and high reward for the partner groups and the Civic Hub. Among the many ideas emerging for the future of Civic Hub, there is one consistent theme: the importance of Civic Hub and partner groups to work together to grow stronger and work towards progressive social change in the Waterloo Region and beyond.



APPENDIX 1: REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH

The goal of this research was to use a community-engaged approach to learn how Civic Hub and partner groups had fared over the COVID-19 pandemic and to make concrete suggestions for the future development of the Hub. Taking space to reflect on the research process and findings helps embed reflexivity in the process, considering the relationship of the research to our own perspectives, biases and positionality, a key tenant of community-engaged research. Reflecting on the research also shares information that might be useful to others undertaking similar research. To this end, the research team solicited feedback from Advisory Committee members and held an open-ended reflection conversation. The research team – Laura Pin, Lia Forma and Aleksandra Petrovic – all were engaged with Civic Hub in various ways before the initiation of the research project, Laura and Lia as members of partner groups, and Aleks as Executive Director of SDCWR. As a result, all members of the research team were deeply invested in engaging with community members and developing a final report that accurately represented the experiences of diverse Civic Hub partner groups.

RESEARCH PROCESS

Like any research process, especially any community-engaged research process, there were some hiccups along the way. Initial recruitment of Advisory Committee members was slow, and Aleksandra's work nudging potential committee members helped ensure representation from many different partners. University guidelines on honoraria limited the number of Advisory Committee meetings that Laura chose to hold over the course of the project. As a result, some Advisory Committee members found the meetings too infrequent, leading to a disjointed process. One Advisory Committee member also noted that the process could have been more inclusive, in terms of accommodating disability-related needs. Generally, Advisory Committee members felt the process was collaborative, and that their feedback was valued and led to meaningful changes in the research process. In addition to providing direction on research methods and approach, the Advisory Committee also reviewed preliminary themes and findings, providing an important check on the resonance of findings with members of the SDCWR community. Important learnings for future projects are the importance of working creatively to prioritize community needs over university guidelines, as well as taking steps towards "community-led" rather than "community-advised" projects.

In recruiting research participants from a small and close-knit community, it was also important to avoid social pressure to participate. We did this by having the research team member with the most distance from an individual/partner group send the interview request. Since Aleksandra was actively involved with many partner groups, Lia and Laura did all the recruitment and interviewing. This strategy was approved by the Wilfrid Laurier Research Ethics Board (REB #8318). All interviewees participated in the post-interview process of reviewing the use of their quotations in this report. As a result, we have confidence that the use of participant quotes in the report reflects the spirit and intention of their statements.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In reflecting on the research findings, we started by noting what our expectations were in starting the research project. Aleks noted how important grassroots organizing is, and the real struggle of Civic Hub with growing into the entity that people need, while navigating tensions associated with being a formal and regulated non-profit charity. Lia noted that when she started this work, there was a strong need to rejuvenate grassroots organizing since "COVID kicked everyone's butt." Yet as Laura pointed out, this manifested differently for different partner groups, as everyone struggled with how to survive and support their communities. As partners shift towards more in-person organizing, we considered how to help catalyze work. Some of the recent initiatives of Civic Hub – like the revival of shared monthly lunches – have been important first steps.

We also spent some time reflecting on what makes Civic Hub different from other social engagement and innovation hubs and landed on the shared values being a key piece. Laura noted that shared values, such as social justice, equity, and anti-oppression, were a key draw for partner groups – many groups came to Civic Hub because in the Hub they found a space that aspired to reflect the same values that drove their organizing work. All of us agreed that these values meant that Civic Hub was different than many social engagement hubs. As a 'grassroots hub', Civic Hub eschews the common requirement that partners provide a level of financial support to join. As a result, Civic Hub has

been able to prioritize radical inclusivity for groups for whom more professionalized hubs are inaccessible or unwelcoming. In short, many partners would not be able to join other social engagement hubs, making Civic Hub a uniquely important space for supporting grassroots organizing. At the same time, Civic Hub's Shared Platform and fiscal sponsorship program are developing new fiscal infrastructure for advocacy and community-building work that falls outside of mainstream social innovation practices. As these programs develop and grow, there are tensions and learnings in moving towards a model that provides partners with sufficient autonomy and shared leadership.

As the conversation drew to a close, we started thinking about the future of Civic Hub, asking, "How do we keep our radical, messy grassroots world alive?" Lia noted,

and Aleksandra and Laura agreed, that the grassroots hub model was what had sustained Civic Hub to date, and what would continue to sustain Civic Hub in the future. Aleksandra described a recent afternoon at the Civic Hub, where every corner of the space was in use, with Black-led, Indigenous-led, and anti-poverty groups all gathering at the Hub. A potential new partner was meeting with staff in a side room, while a child played with blocks nearby, and a pet dog was a quiet attendee at a partner meeting. People were constantly interacting, exchanging greetings as they moved between spaces, connecting with old friends and new collaborators. It was a moment of the future in the present: an afternoon where a fully realized Civic Hub seemed to have already arrived. In a world marked by COVID-19, we believe spaces like Civic Hub are of critical importance for grassroots organizing and civic engagement. The

APPENDIX 2: PARTNER GROUPS OF THE CIVIC HUB WATERLOO REGION

A Better Tent City: a novel community-based approach to providing a home and a sense of belonging for approximately 50 residents who have experienced chronic homelessness in the Waterloo Region.

Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) Waterloo: multi-issue, membership-based community union of low- and moderate-income people who believe that social and economic justice can best be achieved by building community power for change.

Age of Majority Singers: a community choir devoted to creating a welcoming and accessible space for young adults to find and share their joy of music.

African Women Alliance of Waterloo Region: mission and vision to help empower African women and their families as they resettle in Waterloo Region.

Awareness of Low-Income Voices: active and positive voice to low-income individuals and families who are experiencing or who have experienced living at poverty level in Waterloo Region.

A Womb with a View: crisis response programming facilitated by those with lived/living experience of mental health/addiction/trauma/neurodivergence, through an Indigenous lens.

Basic Income Waterloo Region: Advocating for the concept that everybody in society should be assured of having a basic amount of money to live on and money that allows them to pay rent, buy food, etc.

Branches for Hope: support for people who are justice-involved to lead a more pro-social life.

Bring on the Sunshine: supports success for the local Black community, with a special focus on youth.

The Community Company: creates a better economic system through community-led social enterprises; decentralizing wealth and reinvesting it into our communities.

Community Kitchen Cooperative KW: recognizes food as a universal human need and focuses on this to develop opportunities to engage in food security work, community-building, and entrepreneur support.

Disabilities and Human Rights: forum for educating, raising awareness, and discussing issues related to human rights and disabilities.

Divest Waterloo: educate the public on initiatives to invest in renewable energy and divest the fossil fuel industry by our governments in hopes of counteracting climate change.

Fair Vote Canada Waterloo Region Chapter: 1. Provides a forum to dialogue and debate reform of electoral systems. 2. Provides educational material to the public about voting systems around the world. 3. Advocates for electoral reform at federal, provincial and municipal levels. 4. Advocates for a Citizen's Assembly on electoral reform. 5. Advocates for Proportional Representation.

Festival of Neighbourhoods: celebrates the capacity of neighbours to create and improve the areas where they live to increase the quality of life for everyone.

Food Not Bombs KW: climate justice and unsheltered homelessness advocacy.

Fridays for Future: youth-led and organized global climate strike movement.

Home Range: Story Kitchen: a set of exploratory intergenerational and interdisciplinary “learning by doing” programs.

Hope for Community Development: working to break the cycle of poverty through direct action to empower Black, newcomer, and refugee children, youth, women, and single-parent families in the Waterloo Region by providing a launch pad of services and supports that set them up for success.

Kaleidoscope Productions: the development and production of projects that contribute to positive social change that are committed to an accurate reflection of the world around us.

Kind Minds Family Wellness: short- and long-term support to persons who are Black-identifying.

KW Animal Save: inspires change through positive action, creating awareness, and spreading compassion for all animals.

Kitchener-Waterloo Peace: semi-regular e-mail messages listing events and news items of interest to the Kitchener-Waterloo peace and social justice community.

KW Junk Music: inclusively accessible music -make instruments from waste/everyday items to remove barrier of “skill” and use them in workshops with a sustainability discussion, or a song writing session.

Lesley Crompton Tax Prep Services: provides free tax return preparation for low-income individuals and families (income <\$45,000 per individual).

Peace For All Canada: addresses socioeconomic, political, racial, religious and cultural conflict and intolerance, utilizing the Conflict Transformation model.

People’s Action Group: talking about, problem-solving, and addressing roadblocks that people experiencing homelessness may face, connecting with other systems about issues, related to homelessness (e.g., mental and physical health, social services, and corrections).

Reception House Waterloo Region: provides a warm welcome to government-assisted refugees (GARs) through a number of programs and services designed to make their new life in Canada a success.

Shamrose for Syrian Culture: building Syrian- and Arabic-speaking communities, with a focus on responding to the Syrian Refugee Crisis, on a local level.

Shelter Movers Waterloo Region: volunteer-powered charitable organization providing moving and storage services at no cost to individuals and families fleeing abuse.

Spiritual Heritage Education Network (SHEN): intent is to eliminate cruel exploitation by humans of other humans and of nature.

Sudanese Canadian Association of Waterloo Region and Wellington County (SCAWRWC): working to preserve Sudanese culture within the region.

Together: For Perinatal Mental Health, Inc: focused on providing inclusive perinatal mental health support, with cultural humility, to families while building collective community care in the Waterloo Region.

Unsheltered Campaign: a campaign led by community advocates who are housed and not housed to provide 24/7 year-round alternatives to shelter and housing for all unsheltered people in the Waterloo Region.

Waterloo Region Climate Initiatives: raising awareness that the most impactful way possible to combat climate change is to reduce colonial food systems, expand our consumption of plant-based foods, & rewild.

Waterloo Region Yes In My Back Yard: urges the cities of the Waterloo Region to adjust their zoning to allow for more housing, especially affordable housing.

Waterloo Region Community Garden Network: promote and assist with the sustainability of community gardens throughout the Waterloo Region for all those who wish to garden.

APPENDIX 3: ADVISORY COMMITTEE LIST

Aleksandra Petrovic

Executive Director, Social Development Centre of Waterloo Region

Alice Penny

Consultant and Educator, ESG

Bring on the Sunshine

Barbara Spronk

Former Chair of the Social Development Centre Board of Directors

Charles Nichols

Community member

David Omomoh

Nigerians in the Region of Waterloo (NIROW)

Fadhilah Balogun

Peace for All Canada

African Women's Alliance

Martin de Groot

Home Range: Story Kitchen

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell us about your involvement with your group? How long have you been involved with your group? What roles have you taken on?
2. How long has your group existed for?
3. How many members does your group have approximately? By “members” we mean individuals actively supporting the work of your group (for example, volunteers, board members, etc). Who are your members? (demographics)
4. What does your group currently do? Purpose, mandate? Does your group represent or serve a specific community? Do you engage in education? Direct service provision? Advocacy? Organizing community events? What type of activities?
5. What knowledge do you have of the Civic Hub? The Partners? Civic Hub supports?
6. If your group existed before COVID-19 emerged, can you tell me about what types of things your group did?
7. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic what supports were you using from Civic Hub? Physical space (i.e. meeting rooms, equipment), digital resources (i.e. email address, web collaboration, virtual meeting platforms), guidance from other partner groups, partnering in projects, receiving and sharing information about activities and funding opportunities, financial support.
8. What role did the Civic Hub play in your collaboration with other groups before COVID-19?
9. If your group existed during the COVID-19 pandemic, can you tell me about what types of things your group did? Were there any shifts or changes? What challenges did your group encounter? What uncertainty was created that affected your work? What adaptations did you make?
10. During the COVID-19 pandemic, what supports were you using from Civic Hub? Physical space (i.e. meeting rooms, equipment), digital resources (i.e. email address, web collaboration, virtual meeting platforms), guidance from other partner groups, partnering in projects, receiving and sharing information about activities and funding opportunities, financial support
11. What were key learnings for your group during COVID-19? Changes in funding, capacity, etc.
12. What role did the Civic Hub play in your collaboration with other groups during COVID-19?
13. What Civic Hub resources are you currently using?
14. Does your group currently face any barriers to accessing Civic Hub supports and/or resources? Location of physical space (downtown Kitchener, in a church), accessibility of space, knowledge of supports offered, feeling welcomed and included, hours of space operation, difficulty accessing digital resources. What solutions have you found to the barriers your group has experienced? Was the Civic Hub part of these solutions?
15. What role does the Civic Hub currently play in your collaboration with other groups?
16. Do you collaborate with any Partner groups outside of the Civic Hub?
17. What have been some of your group’s successes in the past 12 months?
18. What are your group’s future goals? Thinking about your group’s future goals, how could Civic Hub support these?
19. Is there anything else you’d like to share you think is important for us to know?

CONTACT

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