

Systemic change seems impossible... until it isn't



At the heart of the **Upstream Fund** is the powerful notion of **'we'**—a belief in the collective capacity to effect change when diverse voices are actively engaged and valued.

Doing things differently

Community discussions on safety and wellbeing made it clear that resources, decision making, and funds need to be redirected to historically marginalized communities including, Indigenous, Black, and racialized, who continue to be underserved, under resourced and face ongoing systemic barriers. So began the Upstream Fund.

Through the Upstream funding model, the Region redistributes power to communities through an annual fund that enables decisions to be made by the community, for the community.

Open call and engagement: Self-determined communities

Together with community, we worked to decolonize the process, shifting from competition to collaboration, relationships and trust.

Decision making: Shifting power to community

By a diverse community committee, power to create change is possible. Using a rigorous process, decisions are made by the community, for the community, to help funds go where they're needed most.

The involvement of the community members has made the process transparent which in turn will develop the trust of the organizations and give them confidence to do even better.
— Fauzia Wafai, Community Change Committee Member

Sharing stories and impact: The power of trust

Meet the Upstreamers! Resources have been used to start, continue, or grow impactful upstream community change. Through the Upstream funding model process, to date, **\$8.2M** has been invested in **81 initiatives**. And we're still growing with each year.

"The refreshingly different approach to this process is helping us to break out of our traditional ways of doing this work, exploring new partners especially encouraging us to listen to hidden voices."
— Engage, Rural Strategy



"The Upstream funding has been instrumental in creating a profound and positive impact on young Muslim women who participated in the Empowering Future Leaders program."
— Townline Muslim Centre

"For many of the people we serve, our peer activities program is their only point of social interaction. Many have said it is a lifesaving program keeping them from excessive negative mental health."
— Independent Living Waterloo Region



"Hope for Community Development's Entrepreneurship Support Program has benefited over 100 youth and adults. It helped build young black entrepreneurs financial planning skills, provide business mentorships and networking opportunities, and increased access to financial support to invest in their businesses."
— Hope for Community Development



"To some in the Hamere Noah community, it meant being equal with others and created a strong feeling of belonging."
— Hamere-Noah Kidane Mihret Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church

"This funding has been instrumental in allowing us to establish the necessary infrastructure...our engagement with global organizations like Black Boys Code underscores our commitment to building bridges and fostering inclusivity on a broader scale and expanding awareness to build further capacity."
— The DOPE content

"This funding has definitely helped us build a solid foundation and establish ourselves in the Region. Without a good foundation, sustainability is not possible."
— Crow Shield Lodge

"The funding had a profound and transformative impact, particularly through the implementation of the Parenting and Food Distribution project. This initiative served as a catalyst for positive change within the community, fostering a sense of unity and support among families facing various challenges."
— African Women's Alliance



"This funding has allowed us to build trust, increase community knowledge and awareness of needs as well as resources. We are so grateful for this funding, and it's giving the community hope, new possibilities, and the ability to unite and strengthen the members as well as help integrate immigrants and newcomers."
— Ethiopian Association KW



"Upstream funding has made a substantial difference in our capacity as Rhythm and Blues. In a historic moment for our community, we hosted the first ever Emancipation day event."
— Rhythm and Blues



Evaluation and learnings

To help us learn, researchers from the Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work's Manulife Centre for Community Health Research evaluated this new way of working. They found we successfully developed a community-led funding model that meaningfully supported equity deserving groups towards sustainability and growth.

Another strength of the Upstream model lies in its ability to challenge the status quo... it is about empowering communities to become architects of their own futures.



Waterloo Region, Ontario, Canada is situated on the lands within the Haldimand Treaty, six miles on either side of the Grand River as treaty territory belonging to Six Nations of the Grand River within the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, Chonnonton and Haudenosaunee peoples. This territory is protected by the Dish with One Spoon wampum.

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