

Region of Waterloo
Chief Administrative Officer
Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

To: Community and Health Services Committee

Meeting Date: December 6, 2022

Report Title: Upstream Fund Initiative Update

1. Recommendation

For Information.

2. Purpose / Issue:

This report provides an update on the Upstream Fund community initiative, which is an innovative, community-driven funding approach aimed at supporting systemic change.

3. Strategic Plan:

This work supports all focus areas of the strategic plan. In particular, it supports the Healthy, Safe and Inclusive Communities focus areas 4.1, 4.3, and 4.5 of the strategic plan

4. Report Highlights:

The Upstream Fund recognizes the value that community-led organizations and groups have in making Waterloo Region a safe and well community for all. Investing in community-led change was a key call to action from community as part of the Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan process. Systemic policies that encourage and support community-led change are considered a critical part of a holistic upstream approach.

Staff worked extensively with community to co-design an innovative 3-step model for the Upstream Fund that launched in August 2022. The model was designed around core principles to focus on resources and support beyond just funding allocation. Core goals included; relationship building, peer engagement and collaboration, and learning together with a participatory research and evaluation model.

Highlights include:

- An open call process where the Region hosted 12 Community Collaborative Events that allowed for extensive and broad outreach and engagement of community members. This helped to spread the word about the program and helped build new relationships across communities.

- A Community Change Committee, consisting of community members and leaders making decisions on how funds would be allocated. This decision making process was informed by the Upstream Fund Terms of Reference which were endorsed by Regional Council on 12 April 2022 and the priorities described in the Region of Waterloo Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan.
- The allocation of funding to 25 proposals from a diversity of grassroots organizations and individuals who will undertake initiatives dedicated to preventing root causes of harm, community capacity building and sustainability. The priorities of these initiatives address systemic issues such as reconciliation, anti-hate, inclusive and safe spaces, employment skills, wellbeing, and systems navigation
- This funding model aims to impact grassroots organizations who know their communities best and know best how to effectively respond to their needs. These communities and groups have historically been excluded from funding opportunities and experience systemic barriers to accessing funds. The Upstream Fund has prioritized community-led organizations from these equity-seeking groups:
 - First Nation, Inuit and Métis
 - African, Caribbean and Black identifying
 - Racialized and marginalized groups
 - Newcomers
 - Rural
 - 2SLGBTQ+
 - Youth
 - People living with disabilities

5. Background:

- The Upstream Fund is a \$2.1 million annual fund approved in December 2021 by Council as part of the 2022 Plan and Budget.
- The fund further aims to shift power to community groups by directing investment toward shifts toward grassroots organizations that have historically been excluded funding and resources. An important priority is to ensure that community is engaged to identify key learnings and make improvements for future years.
- In April [CAO-EDI-22-02/PHE-HLV-22-03], Council approved the definition of upstream and guiding principles as part of the general terms of reference for the development of the fund. At that time, Council also approved staff to move forward on the development and implementation of the fund in collaboration with the community.

6. Area Municipality Communication and Public/Stakeholder Engagement:

In August and September 2022, staff engaged community through 9 community collaborative events (2 virtual) which were attended by 123 community members, and held 33 one-on-one sessions with interested community participants. These events (virtual and in-person) aimed to encourage collaboration between organizations, resource sharing, and increase knowledge community initiatives. Anyone interested in applying for funding was invited to attend the events. In addition, local funders and municipal partners were invited to create the original program and further facilitate resource sharing and collaboration. Staff focused on outreach to organizations and individuals that have historically experienced barriers in accessing funding.

7. Financial Implications:

The 2022 operating budget includes \$2.1M of base funding to support upstream initiatives, funded from the property tax levy (\$1.6M) and the Tax Stabilization Reserve (\$500K). This amount is projected to be fully allocated during 2022 to support community upstream initiatives.

8. Conclusion / Next Steps:

- **November 2022:** Staff communicated funding decisions to all applicants and will sign agreements with the recipients
- **December – January 2023:** Staff will distribute funding to awardees.
- **Commencing 2023:** Sharing Stories on Impact and Learning (Step 3) – This step will be oriented to learning and will enable organizations to share their impact through various ways with Council, community and each other. Staff will work with community to fully explore the impact of the program using participatory research and evaluation approaches.

9. Attachments:

Appendix A: Overview of Upstream Model

Appendix B: List of Organizations Receiving Upstream and Equity Fund

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