

# COMMUNITY LEARNING SPACE PROJECT

## Overview

This project is a joint undertaking by the Computer Systems Group (CSG) at the University of Waterloo and the Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo (SPCKW). The project is co-directed by Dr. Donald Cowan and Dr. Colin Mayfield of the University of Waterloo (UW). The project began in September 2001. This community learning space project is supported by a grant from Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC).

## Vision

Our vision is to provide the technologies and processes to create community learning spaces accessible over the Web. A community learning space is a collection of information useful to a community, which is often geo-referenced and accessible over the Web. These learning spaces, which are dynamic and constantly growing, will be supported by databases, maps, and transaction processing thus allowing users to find, interact with and augment learning space information resources. The technologies, which will be supported by a learning space called the "learning academy," will allow community organizations to establish learning spaces with minimal access to technical personnel. We intend to test these concepts and provide guidance for the development of the academy and future learning spaces through the creation of exemplar learning spaces in Canada's Technology Triangle related to culture, quality of community life, economic development and employment support.

## Major Objectives

Our major objectives are to:

- *create a learning environment* to overcome the challenges encountered by community organizations seeking to use new computer communication technologies.
- *create four exemplar community learning spaces* that will use computing and communications technologies and be based on the Mapcheck Web and Internet-based community portal technologies.
- create tools and processes to allow community organizations and individuals to build their own community learning spaces to achieve their objectives.
- *create a learning academy*, a Web-based information and communication networking opportunity, to allow community organizations and individuals to learn how to develop and use community learning spaces and to share experiences and best practices to increase their capacity to create and maintain their learning spaces.
- *evaluate the approach* to developing and deploying community learning spaces and the corresponding support systems of the learning academy including the potential for employment, skills development and supporting Internet access to those with special needs.

## Project Plan

This project will be based on our previous experience developing several similar community learning spaces. Over a period of three years, we will work with four community organizations with different learning space requirements as pilots in developing exemplar community learning spaces. These pilots focus on important economic and well-being areas of our community. We will work with:

- the Waterloo Regional Arts Council (WRAC)
- Economic Development in Canada's Technology Triangle (EDICTT)
- the Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo (SPCKW)
- a fourth pilot partner to be selected during the first year of the project
- all project organizations in an on-line Learning Academy to document what is learned through the project, to encourage sharing between pilot organizations, to develop training opportunities for pilot organizations and other organizations interested but not directly involved as pilot groups.

These organizations were selected for this project because each:

- was already active on-line to some extent,
- had set future Internet development objectives,
- had data that could be worked with on-line,
- was interested in being part of a pilot,
- represented a distinct and important community sector, and
- had differing perspectives and mandates on employment, skills development and inclusion issues.

We will provide the technologies and processes to create community learning spaces, which form dynamic and growing community learning networks. Access to the community learning spaces will be through a community portal for Waterloo Region located at the University of Waterloo.

In preparing the project proposal to HRDC, we met with each pilot partner to determine their possible community learning spaces in general (see Table 1). In September 2001, we began with the development of the Pilot #1 – Waterloo Regional Arts Council. The development of the learning spaces for Pilots #2, #3 and #4 will begin in successive six-month periods. The development of each learning space will take about one year. During this development period, the learning space will go through a number of evaluations by both the pilot partner and their clients.

To create each community learning space of the pilot organization, the steps are:

1. Collaborate with the pilot organization to identify key players to assist each pilot organization define their project objectives;
2. Determine feasible organizational project objectives;
3. Acquire the data for the community learning space from the community group;
4. *Design and build the community learning space;*
5. Determine the legal and liability questions;
6. Instruct the community group on how to operate and maintain the community learning space;
7. Develop the learning academy materials;
8. Put the learning space into operation;
9. Evaluate each learning space, the learning academy and the tools and processes needed to support the creation of community learning spaces;
10. Implement any required changes.

### **Project Team Members**

- ◆ Trudy Beaulne, Executive Director, Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo
- ◆ Don Cowan, Director, Computer Systems Group (CSG), University of Waterloo
- ◆ Shirley Fenton, Project Development Manager, CSG, University of Waterloo
- ◆ Colin Mayfield, Professor, University of Waterloo
- ◆ Doug Mulholland, Technical Manager, CSG, University of Waterloo

The Project Team will undertake a “needs” assessment, articulate expected outcomes, enunciate and refine the project development plan, design and undertake the project’s evaluation, design and undertake the application development, develop the content for the Learning Academy, prepare the project reports, devise a sustainability plan, organize promotional and awareness events.

### **Project Pilot Members**

The Project Pilot organization will work with the Project Team to give guidance to the pilot learning space as it develops. The pilot team members should include people who work in and can advise on:

- the pilot organization’s information (content and databases)
- the pilot organization’s database management (updates and maintains your database information)
- the pilot organization’s web site management