Community Learning Space – Arts and Culture
Waterloo Region Arts Council Case Study
June 2003

Pilot project objectives established February 2002
Initial interview with WRAC Executive Director for WRAC background and
development process – July 2002
Follow up interview with WRAC Executive Director – May 1, 2003
Public Launch of Arts and Culture CLS – May 2, 2003 as part of the Arts in the Mid-
Sized City workshop, Walper Hotel, Kitchener ON

BACKGROUND

Source:
Pilot project objectives established February 2002
Initial interview with WRAC Executive Director for WRAC background July 2002

WRAC is a public service organization with a mission to promote and support the arts in
order to enrich and enliven all the communities of the Waterloo Region. As a member-
supported alliance, the Council serves artist and arts organizations of all disciplines and
traditions; facilitates intra-regional communication, co-ordination and co-operation;
provides communication and information systems.

WRAC currently operates a Web site (www.waterlooregionalartscouncil.on.ca), which
had been updated in 2002. As of July 2002, both the newer and older versions of their
website were available. WRAC maintains a database of all performing and visual artists
in Waterloo Region which is available on it's website. WRACs eventual web objectives
are to develop an electronic information delivery system.

WRAC has in recent years been working to build its own capacity in technical and
program areas. Using volunteer and project funds, various work has been done to update
and publish resources, including the arts directory and website. There have been many
directions and revisions in how this work has been done. Maintaining databases has been
a challenge. Consistent funding for staffing has also been a challenge but, overall, WRAC
has developed its capacity in all of these areas by working with available resources, with
partners and in taking opportunities that come their way. Participating in the CLS project
is one of these opportunities.

WRAC PILOT PROJECT GOALS

The Project Research Team met with the Waterloo Regional Arts Council to review and discuss the joint goals of the pilot outlined in the initial project proposal. Based on these discussions and the goals of the project, the Project Research Team proposed that the pilot project with the Waterloo Regional Arts Council (WRAC) will consist of the following four areas of application development:

1. WRAC cultural directory

2. Portfolio of Artists

    The portfolio of artists will consist of multimedia content (thumbnails/samples, links to other external sites, security and indexing of unstructured data).

3. Community calendar listing (upcoming and past events)

    The Community calendar listing would support an information posting and repository of events. We will undertake this development with the proviso that a simple listing of a single database table may be the user interface at this time.

4. Arts Space Inventory

The CSG technical team was to develop each of these applications with the proviso that the structure of the databases and sample data was provided by WRAC and that the within the timelines of the project (e.g. by April 1, 2002).

PRE LAUNCH PROJECT REFLECTION
Source: Follow up interview with WRAC Executive Director one day prior to public launch of CLS – May 1, 2003

Martin was the main contact for the CLS team for this project. He consulted every step along the way. He was asked for feedback from others and participated in at least 5-6 meetings with CSG especially when Judith Millar came in to it.

Martin also played a role in community to make the Computer Systems Group (CSG) team aware of other resources – e.g. WPIRG events calendar. There was a period when there was a long gap in the project but Judith stirred the pace with a deadline to work toward (Arts workshop). Martin did not get the database work done as had been planned and Judith found funds to help do data entry to assist with this.

Peter, Ric, Steve, students helped with evaluation of the CLS site development. Judith Millar, who is a member of the arts community outside of WRAC played an important role in the later stages of the project to this point.

The cultural directory was not updated as hoped. The new database was not ready. Regional staff have raised questions about long term sustainability of the database WRAC had a team of 3 staff for 6 months to develop the venue database but this work was not completed. WRAC is now counting on community to help finish it

The CLS project process has benefited WRAC in its own technical development. Martin has mastered management of WRACs own website and expects to be able to build direct links between the WRAC website and the CLS. WRAC has now come to terms with fundamental problem vis a vis database and on-line content – the server hosting WRACs database did not allow live database connection which made it difficult to update content of the database for on line access. The CLS project is expected to have overcome this difficulty by providing direct database access for updating etc.

Content and information resource development has happened in many ways. The project has helped to solve various problems to get the venues inventory to the public. This project has also created an events planning calendar, which has been an idea WRAC wanted to develop since 96/97. Some attempts had been made but these were not elegant nor easy to maintain. Now with CLS there is a technical solution that should work with limited staff resources. These will help to achieve part of WRACs technical development plan.

The CLS project has benefited WRAC on many levels of its organizational development. The link to UW has given WRAC credibility. Funders have recognized this project, which has put WRAC in a better place to define its mandate to provide information services. WRAC is in a much better position now just having done this project. The project has put WRAC into contact in with other groups e.g. City of Waterloo. Judith has been strong advocate. These new relationships will benefit WRAC and give it more credibility as a Arts Council.

This project has enabled WRAC to focus on its services and information. The CLS project has helped integrate many of these service pieces after 5 years of having set these as goals. The CLS project has helped achieve these goals and go beyond. The project has helped focus core accomplishments – this is seen as critically important and increases confidence for WRAC in having achieved its goals. WRAC now has reputation of being one of the strong arts councils in province and has been invited to host 2004 Community Arts Ontario conference

The applications created so far will help WRAC achieve its objectives to *act as an arts advocacy* by providing on line resource and increased credibility with other partners

WRACs objective to **provide a public advisory role** may be achieved but only incidentally by being able to provide information services. The project does provide a communication link and all applications on the CLS will provide support to the community so, indirectly, the public advisory role is fulfilled through the project. The artist profiles will provide content that inform and advise and the planning calendar is critical to avoid overlap in planning so this will eventually help to achieve objectives for WRACs public advisory role. Experience in this project re: info systems and on-line resources will increase WRACs ability to achieve these objectives over the long term.

The project has improved WRACs ability to *liaison with other regional, provincial and national bodies*. For example, WRAC will be submitting a best practices award application next year (award from Community Arts Ontario)

Profiles, online directory, press releases will all help to **provide professional support for working artists.**

The project has helped WRAC **provide fundraising and marketing services for member organizations** in terms of marketing broadly conceived. The planning calendar is probably most relevant to this area – this will market arts scene generally and provide opportunity for member organizations to get their message out in long run. This could include on line ticket sales at some future point. The project is close to doing this now – e.g. CLS wants to have a selling market. At this point, however, WRAC encourages individuals to do this on their own sites. Others are developing these supports as well. e.g. KW Society of Artists is creating artist profiles with links to the artist's website for a fee.

WRAC, as an organization, is pleased with its website but not all individual art organization and artist links are included. These could eventually be included when everyone is on line.

WRAC could be helped in their continued technical development to build on the current CLS applications. Suggestions of what could be useful are as follows.

Media services for Regional cultural members to enable people to post their own media releases. Currently, WRAC has to monitor this do the posting on behalf of members.

E-commerce functions, fundraising, sponsor identification such as:
- store front – kiosk/mobile access or small store fronts in each farmers markets across region;
- accounts for accepting money;
- can sell local material – e.g. an on line version of local store such as the Kitchener storefront project
- links to others who sell their own products/services.

Archiving of music and performance art including options for community to use and populate the content of the artist profiles and providing a network broadcast email function.

Community involvement is needed so others beyond WRAC can provide information to populate the **exhibition and performance space inventories** and make suggestions for improvements to the CLS overall. We could add pictures or augment information to make the CLS more information rich and user friendly.

Use of the **long-term planning calendar to promote tourism and economic activities** needs 100% community use and population of this feature. This is necessary to ensure there is enough reliable information available for this to be the authoritative source for local and outside information needs.

WRAC project management tools were an early objective that have not been done to this point in the project. These could be developed in the next stage.

The key objectives for this project have been addressed to this point in the project including:
a) augmenting the community's awareness of the community's visual and performing arts and
b) promoting employment opportunities of artists.

The objective to provide a market place for their artistic work via a virtual listening or viewing room has only been achieved in part. The marketplace function could be developed further. This is not WRAC priority but profiles can include virtual listening or viewing which can fulfill this role.

4. What else is needed to benefit the following audiences:

a) artists,

a. expanded links – featuring individuals

b. support – e.g. economic
c. store front operation
d. making it easy to plug into this e.g. KW Society of Artists
e. encourage individuals to use this resource –e.g set up own website
f. full participation – use the application and provide feedback to improve it

b) sponsors *(including media)* and

- press – archives to help with research
- quick connection to sponsor links
- there is still work to do to acknowledge and thank sponsors – creative options e.g. volunteer management – profiles of sponsors

c) patrons

- more access and use – not able to compete to give daily needed information but can supplement and complement Record, ECHO
- pride - feature serving the arts community
- test out how applications benefit patrons – privileged information – getting behind the scenes information

5. Comment on the process of the project to this point - positive, negative, what could be improved or done differently:

 a) CLS team
Everyone has been busy. Concerted and regular contact may have speeded pace
Towards the end, WRAC rep (Martin) could have been more assertive about design features – wanting to counter stereotypes – graphics not the best e.g. stereotypical male artist with moustache – some features were changed.
Last meeting (prior to launch) – UoW marketing people changed category headings – WRAC reps went along with these changes reluctantly.
WRAC marketing and language is one step removed from what is presented on CLS – WRAC 'identity' would be stronger if there were common titles/headings between CLS and WRAC website

b) WRAC participation – as noted above

6.Other comments:

Is excited about May 2 launch but is concerned about the accuracy of all information.

Pleased about the increased profile for WRAC e.g. Tues April 29 – Record Editorial – great promotion of on line information access for arts, for the CLS and WRAC.
This project has been an entry point – the starting point for connectivity for WRAC
The CLS as a starting page is not the best branding name to give an arts link – 1 start access.
There were delays in the project which created some difficulty. WRAC had staff through project funding but the timing did not work to use these resources well.

Over longer term is worried about the marketing task ahead to let people know about the site - WRAC does not have time and staff resources to market.
Also it is important to engage the community to use and contribute to content of the site – WRAC can't do this on their own
Also concerned about how to make changes to new directory information
Also about how to handle followup to feedback on the site – how will this be processed and who will do it and when?
High speed connection at WRAC – positive but what is WRACs responsibility for the technical and administration of CLS? Taking on connectivity? When does WRAC assume full responsibility? How will this work? What scope does WRAC have e.g. What can be changed on the site?
Could there be Regional $ to support this?