



Catalyst for Sustainability:

The Achievements, Challenges, Lessons
and Prospects of the University of Winnipeg
Community Renewal Corporation

Summary Report



Edward T. Jackson – September 2018

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McConnell

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Acronyms

CMHC	Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
DFS	Diversity Food Services Inc. (Diversity)
FRC	Forks Renewal Corporation
HNW	High net-worth
ICR	Inner City Renovation
JVA	Joint Venture Agreement
LEED	Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design
SEED	Supporting Employment and Economic Development
SROI	Social return on investment
UW	University of Winnipeg
UWCRC	University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation
UWSA	University of Winnipeg Students' Association

Foreword

Through investments in training and innovation, Canada's universities and colleges anchor the economic livelihood and social wellbeing of communities and our country. In addition to teaching and research, their impact is expressed in the people they hire, the goods and services they purchase and the ways they invest their financial, physical and relational assets.

Recognizing their latent capacity to shape better outcomes as economic actors and social innovators, post-secondary institutions are beginning to apply their assets to building "social infrastructure." The 2017 report, *Maximizing the Capacities of Advanced Education Institutions to Build Social Infrastructure for Canadian Communities*¹, explores this opportunity in depth.

The University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation (UWCRC) is an outstanding example of a social infrastructure strategy, comprising investments in urban renewal, post-secondary infrastructure, affordable housing, food services and more. *Catalyst for Sustainability: The Achievements, Challenges, Lessons and Prospects of the University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation* documents this model so that others can learn from it as they develop their own approaches.

To deliver on their potential, social innovators like UWCRC need greater access to investment capital and smart metrics that measure outcomes on multiple bottom lines. Growing the field will also take regulatory innovation to create hybrid business models; recognition from business and innovation support programs; and leadership from the private, public and community sectors.

The federal government's Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy Co-Creation Steering Group – comprising representatives from government, business, labour, academia, finance, Indigenous nations and philanthropy – has developed policy recommendations that address these challenges.

As a member of this group, I hope that readers of this case study will recognize and be inspired by what can be accomplished when post-secondary institutions position themselves as engines of inclusive growth.

¹ C. Strandberg, *Maximizing the Capacities of Advanced Education Institutions to Build Social Infrastructure for Canadian Communities*, Simon Fraser University and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, Vancouver, 2017. Available at <https://bit.ly/2PZrwgf>



Stephen Huddart
President and CEO,
The McConnell Foundation

Preface

The University of Winnipeg (UWinnipeg) is a medium-size Canadian university, located in the heart of downtown Winnipeg on Treaty One territory and the homeland of the Metis Nation. Our roots are deep, extending back to the 1880's and we became an independent university in 1967. Today, UWinnipeg is home to approximately 10,000 graduate and undergraduate students and an additional 4,000 learners who are taking courses through our Professional Education division. UWinnipeg has an annual economic impact of \$1.5 billion, which is significant for both downtown Winnipeg and Manitoba as a whole. We are guided by our Strategic Directions: academic excellence, student success, knowledge mobilization, financial resilience and Indigenization. UWinnipeg's approach to Indigenization is evolving as we learn. Our faculty and students are at the forefront of developing solutions for some of society's most pressing issues, such as responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, meeting the needs of newcomers to Canada, and climate change.

Unlike other universities, which were originally established on the edges of their communities, UWinnipeg does not occupy a large campus area and we do not have a base of undeveloped land. Centrally located in downtown Winnipeg and bordered by one of Canada's most diverse neighbourhoods, we are compact and carefully consider the impacts of our developments.

During the preceding decade UWinnipeg experienced exponential enrolment growth as the baby-boom echo – generations X, Y and millennials – came to our university in ever-greater numbers. At the start of the millennium, UWinnipeg was home to 6,500 students, but by 2008 it had reached approximately 10,000. To manage the necessary expansion, University leadership at the time developed an innovative approach that was built on principles of sustainability and partnerships with broader community.

The results are indeed impressive and we are proud of our success. For example, UWinnipeg has achieved a 32 per cent reduction in real GHG emissions below 1990 levels, in spite of increasing our campus footprint by 33 per cent over the same timeframe. All of our new buildings are LEED Silver or better. Our campus foodservice provider, Diversity, sources close to 60 per cent of their inputs from within a 100 kilometer radius and the great majority of its staff are from marginalized communities and now earn a living wage.

The case study you are about to read is a thoughtful reflection of our experience. There were, and still are, tensions that require attention, including ongoing work to address the financial impacts of UWinnipeg's expansion, trade-offs among sustainability goals and working to advance authentic partnerships with community. As an academic institution first and foremost, we must always be mindful of our core purpose and how the work of the University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation helps us to achieve our mission.

Where we have achieved success, it was through the hard work of dedicated people at all levels. The lessons we learned may provide you with insight, but what worked for us may not be directly applicable to your context. As you consider your own path, I encourage you to think about the unique aspects of your organization, the strengths of the people you work with, your communities, your mission and purpose and how you can lead in creating a better future.



Dr. Annette Trimbee

President and Vice-Chancellor, and
Chair of The University of Winnipeg
Community Renewal Corporation

Executive Summary

Overview

This report summarizes the experience, models and tools, results, challenges, lessons and prospects of the University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation (UWCRC). Established by the University of Winnipeg's Board of Regents in 2005 as a special-purpose entity to implement the University's growth and sustainability plan, UWCRC is a separately incorporated non-profit, charitable corporation with its own Board of Directors (eight members from the University of Winnipeg (UW) and eight from the broader community) and staff. The University of Winnipeg President chairs the Board.

In 2016, it launched UWCRC 2.0 Inc., chaired by a community representative, as a new vehicle to extend its services to other post-secondary institutions, non-profits and cities in Manitoba and elsewhere. Both UWCRC and UWCRC 2.0 Inc. promote four pillars of sustainability: environmental, social, economic and cultural.

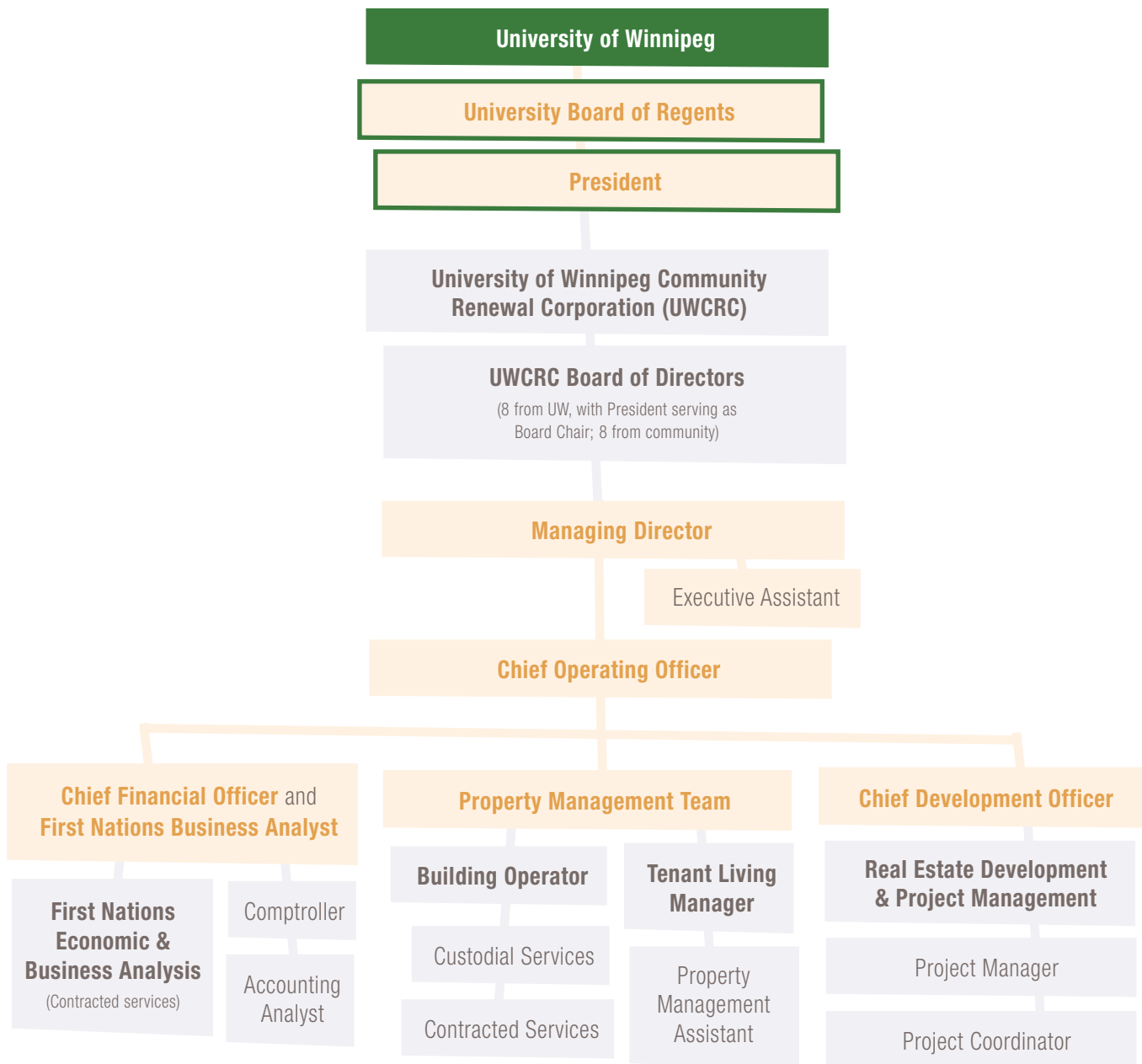
Organizational Evolution

UWCRC's organizational trajectory as a development catalyst has been, first, to focus on the needs of the University of Winnipeg for campus renewal and community engagement and then, later, to market its development services to non-UW institutions and communities in Winnipeg and elsewhere in Manitoba. In its start-up phase, in 2005-2006, the Corporation bought an interest in an office tower at the edge of campus to house the University's and the UWCRC's operations, including the university bookstore. This property generated cash flow through leasehold revenue, including university and other commercial tenancies and, over time, helped the Corporation to secure financing for its own projects. However, during its initial decade, the core business of UWCRC was to develop and manage University construction projects that created a series of fresh, innovative and green facilities—a new residence, day care, labs, offices and classrooms, recreational facilities and more—to serve a larger student population and a commitment to opening the University to the community. The Corporation also animated the start-up and growth of a food-services social enterprise on campus.

By 2016, though, with the opening of the mixed-use, mixed-income residential tower, the Downtown Commons, UWCRC returned to its role as property owner and manager. That same year saw the creation of UWCRC 2.0 Inc., a separate, non-profit entity with the sole purpose of marketing the Corporation's development expertise to non-UW institutions and organizations across Manitoba and perhaps more broadly. The new structure has nearly \$80 million worth of new projects under development. In addition, in recent years UWCRC and UWCRC 2.0 Inc. have stepped up their advisory work in Indigenous economic development.

Organizational Structure

The figure below shows the organizational structure of the University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation today. This diagram indicates that the Corporation operates three units: finance (which includes First-Nations business analysis), property management and real estate development. Further, UWCRC owns, wholly or partially, a number of businesses and facilities through subsidiaries (e.g. Downtown Commons) or joint ventures (e.g. Diversity Food Services and 491 Portage Avenue office tower). To carry out its projects, UWCRC 2.0, a separate legal entity, maintains a service agreement with UWCRC to provide the full range of professional services necessary to execute the roles of developer, project manager, property manager and owner.



University Relationship

The relationship between UWCRC and the University of Winnipeg has been close and very successful. Yet, apart from modest start-up funding, space allocation for UWCRC staff offices, and periodic repayable cash-flow support and corporate guarantees to support borrowing, the Corporation does not receive significant operating funds from the University. Rather, it has had to generate its own revenue primarily through development and project-management fees, rental income, First Nations economic-development and business analysis consulting, property management fees and other sources. In the course of its work, the Corporation has delivered a range of benefits to the University, including cost-effective, well-designed and sustainable real estate projects; improved, healthy food services on campus; creative partnerships with local non-profits, businesses and Indigenous communities; and a visible role as a provider of affordable housing in the downtown core.

For its part, UWCRC was able to build its own capabilities and track record in social real estate and social enterprise through a dozen years of on-campus work; benefit from University Board of Regents, executive support and administrative systems including payroll; access capital at provincial-government rates thanks to the University's status as a publicly-funded institution; and partner with the University of Winnipeg Foundation to mobilize private donations to major new facilities.

Furthermore, as the University's strategic priorities have shifted from growth, infrastructure renewal, sustainability and community-facing initiatives to its current focus on financial efficiency and Indigenization, UWCRC has integrated these priorities into its own strategies and activities.

Social Enterprise

In 2009, in a joint venture with non-profit partner SEED (Supporting Employment and Economic Development) Winnipeg, UWCRC launched Diversity Food Services (DFS), a social enterprise that provides healthy, affordable food in facilities across the downtown campus as well as off-campus cafés at non-profit sites plus a catering arm. Today Diversity employs more than 100 workers, including many who are new Canadians as well as Indigenous citizens and employees facing other labour-market barriers, such as addiction and disability. Diversity offers living wages, extensive training and support, and good benefits. With business volume exceeding \$3 million per year, DFS has also become a major purchaser of fresh and organic vegetables, fruit, meat and dairy products from some 60 local suppliers, has won awards for its affordable, healthy foods from environmental and student organizations, and has attracted the interest of many universities and student groups across North America.

Diversity Food Services

100+ workers
60 local suppliers
\$3M in business volume



Social Real Estate

Since 2007, UWCRC has catalyzed the design and construction of more than \$200 million worth of social real estate. Serving as developer and project manager for the University, and more recently as property manager and owner of a multi-unit, mixed-income residential tower, the Corporation has worked successfully in partnership with governments, non-profits, high net-worth families, foundations, private developers, engineers and architects. Major new facilities have been constructed and are in operation, including the University's large-scale student residence, a large health and recreation complex open to the community, a state-of-the-art environment and science research facility, innovative buildings that house academic departments and classrooms alongside an art gallery, a community education program and common spaces for community use. A recent project, Downtown Commons, which UWCRC not only developed but also owns and now manages, is a mixed-income residential development offering premium, market-rate and affordable units, and is a model for new projects in design by UWCRC 2.0.

To date, the Corporation has built nearly 90 affordable housing units in the downtown core and has plans to build more. Overall, this portfolio of social real estate has generated some \$320 million in direct, indirect and induced economic effects, primarily in Winnipeg and southern Manitoba. Furthermore, five new UWCRC buildings with Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver certification or better, including two LEED Gold developments, helped the University of Winnipeg exceed its greenhouse gas reduction targets and reduce UW's ecological footprint even while it was expanding the downtown campus.

Accordingly, in 2014 UWCRC was awarded the University of Winnipeg's Campus Sustainability Recognition Award for its leadership, innovation and inclusiveness in environmental sustainability.

Indigenous Economic Development

UWCRC operates a third line of business: providing business analysis and project-management services in support of Indigenous economic development. To date, this work has constituted only a small part of the Corporation's activity, but its growth potential is significant. Overall, UWCRC and UWCRC 2.0 have served as consultants to First Nations on more than 50 planning projects, ranging from urban-property acquisitions and property management to on-reserve capital-equipment purchases, facilities for retail stores, housing repair and construction, community economic development support related to new on-reserve school construction, and even a major access road. The Corporation brings to these assignments high-quality skills in business analysis, financial forecasting and mentoring as well as deep respect for local leadership and community engagement.



Challenges

While these results have been impressive, the Corporation has also faced challenges. Within the University environment, there have sometimes been tensions between UWCRC and the academic side of the institution, with some faculty members questioning the value of the Corporation's work to research and teaching. Over time, UWCRC has demonstrated its worth through the construction of new, leading-edge facilities providing new labs, classrooms and faculty offices. And the UW's Board of Regents and senior executives have continued to emphasize that UWCRC has not received significant ongoing operating funds from the University budget.

In another challenge, it was found with Diversity Food Services that university food services constitute a seasonal business, following the cycles of the academic terms.

By adding off-campus operations and catering, the business was able to gain greater scale and smooth out its cash flow while diversifying its customers and revenue streams.

In its real estate development work, the federal, provincial and municipal policy environments—particularly with respect to higher education, affordable housing, Indigenous affairs and inner cities—have changed almost continuously during the past dozen years, obliging the Corporation to remain agile and flexible, to maintain a broad range of funding relationships and to construct customized financing packages for each project. And in its Indigenous economic development activities, multi-level political and policy complexity has also constrained progress.

Implications

Through its creation and support of the Community Renewal Corporation, and the UWCRC's many innovations and achievements, the University of Winnipeg has shown how higher-education institutions can catalyze multi-dimensional sustainability for themselves and the communities in which they are located. By forging authentic, effective partnerships with community-based organizations, professionals, investors and all levels of government, and with the guidance and advice of a talented and focused Board of Directors, the Corporation has produced significant outcomes in the areas of both social enterprise and social real estate—at meaningful scale. In so doing, UWCRC has made important contributions to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to poverty reduction, food security, educational access, decent work, sustainable cities, and responsible consumption. Overall, the Corporation has, very effectively, demonstrated its value as an animator of place-based inclusive growth.

Replication

There are no perfect development models, including this one. But the case of the University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation is rich in insights and lessons that can be drawn upon by other universities and colleges to help make the cities and towns where they are based greener, fairer, more inclusive and more prosperous. With thoughtful adaptation, its strategies, instruments and tools are highly replicable. Further research aimed at other post-secondary institutions on other models and experiences, a step-by-step guide, and executive training would do much to widen and accelerate the replication process and, correspondingly, the scale and reach of its impacts.

However, to fully optimize these results, an additional component is necessary: that of a pan-Canadian impact investment fund for social infrastructure that can provide both shorter-term, pre-development financing and longer-term loans and guarantees for large-scale real estate projects, as well as patient working capital for growing social enterprises. Working closely with post-secondary education institutions, foundations are well-positioned to work with other institutional investors, like banks, insurance companies and pension funds, together with high net-worth individuals, non-profits and governments, to drive the design and implementation of such a fund.



Additional Resources

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The Author

Edward T. Jackson is a university professor, management consultant and author specializing in community-university partnerships, social finance, social enterprise and program evaluation. A former associate dean and tenured faculty member in public policy at Carleton University, he has advised foundations, development agencies, governments, universities and non-profits in all regions of the world.

