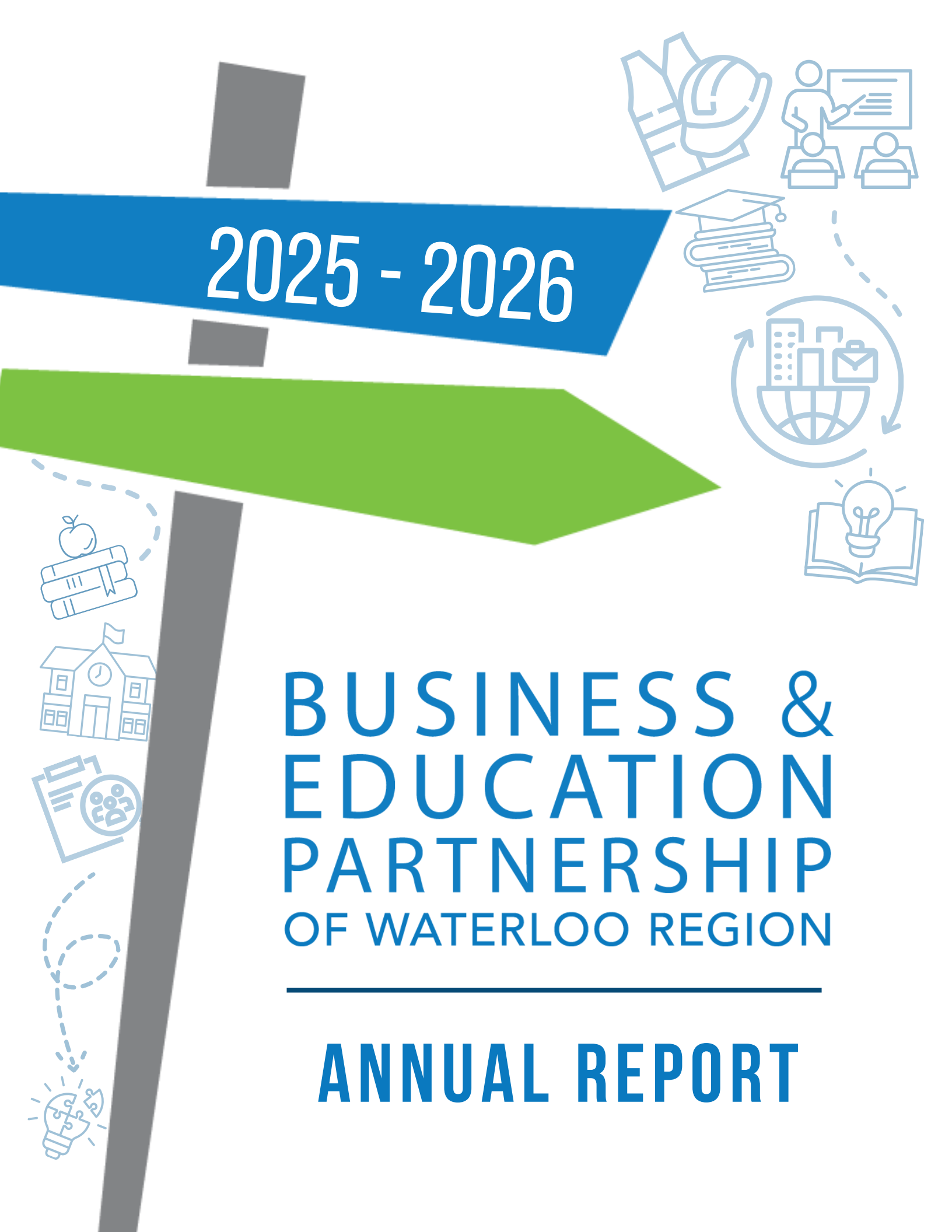




2025 - 2026

**BUSINESS &
EDUCATION
PARTNERSHIP
OF WATERLOO REGION**

ANNUAL REPORT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

Executive Summary

- A note from April Ablano

02

Program Impact

- Explore the impact of our programs this year

09

Success Stories

- Review stories of our program participants

10

Our Team

- Meet the team that made this incredible year possible

12

Supporters

- A thank you to our supporters



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

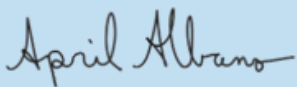
As I reflect on the past year, I am incredibly proud of what the Business & Education Partnership of Waterloo Region has accomplished alongside our volunteers, educators, employers, and community partners. Overall, **the BEP reached over 25,000 participants this school year, the most in our history**. This achievement reflects the growing demand for career-connected learning opportunities and the strength of the partnerships that make this work possible.

Several highlights from this school year include:

- **Reaching all grade 9-10 students in Waterloo Region** - over 13,000 - as a delivery partner for the Ontario Career Lab's Career Conversations program. This work was supported by 200 new volunteers, alongside our existing volunteers who reached another 8,475 youth through our longstanding Speakers Bureau program.
- Continuing the incredible Youth Creativity Fund program which has distributed more than **\$150,000 for youth-led projects** since 2023.
- The return of our Explore Your Future career expo, which allowed **1,500 youth and caregivers** to connect with employers, community organizations and post-secondary institutions.
- Moving to a **new office at the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce**, representing a deeper alignment with the local business community and our shared commitment to supporting the future workforce of Waterloo Region.

This was a year of growth and transformation for our organization as we continue as a connector between education and industry across Waterloo Region. Thanks to your support, young people in our community are more informed about their career options, feel more confident about their future and are taking control of their own career development. By empowering youth to shape their future, we strengthen our community's workforce and wellbeing.

To all of our sponsors, partners and volunteers: thank you for believing in this work and helping us create brighter futures for youth in our region.



April Albano
Executive Director

PROGRAM IMPACT



SPEAKERS BUREAU

SPEAKERS BUREAU

Since 2002, our volunteer Speakers Bureau has connected Waterloo Region educators and schools with inspirational guest speakers from our local workforce. Our roster of **300+ volunteers** share their career story with grade 7-12 students in their classrooms, at school events in the community (e.g. the annual GSA Conference), and through online events.



174
EVENTS

X



245
VOLUNTEER
ENGAGEMENTS

=



8,475
STUDENTS REACHED

"I learned that everyone's education pathway looks different and it's okay to try new things no matter what stage of life you are at."
- Student from Bluevale Collegiate Institute

"I had a chance to speak with each student at the end of class and they all found the presentation very helpful. They really appreciated learning about different possibilities and seeing that it can be possible to purchase a home or car."
- Educator

Speaker Satisfaction:  4.98 / 5

Teacher Satisfaction:  4.75 / 5



PROGRAM IMPACT



CAREER CONVERSATIONS

BEP is a proud delivery partner of the Ontario Career Lab's Career Conversations Program, through which volunteers engage in small group career conversations with students, sharing their career journey, answering student questions, and helping them connect their interests to real-world opportunities.



90
EVENTS



633
VOLUNTEER
ENGAGEMENTS



14,127
STUDENTS REACHED



100% of Waterloo Region grade 9-10 students reached



90% of volunteers rated their experience as highly rewarding



“” FEEDBACK

“The students were wonderful to spend time with this morning, and I’m so happy to hear they connected with what I shared.

Opportunities like these are always special to me, and I’m grateful to BEP for creating spaces where young people can feel encouraged and inspired.”

- **Volunteer Speaker**

“It opened students’ eyes to jobs within career pathways that they maybe hadn’t considered. It was very useful, even for me as a classroom teacher.”

- **Educator**

“Thank you for helping me be more open minded about my career path and less stressed.”

- **Student**

EXPLORE YOUR FUTURE



FEEDBACK

“I learned about the local business and opportunities, and summer jobs for my child”

- Parent

“We learned how to navigate the SHSM program into an OYAP placement and spoke to post secondary institutions on a program path and a few businesses on career paths and how to apply for summer placement.”

- Parent & Youth

“I really wanted to bring my child to build his confidence and personal skills and inquire about job opportunities in welding. This event made him more open and enthusiastic about his future.”

- Parent



2 EVENTS



1500+ ATTENDEES



56 EXHIBITORS

PROGRAM IMPACT

EXPLORE YOUR FUTURE

Explore Your Future is an event series that brings together local youth in grades 7-12, their parents/caregivers, and community members to explore career options. In 2025-26 we organized 2 Explore Your Future events, including a career expo at Tapestry Hall and a panel session at Waterloo Public Library, reaching over 1500 youth and caregivers.

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS



Waterloo Region
District School Board



Waterloo Catholic
District School Board
Quality, Inclusive, Faith Based Education



better together



Toyota Motor
Manufacturing
Canada Inc.



P & H Milling Group
A Division of Parnish in Hamilton, Ontario



Region of Waterloo



WATERLOO REGION
Community
Foundation

Cambridge Chamber of
Commerce Fund

Greater KW Chamber of
Commerce - Corporate
Challenge Fund



PROGRAM IMPACT

VIRTUAL EVENTS

This year we organized 5 webinars reaching more than **675** youth and caregivers:



INFO NIGHT FOR CAREGIVERS

On **January 21**, the Specialist High Skills Major Info Session provided an opportunity to caregivers to learn about SHSM from representatives of the Waterloo Region District School Board and Waterloo Catholic District School Board.



JOB TALKS

The Job Talks series, featuring keynote speaker Jon Callegher, engaged students and parents about the benefits and realities of careers in the skilled trades:

- **February 18:** "What Parents Need to Know About Working the Skilled Trades"
- **March 4:** "5 Great Reasons to Pursue a Career in the Skilled Trades"



LIFE AFTER OYAP

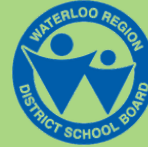
The Life After OYAP sessions were held on **January 12** and **June 3** to support students in exploring their next career steps after participating in the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program.



PARTNERS



Waterloo Catholic District School Board
Quality, Inclusive, Faith Based Education



Waterloo Region District School Board



PROGRAM IMPACT

TRADES PD

Trades PD is a professional development series aimed at helping local educators advise students about careers in the skilled trades. TradesPD provides opportunities for educators to experience skilled trades first-hand and learn about local employers and training options, so that they can share this valuable information with their students.

**35 EDUCATORS
PARTICIPATED**

“BWXT was fantastic! I enjoyed seeing the products they work on and gaining a true understanding of the complexities of the skillset required to complete their work.”
- Guidance Counsellor

THANK YOU TO OUR 2025 - 2026 TRADES PD PARTNERS

P&H Milling
November 17, 2025



BWXT
April 24, 2026



**Waterloo Catholic
District School Board**
Quality, Inclusive, Faith Based Education



PROGRAM IMPACT

ICE CHALLENGES

Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship Challenges (ICE) are one day workshops that allow grade 11-12 student to work on a problem facing a local business or industry.

As a result of participating:



93% are more aware of different career opportunities.



92% feel more equipped with knowledge, skills and connections they need for career success

2025-2026 ICE CHALLENGE PARTNERS



ICE CHALLENGE

RESULTS

8 ICE Challenges took place in 2025-2026



4 Different industries were explored including health, arts & culture, transportation, and sports.



285 SHSM students participated in 2025-2026

PROGRAM IMPACT



YOUTH CREATIVITY FUND

The Youth Creativity Fund (YCF) empowers high school students across Waterloo Region to bring their ideas to life through microgrants of up to \$1,000. This school year, YCF awarded **\$62,000** in grants to **103 students** across **63 youth-led projects**, including student-run events, tech innovations, small businesses, community initiatives, and content creation.

Since the inception of the Youth Creativity Fund

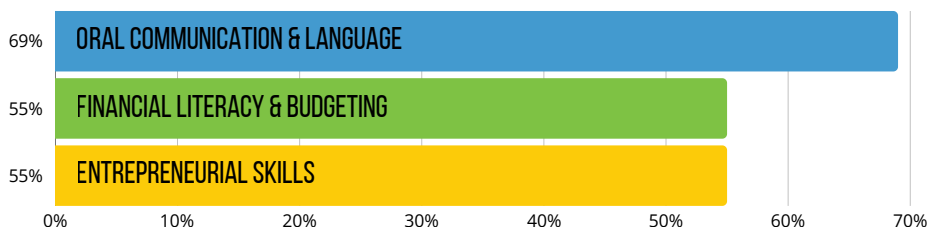
173

YOUTH
PROJECTS

\$146,285

IN GRANTS
GIVEN OUT

2025 - 2026 Participant Skill Improvement Feedback



THANK YOU TO OUR YOUTH CREATIVITY FUND SPONSORS



“ FEEDBACK

“Working with mentors and community organizations gave us valuable insight into what people truly needed. Their guidance helped us move beyond assumptions and create an impact that was more thoughtful and meaningful.”

- Sashreek from project WarmWishes4Winter



“Thank you again for believing in our project! Your support has really helped us continue it beyond Technovation. I just wanted to keep you in the loop and let you know how much your help continues to mean to us.”

- Olivia, Sophie, and Le Anne from project LinkAge

SUCCESS STORIES



THE PROJECT: WARMWISHES4WINTER

Sashreek Arunagiri and partners John Fu and Michael Zang, saw a need to provide essential winter gear and human connection to those facing harsh winter temperatures. Backed by a Youth Creativity Fund microgrant, the team assembled and distributed 100 winter care packages containing gloves, beanies, hand and toe warmers, emergency blankets, and handwritten holiday cards created by their classmates.

THE PROJECT: THE POWER OF WIFI

With the support of the Youth Creativity Fund, Eric Cao and his team aimed to offer elementary students practical experience in coding, electronics, and circuit-building. With determination and enthusiasm, they embarked on this educational journey. Their efforts led them to conduct workshops at Laurelwood Public School and KW Bilingual School. In these sessions, they transformed complex engineering concepts into engaging and interactive classroom activities, which had a significant impact on the students and their understanding of technology.



THE PROJECT: STUDENTGUIDANCE.AI

Polina Saltevsy, Yashika Katyal, and Ridha Shaheen Hamood wanted to bridge the gap in school guidance counseling using technology and community support. With support from the Youth Creativity Fund, they created a platform for students in Waterloo Region, featuring an AI chatbot, a resource hub, and a curated list of free opportunities tailored to students. Their work has greatly enhanced student resources, making a lasting community impact.



MEET THE TEAM



APRIL ALBANO

Executive Director



SCOTT VERHOEVE

Director of Operations



JENNIFER BIRNSTIHL

Program Manager
Speakers Bureau



DAVID WARD

Communications Manager



CHELSEA LEYBOURNE

Program Coordinator



SARAH KEELER

Program Lead



CAMELIA NUNEZ

Program Manager
Youth Innovation



MEET THE BOARD

SCOTT HIGGINS CHAIR

President, HIP Developments

CARMIN LAKHANPAL VICE CHAIR

Senior HR Manager,
PIB Navacord

BITA MANN TREASURER

Team Leader,
Canada Revenue Agency

SARAH LANGILLE SECRETARY

Lawyer,
Miller Thompson LLP

ROSIE HESSIAN

Chair, Outreach Initiatives,
Conestoga College

ANNALISA VARANO

Director of Education, Waterloo
Catholic District School Board

KARI PASICK STEWART

Director, Marketing and
Communications, University of Waterloo

CRISSA HILL

Superintendent, Waterloo
Region District School Board

ARINZE OKONKWO

Head of Customer Success,
AfterShip

OMAR HUSSEIN

Program Director,
Brilliant Labs

KATHERINE ST. LOUIS

Associate Director, Experiential
Learning & Career Development,
Wilfrid Laurier University

ABBAS SAFDARI

Senior Account Executive,
Bettermode

CHRIS MCLEAN

Senior Manager of Talent
Development & Transformation,
Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada



THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS



Waterloo Region
District School Board



Waterloo Catholic
District School Board
Quality, Inclusive, Faith Based Education



FUNDED IN PART BY

CANADA
SERVICE
CORPS

Canada



Region of Waterloo

LAUNCH

INDIVIDUAL DONORS

Mike Stork

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS



Cambridge Chamber of Commerce Fund

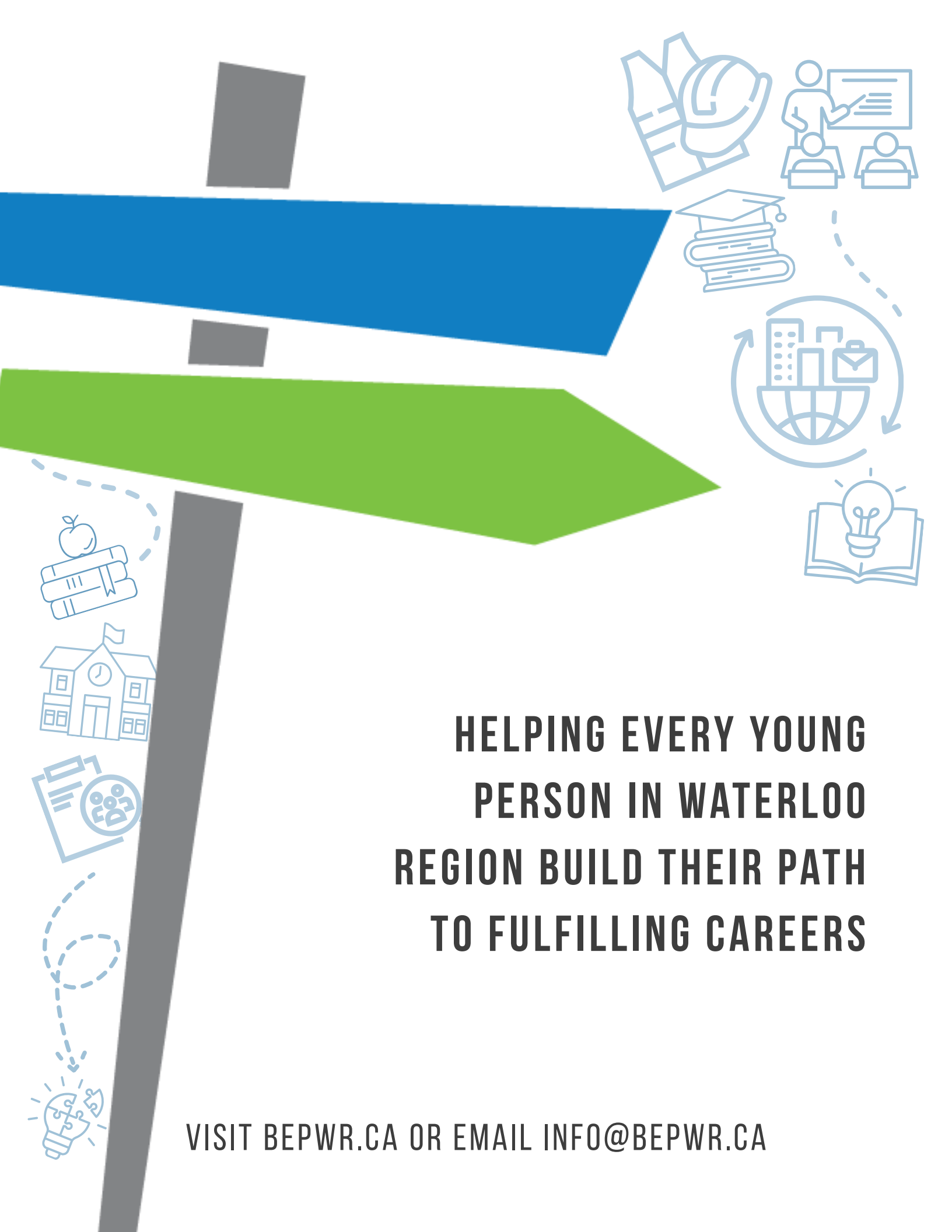
Greater KW Chamber of Commerce - Corporate Challenge Fund



ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTORS

CLAC
Enbridge

Mechdyne
Digital Chaos



HELPING EVERY YOUNG PERSON IN WATERLOO REGION BUILD THEIR PATH TO FULFILLING CAREERS

VISIT BEPWR.CA OR EMAIL INFO@BEPWR.CA