### Case Study Title:
Knowledge Mobilization for Social Innovation in York Region

### Case Study Presenter:
David Phipps

### Presenter Affiliation:
York University, Toronto, Canada

#### 1. What is/was the context and key challenge(s) in your K* case study?
York Region sits to the north of Toronto, Canada’s largest urban space. Governed by a regional government comprised of nine independent municipalities, York Region (www.york.ca) covers 1,776 sq. km. and encompasses nine municipalities north of Toronto, Canada. York Region has more than 1 million residents and with new immigrants making up 43% of the population (almost twice that of the rest of Ontario), York Region is one of Canada’s fastest growing and most diverse communities. It has elements of inner city, high wealth creation, an Aboriginal reserve, rural agriculture and the environmentally protected areas such as the Oakridge’s Moraine. The complex social and human service needs of such a diverse region are confounded by a relative lack of investments in human service infrastructure. In 2007, Price Waterhouse Coopers released a report showing a total human service funding gap of $708.2 million. This gap intensifies the need for human services provided at the community level. Along with other social service organizations, United Way of York Region (UWYR) helps to bridge this gap not just with funding (investing over $8 million annually in community programs) but with civic engagement, community building, leadership and a desire to work across all sectors to improve the quality of life of the citizens of York Region.

York University is Canada’s third-largest university with research and graduate programs in every discipline spanning the full spectrum of programs from health and the pure and applied sciences through business, law, and the humanities, social sciences and creative arts. York University is an active player in the civic and economic fabric of York Region and has a number of university outreach activities in collaboration with York Region communities, businesses and municipal governments. York University has invested in the first Knowledge Mobilization Unit in Canada that is fully integrated into the research enterprise of the university. Operational since 2006, the KMb Unit serves to enhance access to research and research expertise so that academic research can inform decisions about public policy and professional practice.

UWYR and York University jointly deliver knowledge mobilization services to support social innovation which is finding new ways to address persistent social challenges.

#### 2. Who are/were the players and why did/do they need to come together?
UWYR is a key partner in York University’s community outreach and engagement and a key player in York University’s knowledge mobilization strategy. But this relationship took time to grow. We didn’t plan to get here. We evolved here. We started out by being gateways for our organizations. If a United Way member agency sought research expertise, the UWYR pointed them to the knowledge mobilization Unit. If a university professor sought a community partner, the knowledge mobilization Unit would seek the advice of UWYR. One-off researcher-agency project brokering allowed both organizations to develop trust and a shared understanding of community-university collaborations. The mandate of the collaboration is to ensure that university research is accessible to community experts to help inform decisions about new approaches to persistent community challenges.

We deepened our relationships by supporting each other in governance and decision making roles and by...
jointly funding research projects and graduate student interns. We now share funding for a full time staff
person to work at UWYR to ensure that research and knowledge mobilization activities are co-developed
between the community and university. The initiative reaches across all nine municipalities in York
Region and across the university drawing on expertise from all Faculties at York University.

3. How did/does K* play a role in the story, i.e. tools/techniques/approaches.
In the Spring of 2010 UWYR approached York University asking for assistance in exploring new funding
mechanisms to enable it to invest in community strengths as well as in community needs. York University
and UWYR co-invested in three graduate student interns who undertook social asset mapping research in
Markham, York Region. Their research developed the evidence needed to launch a wholly new form of
United Way investment called Strength Investments that recently invested $150K in six projects in 2011
and another $150K in five projects in 2012. As an example, UWYR invested in a project from the
Markham African Caribbean Association titled *Building Sustainable Capacities amongst Afro-Canadian
Caribbean Youth in York Region*. This initiative involves and listens to local youth as they identify their
realities in York Region - inclusion, education, family life - and then helps them identify and build their
own solutions. Strength Investments and therefore this project would not have been possible without the
collaboration between a UWYR opportunity and York research.

Knowledge mobilization was the process of understanding the UWYR opportunity and then connecting
that opportunity to York University research expertise. The collaboration resulted in Strength Investments
which is a social innovation.

4. What was/is the intended impact/contribution of K* and, if you can, tell us whether K* had an impact
and how.
Before Strength Investments UWYR could only fund agencies that provided services to citizens in need
(mental health, homelessness, domestic violence, etc.). With the creation of Strength Investments UWYR
is able to invest in coalitions of citizens developing citizen led approaches to citizen identified needs
occurring in their local communities. The second round of Strength Investments has invested $150,000 in
projects such as youth entrepreneurship, social enterprises for new Canadians, co-operative housing,
people with developmental disabilities and food security. Groups of individual citizens are developing
novel approaches to address community challenges.

5. What are the lessons from this example that others should know about/could be transferred, in general
and particularly in a resource-limited context?
Knowledge mobilization (=K*) is not a single event. It is a process that takes time. The Knowledge
Mobilization collaboration between York University and UWYR has been underway since 2006. We have
brokered over 90 collaborations between York University and York Region agencies and continue to
develop programming to meet emerging community opportunities and university research strengths. We
have learned that knowledge mobilization is a process that enables social innovation. It is those social
innovations that make a difference in the lives of citizens.

6. Any other observations...: