



United Way
East Ontario

**Trust.
Innovation.
Impact.**

**2025-2029
Strategic
Plan**





Thom Donnelly



Dennise Taylor-Gilhen

Letter from Board Chair and CEO

We will always believe in the power of community to shape a more equitable and compassionate world. For generations, United Way East Ontario has brought together people and resources to build strong, healthy, and safe communities across Ottawa, Prescott-Russell, Lanark County, and Renfrew County. Our mission is grounded in collaboration—with local organizations, government partners, and individuals who share a vision for positive change. Together, we improve lives and communities. As we look to the future, our commitment remains: to invest where need is greatest and impact is deepest, ensuring our communities are measurably better because of the work we do together.

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This strategic plan comes at a time of profound change and challenge. Like all organizations in the community sector, we're navigating economic uncertainty, evolving philanthropic preferences, rising demand for services, and shifting societal expectations. Communities are grappling with increasingly complex and urgent issues. Donors, partners, and stakeholders are discerning and

committed to doing the most good. They seek transparency, responsiveness, and accountability. At the same time, we must build on the strengths of a generous and caring community, continue to modernize our operations, and stay committed to fostering and supporting a diverse, highly capable, and empowered workforce. A clarity of vision and strategy that is adaptive, courageous, and inclusive is essential.

This plan is our roadmap forward. It reflects months of thoughtful engagement, analysis, and alignment. We are grateful for the reflections and insights from the Indigenous community, agency and workplace partners, donors, staff, volunteers, board members and others. They have contributed to our ability to articulate clear priorities and directions.

We will communicate our value clearly, deepen trust and engagement, and expand the ways people can engage with us. We will focus on sustainable growth, strengthen our leadership presence within the national United Way movement, and embrace innovation and modernization. And we will continue investing in our people, culture, and internal systems and programs, grounding our work in engagement, community wisdom, and Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Indigenous Reconciliation.

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Ultimately, this will all be in service to rallying the community to understand and join us to tackle the most complex problems that we face—together.

With this plan, we reaffirm our commitment to those most marginalized and extend an open invitation to all who share our vision: join us in building a region where everyone thrives.



Thom Donnelly
Board Chair



Dennise Taylor-Gilhen
Interim President
and Chief Executive Officer

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Land Acknowledgement for United Way East Ontario

United Way East Ontario operates on the traditional, unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation. We recognize and honour their enduring stewardship of these lands and waters—now known as East Ontario—and their leadership in preserving them for future generations.

We also acknowledge that this region is home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, whose histories, cultures, and resilience continue to shape our communities. Moving forward, we remain committed to centering Indigenous wisdom, teachings, and self-determination in our work. We understand that reconciliation is an ongoing journey—one that requires active listening, ethical partnerships, and a dedication to truth, equity, and mutual care.

United Way East Ontario is grateful for the guidance of Indigenous knowledge systems, which remind us of our shared responsibility to nurture sustainable, interconnected futures. Together, we will walk this path in a spirit of respect and collective healing.

Our Vision, Mission, and Values

United Way East Ontario is a region-wide force for good—creating lasting impact across Prescott-Russell, Ottawa, Lanark County, and Renfrew County. We unite people and partners to uncover local challenges and deliver meaningful solutions. Guided by leadership rooted in our communities, we're committed to transparency, accountability, and operational excellence. Together, we break down barriers, improve lives, and open doors to opportunity for those who need it most.



Our vision is that the communities we serve are measurably better because of the work of United Way East Ontario and others.



Our mission is to bring people and resources together to build strong, healthy, safe communities for all.



Our promise is that we will invest resources where they are needed most and where they will have the greatest impact.



At United Way East Ontario, we live into the values of integrity, collaboration, respect, and results.



Commitment to Reconciliation, Social Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Our strategic plan is guided by our commitment to reconciliation, social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

United Way East Ontario holds relationships with local Indigenous leaders, coalitions, and organizations that guide and deepen our understanding of the needs facing Indigenous Peoples in Prescott-Russell, Ottawa, Lanark County, and Renfrew County.

Our work is strengthened by listening to and learning from Indigenous members of our communities about Indigenous strengths and ways of knowing and being, including the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We will continue to build relationships and collaborate with Indigenous communities across our region.

We believe that our identities should not determine whether we are healthy, housed, educated, employed, and safe. But, because of the way our societies have operated over time, equity-deserving communities continue to struggle.

Many people face discrimination for their skin colour, culture, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, or ability. These biases are deeply rooted in colonialism and systemic racism, showing up in policies and power structures that keep equity-deserving groups from reaching their full potential.

Tackling the toughest social issues requires that we are always learning about the factors contributing to disparities across Prescott-Russell, Ottawa, Lanark County, and Renfrew County. We're committed to ongoing learning, and building strong relationships that help us move forward, better, and together.



We believe that equity and justice are achieved when system barriers are dismantled, and everyone has the freedom and opportunity to reach their full potential.

We believe that equity and justice are achieved when system barriers are dismantled, and everyone has the freedom and opportunity to reach their full potential. We're committed to strengthening accessibility and inclusion in the workplace. With every investment we make, we give priority to organizations that are led by or have a mandate to support equity-deserving communities. Through a coalition of organizations, community leaders, and people with lived experience, we're confronting hate head-on—working together to build a more inclusive and compassionate East Ontario.

We engage donors in learning. And, we listen to communities and follow their lead. By collaborating with underserved communities, United Way is contributing to a more equitable future.



Planning Process

We've undertaken an intentional, highly engaged planning process, including:

1 Turning both Inward and Outward, Listening and Learning

Seeking the honest input and insights of board members, staff, donors, workplace partners, other corporate partners, community partners, and agencies.

2 Conducting Foundational Analyses

Compiling strategic themes and conducting Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results (SOAR) analyses through five key lenses: creating impact, brand, operational excellence, revenue transformation, and people strategy.

3 Engaging in Strategic Foresight

Forecasting future conditions and characteristics of our communities and sector, reflecting upon how we wish to contribute, and considering what we need to do now to prepare.

4 Observing Strategic Issues

Diving into all the input, insights, and analysis while considering more than 50 strategic issues and other important factors within and around the organization.

5 Defining Strategic Directions

Determining and defining the strategic issues most important to prioritize now and in the immediate years, to foster the greatest impact in our communities.

6 Framing Objectives and Outlining Milestones

Articulating the most important operational objectives to advance the strategic directions and forecasting directional milestones to help us guide and adapt our work going forward.

7 Developing a Unified Strategy and Narrative

Framing our work going forward by embracing the connections between our priorities and actions, co-creating a strategic narrative to fuel our will and commitment, and engaging others in our efforts to advance community impact.



Meeting the Moment

Our Current Environment

The community sector is navigating a time of profound change, creating both complexity and opportunity. Change is reshaping how communities connect, evolve, and envision the future.

1 Mobilizing Communities Through Trust

Trust in institutions is shifting across public, community, and private sectors. At the same time there is a visible resilience within communities: They are stepping up with renewed energy and purpose, coming together to support one another and respond to local needs. This moment reflects both the fragility and the strength of social connection, showing the importance of demonstrating capability, authenticity, transparency, and integrity to build and maintain trust.

2 Rising Complexity and Interconnected Social Challenges

Communities are changing, growing more diverse in multiple ways, and marked by larger gaps in political, social, and economic realities. The scope and scale of needs are intensifying, tightly interwoven and connected, while being shaped by broader forces like inflation and economic uncertainty. While this complexity presents challenges, it also opens up new possibilities for understanding, collaboration, and innovation in how communities relate to one another and respond to change.

3 Changing Patterns of Engagement and Giving

Community sector organizations are adapting their engagement approaches to involve more voices. With more options than ever, donors are seeking issue(s)-based, interactive, and digital-first forms of giving and engagement. Those who give and support are seeking more personalized lines of sight—impact-driven engagement—and are discerning about their opportunities and decisions to give and engage. There is also a growing desire among individuals to be part of something, to join movements that bring people together in response to the complex issues they are seeing and experiencing within the community.

4 Accelerating Technological Change

Technology continues to advance rapidly, reshaping how people connect, communicate, and access services. While this pace of change can be challenging, especially with the capacity barriers it presents within the community sector, it also presents opportunities to reshape connection, insight, and innovation. The digital landscape continues to evolve, influencing how organizations operate and engage with the community.

5 A Transforming Workforce

The nature of work is undergoing significant change across all industries, and the not-for-profit sector continues to grapple with engagement and retention. Employees are seeking organizations that offer clear career pathways, equitable compensation, and inclusive leadership and that show meaningful commitments to people and culture.

The Path Forward

United Way East Ontario continues to deepen our role as a trusted convener, systems leader, and advocate for the most vulnerable in our communities.

United Way East Ontario grows our reach through partnerships and engagement, evidence-based investment, and a reputation for transparent leadership. Recognizing the complexity and interconnectedness of today's social challenges, we understand that our responses must be collaborative, responsive, upstream, and community-led. We are committed to being a credible, trusted, solutions broker and systems influencer that brings people and resources together to co-create long-term scalable change.

We are embracing a path forward that is thoughtful, focused, inclusive, and action-oriented in order to address the challenges and to take advantage of the opportunities in today's environment, with an end to achieve our collective vision for community collaboration and impact.



Five Strategic Directions have been identified to guide United Way East Ontario's work through the current landscape over the next three years.

They provide a clear, concrete, and actionable focus for how we will move forward with purpose and intention.



Deepen Community Engagement

United Way East Ontario will grow and diversify the ways people engage with us, increasing the number of people supporting the community through United Way. This will create a greater number of people who will understand, be actively involved, and who will commit more deeply to United Way's work and mission—building a movement of collective impact.



Commit to Sustainable Revenue Growth

United Way East Ontario will pursue long-term growth by adopting the most promising and sustainable practices for revenue growth and diversification and engaging people and partners strategically within the process.



Commit to Movement Leadership

By aligning and championing the values, aspirations, and strengths of the United Way movement—and helping to enhance the collective brand and voice nationally—United Way East Ontario will inspire others to join us in our work, building momentum in the movement locally and nationally to tackle communities' toughest issues, together.



Embrace a Culture of Innovation

By creating an environment that encourages and supports innovation and learning, United Way East Ontario will modernize internal systems and ways of work, integrate new technologies and tools, and leverage data effectively and efficiently with the end goal of empowering people and enhancing community impact.



Focus and Strengthen Organizational Capacity

Through alignment of internal systems, programs, culture, and structures, United Way East Ontario will foster collaboration, efficiency, and focus to ensure resources and energy are aligned to have the greatest community impact and deliver on what matters most.

Five core themes have been identified as areas to bring these Strategic Directions to life: Community Impact, People and Culture, Brand, Operational Excellence, and Revenue Development. Together, these Strategic Directions and core themes form a cohesive roadmap for action—reflecting our commitment to **organizational alignment, innovation, and sustainable growth**, and ensuring we are well-positioned to serve our communities today and into the future..

This is not work that the team at United Way East Ontario does alone. United Way invites **governments, donors, other funders, nonprofit partners, and community advocates** to work with us to build communities that are more equitable, resilient, connected, and measurably better for all who call them home.



Strategic Directions

The benefit we want to deliver for our communities



We will... inspire collective action
So that... we grow trust, innovation, community collaboration, and impact.

The most essential work we need to focus on to create the impact we seek

We will... Deepen Community Engagement



So that... we increase the number of people supporting and participating in our work by 20% by 2029 through growing and diversifying the ways to engage with us, creating a local movement where people understand, are involved, and commit more deeply to making our communities better today.

We will... Commit to Sustainable Revenue Growth



So that... revenue grows by 20% and diversifies by 30% over the next three years, by engaging people and partners in sustainable approaches.

We will... Commit to Movement Leadership



So that... as leaders in the sector, we align and champion the values, aspirations, and strengths of the United Way movement, nationally and in our communities, to inspire others to join us and better tackle our communities' toughest issues.

The human resources, capabilities, and culture that underpin it all

We will... Embrace a Culture of Innovation



So that... we create an environment that actively modernizes and encourages new ideas, experimentation, and calculated risk-taking—through learning and development, exploration and piloting, the implementation of technology and other tools, and by using data to inform and strengthen our work.

We will... Focus and Strengthen Organizational Capacity



So that... we collaboratively align our internal systems, programs, culture, and structures where they are needed most to have the greatest impact.



United Way East Ontario reaffirms our commitment to collaborative action and measurable impact. This plan is not just a roadmap, it is a shared promise to our communities, partners, and staff to lead with purpose, evolve with intention, and deliver results that matter. We will align our resources to drive results and move forward with collective metrics to achieve our shared goals.

This plan reflects our commitment to equity, collaboration, and innovation—and to the communities we serve. We invite you to stay connected and be part of our journey. Follow us on social media and subscribe to our newsletter to receive updates, stories, and opportunities to engage in our impact work.



United Way
East Ontario

363 Coventry Road
Ottawa, ON K1K 2C5
Phone: 613-228-6700

Facilitated by

