



Maturing a Great Concept

Writers in Electronic Residence Strategic Plan

2010 - 2013

Prepared by the Board of Trustees with stakeholders, and with the assistance of Jonquil Eyre Consulting. Approved by the Board of Trustees October 27, 2010.

Vision: WiER is a unique vehicle for creative writing teachers to realize their aspirations as educators.

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Executive Summary

Three Strategies

- 1. Market to teachers** through focussed marketing and communications to engage creative writing schoolteachers and their classes.
- 2. Support teachers to succeed** through carefully designed interventions to increase early easy use of the program and to retain existing users.
- 3. Reduce barriers of program cost** by securing resources to subsidize schools.

Nine Key Activities

(i) Acquire new staff skills; (ii) Develop Board of Trustees; (iii) Fundraise to secure resources in addition to OAC; (iv) Focus geographically to build on TELUS support; (v) Collaborate with complementary organizations; (vi) Focus the program on teachers; (vii) Learn, evaluate and measure; (viii) Monitor technology, and (ix) Expand national presence

Focus	What will be different?
Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program doubled in year one, with help of TELUS funding • Program continues to grow by at least 20% per annum in number of classes
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded Board of Trustees • Trustee expertise guides organization • Regular meetings and flow of information which is documented • Monitoring of progress on strategic plan
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased national use of program • Targeted to teacher audiences • Key messages communicated • More channels for targeted communication • Sustained promotion and follow up
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program Coordinator hired on contract using the surplus for funding • Other responsibilities assigned
Fundraising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse funding sources in addition to OAC and TELUS • Multi-year OAC funding • Robust relationships with funders
Support to teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools, classes and teachers retained from one year to next • Less demanding for teachers • Reduced barriers from cost
Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutually beneficial joint marketing, value to teachers (and therefore students) and expertise in working with schools, engaging school boards and evaluating programs
National presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WiER has champions in every province

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Overview

In summer 2010 WiER undertook a strategic planning process that included a broad stakeholder consultation and strategic planning workshop participated in by the Trustees and selected other stakeholders. This strategic plan is the result of that work. WiER is at an exciting and important juncture in its 22 year history. The Trustees have determined that, with a sense of urgency, a significant thrust must be asserted to shift the thinking and practice of the organization to continuously grow the use of WiER's program. There is consensus that the wonderful concept of WiER needs to be brought to maturity.

The known reasons for the lack of growth in demand for the WiER program are lack of awareness of the program, the practical challenge for teachers of taking on a new initiative in addition to the demands of their existing workload and the barrier presented by cost. The strategies that will be used to grow program use over the next three years address these areas.

Three Strategies

Growth will be achieved through three strategies:

1. **Market to teachers** through focussed marketing and communications to engage creative writing schoolteachers and their classes.
2. **Support teachers to succeed** through carefully designed interventions to increase early easy use of the program and to retain existing users.
3. **Reduce barriers of program cost** by securing resources to subsidize schools.

Nine Key Activities

The strategies will be realized through nine key activities:

- (i) Acquire additional new staff skills and experience
- (ii) Develop the Board of Trustees
- (iii) Fundraise to secure resources in addition to OAC
- (iv) Focus geographically to build on TELUS support
- (v) Collaborate with complementary organizations
- (vi) Focus the program on teachers
- (vii) Learn, evaluate and measure
- (viii) Monitor technology
- (ix) Expand national presence

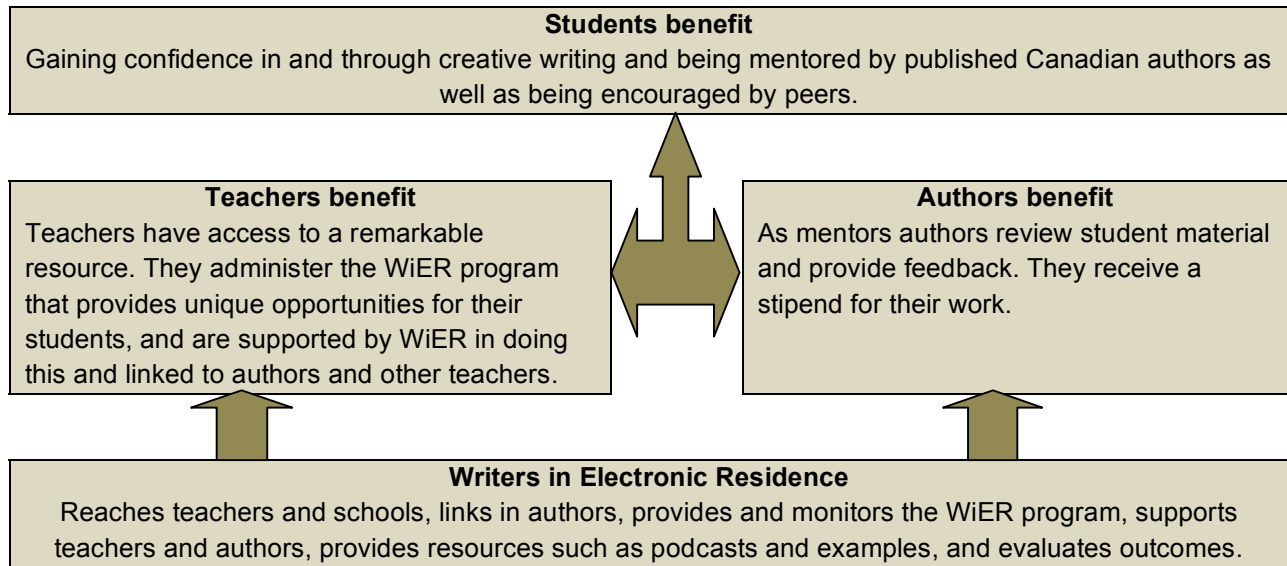
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Vision

WiER is a unique vehicle for creative writing teachers to realize their aspirations as educators.

Mission

Across Canada WiER encourages creative writing by linking students, teachers and Canadian writers with each other to exchange ideas. Participation of all students is promoted by helping to make the program accessible and affordable.



Goal

Grow use of the program by engaging 20% more teachers and their classes each year.

In 2009-2010 twenty-one classes used the WiER program. TELUS support doubles this in 2010-2011 by TELUS funding six classes of students in the GTA and 15 in Ottawa, a total of 21.

Annual targets then, are to equal or exceed:

Year	Target number of classes
Sept 2010 – June 2011	42
Sept 2011 – June 2012	50
Sept 2012 – June 2013	60

Values

- Support student creativity
- Provide a voice for vibrant Canadian authors
- Respect for student, teacher and writer participants

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- Recognize the benefit of reflective thinking
- Value the exchange of ideas

Strategies

More detail follows on the three strategies that WiER will use over the next three years to grow the organization:

Strategy 1: Market to Teachers

Directed at teachers - Although students are the beneficiaries, teachers are essential to the success of the WiER program. Creative writing teachers in schools need to be aware of the program and understand what it can achieve to enhance their teaching. It may be 'special' teachers, those who go 'above and beyond', who use WiER as a resource to excite and expand their students' confidence, enthusiasm for and involvement in creative writing. The marketing and communications plan will be directed at finding and informing these teachers.

Ideas include presentations on Professional Development (PD) days, creative writing camps for teachers, focussed podcasts and enabling an online dialogue among teachers.

Describing the value to students - Teachers who are experienced with WiER describe how the program can help to stimulate previously unmotivated students. Writers and other stakeholders describe the value of WiER to students who lack other opportunities to engage with Canadian writers. To address these opportunities marketing and communications will also be directed at schools with evidence of diverse student populations.

Targeted, expanded and sustained channels – Currently WiER communications are focussed on the website, articles and advertisements in publications for teachers and administrators (e.g., Education Canada) and the start up package of information sent to participating schools.

Marketing and communications will be targeted at one or more levels. For example:

- (i) To the School Board e.g. to superintendents using the TDSB weekly bulletin
- (ii) To a family of schools using a mentor or colleague who is familiar with WiER
- (iii) Through principals, heads of departments or teachers at schools using an e-flyer
- (iv) To the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation and The Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (and in the future to their counterparts in other provinces) by identifying champions who will advocate for the program and may be able to provide funding support. E.g. quarterly newsletter.

Communications will require timely contact and persistence including personal follow up. For example there are 148 schools in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. Using TELUS funds to reach 15 of them will require a success rate of one in every 10 schools to participate with WiER.

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Strategy 2: Support Teachers to Succeed

Although they say it is worth the effort, even enthusiastic and experienced teachers describe the implementation of WiER as time consuming and demanding. One goal is to support teachers to achieve success thereby increasing the likelihood of retention of teachers who have used WiER. A carefully designed program to support teachers will be developed to respond to the increasing demands on teachers. To inform the development of this program to support teachers it will begin with better understanding why so many schools use the program only once and what challenges teachers face. Also monitoring inquiries from schools which then do not proceed with the program will be followed up to understand why.

Particularly directed at first time users, the program will provide information, guidance and side by side practical support and may include school visits, workshops, a mentor or buddies. (By focussing geographically, face to face support becomes doable within limited budgets.) It will include making available to teachers enhanced resources such as user friendly materials, examples of how to implement the program, suggestions for topics, podcasts including video podcasts etc. Support may include demonstrating to teachers how WiER aligns with other school board or provincial department/ministry curriculum expectations and will include assisting teachers to use the technology.

Effective incentives will be explored to enable a teacher to remain involved with WiER in subsequent years.

Strategy 3: Reduce Barriers of Program Cost

Cost of the program is understood to be a barrier for school participation. However the extent of the barriers presented by cost and what would be affordable needs to be fully understood. To what extent and how to fairly subsidize classes will be determined. This will inform fundraising to secure resources for this purpose.

Securing corporate support for schools, classes and teachers will be aligned with funder interest without distracting from WiER's vision, mission and goal.

Key Activities

More detail follows on the nine main activities that WiER will use over the next three years to grow the organization:

- (i) **Acquire additional new staff skills and experience** - New and additional staff skills for the organization will be retained with responsibilities especially focussed on communications, marketing, and establishing and maintaining relationships with users and funders. The objective is a Program Coordinator who would be retained on a one year contract utilizing surplus funds, to stimulate growth in year one of the plan. It is anticipated that this position will continue after year one by building on momentum in the subsequent two years.

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- (ii) **Develop Board of Trustees** –The number of Trustees will be expanded. Skills of additional trustees include fundraising experience, representing other parts of Canada, influential teachers, a representative of the Canadian Education Association (CEA) and The Learning Partnership, as well as retiring school board administrators or superintendents. Also development of the Board of Trustees including formalizing regular meetings, ensuring documentation of decisions, effective flow of information and utilization of Trustee skills to determine and maintain organizational direction.
- (iii) **Fundraise** to secure resources in addition to Ontario Arts Council (OAC) for engaging schools and supporting teachers. This will include corporate support and other grants. Relationships with funders will be established and maintained to ensure mutual accountability. One facet of this activity is to work to secure multi-year OAC funding.
- (iv) **Focus geographically** - Building on the injection of support to Ottawa and Greater Toronto Area by donations from TELUS will enable subsidized school participation in those areas. These areas will be the focus of growth in year one of the plan with plans in place to expand geographically in year two.
- (v) **Collaborate** with complementary organizations to establish joint marketing in new ways to schools, to add value for teachers (and therefore students) by broadening the service offering to schools and for mutual exchange of expertise to learn with others about ways of working with schools, engaging school boards and evaluating programs etc.
- (vi) **Focus program** on teachers of elementary language arts and secondary school English and communications. The focus will ensure that WiER does not distribute effort to other areas such as audiences outside schools.
- (vii) **Learn, evaluate and measure** to understand better what is working and what needs to be changed. An example will be securing feedback from users, measuring impact and results, logging expressions of interest and maintaining the relevant database of these contacts.
- (viii) **Monitor technology** WiER recognizes that the use of technology is fundamental to the WiER program experience. The speed and visibility of changing technology necessitates that WiER be overt in describing the accessibility and usability of its platform. This includes the benefits of (i) using technology and (ii) asynchronous communication. Communication may include describing appropriate usability in the classroom (as opposed to the playground) and addressing concerns such as levels of permission. Monitoring of technology on a regular basis will occur to ensure its efficacy.
- (ix) **Expand national presence** The focus of the next 3 years is to build on the new schools being subsidized by TELUS in Ottawa and the GTA and schools that are currently participating. WiER also wants to build its national presence e.g. by cultivating champions or WiER ambassadors who are familiar with local curriculum and priorities in every province as the basis for engaging schools in each province.