Toolkit

NSG Project Coordinator

Introducing the Principles of Grassroots Grantmaking and tips for program success!

vancouver foundation | **neighbourhood small grants**

Contents

What are Neighbourhood Small Grants?

Have a great idea to bring people together in your neighbourhood?

Neighbourhood Small Grants (NSG) empower community members to put their ideas into action by providing **$50 to $500 grants** for projects that make neighbourhoods better places to live.

The NSG is a grassroots grant-making program, committed to fostering local leadership and community self-direction.

NSG funds are administered by local community organizations, who hire a Program Coordinator to oversee the NSG.

Local people partner with a neighbour or friend from the same community to apply for a grant and implement their projects as Project Leaders.

Each community establishes a Neighbourhood Granting Committee (NGC) comprised of local volunteers who review applications and make granting decisions, ensuring that the grants are serving community aspirations and interests.

In less than a decade, the NSG program has more than tripled its reach. Developed and funded by the Vancouver Foundation, and working in partnership with local community organisations [1], it now serves 21 neighbourhoods across BC, including:

- Vancouver:
  - » Carnegie, Strathcona and Ray-Cam
  - » Cedar Cottage, Hastings-Sunrise and Renfrew
  - » Central Vancouver: Mount Pleasant, Little Mountain
  - » Downtown Peninsula
  - » South Vancouver and Collingwood
  - » UBC, Point Grey and Musqueam
  - » West Side
  - » West Vancouver and Lions Bay
- North Vancouver
- West Vancouver and Lions Bay

- Burnaby
- Richmond
- New Westminster
- Abbotsford
- Maple Ridge
- North Surrey
- **Squamish and Britannia Beach**
- **South Okanagan/Similkameen**
- Victoria
- Parksville Qualicum Beach
- Salt Spring Island
- Clayoquot Sound

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1 To support sustainability as the NSG expands across BC, partner organizations outside Metro Vancouver provide 50% of the funding for NSG grants in their community.

NSG Goals and Objectives

Connecting and engaging neighbours

Strengthening belonging and responsibility

Sharing skills and knowledge

Respecting and celebrating diversity

To help inspire NSG projects and guide granting decisions, the NSG has outlined four core goals and objectives. Additionally, as part of the NSG's commitment to place-based grantmaking (see p. 14), Granting Committees are welcome to create their own goals and objectives to address local priorities.

Annual evaluative surveys track program outcomes for the four core NSG goals through a series of key indicators:

Connecting & Engaging Neighbours

- Building new relationships and deepening existing relationships through frequent interactions
- Developing a sense of community connection, belonging, trust, and safety

Indicators

- % of projects that helped create new connections and that built lasting relationships between neighbours
- % of projects where participants interacted frequently
- % of Project Leaders and granting committee members reporting a greater sense of connection, belonging, trust, and safety
- Relevant reflections and stories from Project Leaders and granting committee members

Strengthening Belonging & Social Responsibility

- Developing neighbours' knowledge about and sense of belonging to their neighbourhood
- Engaging neighbours to make meaningful contributions and leave legacies in their community
- Encouraging collaboration between neighbours

Indicators

- % of Project Leaders and granting committee members reporting an increased knowledge about their neighbourhood and local resources
- % of projects that make use of local assets, including people, places, groups, and organizations
- % of Project Leaders and granting committee members reporting an increased sense of belonging
- % of projects resulting in physical legacies and annual traditions
- % of Project Leaders and granting committee members reporting an interest in collaborating with others in the future
- Relevant reflections and stories from Project Leaders and granting committee members

Sharing Skills & Knowledge

- Creating opportunities for neighbours to share skills and knowledge in order to build community connections and develop a sense of accomplishment

Indicators

- % of projects where participants shared their skills and knowledge
- Relevant reflections and stories from Project Leaders and granting committee members

Respecting & Celebrating Diversity

- Highlighting and celebrating the diversity of neighbourhoods
- Connecting people across boundaries such as age, ethnicity, income level, cultural affiliation, and sexual orientation
- Promoting accessibility and inclusion for all people

Indicators

- Diversity of Project Leaders and granting committee members
- % of projects that have participants from diverse backgrounds
- % of projects that connected groups across boundaries
- % of projects that were accessible and inclusive
- Relevant reflections and stories from Project Leaders and granting committee members

Principles of Grassroots Grantmaking

As the NSG expands to communities across BC, the Vancouver Foundation has developed the Principles of Grassroots Grantmaking to guide Program Coordinators, Granting Committees and Project Leaders as they contribute to the NSG's mission of harnessing local skills and experiences in order to foster community self-direction and empowerment and make our neighbourhoods better places to live.

The Principles of Grassroots Grantmaking are intended as a practical resource that can inform various aspects of your role, including program promotion and supporting Granting Committees and Project Leaders.

Everyone has gifts
Asset-based community development

The NSG uses an asset-based community development approach to build vibrant and sustainable communities by drawing on existing strengths. We believe that everyone has capacities and gifts to contribute to their community and that the passions, skills, and knowledge of neighbours are the building blocks of community development.

The three core steps of asset-based community development (ABCD)[2] include:

1. mapping existing strengths and assets,
2. defining local values and priorities, and
3. mobilizing assets towards a common goal

Everyone in the NSG acts as a powerful "community connector"[3] who sees the gifts in others and the richness of your community, and helps connect people, groups, and resources to make your community a better place to live.

Community asset inventories

As an NSG Program Coordinator, you can leverage your oversight of multiple NSG projects to help map local resources that can support Project Leaders and overall program promotion. Inventories and guides for accessing resources can encourage participation from newcomers and more isolated neighbours who may not be aware of all the available resources that could support them in implementing a project idea. You could even host a workshop inviting community members to map local assets and discuss community priorities, which can double as a networking opportunity and information session to promote the NSG!

Community asset inventories may include:

- [ ] **Free or affordable community spaces** including accessible indoor and outdoor spaces

- [ ] **Resources to guide Project Leaders** in applying for city permits, insurance, or other requirements for public events

- [ ] **Project equipment** such as tables, chairs, and tents

- [ ] **Community sponsors** including organizations and businesses offering tools and equipment, food and refreshments, or other resources

- [ ] **Contact information of community volunteers** who are interested in supporting with project implementation or as "co-signers" for potential Project Leaders who have fewer community connection

- [ ] **Sources of additional financial support** for projects seeking to scale up or sustain activities in the long-term, beyond the scope of the NSG

- [ ] **Partners for promotion** including local organisations, social service providers, informal community groups and highly connected individuals who can help amplify your promotion or host short presentations

- [ ] **Existing communication platforms and networks** (e.g.: local media, social media pages, bulletin boards, newsletters, advertising spaces, and informal or grassroots networks for communication that can be leveraged and strengthened to promote the NSG)

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2 Kretzmann, J. & McKnight, J. P. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets.* Evanston, IL: Centre for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University.

3 McKnight, J. & Block, P. (2010). *The abundant community: Awakening the power of families and neighborhoods.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers

Small is beautiful
The power of small-scale initiatives

The NSG is a grassroots grantmaking program that believes that small-scale actions and projects can have far-reaching and lasting impacts on people and places. Sometimes only a small amount of money is needed to get a project started and reduce the stress of financial barriers of planning community events so that neighbours can focus on enjoying one another's company.

Short term successes and tangible results can also spark neighbours' motivation, sense of capacity, and desire to collaborate with others and give back to their community. Small projects might inspire further initiatives and can act as pilot projects that provide credibility to be scaled up over time with other partnerships and larger funding applications.

Strengthening organisational support

One of the key factors impacting the success of grassroots grantmaking is the degree of organisational support within a foundation (Burns & Downs, 2007), including having "program champions" at all levels of the foundation, and efforts to embed the program within the foundation's core work, allowing it to inform and influence the foundation's other activities.

However, one Program Coordinator in the 2017 NSG evaluation survey also noted the importance of organisational support within partnering organisations, describing how they strived to remind staff in their organisation about the NSG program. The NSG would encourage Program Coordinators to continue these efforts, and the literature of grassroots grantmaking[4] describes a number of returns on investment that grassroots grants can provide, including:

- [ ] Providing organisations an avenue through which to connect with community members, including more marginalized groups who may have difficulty accessing larger grants in order to gain a deeper understanding and new perspectives on the community's opportunities, challenges, and priorities, which can inform their planning and decision-making

- [ ] Building on broader organisational goals, for instance by developing customized NSG Goals and Objectives based on local priorities (see p. 4)

- [ ] Increasing the partner organization's visibility, credibility, and accountability within a community

4 Burns, T. & Downs, L. (2007). A legacy of leadership and support for grassroots grantmaking. Grassroots Grantmakers. Retrieved from: http://www.grassrootsgrantmakers.org/wp-content/uploads/10009638_Legacy_of_Support.final_.pdf
Richardson, J. F. & Works, E. G. (2013). A short course on grassroots grantmaking. Grassroots Grantmakers. Retrieved from: http://www.grassrootsgrantmakers.org/wp-content/uploads/Grassroots-Grantmaking-Short-Course-Final.Web_.pdf

Local is best
Local leadership

From an asset-based community development perspective, local community members are experts in the opportunities and priorities in their neighbourhoods and have a unique ability to gain trust and foster participation amongst their neighbours[5].

Fittingly, the NSG is powered by you, the local Program Coordinators, the Granting Committee members and Project Leaders. Vancouver Foundation and its community partners support local leaders by soliciting and listening to their feedback, connecting them with resources, and facilitating peer mentorship to ensure that they receive advise that is context-specific and grounded in lived experience.

Empower local leadership as a Program Coordinator

☐ **Encourage NSG mentorship**. Project Leaders find it very meaningful when Program Coordinators and granting committee members attend their events and offer individual mentorship and advise on applications.

» As much as possible, dedicate some time to connect in person with NSG applicants and visit some NSG events, and encourage granting committee members to do the same

☐ **Promote networking, mentorship, and capacity building opportunities** for Project Leaders and prospective applicants

☐ **Invite experienced Project Leaders to share their best practices** at local information sessions

☐ **Support equity and accountability in your local Granting Committee.**

» Discuss expected time commitment for the NGC with potential members and establish a procedure to check in with committee members and review availability when they are regularly not fulfilling obligations

» Track the number of incoming applications and discuss workload with standing committee members to identify early on whether additional committee members need to be recruited

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5 McKnight, J. & Block, P. (2010). *The abundant community: Awakening the power of families and neighborhoods.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Where we live matters
Place-based approach

As the NSG expands across BC, it strives to maintain a place-based approach to community development, collaborating with local community partners to adapt the program to local contexts. NSG projects are envisioned, approved and implemented by local community members, who leverage the particular resources and relationships available to them so that change happens in a way that is unique to each neighbourhood/community and the people who live in it.

Adapting the NSG for your community

Although the NSG program shares a basic organizational structure in all participating neighbourhoods, local partners and Granting Committees are welcome to modify various elements to suit local opportunities, needs and interests. As you plan the upcoming granting cycle, consider place-based adaptations you can make so that the NSG program resonates with your community members, addresses local barriers to accessibility, and celebrates the uniqueness of your neighbourhood:

NSG Goals and Objectives

- [ ] Talk to your granting committee about local Goals and Objectives that could support projects that address your neighbourhood's priorities and interests (e.g. youth engagement, safety, promoting arts and culture, intergenerational projects, etc)

Promotional Material

- [ ] How can you adapt NSG promotional material to include stories, images, and invitations that will resonate in your community?

- [ ] What local alternatives to the NSG blog could help promote events in a more timely and visible way (e.g. shared calendars, e-newsletters, social media pages)

- [ ] How can we support Project Leaders in documenting and sharing the stories of their initiatives with their community?

Feedback & Evaluation

- [ ] What information could help you better assess and support the NSG's success in your area? Talk with the NSG staff at the Vancouver Foundation to incorporate additional questions in the annual Project Leader and Granting Committee surveys, or develop your own assessment process

Accessibility and Inclusion

- [ ] Compare demographic data of your Neighbourhood Granting Committee members and Project Leaders with local demographics to identify gaps in representation and outreach priorities for your community

- [ ] What are prominent languages spoken by community members in your neighbourhoods? Talk with the NSG staff at the Vancouver Foundation to create translations of promotional material and application forms

We learn Together
Capacity building and knowledge exchange

Opportunities for knowledge exchange and capacity building support the success and sustainability of place-based grassroots grantmaking programs such as the NSG.

The NSG aims to foster a spirit of life-long learning and to empower community members to contribute to knowledge exchange and evaluation for program improvement. The Vancouver Foundation and local community partners facilitate several networking and capacity-building opportunities for Granting Committee members and Project Leaders, including training and orientation sessions, grant-writing support, skill building workshops, community gatherings, and the annual NSG evaluation surveys and final report.

Supporting capacity-building and knowledge exchange in your community

As a Program Coordinator, you play a key role in facilitating knowledge exchange and capacity building opportunities in your community. Recommendations based on feedback from past Program Coordinators, granting committee members, and Project Leaders include:

☐ Supporting Project Leaders in documenting their projects (e.g.: providing photographers and videographers, creating posters or gallery walks to showcase project stories)

☐ Broad promotion of available grant-writing support, wrap-up events, the annual evaluative survey, and the final report

☐ Considering what feedback from Project Leaders and granting committee members would help you improve the NSG program in your community, and discussing with the Vancouver Foundation to incorporate related questions in the annual evaluation surveys

☐ Encouraging granting committee members and experienced Project Leaders to act as mentors within their community

☐ Strengthening the capacity of Project Leaders and Neighbourhood Grant Committee members using networking tools such as social media or in-person social events

☐ Providing skill building opportunities that can support project leaders to have the broader understanding of community development so they can take their existing projects to more advanced/deeper level and outcomes.

Everyone is invited
Accessibility and inclusion

The NSG is committed to facilitating accessibility and inclusion so that all neighbours feel welcome to contribute to NSG leadership, initiate projects, and participate in community events. When all voices are heard, and all ideas considered, we can create visions for our neighbourhoods' future that are powerfully supported by the community. Projects that are accessible and inclusive increase neighbours' sense of belonging and create opportunities for people to form connections across differences. [6]

Tips for Promotion and Outreach

Since demographics can vary greatly between BC communities, the NSG encourages Program Coordinators to use local demographic benchmarks to identify gaps in representation and targets for future outreach. However, recent NSG evaluations[6] surfaced overall gaps in participation across all NSG communities, including an underrepresentation of youth, seniors, new residents, and in community members living in vertical communities. The following tips offer a starting point for more targeted outreach to these communities.

New Residents

» Promote participation as an opportunity to connect with neighbours (e.g.: *"Invite your new neighbours to a block party! Apply for an NSG grant today!" or "New to the Community? Apply for an NSG grant to help meet your neighbours!"*)

» Host a neighbourhood-wide networking or "meet and greet" session before the application deadline to promote the NSG and create opportunities for newcomers or more isolated community members to make connections

» Maintain an inventory of key resources for NSG projects to support potential Project Leaders who have fewer connections with the community (see p. 7)

Vertical Communities

» Identify "high-rise ambassadors" such as Project Leaders and Granting committee members who live in high-rise buildings, or condo strata management, who can help promote the NSG in high-rise building bulletin boards or strata email lists, etc.

» Ask previous Project Leaders for advise on promoting events in high-rise buildings

» Send NSG promotional materials (flyers, postcards, etc.) to individual addresses within high-rise buildings, highlighting stories of projects within vertical communities

Youth and Seniors

» Establish partnerships with schools, senior centres, community centres, youth groups, youth leadership initiatives, etc. to support with promotion, outreach, and mentorship

» Develop NSG mentorship initiatives for youth, for instance workshops to support youth with grant applications and project implementation, or pairing youth with more experienced Project Leaders as co-applicants on a project

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6 [Link to 2017 Final Report]

Resources for Program Coordinators

While not a comprehensive list, the following resources helped inform the NSG's goals and principles, and can serve as an excellent starting point to learn more about community development and grassroots grantmaking:

Sharing the Learning: Resident-led Grassroots Grants Program
This special publication from Grassroots Grantmakers shares insights on establishing and supporting resident-led grantmaking committees, drawing from the experiences of two American foundations, The Cleveland Foundation and The Skillman Foundation.

> *Grassroots Grantmakers, 2011*
> http://www.grassrootsgrantmakers.org/
> sharing-the-learning-resident-led-grassroots-grants-program-2/

"Thoughtful Technical Assistance"
Describing four key principles to providing strong technical assistance to grantees.

> *Page 11 in A Short Course on Grassroots Grantmaking by Richardson & Works (2013)*
> http://www.grassrootsgrantmakers.org/wp-content/uploads/Grassroots-Grantmaking-Short-Course-Final.Web_.pdf

Building community: Finding joy together in chaotic times
Paul Born, 2014

Building communities from the inside out
John Kretzmann and John McKnight, 1993

The abundant community: Awakening the power of families and neighborhoods
John McKnight and Peter Block, 2010

Neighbour power: Building community the Seattle way
Jim Diers, 2004

Asset building and community development (3rd ed.)
Anna Haines and Gary Paul Green, 2012

Asset-Based Community Development Canada
http://www.deepeningcommunity.org/abcd-canada-home

Grassroots Grantmakers
http://www.grassrootsgrantmakers.org/

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