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Granting **Decisions**

Coordinating NSG Toolkit
Module 5 out of 9

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Introduction Module 5: Granting Decisions

The Neighbourhood Grants Committee (NGC) is the group of local volunteers who make decisions about how the Neighbourhood Small Grants (NSG) funding is distributed in their community. In this module, you will find guides and templates to support the Committee through the process of making granting decisions and distributing your NSG funds. You will find more resources connected to recruiting, orienting and setting up your NGC in [Module 2: Neighbourhood Grants Committee Recruitment and Orientation](#).

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Granting **Decision-Making**



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Guide to the Granting Decision Process

Each Neighbourhood Grants Committee (NGC) organizes their granting decision-making process a bit differently. However, an overarching principle to keep in mind is that in Neighbourhood Small Grants (NSG), the process is the same as the goal – to empower local leadership, support people to share their gifts, and build connections. For this reason, the ways we choose to conduct the granting decision meetings can be as important as the decisions that get made.

The NGC is, like everything in NSG, meant to be an embodiment of the [“Principles of Grassroots Grantmaking”](#) (see 2.4). As local experts guiding the granting decisions the NGC is one of the main ways we enact our principles of “local decisions” and “where we live matters”. As we strive to build an NGC that reflects the diversity of our communities, we fulfil the principle of “everyone is invited.” By taking the time to get to know our NGC members, their role can also be informed by the principle “everyone has gifts”. What are the gifts each Committee member brings to the table? How can we integrate their skills, interests, resources and areas of knowledge and expertise into the process? How can we divide tasks amongst NGC members according to their strengths and preferences? Focusing on the gifts of the Committee members, just as we do those of applicants, can help them flourish and grow in the work.

Of course, there can always be room for members to challenge themselves and try new things as well, which brings us to the principle of “we learn together”. What do the NGC members most want or need to get out of their time on the Committee? What do they most want to learn or what skills do they most want to practice? The learning process of Committee members begins in their interviews and the NGC Orientation, continuing on throughout the decision-making process. We may invite longer term NGC members to mentor new ones and provide opportunities for the members to attend local conferences, NSG summits, and workshops.

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Elements of the NSG granting decision process

- 1. Preparation:** Most Coordinators ask the Committee members to look over the applications before the first meeting. Access to the online Grant Management System (GMS) should be given to the NGC as soon as possible, and no later than a week before the application deadline. Once paper applications are put into the system, notify the Committee to go back in to read them, so that they do not get missed if a member has already gone over the other applications. You may want to also have NGC members prepare comments on each application. Comments can be made directly into GMS or be brought with them in writing. Members should also be encouraged to review their [NGC Manuals \(see 2.6.2\)](#) ⬇ before the first meeting.
- 2. Length and Number of Meetings:** It can be hard to predict how much time an NGC meeting will take. It will depend on how many applications you have to review and how quickly the group is able to review them. It will also depend on many meetings you wish to have. Do you and the Committee members want to have fewer meetings that last longer or more that are shorter? An initial meeting may also require more time than a follow up meeting. Many Committees have an initial meeting to go through applications and split up the applicants that need to be contacted for questions or to make changes to their applications, and then a second meeting to go over what is learned through those contacts and to finalize decisions and grant amounts.
- 3. Scheduling:** Online polls such as those available through [LettuceMeet](#), [When2meet](#) and [Doodle](#) can be useful in setting dates and times for meetings that work for all or most of the Committee members. It is best to do this at the Orientation or soon after, so that people have time to plan ahead. Many committees meet in the evenings or on weekends, depending on member schedules.
- 4. Attendance:** Decision-making meetings must take place no more than 4-6 weeks after proposals have been received. A minimum of 50% of the members is required for making decisions. Although most meetings take place in person, they can also be done over video (for example on [Zoom](#)) or in person with some people joining through video if that helps with attendance.

Online polls for setting dates and times for meetings →

lettucemeet.com
when2meet.com
doodle.com

Video Meetings →

zoom.us

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Online polls for setting dates and times for meetings →

bcafn.ca/first-nations-bc/interactive-map

maps.fpcc.ca/

5. **Territory Acknowledgement/Welcome:** Start the meeting by naming the First Nation(s) on whose territory the program is taking place. If you are a non-Indigenous person, you may also want to consider using this as an opportunity to reflect on the relationships between the local NSG program and First Nations communities in your area, and name some of the history, connections and work being done towards reconciliation and relationship-building. You can learn whose land your work takes place on here: [Interactive Map | British Columbia Assembly of First Nations](#) or [First Peoples' Map of B.C.](#) If an Indigenous person from the host territory is present you can also invite them to do a welcome, and provide an honoraria if they choose to.
6. **Sharing Food:** Depending on the time of day, you may want to offer lunch, dinner or snacks. Learn beforehand about any dietary needs or preferences of the Committee members. Sometimes it can be fun to share food that is made locally, as a way to set the tone for place-based aspect of the grants.
7. **Review Agreements and Ways of Being Together:** If there are any Committee members who haven't signed the "NGC Agreements" yet, then you can have them do so at the first meeting. Some Coordinators may also choose to review the Agreements at the first meeting or to return to the Agreements if any tensions or difficulties arise. The ["NGC Agreements Template" \(see 5.2.2\)](#) ↓ is available in this section, but remember to use your customized version if you've already worked on one. You may have agreed upon ["Ways of Being Together" \(see 5.2.3\)](#) ↓ at the NGC Orientation, in which case you may also wish to review them at the first meeting or have them printed on flipchart paper to put up during meetings. If you did not do this at the Orientation, then a template is available to use at the first meeting. You may want to offer the examples given and then have them decide together which ones to keep, whether they want to change any of the wording, and if there are others they would like to add.
8. **Review Decision-Making Principles, Concepts and Guidelines:** At the start of the meeting, check in to make sure everyone feels like they have a solid grasp on the principles and guidelines of the NSG program. These are both available in the ["Guide to NSG Decision Making" \(see 5.1.2\)](#) as well as in the [NGC Manual \(see 2.6.2\)](#) ↓. The "Guide to NSG Decision Making" is a shorter version that only includes information relevant for the granting decision process,

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and so might be more convenient to have at meetings as a reference document. Some members may also wish to have the guidelines as a point form checklist which is available for as a [template \(see 5.2.4\)](#) ↓. Getting everyone on the same page right from the start saves time and opens up space for clearer, stronger decisions.

You may also want to remind the Committee of the “bigger picture” of the NSG program as needed during meetings. For example, if the group is starting to focus on the guidelines in a way that is overly specific, wanting to decline more grants than might be necessary rather than work with applicants to alter projects or understand the program better, you may want to foster discussions about the larger “spirit” of the program.

Sometimes the Committee members feel very responsible for the money they are handing out, wanting to make sure that the projects they approve are the “right ones.” It can feel strange extending the kind of trust it requires to put money directly into the hands of local residents with no promises about how they will use it. This trust, however, is at the core of what the program does and why it is so successful.

An easy way to bring the focus back to this trust is the concept of “starting with yes”, which implies that we want to consider each project as one we will say yes to unless there is a strong reason not to. Starting with yes helps us begin from a place of seeing the strengths in projects, discourages quick dismissals of projects, and redirects the discussion from criticism of applications to constructive feedback and a solutions-based focus. An exploration of the starting with yes concept is included in the [“Guide to NGC Decision-Making” \(see 5.1.2\)](#) as well as the [NGC Manual \(see 2.6.2\)](#) ↓. An [infographic \(see 5.2.1\)](#) ↓ that summarizes the concept is also available, and this can be printed and put on the wall or in the middle of the table during decision-making meetings.

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Refocusing the committee on the bigger picture and embracing the idea of starting with yes during decision-making can also include:

NSG Video →

youtube.com/playlist?list=PLeWryyLHnL7z3_agYmHKLt3xmOyoBFaW_

To learn more about "Asset-Based Community Development" →

deepeningcommunity.org/abcd-canada-home

- asking "is there anything that could change in this application/project that would allow us to say yes to it?"
- taking a break in the meeting to watch one of the [NSG videos](#)
- reviewing the Principles of Grassroots Granting (see 2.4)
- discussing the applications through the lens of [Asset-Based Community Development](#) - what are the assets and gifts reflected in this application?
- letting the committee know that the grants are allowed to be a learning experience - they do not need to be perfect or do things the way someone with more experience (including the Committee members themselves) might do it
- if people have a lot of experience in a certain area and are therefore more critical of certain grants that involve elements of their expertise, asking them to offer resources or support to those applicants rather than focusing on how the project won't work or should be done differently
- before declining grants, taking one last look to see if the project reflects the principles of the program and if so, looking at how they could fit the guidelines as well
- writing out explanations of why any applications were declined and going back at the end to review them and make sure that they are consistent and strong

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9. **Facilitation of Meetings:** As the Coordinator, you can facilitate the meetings yourself or choose to invite members with strong facilitation skills to do so. The facilitator is there to ease the group process and support inclusion. The Coordinator or other facilitator can bring a draft agenda and ask for any additional input from members. Other than leading the group through the agenda, the facilitator may also want to ensure that all members of the Committee are given a chance to speak, giving more time to members who speak English as an additional language or more introverted members, and to limit certain behaviors that affect NGC dynamics in a negative way (offensive language, discussing people instead of issues, focusing on finding faults in the applications etc.). In order to help share the work and provide learning and skill-building for less experienced Committee members, you could also have co-facilitators who assist the main facilitator with the group process.

10. **The Coordinator Role in Meetings:** Whether or not the Coordinator is facilitating, they can have a role in setting the tone of the meeting and supporting the group to make their decisions. Tips that other Coordinators have offered for effective grant approval meetings are:
 - listen carefully, reflect, seek clarity and summarize
 - be aware of the process as well as the content of the decision-making
 - be honest in addressing issues and involve members in finding solutions
 - create an appropriate balance between efficiency and caring for members
 - set a positive tone and provide reminders of key concepts such as “starting with yes”, the Principles of Grassroots Grantmaking and the NSG granting guidelines when needed

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11. **Accessibility and Inclusion:** It can be good to give ample space for Committee members to let you know of anything they might need to support their participation on the Committee. Examples could include help figuring out childcare or transportation arrangements, for people to speak slowly or clearly, for other Committee members and/or the space you meet in to be scent-reduced or scent-free, a wheelchair accessible space or certain kinds of seating. Building rapport with members can also be helpful in creating a safe environment for them to participate. Sometimes facilitating mentorship by members who have been on the Committee for a year or more can also make participation easier for new members. It may be useful to also remind Committee members who have been in the role for many years to make sure they make room for new people to become part of the decision-making process and bring in new ideas and perspectives.
12. **Consensus and Voting:** Grant decisions are made using consensus-building discussion within a reasonable amount of time allotted for each application. When consensus is not reached, decisions are made by voting where majority vote determines proposal acceptance and amount of funding. If the vote results in a tie, further discussion will be encouraged until a majority vote is reached.
13. **Coding and Organizing Applications:** At the first meeting, some Committees go through each grant one by one, assigning them a colour or a number (for example from 0-5 for how strong the grant is) or sorting them into “Yes”, “No” and “Maybe” piles.

An example of a colour-coding system that is inclusive of people who are colourblind would be:

Light blue

for “likely approve”

Medium blue

for “likely approve with some concerns or questions”

Orange

for “May approve but stronger concerns”

Black

for “likely decline”

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14. **Deciding on Grant Amounts:** Entering estimated amounts for projects that will likely be funded can also give the Committee a sense of how far the money will go. It can also sometimes be useful to set a base amount for certain kinds of projects, such as \$250-\$300 block parties, particularly if you have applications that request more than the available funding. This amount can be applied generally, with exceptions for projects that will receive a bit more or less because of the scope of their project ideas.
15. **Keeping Track of Decisions:** Some Coordinators choose to enter decisions, notes and amounts directly into GMS. Others find it helpful to have the grants downloaded into an Excel worksheet so that they can more easily see all of the decisions together and keep track of them. This also allows them to use things like colour coding to keep track of decisions.

You can also use Excel to keep track of the total amount of the grants in the “Amount Approved” column. As you tentatively add amounts for each approved application, this allows you to see if you are over or under your granting budget.

How to use Excel to add amounts for approved applications:

1. Highlight all of the cells you want to add up
2. Press “autosum” in the home menu at the top of the screen
3. Find the totaled number below the highlighted cells, which update automatically as you change any of the grant amounts.
4. Look at the “Request Amount” column to get a sense of how much money has been requested in total

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Compare the “Request Amount” total to your total granting budget. This could tell you if you are potentially able to fund all of the applications fully, or if the requested amounts are over your budget and so you will need to fund less projects and/or some at a lower amount than they have requested.

An Excel database can be downloaded from GMS. All of the information from the applications will be included, and you can delete any unnecessary columns so you can see the main information you need at a glance. If a downloaded database is used to track decisions through the granting decision process, the final decisions and amounts will then need to be entered into GMS once they are made.

- 16. Contacting Applicants for Clarifications and Changes:** After the initial meeting, the Committee members may have questions or concerns they need to address with applicants before moving forward with their decisions. What questions do they need to ask for more information and what requests can they make of project leaders to help their projects align with the NSG granting guidelines? This is a great chance to do some capacity building with applicants, helping them to think more deeply about the intention of their project and reflect on the principles of the NSG program. The applicant contacts can be split up amongst Committee members and the Coordinator. See the document [“Guide to Contacting Applicants” \(see 5.3.1\)](#) for tips on this process. Once applicants have been contacted, the Committee can go over those applications again, each member reporting on what they learned in their contacts with applicants. This usually happens at the next NGC meeting, but could also be done over email if needed.
- 17. Finalizing Grant Decisions:** When all of the approved projects are chosen, grant amounts can be adjusted to keep the Committee within budget. Before finalizing amounts, the Committee members may want to go through one last time to make sure there is some consistency in the amounts given to projects that are similar in content and scope. When the Committee declines a grant, it is a good practice to record the reasons why the grant was not a fit so that this information can later be passed on to the applicants or the Partner Organizations if they have questions. This can also strengthen decision-making. Granting decisions including amount of money approved and reasons for rejection are compiled by the Program Coordinator. These are usually shared for review to all NGC members before notifications are

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sent to grant applicants. Partner Organizations may also wish to look through decisions before they are finalized. If you were using an offline database to record decisions and granting amounts, then make sure to enter the decisions into the GMS.

- 18. Letters to Successful and Declined Applicants:** Once decisions have been finalized, letters can be sent by email to applicants to let them know whether their grant was successful. Templates are available both for successful applicants ([see 5.4.1](#)) ↓ and those whose application was declined for funding ([see 5.4.2](#)) ↓. In letters to those who are not funded, consider providing them some information on why they were declined and what they might need to do differently to be approved in the future. If they are a better fit with other funding streams, then consider letting them know where else they might apply.



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Guide to NSG Decision-Making

The following are the principles, concepts, and guidelines used to make granting decisions. They begin with the Principles of Grassroots Grantmaking, which are the core of the Neighbourhood Small Grants (NSG) program. Next comes the important concept of “Starting with Yes” which sets the tone for the grant decision-making process. This is followed with some information on setting Priority Focus Granting Areas, in order to encourage projects around priorities identified by the community. And lastly, the Granting Guidelines, with supporting information and considerations for each one. All of this information is also available in the [NGC Manual \(see 2.6.2\)](#) ↓.

Principles of Grassroots Grantmaking

The principles of grassroots grantmaking guide our mission of harnessing local skills and experience in order to foster community self-direction and empowerment and make neighbourhoods better places to live. They are at the center of the Neighbourhood Small Grants (NSG) program.

“We have a universal need to connect with one another.”

VIVEK H. MURTHY

Everyone has gifts: We use an Asset-Based Community Development approach to draw upon existing strengths and build sustainable communities. The passions, skills, and knowledge of neighbours are the building blocks of community development. The resources necessary for change already exist in each community through asset areas such as physical, human, social, personal, and financial. When neighbours are encouraged and inspired to share and connect their assets, communities are strengthened, and meaningful and lasting change can come from the ground up. Connecting local assets also increases relational networks, helps new groups and associations to form, and grows the neighbourhood’s sense of ownership, pride, and ability to work towards common goals.

Small is beautiful: We believe that small scale actions and projects can have a far-reaching impact on people and places. We support individual or informal group-led projects with budgets of \$500 or below. No project is too small, and when counted collectively these projects create lasting impact and become a powerful movement of neighbour-led change.

Local decisions: We believe that neighbours know what is best for their communities, so we make sure that decisions about projects are made locally. We rely on Neighbourhood Grant Committees (NGC) — made up of people living in the community — to review ideas submitted by other

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neighbours and decide which ones to fund. We support our volunteer leaders as experts, solicit and listen to their feedback, offer guidance and skill sharing opportunities, and connect them with each other and resources to help build on their success.

Where we live matters: We take a place-based approach to building community. Though our grassroots grantmaking program areas share many commonalities, they are each designed or adapted to meet unique local conditions. In building community, it is the community that is the expert. Projects are done at the neighbourhood level, and these neighbourhoods are defined by the people who live in them. The neighbourhood a person identifies with can provide a rich set of resources and relationships. Projects are led by people who bring these local resources and relationships as contributions to the work, and change happens in a way that is unique to each neighbourhood and the people who live in it.

We learn together: Building a sense of belonging and creating a sustainable community requires certain skills and resources. We seek to empower community members with decision-making abilities and access to knowledge, resources, and opportunities so they can effectively act together to achieve collective goals.

Everyone is invited: We are committed to welcoming and listening to all voices in local solution-building, and making opportunities for participation accessible and inclusive. We must be conscious of the barriers to action and supportive of efforts to overcome them. When all voices are heard and all ideas considered, projects will represent and highlight the diversity of each community and neighbours will form connections with one another regardless of potential boundaries.



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Starting with Yes

Although there are specific guidelines that projects must meet in order to be approved to receive grants, they also center the bigger picture of the NSG program and grassroots grantmaking when looking at applications. For example, we believe that everyone has gifts to offer, and aim to empower local leadership by extending trust and putting funds for projects directly in the hands of groups of neighbours. A good way to keep these values at the heart of the decision-making process is the concept of *starting with yes*.

“The gifts of the people in our neighbourhood are boundless. Our movement calls forth those gifts.”

JOHN MCKNIGHT

Starting with yes means considering each project based on its strengths and with a focus on approving it if we can. This doesn't mean we shouldn't sometimes say no! Of course there are applications that need to be declined. However, the idea of *starting with yes* discourages instinctive dismissals of unusual and imperfect ideas, proposals to do things differently than perhaps we would choose to do them, or in ways similar to other initiatives that did not work all that well in the past. It encourages us to consider applications that aren't as detailed or well written as others, which could be because of literacy or language barriers rather than shortcomings in the applicants' ideas and their capacity to be successful in their projects.

The concept of *starting with yes* redirects the discussion from criticism to constructive feedback and solutions. It cultivates a willingness to support applicants to make changes to their application or project so that they can be funded. This can also mean contacting applicants to gain clarification or providing mentorship and support to Project Leaders when needed so that they can succeed.

When approving grants, we can feel responsible for the money we are handing out, wanting to make sure the projects we approve are the “right ones.” However, despite the program itself being a large financial investment, each individual grant is small enough that we can afford to be generous in how we distribute them. We want to give people a chance to learn and grow together as this is how community building happens at a grassroots level. *Starting with yes* means using the grants to call forth the gifts of others in our community, letting them know what they have to offer is valuable and helping them to share those gifts with others.

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Priority Granting Focus Areas

Some NSG areas also choose to have focus areas for their grants. Not all grants would need to fall under these focus areas, but special funds could be put aside for projects that do, or those projects could be prioritized within the normal granting funds. These focus areas are a way to engage certain populations within the community or to encourage projects around a certain priority that has been identified by the community. Here are a few examples:

- Projects that **connect Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members** to promote cross-cultural learning, sharing, and understanding. For example, community kitchens where stories of food are shared; collaborative arts and crafts workshops where participants exchange their skills and experiences,
- Projects that are led by **youth aged 18-24** and may encourage and engage more young people to participate in the program. For example, youth-led community dialogues; youth-led neighbourhood-cleanup events that foster intergenerational connections.
- Projects that **build intergenerational connections**. For example, cooking or gardening projects where youth learn about growing and preparing food from seniors, or projects where youth teach seniors computer skills.
- Projects **with a green focus**. For example, projects that help in reducing participants' carbon footprint, creating zero waste, improving access to nature, growing local food, and so on.



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Granting Guidelines

The eligibility criteria of the NSG program are designed to ensure that communities are able to support a diverse range of projects that uphold the Principles of Grassroots Grantmaking. A description of each guideline is below:

- 1. Applicants must live in the participating community they apply to and projects must take place within the neighbourhood or community where the application is processed.** One of the principles of grassroots grant-making is that “where we live matters.” We take a place-based approach to community development. Therefore, the applicants must live within the communities funding the grants and do their project in that community. However, sometimes the boundaries of NSG areas might not perfectly or absolutely reflect the boundaries of the community, and so people who live or implement their project close to but outside of those boundaries can be considered if the Committee feels it is appropriate.
- 2. Two applicants living in the same community but from different households are required on every application, one as the main applicant and the other as co-applicant.** Both are responsible for managing the grant money. The intention of this guideline is to encourage community-building and to ensure that it is indeed a group of residents applying and not an individual or single household. Some Committees choose to make exceptions for roommates, as they often don’t operate as a household in the same way that partners or families might. Different suites in the same house or building can count as separate households.
- 3. Individuals can be main applicants for one Neighbourhood Small Grants project per year and a co-applicant on up to two project applications per year.** Ideally people who want to initiate or help plan multiple projects will team up with their neighbours, which helps spread both leadership and funding further within the community. Sometimes groups of people also apply for multiple grants, using different applicants and co-applicants (for example, a group of seniors who live in the same building or attend the same program or gardeners from a local community garden). If you’re aware that this is happening, the Committee may want to consider a limit on how many projects they will fund per group.

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- 4. Projects must be free, accessible and welcoming to all. They may not charge entrance fees, request donations, or fundraise for other projects and/or organizations.** Cost or a sense of pressure to donate can become a barrier to people participating in a project. Even if providing money is optional, sliding scale or by donation, this can still make it more difficult for some people to feel welcome or comfortable to participate. Project Leaders can also be encouraged to make events inclusive in other ways as well, such by choosing venues that are wheelchair accessible or scent free when possible, translating project materials into multiple languages, putting gender pronouns on name tags and so on. This guideline doesn't mean that projects can't focus on a particular group of people, particularly if that group faces marginalization of some kind. Some NSG projects focus on bridging differences, bringing people of many different backgrounds together to build community. Other times they focus on building safety and capacity for a particular group who face barriers to belonging. Examples might include single mothers, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour), LGBTQ+ communities, seniors, or people with disabilities.
- 5. Except for community gardens, projects involving infrastructure building or upgrading or purchasing of large equipment such as computers are not eligible.** Infrastructure building and upgrading or large equipment purchases can bring up liability issues, as well as issues around who it will belong to, be cared for and how it will be shared. It is also not a fit with the "small is beautiful" principle. Smaller pieces of equipment can be purchased if the Committee believes that it is a good financial decision that will have long-term benefit to the community. If equipment can be rented or borrowed, this would often be preferable, and the Committee may want to make suggestions if they know where the item is available in this way. When smaller items are purchased, things to consider include: Where will it be stored and how will it be maintained? How will the community have access to it after the project is completed?
- 6. Projects involving therapy and counseling support are not eligible.** Due to liability and safety issues, this sort of support is best done in a professional setting.
- 7. Applicants may not profit financially from the project.** They cannot, for example, receive the honoraria themselves nor pay it to their own business.

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- 8. Registered organizations and businesses are not eligible to apply. These grants are specifically for individuals and small volunteer-based neighbourhood/community groups.** Although businesses are welcome to support projects, they are not able to apply. Registered organizations, with the exception of those that are volunteer-driven such as Community Gardens or PACs (if the committee feels this is appropriate), are also not eligible to apply. The Committee may want to check any organizations or groups that apply for nonprofit/registered status before considering their application.

Registered organizations can support the grants by promoting it to their program members and helping them apply. If funded, applicants should be encouraged to do their projects outside of regular program activities, open them up to people not already linked to the program, and take leadership in their projects rather than relying on program staff. If program participants are supported by the organization's staff, it is important that the project idea originates from them and that the staff only provides support and mentorship. Applicants should be encouraged to lead, plan and implement their projects so they can build skills and confidence and be able to do a project on their own in the years that follow.

- 9. Projects must begin after the grant decisions are made. Projects are not supported retroactively.** If the project is completed by the time the grant decisions are made, it cannot be funded. It can be helpful to estimate when the decision-making will be complete so that the Committee can ensure that projects take place after this time. Generally, it takes 6-8 weeks from application submission to granting decisions.
- 10. Preference will be given to new projects, or those that have been funded for fewer than three years in a row.** Although there is much value in ongoing projects that create community traditions that can be built on year to year, these ongoing projects may also have access to resources and support that new projects do not. By ensuring that new projects receive priority in the funding, the Committee can ensure they are continually providing support to new connections within the community. This does not mean that repeat projects should not be funded at all. They could, for example, be given less funds than newer projects. If the project has been funded in previous years, it can also be good to encourage applicants to add new components, involve new organizers/leaders, do additional outreach and otherwise add to what was done in previous years. The Committee may also want to prioritize new Project Leaders in this same way as well, over applicants who have applied many previous years.

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11. **Projects may continue year-round, but the grant must be spent by a specific date, generally 6-7 months after decisions are made. This is typically November 30th for the spring cycle and May 30th for the fall cycle.** Although we encourage projects to continue beyond the time when the grant is spent, it is important to ensure that the grant money has been used by a certain date both for administrative purposes and so that we are able to harvest stories from projects before the next year's granting begins. Some people will ask to return the funds because they do not think that they will be able to complete the project in time. These Project Leaders can be encouraged to do their project in a smaller or easier form if this is appropriate. Otherwise, unused funds will need to be returned by this date.
12. **The budget of each application is expected to be under \$500. However, applications that offer unique and creative ways of meeting the NSG goals may be considered for additional funding.** This is another example of the idea that "small is beautiful". Projects can ask for in-kind donations or financial support from other sources, as long as the scale of their project remains appropriate for the program. Committees who have the funds to do so may choose to offer extra funding to select applicants. These applicants will be asked to submit a new expanded budget for their project to the Committee for consideration. On top of the project offering unique and creative ways of meeting NSG goals, the Granting Committee can determine any additional criteria they would like to use for determining which projects will receive an offer of extra funding if it is available. They may, for example, look at projects that were successful in the past, projects that address specific focus areas (such as reconciliation or the environment) or ones that come from groups the program is making an extra effort to engage (such as youth, Indigenous communities, or newcomers).
13. **A portion of the grant money may be used to pay people for services (also called honoraria) to help with the project. An example may be a carpenter or face painter.** Total honoraria may not be more than \$100 per project. An honorarium is a fee paid for a service, in which it is acknowledged that the fee does not cover what would formally be paid for such a service. Honoraria can also be paid as a gesture of acknowledgement of services that don't have a formal price attached to them or as a gesture of acknowledgement of valuing what someone is offering. There may be circumstances where an applicant needs to pay an honorarium to someone involved in carrying out their project activities. Such honoraria are limited because the program encourages people to freely offer their time and skills and pool together the gifts of their neighbours in order to improve their neighbourhood and build

5.1.2

community. Please note that many Indigenous communities have protocol around honoraria. Please always inquire about this and follow local protocols, even this means providing an honoraria higher than \$100.

14. If a project is going to take place on neighbourhood streets or public spaces/parks, applicants will need to follow municipal by-laws and obtain appropriate permits and liability insurance prior to their project start date.

In order to approve some projects, the Coordinator or Committee may need to research municipal by-laws or necessary permits. Examples might include projects that want to install something on public property, such as traffic calming signs. Permits might also be required for block parties, projects that take place in parks (this can sometimes depend on the anticipated number of participants) or garden projects on public land. Some areas may have clearly laid out rules about specific kinds of projects. For others, an applicant may need to contact the local parks board or municipality to learn whether their project idea is permissible and if permits are required. It can be helpful to find some allies within the municipality that you can direct applicants to for information and support. Sometimes these processes can also be avoided altogether by doing a project on privately owned property or at a local organization.

There may be areas of liability and safety in which the Committee may want to decline funding or discuss with the applicants whether they are willing to remove these elements from their projects. One example that has come up is offering child minding at events (unless the parents are in sightline of the children while they are being watched by someone else or the event is at an organization that can provide professional child minding). Some areas also do not fund bouncy castles because of safety issues and also because they tend to be a large budget item.

Liability insurance will only be necessary in certain situations - for example if an organization requires it for someone to use their space or in some municipalities if the event is held in public spaces such as parks. It can also be good to ask applicants to consider any more general safety and liability issues, including around any structures being erected (tents, sculptures or book exchange boxes for example), physical activities (a bike race or exercise classes), and participant allergies (to bees, foods, or latex balloons for example). For certain projects, the Committee may want to ask participants to sign waivers as well.

5.1.2

Projects that take place on private property may not be required to have extra insurance coverage because home or rental insurance may cover events and activities. However, applicants should inquire with their insurance providers about what type of coverage they need to have in place for the projects they are planning. Strata corporations are also considered private property. It is the responsibility of the applicant to contact their Strata to inform them of the project if it will take place on Strata property and to determine what insurance coverage requirements will be.

The Coordinator and Committee can consider creating resources about these issues specific to their area for applicants. Even so, there may be projects that fall outside of what is covered by these resources, and in these cases the applicants may need to do further research and get back to the Committee.

15. **When creating a project budget, applicants should determine the actual cost of items to be used and think resourcefully in how to obtain materials through borrowing or donations.** If a budget is very vague, the Committee can ask the applicants to further itemize budget costs. The Committee may also have to adjust budget amounts because there is not enough money to fund everyone at their requested budget. Having itemized budgets can help the Committee determine if the amount they can or want to provide is enough for the project to still be feasible. When the Committee has ideas to help people lower costs they might also consider contacting them to suggest resources.
16. **Applicants are responsible for keeping expense receipts to account for project costs.** Because trust is a core value of the NSG, it is not a requirement for the Coordinator or Committee to ask for projects to turn in receipts. However, in case a situation comes up where receipts are needed, we do ask Project Leaders to hold onto them for one year after they receive the grant.
17. **Festival-style events are expected to focus on a specific neighbourhood or community with a range of 100 to 300 attendees. Projects that are part of festivals must demonstrate an activity within the event that helps neighbours to develop or strengthen relationships.** Because of the focus on small projects and building ongoing relationships, large festivals are not eligible for funding. Once festivals that were started with NSG funding have become too large, the Committee may want to suggest other funding streams, perhaps by having them partner with a local organization. Or, alternatively, a smaller scale activity within the larger festival may be appropriate for funding, particularly if it will build connections between local residents.

5.1.2

Other considerations:

Legal Substances: A topic that has come up in the past has been around the discussion or consumption of legal substances such as alcohol and cannabis at events. Vancouver Foundation is comfortable with granting dollars going towards information and education on cannabis and alcohol, as long as it ultimately serves the principles of NSG (e.g. a cannabis information workshop that serves to connect and educate neighbours). They are also comfortable with granting dollars going towards the adult consumption of legal products, as long as it's not the primary purpose of the grant/activity. For example, an event that included a glass of wine with the meal would be acceptable. Partner Organizations in your area may have a different policy however, and so it is good to check and decide on what your practice locally will be.

It is also important to acknowledge that not everyone feels comfortable or safe around substances such as alcohol or cannabis. Because one of the principles of NSG is that everyone is invited, we can encourage Project Leaders to consider whether having substances at an event might become a barrier to some people participating. If this is a concern for the Committee they could ask that the Project Leader do some work around this before their event. For example, before an event, they could contact the people on their block and confidentially invite feedback around whether having alcohol or cannabis at the event would make them feel less welcome, included or comfortable.

Granting Decision Making: Resources & Templates



5.2.1 Starting with Yes Infographic

This infographic was designed for Committee members as a visual reminder of the “start with yes” framework used to approve applications. Reviewing this at the beginning of the meetings or returning to it when a reminder is needed can be helpful in setting the tone for decision-making. You may even want to have it displayed somewhere visible during meetings.

5.2.2 NGC Agreements Template

Before the decision-making begins it can be helpful to review whether all of the NGC members have signed the NGC Agreements. This is also a document you can choose to review at the first decision-making meeting or return to if there are any issues in the group process. If you have already customized this template for your area, remember to use the most updated version.

5.2.3 Ways of Being Together Template

If you weren’t able to create intentions for the ways the NGC members want to work together as a group at their Orientation, the first decision-making meeting is a good time to do this. While the NGC Agreements are the larger expectations of Committee members, these are more about the process of the group itself. You may also want to review these at the first meeting or even have them displayed somewhere visible during meetings. If you have already customized this template for your area, remember to use the most updated version.

5.2.4 Granting Guideline Checklist Template

This template provides a short checklist of the granting guidelines and can be used at meetings to review applications.

5.2.5 Template for Offering Additional Funding

NGCs who have the funds to do so may choose to offer extra funding to applicants that offer unique, creative or powerful ways of meeting the NSG goals of their community. This document includes a template email to send to applicants the Committee wishes to offer more funding and an amended budget template for them to fill out.

5.3

Granting Decision **Follow Up**



5.3.1

Guide to Contacting Applicants

In order to approve their grants, some applicants might need to be contacted in between decision-making meetings in order to ask them questions or to request they make changes to bring their project in line with Neighbourhood Small Grants (NSG) guidelines. These contacts can be split up amongst the Coordinator and Neighborhood Grant Committee (NGC) members. Here are some things to keep in mind when making these contacts:

Is phone or email a better fit? Having a phone conversation may allow you to get a better sense of where people are coming from and if they understand your concerns or the changes they need to make to their projects to have them approved. If you are uncomfortable using your private phone line, the Coordinator may be able to arrange for you to make calls from a community Partner Organization. If you do not have any luck getting in touch with someone by phone or if it is a very straightforward question, then email may be more appropriate.

Providing context: Make sure to introduce yourself when you phone or email, and explain how you are involved with NSG. For example, let them know that you are the Coordinator or part of a group of local volunteers who makes the decision about how the NSG funding is distributed in your area. Explain that the Committee is currently reviewing applications and that you are calling to ask some questions about their project application.

Specify the project: Always specify which grant application you are calling/emailing about, as some people are involved in more than one.

Keep NGC decision-making confidential: Details of the decision-making process, such as whether the Committee is leaning toward approving their project or how much money they are thinking of

providing the project, should be kept confidential until the decisions are finalized.

Empower and support applicants: Even when asking for improvements in someone's application, strive to be affirming and encouraging in tone, and do your best to explain why you have the questions or concerns that you do. This can be a great opportunity to explain the guidelines and principles of NSG, which can help make this or future projects more successful. Although what you learn will sometimes mean the Committee has to decline a project, keep in mind that this program is grounded in a belief that everyone has something to offer. Try to be aware of any personal biases you might have around the project and at this time, try not to request changes to the content of the projects except to ensure they align with the guidelines and goals of the NSG program. Make a mental note of any other kinds of support or mentorship the Project Leader may require for later, and bring this to the attention of the Committee.

Explain the process: End by letting them know approximately when you will be in touch to confirm whether the project was funded and how. If the date for the Project Leader Orientation event is already set and it looks like this application might be approved, you can also let them know to save the date.

5.3.2

Guide to Engaging the NGC

Ideally, the Neighbourhood Grants Committee (NGC) is involved in the program throughout the year both before and after granting decisions. However, it can be easy for participation to drop off after the granting decisions are made, and so this is a good time to touch base with the NGC members to discuss what comes next and ways they would like to stay involved. Here are some of the ways that you can continue to engage your Committee beyond the decision-making process.

Project Leader Orientation

If possible, it can be good to set the date for your Project Leader Orientation event before the granting decision-making is done, so that the NGC members can keep the date free. You will want to involve them in both the planning and execution of this event. In order for the event to run as smoothly as possible, choose a date and time when the majority of the NGC members are available to help.

Mentorship and Attendance of Projects and Story Harvesting

Many Committees assign a certain number of projects to each NGC member for mentorship and support if needed and attending events. This is an excellent way to encourage and support Project Leaders as well as harvest stories. If the NGC doesn't want to assign each project to a member, they could make a list of projects that might require mentorship. The Coordinator can then contact the Project Leaders to see if any support is needed, and if so, match them with an appropriate NGC member. Some Coordinators also set a minimum number of projects for each NGC member to attend and ask them to do short write ups and/or submit photos of the projects they attend as part of their story harvesting. We can also encourage them to apply for their own grants the next year if they haven't already, and use attending projects as a way to get inspired and think of ideas.

Wrap-Up Celebration Event

Let the Committee know you'll also be asking their help with the Wrap-Up Celebration Event and around when it will take place. You may want to give them a sense of the goals of this event so they have time to consider it and develop ideas or ask them to reflect on last year's event if they were present and what they'd like to do similarly or differently this year.

5.3.2

Learning Opportunities

You can also give them a sense of what learning opportunities may be available to them, including NSG Learning Days/Summits and local workshops or conferences. This can also be a good chance to ask if they have any requests for learning opportunities and to reflect on any kinds of skills-building you think might be helpful for the group.

Letters of Recommendation and References

For some NGC members, volunteering on the Committee is an important step towards other volunteer, educational or employment opportunities. You can offer to write letters of recommendation and references for them when this is useful. If they have certain skills they are trying to develop for their resume, this may be another opportunity to find new ways for them to be involved.

Recruiting New NGC Members

Once NGC members have a sense of the responsibilities of the Committee, they may be able to identify people in the community who would be interested in joining and who can be invited to interview when spots on the Committee open up.

Promoting the Grants and Doing Outreach

Especially in the second year and beyond, we want to get the NGC engaged in promotion of the program. At the end of the granting process it can be a good time to ask the Committee to reflect on ways they might help expand their promotions the next year and to keep an ongoing eye out for ways and places to promote in the future, particularly in areas or with groups that the program wants to better reach. This is also a great way to re-engage the Committee members as the next round of grants begins.



5.3.2

Other Roles

During their time on the Committee or after their term is done if they'd like to stay involved, we can also find other roles for people to play based on their gifts, knowledge and interests. Feel free to ask them if they have other ideas for ways they'd like to be involved and to think creatively about ways to continue to engage them beyond the decision-making. The possibilities are as diverse as the Committee members themselves! For example, they could:

- Assist projects who need it with designing their poster or getting permits
- Plan workshops or other learning opportunities for the Committee or for Project Leaders
- Photograph events or write articles on projects for the local media
- Host information sessions for applicants
- Help interview, train and mentor new Committee members
- Consult with projects who want more information on how to make their projects accessible for specific groups they belong to themselves, such as people with disabilities, youth, seniors or newcomers
- Liaise with municipal staff on how to best support projects that require municipal permits or approval processes
- Create resources for Project Leaders, such as list of local venues where events can be hosted for low cost or free
- Provide translation in languages they are fluent in, for projects wanting to extend invitations to neighbours in multiple languages

5.3.3

Guide to Story Harvesting

“Words are how we think; stories are how we link.”

CHRISTINA BALDWIN

NSG Website →

[neighbourhoodsmallgrants.ca/
stories/share-your-story/](https://neighbourhoodsmallgrants.ca/stories/share-your-story/)

Much of the impact of Neighbourhood Small Grants (NSG) is difficult to capture quantitatively, in numbers and statistics. It is most easily shared and understood through stories. As such, harvesting stories from the projects is key to evaluating the successes, learnings and challenges of each granting cycle. Working with projects to harvest their stories is a role that can be shared by the Coordinator and the Neighbourhood Grants Committee (NGC).

This can be an ongoing process that begins at the time granting decisions are made through the program evaluation at the end of the granting cycle and beyond. You may even be able to harvest stories from a project long after it was funded, as it continues to evolve and expand. Here are some examples of ways Project Leaders can be encouraged to share their NSG stories:

The NSG Website

Project Leaders can be asked to post on the NSG website on the [Share Your Story page](#). Nearing the end of the grant cycle you can choose to send out an invitation to everyone to post on the website, approach specific projects and ask them directly if they are willing to make a post about their project, or request this of any projects that are unable to make it to the Wrap-Up Celebration. These posts can include photos and videos. If they can't find their community on the drop-down list, ask them to choose “BC-wide” to upload their story. Ask Project Leaders to let you know once their story is uploaded so that you can take a look.

Social Media

You can also encourage Project Leaders to post on your local or regional social media accounts or on their own and tag or mention **#VFNSG**, **@VancouverFdn** and local hashtags or social media accounts.

Photos and Videos

Photos and videos from events are a very effective way of capturing the “story” of the project. Within the [Project Leader Manual \(see 7.1\)](#) ↓, Project Leaders will have access to the “Documenting Your Project” template that includes tips and ideas on how they can get consent from participants to be recorded.. You can also hire a professional photographer to take photos of some of the projects in your area. Vancouver Foundation or your Regional Network may be able to offer some funding for you to do so. This is a great way to get high quality photos to use in future promotional materials.

5.3.3

Attending Events

Attending events yourself and speaking with participants is another way to harvest stories, either just for your own use or with the Project Leaders permission, you can write up a bit about the project and/or take your own photos and videos. NGC members can also be asked to attend events and do a little write up after. Some NSG areas assign a certain number of projects for each NGC member to attend and report back about.

Local Media or Newsletters

If you are able to connect Project Leaders with local media to be interviewed, or can do this for your own newsletter or that of another local organization, this can be an excellent way of drawing out particularly impactful stories.

Creative Documentation

Sharing stories is another way Project Leaders can share their unique gifts. Many do creative documentation including interviewing their project participants, recording a podcast, creating an interactive activity at their events such as putting up sheets of paper with questions like “How do you think this project will make our neighbourhood better?”, or doing an artwork about the project.

Photovoice

Photovoice is an image-based storytelling approach that was developed by Dr. Caroline Wang at the University of Michigan, School of Public Health with the intention of empowering community members to tell their own stories using photography. Instead of relying on traditional reports and surveys, which often create barriers for participants to share back, this method allows us to truly see participant experiences that are created and interpreted by them.

5.3.3

To use Photovoice with Project Leaders, we would have them choose some photos from their project and then facilitate discussion around simple questions such as:

- What is your project about?
- How did your project make you feel?
- What was a surprise during the project?
- What did you struggle with most?
- How did this project make your community feel?
- What have you learned about your community?
- What brought you to NSG?

Click here to learn more about the method →

participedia.net/method/5016



Granting Decision Follow Up: Resources & Templates



5.4.1 Template Letter to Successful Grant Applicants

This template can be customized to send to the applicants of the projects that are successful, to let them know how much funding they will receive and the next steps in the process.

5.4.2 Template Letter to Applicants of Declined Projects

This template can be customized to notify applicants whose applications have been unsuccessful and will not be funded. It can be helpful to provide some feedback to the applicants on why their grant was declined to help them be successful if they reapply in the future.