



CASE STUDY | FOSTERING COMMUNITY THROUGH NEIGHBOURHOOD GRANTS

GLENDAL COOPER

Neighbourhood grants have been popping up across the country. These locally-based, resident-driven grants pave the way for neighbours to get to know each other while working together to implement their innovative ideas. These grants spark greater involvement in neighbourhoods and boost neighbourhood pride while making the places where we live even better!

INTRODUCTION

Neighbourhood grants are emerging as an effective tool for fostering community building at the grassroots, local level. Providing funds to neighbourhood-level groups can be a catalyst for encouraging residents to take action and get involved in making their neighbourhoods even better places to live. As you consider whether a neighbourhood grant program is a good fit for your community and what the framework could look like in your community, we have compiled what we have learned from the City of Calgary, City of Victoria and the City of Kitchener's grant programs.

PURPOSE OF NEIGHBOURHOOD GRANTS

By putting funds in the hands of residents or neighbourhood-based organizations, grants are able to nurture a sense of community by reducing barriers to taking action. Grants not only help remove financial barriers, but they also provide a reason to knock on each other's doors and invite people to get together. They spur opportunities to gather and get to know the people we live beside, and in building these social connections, the sense of safety and feelings of belonging in the neighbourhood tend to be enhanced.

The City of Calgary has a Community Social Work program, which offers Neighbourhood Grants to priority neighbourhoods to support grassroots initiatives in moving from ideas to action. The goal of the granting program is to engage, support and mobilize residents to help strengthen neighbourhoods and increase social inclusion. In priority neighbourhoods, residents may not have access to small amounts of money to make good ideas turn to action. This grant



City of Victoria McCaskill Street Road Mural

aims to reduce this barrier and provide opportunities for residents to develop leadership capacity and confidence in taking action on matters that affect them.

The City of Victoria's My Great Neighbourhood Grant is available for every neighbourhood. The grant is designed to help residents animate public space, develop and enhance a sense of community and leave a positive legacy.

The City of Kitchener's Neighbourhood Matching Grant focuses on inclusive and diverse neighbourhood involvement, ensuring participation of residents, community members and volunteers in the project planning and process contributes to neighbourhood identity.

FOCUS AREAS

The purpose of neighbourhood grants is typically reflected in the focus areas, or project qualifications set out for projects. Often these qualifications mirror city council priorities or department objectives. Here are a few examples of what existing neighbourhood grants hope projects will be designed to achieve:

- Create gathering spots or provide activities that bring people together.
- Contribute to neighbourhood beautification or celebration.
- Enhance quality of life.
- Foster a sense of neighbourhood pride and belonging.
- Build stronger relationships between neighbours and neighbourhood groups.
- Improve safety, accessibility and/or mobility.
- Inspire residents to become more involved in their neighbourhoods by working together.
- Create capacity building opportunities for residents.

GRANT LOGISTICS

There are many logistical considerations when creating grants, including how to fund the grants, how much funding to offer, who the grants will be available to, how decisions about grants will be made.

WHO FUNDS THE GRANTS? Grants are funded through a variety of sources. The City of Calgary's Neighbourhood Grant and The City of Victoria's My Great Neighbourhood Grant are both funded by the City. The City of Kitchener's Neighbourhood Matching Grant is funded through a partnership with the City, Your Neighbourhood Credit Union and the Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation.

FUNDING AMOUNTS - How much funding is available per project varies across communities and sometimes within granting programs based on the scale of the project. Many focus on smaller projects or events-based activities to foster social connections and help neighbours meet each other. These grants usually have maximums of \$2,000 with many having a maximum of \$1,000 available per application. There are some grants which are larger and often have an additional focus such as place-making and can range up to \$15,000 per project.

MATCHING FUNDS - As in Victoria and Kitchener, some grants require matching funds. Matching funds often do not need to be cash contributions rather they can be donations of materials or services, and

volunteer time. Every grant differs on what they value volunteer hours at but typically they are valued at or above the minimum wage. There are other grants, like Calgary’s Neighbourhood Grant, which do not need matching funds to reduce barriers to participation.

ROLE OF CITY STAFF - City Staff play a critical role in the success of granting programs. Staff from the department responsible for operating the grant work closely with residents and applicant groups to ensure that the proposed projects fit within the boundaries of what is possible within the municipality including bylaws, policies and priorities. Staff also have an integral role in assisting residents in navigating internal processes and working with other city departments to help pave the way for projects. This role often requires a great deal of creativity!



City of Kitchener Little Library Project in Thomas Slee Park

DECISION-MAKING - How decisions are made about whether or not to approve grants vary across communities. Although there seems to be common themes represented by the cities of Victoria, Calgary and Kitchener. In some instances, decisions are made by committees primarily consisting of City staff from across departments or a blend of City staff and community members. In other communities, while City staff work with residents to ensure projects are feasible and reflect the goals of the grant, the City Council is ultimately responsible for the final decisions regarding grant applications. A third method of decision-making supports resident committees to make the decisions on grants.

The City of Calgary has adopted a model of Resident Advisory Committees. Engaged residents from priority neighbourhoods are invited to volunteer on local advisory committees. When approaching prospective committee members, a community social worker will consider the unique demographics in the neighbourhood, paying attention to those voices which may be underrepresented at traditional decision-making tables. It is understood that community residents hold significant knowledge about their neighbourhood and this knowledge is used to provide valuable feedback on applications brought forward to the advisory committee. Grant advisory committees use a consensus decision-making, in-person approach to ensure everyone’s opinions, ideas and concerns are taken into account.

GRANTS AT A GLANCE

Grant	Neighbourhood Grant	My Great Neighbourhood Grant	Neighbourhood Matching Grant
City	The City of Calgary	The City of Victoria	The City of Kitchener
Grant Amount (max.)	\$1,000	\$1,000 for activities \$5,000 for place-making	\$2,000 for event-based projects \$15,000 for projects
Grant Funders	The City of Calgary (the Community Social Work program)	The City of Victoria	Your Neighbourhood Credit Union & Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation
Matching funds needed?	No	Yes	Yes

Who can apply?	Residents only in priority neighbourhoods. The grant is to be resident-led but residents can involve an organization if they want to	Registered non-profit or charitable organization can apply directly. Other groups are welcome with sponsorship of a not-for-profit	Both formal (Neighbourhood Associations or non-profits) and informal neighbourhood-based groups in Kitchener are eligible to apply.
Intake	Residents can apply throughout the year	Applications are accepted twice a year	Applications are accepted anytime throughout the year with seasonal review periods.
Focus Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase Economic Participation • Build Inclusive Neighbourhoods, and/or • Foster Truth & Reconciliation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animate community spaces • Create gathering spots or provide activities that bring people together • Neighbourhood pride and quality of life • Promote community development and community programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renew a neighbourhood public or green space; contribute to neighbourhood beautification or celebration • Foster a sense of neighbourhood pride and belonging • Build stronger relationships between neighbours and neighbourhood groups • Improve safety, accessibility and/or mobility
Decision-Making	Resident Advisory Committees review applications and make decisions, and include Community Social Worker.	The City Council has final decision-making power after vetting and scoring is done by neighbourhood staff.	Decisions are made by the Neighbourhood Matching Grant committee, which includes representatives from the community and City of Kitchener staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As with every program, through implementation, learning happens. As cities who have experience offering grant programs, here are their top recommendations for successful granting:

1. Build in staff support to assist with everything from writing the grant to implementation. Through each stage, staff support residents to build their capacity.
2. Use an equity lens in all aspects of the program to ensure everyone can participate fully.
3. Make sure applicants have a consistent point of contact.
4. Spend time before launching a grant program to think through the boundaries your organization has. Be clear about what can and cannot be funded.
5. Plan ahead on how you will make a decision. Think beyond a simple yes or no answer and consider how to help cultivate ideas.

6. Create a catalogue of ideas to share with residents.
7. Ensure there is a clear path to success for project completion.
8. Ask applicants to provide a plan for maintenance and/or eventual removal of the project.

CONCLUSION

If you are looking for innovative ways to make neighbourhoods even better, neighbourhood-based grants may be an effective tool for your community. Neighbourhood well-being, safety and social connections can all be enhanced by tapping into the on-the-ground knowledge of residents and providing resources and support to bring their ideas to life.

Special thanks for their contributions:

- City of Calgary - [Neighbourhood Grant](#)
- City of Victoria - [My Great Neighbourhood Grant](#)
- City of Kitchener - [Neighbourhood Matching Grant](#)

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