



Revitalizing Grant Programs: A Comprehensive Review of Investments and Opportunities

Phase 1

**Discovery: Communications and Engagement Research and
Recommendations**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The relationship between the City and its local not-for-profits (NFPs) is mutually beneficial. The City of Prince George relies on the valuable support of these NFPs in their mission to enhance social health and well-being through projects and partnerships aimed at improving the lives of everybody who calls Prince George home. Through these local NFP organizations and countless volunteer hours, residents in the City of Prince George benefit from a wide range of services that might not otherwise be possible, or affordable. Examples include the delivery of recreation, arts, and cultural, social well-being, as well as environmental programs and services for its residents.

The City invests in supporting NFPs in a variety of ways, including community grant programs, service agreements, permissible tax exemptions, low-cost leases, facility rentals, event promotion, staff assistance, and other supports.

As identified in the robust myPG Social Development Goals¹ for a sustainable community, the City of Prince George wants to ensure investments in the grant program are meeting the needs of the community and the NFP organizations helping to deliver these services. To that end, the City is undertaking a comprehensive review of its processes to provide grants and financial assistance to support NFP organizations as identified in the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 Corporate Work Plans (Appendix 1, 2) and the myPG Goals.

Phased Approach

This report represents the first of three phases:

Phase 1 – Discovery: Communications and Engagement Research and Recommendations.

Phase 2 – Solution Seeking: Identify and Evaluate Options.

Phase 3 – Alignment, Action, and Awareness: Implementation and Monitoring.

The primary focus for Phase 1 is current and potential recipients of the myPG Community and Celebrate Grants. Four major arts and culture service agreement holders who are also community grant applicants were invited to participate in the survey and focus groups. Recipients of other service agreements or supports such as property tax exemptions were not included in this initial phase.

The purpose of Phase 1 was to better understand the key audiences, their behaviors, attitudes, and needs, in terms of what is working well, and areas for attention. This includes NFPs, staff, and other funders.

A survey and focus groups were used to identify areas that are working well, and areas for attention. An Idea Jam held with other funders was used to share successes and identify trends in giving. A high-level literature review helped to identify trends in the grant giving landscape, with a focus on the public sector.

¹ [myPG Social Development Goals](#)

Key Findings

In general, the NFP community was very appreciative of the City's support. When asked about their experience with the community grant programs, the majority of survey respondents rated the program as good or excellent. The following findings are presented as opportunities for continuous improvement.

For analysis, application, and reporting purposes, the key findings and recommendations have been categorized into the following themes that emerged from the data sources.

- Emerging and evolving needs of the local NFPs.
- Priority alignment.
- Grant structure, processes, and reporting.
- Capacity building, training, and support.
- Promotion, communications, and collaboration.

The key findings and recommendations can be used to inform the actions for Phase 2 and 3. These have been presented in a staged approach for consideration: what can be done now, then, and next. Timelines would be updated when the scope of staff involvement in next steps is determined, and accompanying updates to the Corporate Work Plan are completed.

Project Team

This report was a unique collaborative project with contributions from all members of the project team, developed with support of an external consultant and implemented by staff:

- Project lead and sponsor: Chris Bone, Civic Initiatives and Partnerships Leadership.
- Researcher, writer, organizer, Idea Jam Host: Sarah Brown, Supervisor, Civic Initiatives and Partnerships Division.
- Project team member: Robyn McConkey, Parks Services Supervisor, Parks Division.
- Project team member: Debbie Heywood, Manager, Event Services, Civic Facilities and Events.
- Strategic communications advice, support: Julie Rogers, APR, Communications Manager.
- Project planning, communications, and engagement research (surveys, focus groups), report writing: Jan Enns, MA, Jan Enns Communications Inc.

PURPOSE

The City of Prince George relies on the valuable support of local not-for-profits (NFPs) in their mission to enhance social health and well-being through projects and partnerships aimed at improving the lives of everybody who calls Prince George home. Through these local NFP organizations and countless volunteer hours, residents in the City of Prince George benefit from a wide range of services that might not otherwise be possible, or affordable. Examples include the delivery of recreation, arts, and cultural, social well-being, as well as environmental programs and services for its residents.

As identified in the robust myPG Social Development Goals² for a sustainable community, the City of Prince George wants to ensure investments in the grant program are meeting the needs of the community and the NFP organizations helping to deliver these services. To that end, the City is undertaking a comprehensive review of its processes to provide grants and financial assistance to support NFP organizations as identified in the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 Corporate Work Plans (Appendix 1,2) and the myPG Goals.

The overall Grant Review Project Planning for Engagement document (Appendix 3) encompasses the wide range of the City's investments in NFPs, such as direct financial grants, reduced rentals, leases, and tax exemptions.

The purpose is to better understand the evolving needs of local NFPs and opportunities on how to improve alignment with City priorities, its portfolio of grant offerings, and the various processes including applications, administration, adjudication, and outcomes. Phase 1 seeks to address a series of questions that have been categorized into the following key themes that arose from the research:

- Emerging and evolving needs of the local NFPs.
- Priority alignment.
- Grant structure, processes, and reporting.
- Capacity building, training, and support.
- Promotion, communications, and collaboration.

Phased Approach

To benefit from the insights of local NFPs and staff that can be used to determine practical, feasible actions for moving forward, this project has been organized into three phases, with this report covering Phase 1.

Phase 1

Discovery: Communications and Engagement Research and Recommendations

This initial phase of the Grants Review Project involved the development of a communications and engagement strategy implemented by City staff and supported by an external consultant.

² [myPG Social Development Goals](#)

Phase 1, included in this report, involved conducting research to better understand key audiences, their behaviors, attitudes, and needs, in terms of what is working well, and areas for attention. It also looked at trends in the giving landscape. A survey and focus groups were used to identify areas that are working well, and areas for attention. An Idea Jam held with other funders was used to identify trends in giving, along with a high-level literature review. The recommendations from this report will help inform the next phase.

Phase 2

Solution Seeking: Identify and Evaluate Options

Phase 2 involves identifying and evaluating potential solutions to address the issues, opportunities, and recommendations in Phase 1. Establishing a Staff Working Group with representatives from each of the grant and support programs and administrative functions is key. This group would review recommendations and identify options for implementation that are feasible, effective, and aligned with the organization's goals and values. This phase would also involve seeking feedback from key parties prior to finalizing recommendations. The goal of this phase is to prepare an action plan for implementation based on analysis of viable options for addressing the identified issues and to make informed and strategic decisions about how best to move forward in Phase 3.

Phase 3

Alignment, Action, and Awareness: Implementation and Monitoring

This final phase involves implementing the recommendations developed in the previous phases with the goal of achieving tangible results. This phase would also include processes to monitor successes and reporting for continuous improvement.

Success

The initial communication and engagement planning identified key success factors for the overall Grant Review Project:

- Engage current non-profits in helping to identify opportunities for improvement.
- Cast a wide net to hear from a diverse range of perspectives.
- Use this information to update the guidelines, framework, and criteria for and administration of the grant process for both the City and for applicants for Phase 2 consideration.
- Provide recommendations for Council about how to update the grants and financial assistance programs in a way that best meets the needs of our community.
- Increase community awareness about the amazing work being done to deliver services in partnership with our third-party providers.

Scope

Phase 1 focuses on the processes to provide and administer direct financial assistance to NFPs. The myPG Community Grants and Celebrate PG Grants are the primary focus. SportPG Grants are working well, the small Enhancement Grant budget was rolled into the myPG Grant stream, and the MeetingsPG Grants, funded through Council's Contingency, have been on hold since before COVID-19.

Recipients of service agreements or supports such as property tax exemptions were not included. That said, four major arts and culture service agreement holders who are also community grant applicants and past recipients were invited to participate in the survey and focus groups.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The City of Prince George invests significantly in the local NFP sector to help ensure the delivery of services for its residents, including recreation, arts and culture, social well-being, as well as environmental programs and other services. Examples of these investments and supports include direct financial grants, longer-term service agreements, waived or reduced facility fees, low-cost leases, permissive tax exemptions, and staff supports.

The City's investments in its local NFPs are mutually beneficial for the community. Thanks to these NFPs and countless volunteer hours, Prince George citizens benefit from programs and services that might not otherwise be offered via taxation and users fees. The collective research shows not-for-profits can also help build community resilience by providing emergency support in times of crisis, build social capital and stronger community ties by creating opportunities for volunteerism, and foster a sense of ownership. NFPs can also leverage their resources to obtain additional support through partnerships and collaborations, creating more impactful solutions to community needs.³

While NFPs represent a significant method of service delivery, a comprehensive city-wide review of these investments has not been undertaken in recent years and has been identified as a Corporate Work Plan priority.

A comprehensive review will lead to a more fulsome understanding of the needs of the local organizations who provide these services and how to best support them to meet the evolving needs of the community.

In addition, there are several reasons why this review and the outcomes are important.

- **Alignment:** Ensure grant programs align with City priorities to address community needs and priorities identified by Council, the myPG Social Development Goals, and other goals such as inclusion and equity, for example.
- **Accountable:** Alignment also helps ensure the City is able to measure and evaluate the impact of its grant funding, which is important for demonstrating accountability to the community.
- **Efficiency:** Ensure grant processes are coordinated and streamlined to maximize limited staff and NFP resources.
- **Accessible:** Maintain grant applications that are easy to access and accessible, equitable, and transparent, which can help to maximize the impact of the City supports.
- **Transparent:** Build trust in the process for allocation of grant funding and decision-making through a validated adjudication process, identified as a hallmark in successful granter-grantee relationships.⁴
- **Leveraged:** Build opportunities for partnerships and collaborations with other organizations to leverage resources and maximize impact of supports provided.

³ [Funder Collaboratives: A Topic Brief for Donors](#)

⁴ [Exponent Philanthropy: Great Funder-Nonprofit Relationships](#)

- **Connected:** Build relationships with and between NFPs to better support the NFP community and the City in common goals to meet the evolving needs of the community.
- **Supported:** Increase awareness, recognition, and ultimately support for the benefits of work of the NFPs and the City's role in providing support.
- **Sustainable:** Enhance the City's augmented service delivery model with a sustainable granting practice.
- **Required:** In some cases, local governments may be required by law to facilitate grants for specific purposes, such as emergency support, environmental, or social justice initiatives.

METHODOLOGY

Phase 1

The focus for Phase 1 of the Grants Review Project was to better understand the target audiences, their behaviors, attitudes, and needs, in terms of what is working well, and areas for attention. It also looked at trends in the giving landscape. A survey and focus groups were used to identify areas that are working well, and areas for attention. An Idea Jam held with other funders was used to identify trends in giving, along with a high-level literature review.

The Phase 1 strategy has been designed to address a number of high-level questions listed in the Grant Review Process Plan. These questions are noted below. For analysis, application, and reporting purposes these high-level questions have been categorized to reflect the key themes that arose from the data sources.

Phase 1 Themes

1. Emerging and evolving needs of the local NFPs

- Are there emerging service delivery trends or gaps that could be addressed by targeted CPG grant funding?
- In addition to funding, what can the City do to better support non-profit service delivery?
- Is there a particular demographic that City grants should focus on?

2. Priority alignment

- How should the city administer its grant funding to ensure the greatest impact in relation to myPG Social Development goals?
- Should the City allocate grant dollars in a way that ensures equity across social development goals?

3. Grant structure, processes, and reporting

- When should the City utilize service agreements vs. grants to facilitate service delivery?
- Is it better for the City to offer a few high dollar grants or many low dollar grants?
- Should there be a cap on the total amount of City funding that any one organization can receive?

4. Capacity building, training, and support

- Should the City require recipient organizations to report on the use of City funds? If yes, what should that reporting entail?

5. Promotion, communications, and collaboration

- Why don't more and a greater variety of organizations, apply for CPG grant funding?
- In addition to funding, what can the City do to better support non-profit service delivery?

Phase 1 Project Goals and Objectives

The Phase 1 includes the following goals and objectives to develop a communications and engagement strategy to inform the overall project deliverables.

Goals

- Consult with local NFPs on how to improve the current grants and financial assistance programs.
- Increase awareness about the benefits and outcomes of the City's grant process that enable the provision of services and programs that might not otherwise exist or be as readily affordable or available in our community.
- Strengthen relationships with other similar granting organizations, not-for-profit organizations, and community champions.
- Engage thought-leaders, funders, and interested parties in identifying trends and potential options for consideration and/or collaboration.
- Address the questions in the initial report (Grant Review Project Planning for Engagement, Fall 2022). See Appendix 3.
- Use the information to better inform the development of recommendations to Council for the next phases.

Objectives

- Conduct an audit and assessment of current communications materials being produced for promoting and advising others about grants and financial assistance opportunities.
- Identify trends in grant and financial assistance programs and processes through a high-level literature review.
- Establish a blended Project Team consisting of both internal contacts and external champions and partners to provide input and help guide and promote the process.
- Host an 'Idea Jam,' an information and idea exchange and brainstorm webinar with major funders, local government grant leads, and other key contacts to identify trends and brainstorm opportunities.
- Ensure local not-for-profit organizations have the opportunity to provide input via an online survey of granting practices and preferences, and address questions in initial report.
- Explore barriers and opportunities for the granting process through in-depth focus group interviews with key interested parties, and also address relevant questions in the initial report.
- Ensure key internal contacts, such as Council and impacted departments, are provided advance notice of next steps and/or actions underway.
- Analyze the data and provide a report with recommendations for consideration in the report to Council for updated and actionable grant and financial assistance programs.

Phase 1 Data Sources

High-Level Trend Review

Purpose: Identify trends in grant programs, with a specific focus on local governments.

A high-level internet scan identified several trends in grant making. It is important to note that trends vary depending on the location, size of city, and priorities. Search terms included: grant making, grant giving, trends in local government, public sector.

Idea Jam

Purpose: Assess current trends amongst local governments and other BC funders.

Staff hosted an information and idea exchange (Idea Jam) with other local government contacts and key partners to identify trends, challenges, and opportunities for program improvements and collaborations.

- The Idea Jam was held on Thursday, September 8, 2022, from 12:00-1:30 via Zoom. Thirteen people participated, representing five funding organizations and five local governments, to learn more from the keynote speaker, and share current trends in grantmaking.
- The session began with two Idea Generators to provide perspectives on the current state of giving:
 - Presentation by Jenessa Ellis, Sector Development Coordinator with Vantage Point, a Vancouver-based non-profit organization working to transform non-profits in BC by convening, connecting, and equipping leaders to lift organizational capacity.
 - Presentation by Trista Spencer, Executive Director, United Way of Northern BC, and a member of the City's Grant Adjudication Committee. The United Way is a well-known significant NFP funder with a mission to improve communities through connecting resources to local needs.
- Following the presentation, participants engaged in a facilitated discussion to share and learn from each other about emerging needs, trends, leading practices, and reconciliation.

Survey of NFPs

Purpose: Assess awareness, current practices, and opportunities for improvement.

- The survey invite was sent to a distribution list representing groups and agencies that had previously applied for a City grant(s) or were affiliated with the City as part of their service delivery in the community (including arts and culture, sports, social services, environmental groups, and others). Additionally, to share the survey broadly and gather diverse perspectives, the survey was also shared via three other local funders to share with their networks.
 - The survey ran from November 21 to December 21, 2022. Reminder emails were sent. See Appendix 4 for a copy of the survey questions.
- Of the 260 surveys sent to local NFPs, 110 were completed for 42%, providing a good representation of the perspective of local not-for-profit groups overall.

Focus Groups

Purpose: Increase understanding of NFPs' practices, what is working well, and opportunities for improvement and to further explore and validate the themes from the survey.

- Survey respondents were asked to provide contact information if they were interested in participating in the subsequent focus groups. Of these, 30 invitations to participate were sent, resulting in four focus groups representing 14 NFPs. This included recipients of the Grants under review in Phase 1 as well as the four long-standing Service Agreement holders (Symphony, Theatre NW, Folkfest/Coldsnap, Community Arts Council), funded by the myPG grant stream.
- Staff with responsibilities for managing the various grant programs were invited to participate in a staff focus group. Of these, 10 staff members provided key insights from an internal perspective.
- A discussion guide with questions was created to provide consistency, however, each group was unique and the conversations in each group varied. See Appendix 5 for a copy of the focus group questions.
- The focus group conversations helped confirm key themes in the Idea Jam and the survey, providing greater insights on some of the barriers and opportunities.

Grants and Financial Assistance

The City of Prince George recognizes local organizations work hard and have many ideas on how to boost the community. To that end, the City provides grants and financial assistance programs to help groups meet their goals of enhancing PG for all who live here.

princegeorge.ca

Meetings with Local Funders

Purpose: Provide information about the process underway and seek opportunities for collaboration.

Staff have ongoing communications and exchange ideas formally through the adjudication process with representation from the United Way, Integris Credit Union, Canadian Tire, and the Prince George Community Foundation. Staff have also met with other funders such as ICBC.

BACKGROUND

The City of Prince George relies on a variety of options to provide services for the community. These range from direct service delivery to volunteer and NFP service delivery (Appendix 6: How We Enable Service Provision). The City invests in NFPs, through supports such as direct financial grants, reduced rentals, leases, and tax exemptions. This helps enable NFPs to deliver a wide range of programs and services for the benefit of the citizens. Provincially, in 2016 community non-profits contributed \$6.4B GDP to the economy and account for 117,131 jobs with an average annual compensation per worker of \$42,500.⁵

Trends in Grants for NFPs

There are a number of emerging trends in the giving landscape. These speak to some of the key issues and opportunities for local governments and their community NFPs to take into account when planning their programs. These trends in city grant programs vary depending on the city and its priorities. Interesting to note, some trends may appear to be at odds. For example, the desire to reduce reporting may contradict the desire to focus on impact and the need to quantify.

Truth and Reconciliation: Truth and Reconciliation are important values in Canadian society, and local governments are incorporating these values into their grant programs to support Indigenous-led initiatives and promote reconciliation. Examples include Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Calgary. Many also require alignment with local strategies and/or Declarations.

Focus on equity and inclusion: Many cities are identifying equity and inclusion in their grant programs, with a focus on ensuring that all eligible organizations have access to funding, regardless of their size or background. This includes efforts to reduce disparities and address systemic barriers that may prevent some organizations from accessing funding (e.g., Vancouver, Edmonton, Ottawa).

Emphasis on outcomes and impact: Some City grant programs are increasingly focused on outcomes and impact, with a shift away from funding projects or programs based solely on their potential to achieve short-term goals. Cities are looking to fund initiatives that have a measurable impact on community well-being, with a focus on long-term outcomes.⁶

Collaboration and partnerships: Many cities are leveraging partnerships and collaborations with other organizations to maximize the impact of their grant funding. This includes working with non-profits, community groups, and other parties to identify shared goals and priorities and develop joint initiatives. Shared goals are one of the best practices for successful, long lasting corporate-non-profit relationships.⁷ Locally, the Idea Jam is a productive example that boosted opportunities for sharing leading practices and collaborations.

Innovation and experimentation: Some organizations are testing innovative approaches to grantmaking to address local needs. Examples include allowing funding for staffing and operating

⁵ [Nonprofit Sector Profile, City of Vancouver](#)

⁶ [The Urban Institute: State and Local Govt Investing](#)

⁷ [Institute for PR: Partnerships in the public interest for building successful corporate-nonprofit relationships](#)

costs, sharing application forms with other funders, or reusing forms as ways to address emerging needs, reduce work, and streamline processes⁸. The Vancouver Foundation has removed their reporting requirements. Trust-based Philanthropy is also a growing trend, fostering stronger relationships with NFPs to help advance equity, shift power, and build mutually accountable relationships.⁹

Flexibility and adaptability: Grant programs are becoming more flexible and adaptable, with a focus on responding to changing community needs and priorities, perhaps spurred on by COVID-19.¹⁰ This includes efforts to streamline application and reporting processes and provide more frequent funding opportunities. A more recent example is the move by UBCM and District of Sechelt to offer some multi-year funding for specific projects in response to emerging need. Streamlining the application and reporting process was a consistent theme across all data sources.

myPG Community Grant Budget

Historically, the City's Grant and Financial Assistance Program budget has provided for NFPs through direct funding via myPG Community Grant, the Celebrate Grant, MeetingsPG and Sport PG grants. In 2022, the City supported 54 organizations in the community by disbursing a total of \$536, 975 in these various grant streams.

The City also uses service agreements with various organizations to facilitate service delivery. The funding for these service agreements comes from a variety of approved operating budgets outside of approved grant budgets. In addition, the municipality supports organizations like the Prince George Public Library, Tourism Prince George, and the Northern Spotted Centre through board membership and financial contributions totaling over \$4 million annually.

The service agreements for four major arts and cultural organizations sit within the myPG Community Grant budget. These longer-term service agreements include the Prince George Symphony Orchestra, Folkfest/Coldsnap, Theatre NorthWest and Community Arts Council of Prince George and District. These account for approximately 51% of that annual myPG Community Grants budget.

While Phase 1 did not focus on service agreements, representatives of these four major groups were invited to complete the survey and participate in the focus groups as they are also community grant applicants.

⁸ Idea Jam

⁹ [Trustbasedphilanthropy.org](https://trustbasedphilanthropy.org)

¹⁰ [Centre for Effective Philanthropy: Persevering through crisis. The state of nonprofits](#)

2022 City Grants Summary

This Phase 1 report primarily focuses on the processes to provide and administer direct financial assistance (grants) for the popular myPG Community Grant and the Celebrate PG Grant.

Program	Funding	# Groups
myPG	\$ 477,048	42
Celebrate	\$ 30,000	4
Enhance		0
SportPG	\$ 21,177	6
MeetingsPG	\$ 8,750	2
TOTAL	\$ 536,975	54

Figure 1: 2022 City Community Grants Summary

Additional Supports

The City also provides support to a variety of organizations in the form of:

- Property tax exemptions.
- Leased civic assets such as buildings, sports fields, parkland.
- Scheduling and renting of facilities, including parks, Arenas, CN Centre, Exhibition sites.
- Human resources for activities such as application support, events, and promotion.

Internally, these activities are handled by a variety of staff, using a variety of administrative processes, implementation, and reporting. There does not appear to be consistent conversations between the different departments that look after different grants (e.g., SportPG) or the additional supports (e.g., tax exemptions).

AUDIENCES

The City of Prince George has a unique and strategic model for service delivery, working in close partnership with NFPs to provide a wide range of services for its residents, including recreation, arts and cultural, social well-being, and environmental programs and services.

Given this wide range of services, it is not surprising that the groups that apply for funding vary in size, skill, capacity, and age. This continuum ranges from newly formed groups to well-established groups with different needs and interests. From conversations with focus group participants and staff, different types of NFPs may require and/or provide different levels of service and support. These different audiences should be considered when developing any capacity building offerings.

While mostly NFPs, it should be noted that there are also community groups that are not formed as a charity (e.g., track and field), that may seek assistance and are unable to attain it given their status.



Hard to lump together. Some are skilled at governance and others are new and have more volunteers.

KEY FINDINGS

Insights gathered from the Idea Jam, survey, and focus groups conducted with NFPs and City staff have provided valuable information regarding the City's grant program. To effectively analyze and synthesize these findings, the research questions have been categorized to reflect the key themes that arose from the data sources:

1. Emerging and evolving needs of NFPs.
2. Priority alignment.
3. Grant structure and processes.
4. Capacity building and support.
5. Promotion, communications, and collaboration.

This section of the report applies these insights to each themed category, explores implications, and provides recommendations for consideration.

1. Emerging and evolving needs of the local NFPs

Like many organizations in the wake of COVID, NFPs are facing an evolving number of challenges.¹¹ Conversations with other local governments, funders, and local NFPs through the course of this project indicated a growing number of concerning trends that can impact the ability of NFPs to provide the services and programs that the community relies on. This includes:

- Increased costs to operate (staff, inflation).
- Funding uncertainty.
- Increased competition for funding.
- Decreased donor base.
- Decreased volunteerism.
- Staffing recruitment and retention challenges.

In exploring ways to address some of the emerging service delivery trends or gaps, survey respondents, focus group participants, and Idea Jam attendees identified some common themes:

- Technical support through the application process.
- Sustainable sources of funding, including multi-year funding and core funding.
- Funds for operating and/or capital expenses and travel expenses.

¹¹ [Persevering Through Crisis: The State of Nonprofits](#)

- Provide other forms of support such as shared office spaces, staff support, free meeting spaces.
- Assistance with addressing some of the emerging areas such as Truth and Reconciliation and equity, for example, assistance with preparing culturally appropriate materials.
- Event promotion.

Notably, many expressed their gratitude to the City for their current support, and for the opportunity to provide their input through this engagement process. In general, the NFP community was very appreciative of the City's support. When asked about their experience with the community grant programs, the majority of survey respondents rated the program as good or excellent. The following findings are presented as opportunities for continuous improvement.



We really appreciate the quality of Staff and the generosity of Council. Thank you.

Recommendations:

- Seek opportunities to build stronger connections with the NFPs through workshops, capacity building, and recognition events.
- Continue to engage NFPs by providing an update on this process and next steps and consider opportunities to seek feedback on a more regular basis.
- Address the recommendations further in this report related to capacity building, streamlining the administrative and reporting processes, and structuring grants as multi-year offerings.



Keep it up!
Very helpful!

2. Priority alignment

Both NFPs and staff recognize that grants are essential to providing these services. When asked about how or whether funds should be focused on specific causes or demographics, a common response was a lack of clarity on the City's priorities for grant funding.

The myPG Social Development Goals¹² foundational to the grant program, are listed in a document on the website and not readily accessible, or top of mind. These goals, while still important today, were developed through a robust community engagement program completed in 2010 and reconfirmed in 2018. Confirming these priorities and potentially identifying any future ones is recommended.

Caution was issued about having priorities that change and the need to have stability in the criteria. Programs require long term commitment from NFPs. Some of these emerging areas are sensitive and can be challenging to incorporate. One example provided was how to address climate change

¹² [myPG Social Development Goals](#)

and the need for information on what could be done. Concerns were also expressed about any significant changes being made without consultation, especially around emerging and sensitive areas such as Truth and Reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion.



If anything at all, consult and gain feedback before announcing any initiative.

Having a framework to map out the grants, goals, and priorities was suggested. Given the number of different types of grants offered, it would be beneficial to reconfirm the goals and objectives for each one. This could also include a broader discussion to incorporate high-level Council priorities or other emerging areas such as Truth and Reconciliations or poverty and food security for example.

Confirming priorities can provide consistent benchmarks that can be used for reporting and evaluation. The information can also be used to help promote awareness of the grants program, and specific grant offerings, adjudication process, and reporting requirements.

myPG Social Development Goals

- Affordable, accessible housing
- Clear identity and pride
- Cultural richness
- Equity and inclusion
- Safe environment, supportive and engaged community with strong neighbourhoods.

Recommendations:

- Identify and/or confirm priorities, goals, and objectives for each of the grants.
- Use this information to update criteria for applications, adjudication, reporting, and promotion.
- For new and emerging areas, in the short term, provide practical information on what can be done to incorporate ways to address at their level (e.g., what can be done to host a greener event or reduce greenhouse gases; how to create culturally appropriate materials).
- Consider opportunities to inform and engage the NFP community on any updates or changes in priorities, goals, and criteria.

3. Grant structure, processes, and reporting

There were many common themes raised relating the grant structure, processes, and reporting. Overall, both survey respondents and focus groups participants were appreciative of the support the City provides both financial and in-person. The majority of survey respondents rated their grant experience as good or excellent. The following are opportunities that were identified for continuously improvement.

Structure:

- As NFPs struggle with increasing costs they are looking for more sustainable funding options. Aside from the general request for more money, a common request was for more multi-year grants (top ups for cost of living and inflation were also mentioned). Concern was expressed over the perception that the City wants to fund new projects, yet when the project gains momentum in year two, there was no funding. Extending grant funding over multiple years is seen as a viable solution.
- Other suggestions included:
 - Allowing funds to be used for operating, staffing costs, and travel.
 - Provide other supports such as sharing office and activity spaces, free coworking or meeting spaces, or waiving facility rental fees.
- The use of service agreements as grants was also raised, with a desire for more clarity and consistency from both the staff and NFP perspective.
- Direct financial grants are just one of the many ways the City invests in NFPs. The City also provides property tax exemptions and reduced fees and rentals. As an initial step, staff are in the process of preparing a comprehensive inventory of grants, in-kind support, and service agreements to get a better understanding of all the investments and supports provided.



By the time you're hitting stride, the funding dries up.

Criteria:

- Questions about using grant criteria to facilitate change were raised in the focus groups; whether they should be more specific and focus on key issues such as Truth and Reconciliation or poverty or remain generic as is currently the case. While no clear theme arose, participants could see the benefits and the challenges, with concern this could potentially impact the pot of funds available.
- From a trend perspective, some local governments are adding more focus on emerging issues, using their grant criteria to help drive change (e.g., for equity, inclusion, Truth and Reconciliation). What was consistent was the lack of knowledge about the City's priorities, and the criteria that should reflect these priorities.

Administration:

- While there were many positive comments about the application process, 'red tape' was still a common theme in both the survey and focus groups. A few comments indicated that smaller grants were not worth the time to complete due to the paperwork. Streamlining the application process was key theme in the survey and focus groups. Ideas included limiting the number of questions, using checkboxes as some grants currently do, and even reusing applications between programs.

- Multiple intakes throughout the year were also appreciated, although standardizing them was also mentioned. Coordinating timing and application forms with other local funders was also mentioned. This could also help with promotion of the grants, creating a bigger impact potentially in the news and social media to increase awareness. Currently, each of these grants has its own purpose, and with that its own administrative processes, including intake and applications.
- Letters of support from the City were also appreciated. While the majority did not indicate a need for letters of support, the ones that did required them for some significant other funders.
- E-transfers were also asked about in the survey, with 80% of respondents confirming this as an option.
- What was helpful was the feedback in the survey to provide a PDF list of questions prior to completing the online form. As a result of this comment, staff prepared the documents for downloading for the spring intake of the myPG Community Grant.

Adjudication:

- Another common theme was the desire for more clarity around the adjudication process: who is involved, how does it work, what is the criteria being used to judge an application. NFPs are aware of the competitive nature of grants. Some focus groups recognized the challenge of competing for grants against bigger issues such as arts over poverty, albeit there are benefits to both. Comments indicated that increasing awareness and understanding about the process would increase the perception that the process is fair.
- Currently, the myPG grant adjudication is a committee of two staff and four to five community members who tend to be personally philanthropic, represent philanthropic organizations, or represent a community granting organization.



It would be helpful to know how our application is being rated.

Reporting:

- Some commented that the process was smooth, while others described it as too much work and not worth applying. One enterprising respondent requested 'no strings' attached funding. The BC Arts Council was provided as a good example of reporting requirements.
- Currently, reporting practices vary by grant. Consistency could reduce time for NFPs and for staff.
- Consideration also needs to be given to how best to require reporting for different types of projects, such as one-time expenditure vs a grant seeking to drive social change where proof of impact may be key. Learning from other funders and local government leaders in this area can help.

Recommendations:

- Complete the inventory of grants.
- Establish a Staff Working Group with the purpose of reviewing the grant inventory and overall grant process. Use the feedback from the research in this report to create an action plan to address the recommendations suggested in this report. This could also look at where the different grants and service agreements are housed within the City as an example.
- Confirm priorities for grant programs (e.g., myPG Social Development Goals, criteria).
- Collate samples of the various documents and processes used for each grant.
- Identify opportunities to adjust or create new grants to address specific priorities such as Truth and Reconciliation, equity and diversity.
- Address opportunities to invest in multi-year funding and the use of grants for other purposes such as operational costs if in keeping with confirmed priorities.
- Explore additional ways to support NFPs where it aligns with priorities. This could include a range of support such as opportunities to assist underserved communities, or help with volunteer recruitment, free meeting space, or shared facilities for day/evening activities. It could also include promoting the value of NFPs in the community, such as the value of arts and culture. Another consideration is looking at ways to assist other community groups that may not be NFPs (e.g., track and field group).
- Seek ways to improve consistency in the administration with an eye to streamline and reduce barriers to participation e.g., consistency in base-line grant criteria, provide application questions as a PDF, provide adjudication process on the website, use checklists for clarity, and ideally maximize staff time.
- Consider streamlining the intake to maximize staff resources to review and adjudicate applications and increase awareness impact via media and social media (e.g., create an 'intake season').
- Use a planning calendar to coordinate grants offerings and communications.
- Consider informing and engaging with NFPs on any proposed changes.
- Prepare checklists and content for website and forms, including information about accepting e-transfers.
- More clearly define types of supports, including a direct financial grants vs service agreements and sources of funding (e.g., budget for grants vs budget for service agreements).
- Continue to provide letters of support as requested.

4. Capacity building, training, and support

Capacity building has been recognized as a key strategy to support NFPs and is listed on the City's website under *Support for nonprofits*.¹³ Prior to COVID, the City provided orientation and education workshops for current and potential grant applicants. The purpose of the event was to familiarize the NFPs with the grant opportunities available and provide guidance on the application, adjudication, and reporting process. In addition, an annual Mayor's event was held to recognize and show appreciation for the volunteers that provide these valuable services; the survey showed that 60% of NFPs services are delivered by volunteers. Based on comments from the survey and the focus groups, continuing to provide support around the application process – including how to complete it – would be well received. Two independent comments indicated that some type of informational or educational aspect could be included as part of the Mayor's event.

In addition to initial support there was a strong call for ongoing support for training and capacity building. Like many organizations, NFPs are also struggling with recruitment and retention of staff and volunteers, disrupting their ability to deliver service. Examples provided included meet and greet workshops to foster network connections, half day workshops, as well as shorter lunch and learn type events with a very specific focus on governance, finance, or skill development. Workshops could be tailored to suit the audience.

Specific examples offered in the focus groups included providing support (e.g., information, examples, training), for creating culturally appropriate materials. Another idea was to develop a mentor/mentee program where more established NFPs could provide guidance or assistance to newer NFPs.

Consider additional support NFPs may need if criteria for some grants change, such as initiatives that require measuring specific types of impacts and outcomes.

Recommendations:

- Continue to host workshops to promote the availability of the grants and provide assistance with filling in the application forms.
- Working through the Staff Working Group, identify opportunities for training, education, and mentorship, both in-person and online. Engaging representatives from the local NFP community and other local funders can help ensure topics are relevant, timely, and promoted to increase attendance. Consideration should be given to a variety of options (e.g., lunch and learn vs half day workshop), and also to the audience (e.g., new vs established).
- Confirm plans to host a Mayor's volunteer recognition event in future. At a minimum use this as an opportunity to provide recognition of the mutual benefits, the wide range of investments the City makes, and any upcoming educational events if appropriate. This event

¹³ [Support for Nonprofits](#)

could also be used to provide an update on the overall Grant Review Project and thank people for participating.

5. Promotion, communications, and collaboration

The City undertakes a number of activities to promote grant availability and intake. While this can vary it may include a news release, information on the website and social media posts, as well as direct email.

Grant availability awareness:

- A common theme in both the survey and the focus groups was lack of awareness of grant availability including criteria/purpose and intake dates. While this can be improved with a checklist of communication activities for staff to be initiated at the launch of a grant, it is challenged by the fact that there are many different grants and many different intakes. Creating consistency in the offerings of grant products could help improve uptake and interest.
- Increasing coverage via the City's social media channel can also increase awareness of grant availability and boost transparency and trust in the process. Social media is a great way to showcase the good works being done as a result of the City's investment, especially on the City's popular Facebook page which has 19,000 people who have opted to receive updates.
- Each of the direct financial grants are clearly listed on the City's webpage for Grants and Financial Assistance, however, it was noted that it is not easy to find from the City's homepage. While each of the grants are clearly listed, comments were also made that the purpose for each could be more clearly stated. Information posted about the type of grant and reporting requirements can also help address expectations. A review of the information and instructions for each grant would be helpful to enhance clarity and consistency, including the use of the term 'non-profit,' or 'not-for-profit.'
- In addition to these direct financial grants, the City also invests in NFPs by providing other support such as property tax exemptions¹⁴, subsidized rentals, and service agreements.¹⁵ This information is hosted in different places on the website. Once priorities and supports are confirmed, thought should be given to revisiting the website for a more comprehensive web presence.



When we became a non-profit, we received this email, which was awesome.



Information of what the grant is intended for would be good.

¹⁴ [City of Prince George Permissive Tax Exemption Policy](#)

¹⁵ [Support for Nonprofits](#)

- Another communication concern were comments that showed a lack of understanding about the City's investments in NFP programs, projects, and/or events. Comments reflected a perception that the City doesn't contribute to these events, or to activities like arts and culture in general. It appears that the City is not receiving due recognition for the investments it makes. A more fulsome communications strategy, including NFP testimonials, can help increase awareness of the City's role on behalf of its citizens.

Application status:

- There were several very complimentary comments about being kept informed throughout the process as their application was being reviewed. Conversely there were also many comments about being uninformed about the status of their application. Using a checklist to create a more consistent process can help increase satisfaction and help staff ensure that steps are not missed inadvertently.

Debriefing:

- Some comments reflected a positive experience, while others did not. Many survey responses indicated they felt uninformed through the process. There does not appear to be a consistent practice. Addressing this through the Staff Working Group to create and promote a consistent approach and commitment would aid in building transparency and trust in the process.

Collaboration:

- Building and strengthening partnerships and collaboration is a trend in grant making especially for local governments and NFPs with limited resources.
- At the local government level, the recent Idea Jam is a productive example of local governments working together to learn from each other and share leading practices. It is the intent of this group to meet again in the future. Collaborating with other local funders can also have great benefits by looking at opportunities to streamline processes, assist with adjudication (as is done now), and even potentially market grant availability together.
- At the NFPs level, collaboration can assist with building capacity and networking. Comments from some indicate a desire to collaborate with other NFPs, even though it was recognized that NFPs may be in direct competition for grant funding. Collaboration could take the form of hosting joint events, training, or even strengthening social ties. It was suggested a few times that the City can help facilitate this by bringing different groups together. Purpose-made connections can also help advance common goals. Providing networking support and information sharing for NFP Directors and other special types of NFPs roles can also help strengthen the NFPs community.



Provide a forum for collaboration with not-for-profit service providers to partner in providing services to residents of the City.

NFP event promotion:

- Assistance with event or activity promotion was suggested, examples being special events or volunteer recruitment drives. Mentions included adding information about the grants and becoming a volunteer in the Welcome Wagon packages. Hosting Volunteer Recruitment Fairs to boost volunteerism, provide information on grant offerings, and promote the City's investments in NFPs were also mentioned.
- Currently, successful applicants are provided with a two-page guideline and logo with instructions for brand consistency (Appendix 7: Recognizing and Acknowledging a Grant). According to this guide, the City may publicize events and activities that have been funded by grants. In such cases, the organizer of events/activities is to provide information in a timely fashion upon a request by the City. It is up to the applicant to ask for assistance with promoting their event.

Recommendations:

- Create a communications plan for consistently and proactively promoting availability of the grants, framed as an investment in the community. Consider the use testimonials and leveraging the City's popular social media channels to spread the word about intakes and success stories and increase recognition of the role of the NFPs and the City's investments on behalf of its citizens.
- Create a consistent process for communicating with applicants throughout the process and debriefing. Use a checklist to ensure implementation.
- Once grant offerings are confirmed and aligned, update the website.
- Consider opportunities to host events to bring NFPs together such as a Volunteer Recruitment Fair to recognize the work of the NFPs and their volunteers, potentially providing an informational and/or educational aspect to the event.
- Identify opportunities to enhance collaboration working with the Staff Working Group between departments, and engaging members of the NFP community for input and feedback as needed.
- Review current protocols for event promotion and update as needed to reflect any changes.
- Continue to meet with other local funders to look for opportunities to collaborate on grants and communications.

STAGED RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

The major recommendations listed in the Key Findings can be implemented in a staged approach:

- Stage 1: Now
- Stage 2: Next
- Stage 3: Then

Important to note that this is a guide and may change depending on priority and capacity.

Revitalizing Grant Program Roadmap

Now	Next	Then
• Present overview of Phase 1 to Council. • Establish Staff Working Group with Terms of Reference. • Create PDF of application questions for all grant programs. • Complete inventory of City investments in NFPs. • Collate samples of descriptions and instructions for each grant. • Continue to provide letters of support as per the City's policy on letters of support.	• Confirm and clearly define types of City supports provided. • Confirm priorities for future grant program. • Review criteria, and admin procedures for applying, reporting, and debriefing. Identify any changes. • Create a plan to inform and engage NFPs and other funders prior to implementation if required. • Review communications to ensure consistent content. • Prepare checklists for staff for grant administration. • Prepare a communications plan and communications checklists. • Review web content for consistency and to feature description of purpose for each. • Explore opportunities to adjust or create new grants to address specific priorities such as Truth and Reconciliation, equity, and diversity. • Identify process for monitoring successes, outcomes, and opportunities for continuous improvement.	• Host workshops, recognition events, recruitment fairs. • Check in with NFPs to inform on actions taken, next steps, and potentially engage if changes being made. • Involve NFPs and other funders in a meeting around addressing capacity building needs. • Identify and take action on any new or changes to investments provided. • Determine if Staff Working Group needs to meet annually once program moves into full implementation. • Implement any opportunities for continuous improvement. • Continue to meet with other local governments and funders as part of continuous improvement. • Continue to update Council as identified. • Moving forward, consider structure to achieve coordination of grant administration processes.

APPENDICES

1. City of Prince George 2022-2023 Corporate Work Plan
2. City of Prince George 2023- 2024 Corporate Work Plan
3. Grant Review Process Planning Document
4. Survey Questions
5. Focus Group Discussion Questions
6. City of Prince George: How we Enable Service Provision
7. myPG Grant: Recognizing and Acknowledging a Grant