

Vancouver Foundation's Systems Change Grantmaking EVALUATION SUMMARY March 2019

In 2015, Vancouver Foundation launched its Systems Change grantmaking program (called Social Innovation Grants until 2017). This program seeks to create the conditions for social innovation projects to develop, test, and scale, through responsive granting across British Columbia. To what extent was this achieved? This brief presents key findings from an external evaluation.

SOCIAL INNOVATION GRANTS 2015-17



\$27.1M+
Granted to BC organizations



366 Projects funded

Projects addressed issues including:

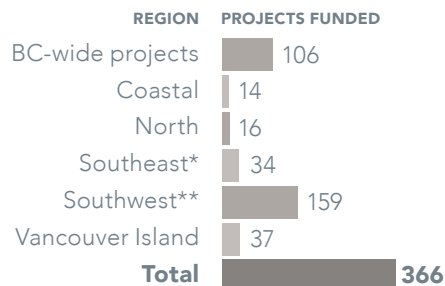
Education • Training • Health •
Social Development •
Environment • Animal Welfare •
Arts, Culture • Reconciliation

Activities for grantees and applicants:

Detailed Guidelines • Grant Program Info Sessions •
Social Innovation 101 Workshops •
Develop Cohorts • Learn Cohorts •
One To One Consultations By Program Staff



**SOCIAL INNOVATION
GRANTS DISBURSED
2015-2017**



* Southeast is the Thompson-Shuswap, Okanagan, Kootenays, and Cariboo Chilcotin.
** Southwest is the Lower Mainland, Fraser Valley, and Howe Sound

Systems Change grantmaking is one of several ways that resources flow through Vancouver Foundation into BC communities.

PROGRAM	NUMBER OF GRANTS 2015 - 17	AMOUNT INVESTED IN BC COMMUNITIES, 2015-17
Social Innovation Grants	366	\$27,100,000
Youth Engagement Grants	65	\$2,500,000
Partnerships Grants	82	\$4,600,000
Donor Advised Grants	6,800	\$58,000,000
Designated Grants	5,700	\$65,000,000

“ Systems Change Grants support projects that take action to address the root causes of pressing social, environmental, or cultural issues by influencing the behaviours of populations, organizations, and institutions. ”
- Vancouver Foundation

ABOUT THE EVALUATION

Evaluators:

Juniper Glass: Lumiere Consulting
Sarah Farina: Broadleaf Consulting

Period covered:

Social Innovation Grants 2015-17 and stakeholder perspectives on the 2018 iteration of Systems Change Grants

OBJECTIVES

- Understand the impact of Systems Change grantmaking: on grantees' activities and relationship with Vancouver Foundation, on communities through grantees' work, and on the conditions for social innovation and systems change in BC
- Generate knowledge and insights for the Foundation to improve its grantmaking approach and process

HOW DATA WAS COLLECTED

SURVEY:



KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS:



FOCUS GROUPS: 3 groups with 15 participants in total
(grantees, volunteer advisors, partners, and other funders)

FINAL/PROGRESS REPORTS FROM FUNDED PROJECTS:



STRATEGIC REFLECTION SESSIONS:



RESEARCH:

On grantmaking for systems change and social innovation

KEY FINDINGS



83%

of applicants and grantees agree that the grants program helps to create the conditions for social innovation and systems change.



Vancouver Foundation is unique as a responsive funder in the emerging field of grantmaking for systems change.

Vancouver Foundation has an approach that not many other funders have taken: investing in systems change initiatives designed by grantees based on community needs and addressing diverse social, environmental, and cultural challenges across BC. Often other systems change funders take a “strategic philanthropy” approach, which focuses on a more limited range of issues and can be more directive about which activities will be supported.



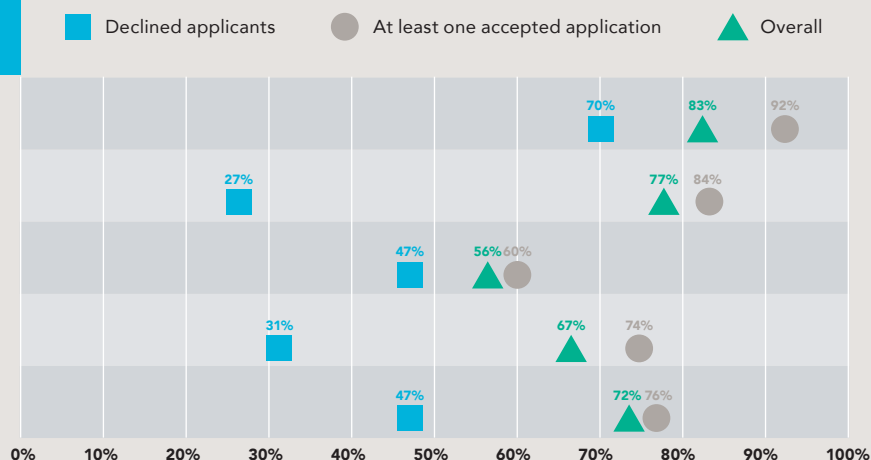
Systems Change grantmaking has made a meaningful, though uneven, contribution to the conditions for social innovation and systems change in BC.

CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE	LEVEL OF VF'S CONTRIBUTION	HOW SYSTEMS CHANGE GRANTMAKING HAS INFLUENCED THESE CONDITIONS
CULTURE of systems thinking and innovation	MODERATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizations increasingly demonstrated an ability to present quality proposals that address root causes. Develop Cohorts and consultations with staff particularly strengthened applicants' ability to see their work through a systems change lens and to develop effective proposals. Nearly all 2017 approved projects indicated a good fit with social innovation and systems change. In earlier years, only two thirds (66%) of grants were well-aligned. 87% of applicants and grantees understood what Vancouver Foundation meant by the term “social innovation”. 94% of applicants and grantees understood how their project would make a change in the routines, resource flows, authority flows, or beliefs in their system (key aspects of the Foundation's definition of systems change)
DEMAND for systems change and social innovation initiatives	SIGNIFICANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems Change grantmaking signaled to the nonprofit sector the need for more initiatives that address root causes and build systemic solutions to BC's social, cultural, and environmental challenges. A majority of grantees agreed that the program allowed them to take risks (74%) and to generate new project ideas beyond their usual activities (60%).
SUPPLY of systems change and social innovation initiatives	SIGNIFICANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A substantial financial investment (over \$27M) supported a wide variety of social innovation and systems change initiatives, many of which may not have advanced without Foundation support. 83% of grantees and applicants stated that the grants program allowed them to undertake more innovative or riskier systems change projects. Grants supported projects at different stages of social innovation, and multi-year commitments benefited the emergent nature of systems change work.
EXCHANGE of knowledge and networks	MINIMAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program prioritized funding projects rather than supporting networking, knowledge exchange, or intermediary organizations, so less progress on this condition was to be expected. The networking and knowledge sharing activities offered by the Foundation received mixed reviews from stakeholders, indicating it is important to work more closely with community organizations to develop such activities.

* Four main conditions to foster systems change and social innovation in a region, adapted by Juniper Glass and Sarah Farina from *Fertile Ground: Creating the conditions for social innovation to flourish in Northern Ireland*. 2016. The Young Foundation.

Proportion of applicants and grantees that agree that Vancouver Foundation's Systems Change grantmaking program...

- ... is a useful addition to the funding options available to BC organizations and communities.
- ... [allowed us/allows organizations] to undertake work that [was/is] difficult to get funded elsewhere.
- ... required our organization to generate new project ideas beyond our usual activities.
- ... [allowed us/allows organizations] to take risks.
- ... inspired our organization to think differently about our work.



Funded projects are making progress towards systems change outcomes.

To assess the results of the many different types of projects funded by Vancouver Foundation, a systems change outcomes framework was applied. This framework shows the relationship between shorter term, easier-to-achieve results (1st order outcomes) and broader, longer term impacts (2nd and 3rd order outcomes). It is made up of seven archetypal results commonly seen in systems change processes.¹ The evaluators found that projects funded during 2015-17 have demonstrated encouraging results, particularly improved relationships and knowledge among actors in their respective systems. Many grantees are also making progress towards influencing higher-order outcomes such as improved practices, policies and societal narratives related to the social, cultural, or environmental issue they address. Because of the diversity of funded projects, it was not expected that all would show results in each outcome area.

¹ MetaLab, Tatiana Fraser and Juniper Glass. 2018. *Systems Change Outcomes Framework*. Adapted from: Williams, S. 2017. *Evaluating Sustainability Transition Experiments in Times of Rapid Change*. International Sustainability Transitions 2017. Gothenburg, Sweden.

Progress on Systems Change Outcomes Made by Funded Projects, 2015-2017

ORDER OF OUTCOME	OUTCOME	% OF PROJECTS MAKING PROGRESS
1st order outcomes	Increased knowledge and capacity of system actors	81%
	Improved relationships and collaboration among system actors	69%
	Improved tools and resources available	53%
2nd order outcomes	Improved practices in the system	52%
	Improved policies in the system	28%
3rd order outcomes	New narratives and culture shifts	52%
	Population-level impacts	12%

Note: Analysis based on the review of grant reports from 95 randomly selected projects, almost all from grants approved in 2015 and 2016.



Certain sectors and populations face challenges accessing Systems Change Grants and may require adaptations in the Foundation's approach to granting.

- **Indigenous-led organizations** agree with the importance of addressing root causes, and this generally fits well with Indigenous approaches. However, findings show that incorporating culturally relevant language and offering coaching support will help Indigenous-led organizations to show how their work aligns with grant requirements and to prepare strong proposals.
- **Rural organizations** want the Foundation to better understand their contexts, including the unique funding, human resources, collaboration, competition, leadership, and transportation issues that provide both opportunities and challenges for systems change projects.
- **Arts and culture organizations** appreciate being able to access increased funding for community-based and less traditional cultural initiatives, but struggle to translate their work into systems change language.



Specific features of the grants program reflect best practices in systems change funding and were also identified by key informants as important for grantees' effectiveness.

Not just the amount of funding, but how the investment takes place has an influence on systems change initiatives. Because systems change work is intensive, emergent, and often long-term, the flexibility and sustained support of funders like Vancouver Foundation is important. The findings showed that:

- The grants program is relatively flexible, allowing for course corrections (changes to project plans) in response to changing conditions.
- Policy advocacy projects are accepted (and encouraged).
- Offering different grant types supports initiatives at different stages, and each grant type appears to fill a particular need in systems change work.
- Test and Scale Grants provide an adequate time frame to accomplish significant work (3 years). Grantees can apply for follow up grants and, as of 2018, the Foundation may also provide extension grants in certain cases for projects in progress.
- As of 2018, the grants program allows projects that cross fields and disciplines (e.g. a project that addresses an environmental issue in a way that also reduces social exclusion).

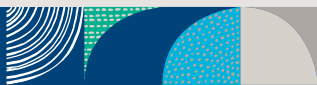


The granting practice is generally good in terms of quality of staff interaction, but the application process could be streamlined.

Applicants and grantees:

- are highly satisfied with the level of knowledge, understanding, respect, and technical and strategic support provided by Vancouver Foundation staff.
- would like to see the administrative burden of the application process reduced, such as reducing the number of questions and level of detail required in the Letter of Intent and Full Proposal forms.

2018 applicants had the least challenges with the application process, indicating that the clarity of the guidelines and application form is improving.



CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings of this evaluation indicate that Vancouver Foundation and BC communities would benefit from staying the course by continuing to fund systems change projects at different stages of development across the province. The evaluators made several recommendations to enhance the strategic influence of the Foundation and the equity, accessibility and effectiveness of Systems Change Grants.

To read the full evaluation report, please visit www.vancouverfoundation.ca

