Neighbourhood Small Grants:

Discoveries in Grassroots Grantmaking

vancouver foundation | neighbourhood small grants

Contents

Meet your neighbours

For nearly two decades, Vancouver Foundation has been involved in grassroots granting. These are small grants, with a local flavour—simple but powerful ideas that inspire high hopes for a sense of belonging and a feeling of "home" in the place where we live.

The Neighbourhood Small Grants (NSG) program funds projects that link neighbours, leverage creativity, and decrease social isolation. Think street parties. Jamming and pickling. Cultural mash-ups. Film nights and theatre days. Community gardens and harvest suppers.

Everyone is welcome.

In 2011, we began collecting robust evaluative data on the NSG program. The importance of doing so was reinforced by Vancouver Foundation's 2012 Connections & Engagement survey. The survey found neighbourhood connections, overall, to be weak. Many residents did not participate in community activities, and many found forging meaningful relationships challenging. In fact, the most often-cited reason for not participating in neighbourhood and community life was a feeling that residents have little to offer.

These findings re-energized our intention to use NSG as a tool that could incentivize connection. In 2017, Vancouver Foundation will be repeating the Connections & Engagement survey. Our five year review of NSG is part of our collective learning as we prepare that research.

In the meantime, we continue to invite new partners to join us, and are thrilled at the response as NSG expands to Vancouver Island, the Interior, and more Lower Mainland locations. We would like to acknowledge all those who have made NSG the success it is. We look forward to continuing to meet, greet, and know our neighbours.

Lidia Kemeny
Director, Grants & Community Initiatives

Neighbourhood Small Grants at a Glance

What is a Neighbourhood Small Grant?

Neighbourhood Small Grants (NSG) is an empowering program that helps people build vital connections. Developed and funded by Vancouver Foundation, NSG encourages new ideas by granting small amounts ($50 to $1,000) for projects that make neighbourhoods better places to live.

From local residents swapping books at street-side mini-libraries to high-rise dwellers celebrating their West-End apartment's iconic history, NSG projects engage people where they live, on their terms—reaching across age, gender, and ethnicity.

Upwards of 800 NSG projects each year engage tens of thousands of people. That's a lot of connection worth learning more about.

Why a five-year review?

Research shows that when people feel connected to their neighbours, they are safer (less crime), healthier (lower levels of depression and other illnesses), and more resilient at coping with individual and collective difficulties.

Regular and repeated interactions among neighbours also promote trust, cooperation, and reciprocity. This social capital is desired by many when choosing where to live and put down roots. Building and sustaining such capital, however, is not automatic. It demands collective and locally-grown leadership.

Vancouver Foundation now has five years of annual evaluations to assess the ability of Neighbourhood Small Grants to contribute to social capital. Exploring the trends and challenges is important for our learning and that of our partners.

Research shows that when people feel connected to their neighbours, they are safer, healthier, and more resilient.

When did it all begin?

Neighbourhood Small Grants has been underway since 1999. For many years, it existed as simply good "place-based" work supported by small amounts of grant funding.

But around 2010—as we saw the City of Vancouver grow and change—we became more intentional. Reaching out to long-standing community centre and Neighbourhood House partners, we initiated an intense dialogue about NSG.

Through a collaborative planning process, we wanted NSG to more effectively support resident involvement in leading community projects. The result was a learning and evaluation framework that enabled consensus on vision, goals, objectives, outcomes, and indicators. A living document, it continues to be refined to this day.

Who is involved?

Overall, our partners have remained stable (see back cover for current list). Changes mostly involve an increase in new municipal and community foundation funding partners, as the program has grown. Community centres and Neighbourhood Houses, as well as some municipalities, lead the way in administering funding for NSG locally.

These organizations establish Resident Advisory Committees (RACs), made up of local resident volunteers with diverse interests and experience. The RACs act as decision-makers in reviewing grant applications. Project leaders partner with a neighbour or friend from the same community to apply for a grant and implement projects.

We wanted Neighbourhood Small Grants to more effectively support resident involvement in leading community projects.

Where do Neighbourhood Small Grants happen?

In 2011, the NSG program was based in four neighbourhoods in the City of Vancouver (coordinated by 10 community organizations) and one in South Burnaby. That year, four new neighbourhoods were also piloted: two more in Vancouver, one on the North Shore, and one in North Surrey.

In 2012, New Westminster was added, and the City of Vancouver also began funding Greenest City Neighbourhood Small Grants focused on local environmental projects. In 2014, Richmond began to participate in NSG. And in 2015, the NSG program expanded further afield, with programs piloted in Victoria and the Clayoquot Sound region, in partnership with community foundations.

Interest in the program continues to accelerate with new partners coming on stream in Abbotsford, Maple Ridge, South Okanagan region, and the University of British Columbia. Depending on their length of time with the NSG program, maturity of the RAC, and increase in applications, organizations may be full, emerging or pilot partners.

How does it work?

Grants of up to $1,000 are given to projects that aspire to the following goals: connect and engage neighbourhood residents; share residents' skills and knowledge within the community; build a sense of ownership and pride; and respect and celebrate diversity.

An annual grant call involves online application submissions. Partners coordinate the program in their geographic catchments by establishing and supporting the Resident Advisory Committees to perform community outreach, solicit ideas, and review project applications. Project leaders are responsible for seeing the project through, management of funding, and reporting on results.

Community organizations and municipalities outside the Metro Vancouver area co-fund the NSG program. As we expand the program beyond Vancouver, we will continue to seek co-funding.

"I was inspired to lead a project because I wanted to connect members of my community with each other through the medium of poetry. This way, they would have a vehicle to share their thoughts, ideas, creativity and emotions with others in a safe, welcoming, supportive, inspirational and creative space."

Neighbourhood Small Grants: Goals and Objectives

VISION: To harness local skills and experiences in order to foster community self direction and empowerment to make neighbourhoods better places to live

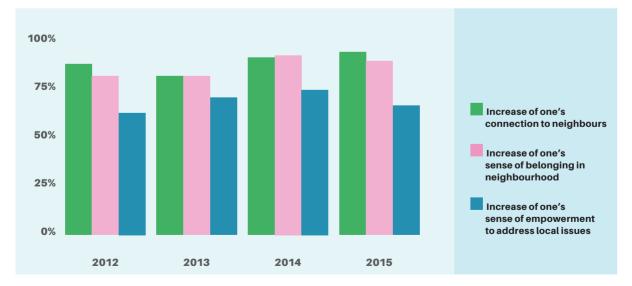| Goals	I. Connect and engage neighbourhood residents	II. Share residents' skills and knowledge	III. Build sense of ownership and pride within communities	IV. Respect and celebrate diversity
Objectives	• Build new relationships amongst neighbourhood residents • Deepen existing relationships through frequent interactions	• Residents actively share skills and knowledge	• Showcase and make use of local assets including people, places, groups, and organizations • Engage residents to make meaningful contributions to their communities	• Highlight and celebrate the diversity of neighbourhoods • Connect people across boundaries such as age, ethnicity, income level, cultural affiliation, and sexual orientation • Promote accessibility and inclusion for all residents
Outcomes	• Residents develop sense of community connection, belonging, participation, trust, and safety	• Residents develop a sense of accomplishment from sharing or acquiring skills and knowledge	• Residents recognize, actively use, and leverage local assets • Residents are engaged in activities that make their communities better places to live • Opportunities for residents to build physical legacies (i.e. community gardens) and annual traditions	• Diversity is reflected in types of projects, project participants, and project leaders • Residents form connections with one another regardless of potential boundaries • Increasased opportunities of accessible and inclusive projects to engage residents
Indicators	• % projects that helped create new connections • % projects where participants interacted frequently • Number of project leaders and RAC members reporting a greater sense of connection, belonging, trust or hope • Number of project leaders and RAC members reporting increased participation in community • Experiences in making and strengthening connections reported by project leaders and RAC members	• % projects where participants shared new skills and knowledge • % projects where participants learned from each other • Experiences of project leaders and RAC members sharing and acquiring skills and knowledge	• % projects that make use of local resources such as people, places, groups, and organizations • % projects that enable residents to make meaningful contributions to their community • % projects that leveraged additional local resources • % and types of projects with physical legacies • % and types of projects resulting in new traditions • Sense of ownership and pride reported by project leaders and RAC members	• Diversity of Resident Advisory Committee members • % projects that have participants from diverse backgrounds • % projects that were accessible and inclusive to people from the community • Types of accessible and inclusive practices used to welcome diverse participation • % projects led by people from diverse backgrounds

What Have We Discovered?

After five years, NSG reveals a narrative that charts community wellbeing by connecting the experiences of NSG participants. Here is what we've learned:
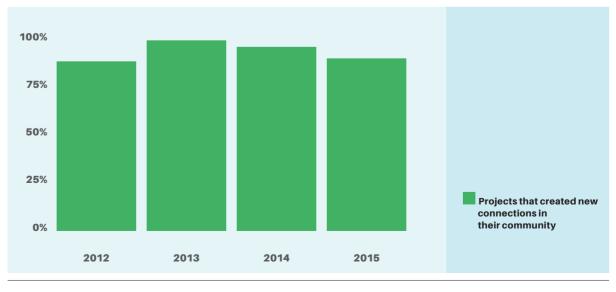
Key Trends[1]

Change in Community Connections, Sense of Belonging, and Self-Empowerment to Address Issues

Change in Community Connections Experienced by NSG Project Leaders (2012-2015)

Legend:
- Increase of one's connection to neighbours
- Increase of one's sense of belonging in neighbourhood
- Increase of one's sense of empowerment to address local issues

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1 Findings are based on annual evaluative surveys with consistent questions. Evaluation reports have emphasized different themes in different years, so there are not year-over-year findings that can be presented.

- Project leaders' connection to their neighbours, sense of belonging and empowerment to address local issues have—for the most part—shown a steady increase over four years of data. **Sense of belonging** is one of the indicators of *community vitality* within the Canadian Index of Wellbeing Framework.[2]

- But quantitative metrics are only part of the story. Qualitative experience counts too, as recounted by this project leader in 2015: *"I moved to this neighborhood just 2 years ago—however, after organizing The Living Room Art project for 2 years, it feels like I lived here my entire life."* Watch a video about this project.

- **Trust** is another indicator of community vitality in the Canadian Index of Wellbeing. The quantitative data on trust captured for the last two years by NSG data is within the range of 79-82%. Worth noting, however, is that anecdotal evidence of increased trust has been provided by project leaders since 2012, as shown by quotes below:

  — *"I feel my children are safer in the neighbourhood because they know who lives where and everyone by name on the whole street."* (2012)

  — *"Our building has become a very friendly place to live since the event. People know each other and chat to each other as they pass in the hallway. Others have gone for coffee together; one has made an arrangement with another neighbour to dog-sit for him. When the fire alarm went off, neighbours knocked on the doors of our two wheelchair residents to assist them. People are leaving keys with their neighbour when they go on vacation in case access is needed to their apartment. We all exchanged email addresses so people are communicating more that way as well."* (2013)

  — *"We trust each other to contribute and to return borrowed items, as well as to contribute time to each other when needed."* (2014)

  — *"We exchanged telephone numbers at our block party and a month later we received a call from a neighbour who was not feeling well and asked for help as she was alone."* (2015)

Percentage of Projects that Created New Connections (2012-2015)

Projects that created new connections in their community

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2 See https://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing/

Meeting the Principles of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)[3]

- According to ABCD, people must be connected for sustainable community development to take place. Relationships strengthen the social capital (norms, networks, and social trust) that exists in groups whose members work together in collaborative action.

- Evaluation results of the past four years show NSG has been instrumental in strengthening the bridging social capital of neighbourhoods by connecting people who previously did not know each other.

"I feel my children are safer in the neighbourhood because they know who lives where and everyone by name on the whole street."

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3 ABCD is a useful concept for considering how local assets contribute to strong and sustainable communities. While we do not intentionally frame our NSG outcomes around ABCD, these principles can provide additional context on the power of linking and leveraging existing community strengths. See http://www.abcdinstitute.org/docs/What%20 isAssetBasedCommunityDevelopment(1).pdf

- **Gifts:** Community is strengthened when everyone shares their gifts. These gifts can be used and rearranged in different ways to not only enhance their power, but also to empower those who use them. Evaluation data from the past two years indicate that close to 60% of NSG projects involve the sharing of gifts. Project leaders share their value through quotes below:

— **"***My choice of a gardening-based project was wise as it is well within the scope of my knowledge, expertise, and local network. And it reminded my neighbours and colleagues that even though I am now a "senior", albeit I perceive myself as middle-aged, I am still active, energetic, and supportive of my community.*" (2013)

— **"***I was inspired to lead a project because I wanted to connect members of my community with each other through the medium of poetry. This way, they would have a vehicle to share their thoughts, ideas, creativity and emotions with others in a safe, welcoming, supportive, inspirational and creative space.*" (2015)

Citizens at the Centre

Within the principles of ABCD, residents are viewed as active actors and decision-makers in the development of their community. Decisions come from open and inclusive conversations where people are heard.

In addition to NSG-supported projects that bring community members together, the Resident Advisory Committee (RAC) structure has enabled residents to grow their leadership skills. Deliberating on projects, they identify and support ones that complement the existing strength and vibrancy of their community.

The number of RAC members has increased from 92 in 2011 to 152 in 2015. Many describe the decision-making process as open and transparent:
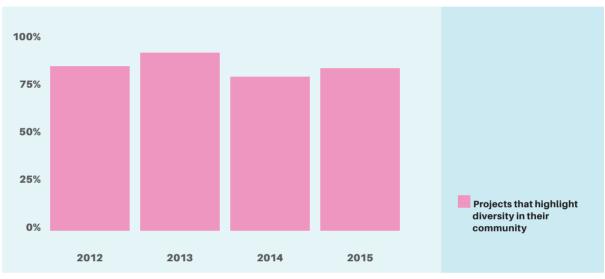
"Each and every one on the committee was asked for their input. The group discussions were open and very helpful in making the decisions." (2013)

"The diverse group (in terms of age, location around the city) of committee members resulted in a more informed decision since we all had knowledge of different activities around our city." (2014)

In addition, the RAC is another medium for building stronger social capital amongst neighbours:

"I consider my fellow RAC volunteers to be friends, mentors, peers that have formed what has become a very important network in my life. In fact, in my professional life, I have used my RAC team as an example of a group that works well." (2014)

- **Hospitality:** Strong communities are welcoming and recognize that individuals who were once strangers become community members with new ideas, gifts, and energy. This goal is an inherent value for NSG because welcoming and inclusive projects create compassion, equity, trust, and empathy between residents on a personal level. Communities that reflect these qualities are stronger, more resilient, and safer.

- The chart below indicates the percentage of projects that highlight the diversity of their community. Some of the strategies that made NSG projects inclusive and accessible included using promotional materials in several languages, offering translation services during events, holding events at wheelchair accessible venues, providing food options to accommodate dietary restrictions, inviting diverse community members to have central roles in events, and making sure that projects are cost-free for participants.

Percentage of Projects that Highlight Diversity in Community (2012-2015)

Legend: Projects that highlight diversity in their community

Other Noteworthy Trends

Project leaders' sense of accomplishment is shown to be a consistent trend, as demonstrated by these testimonials:

— *"I feel like I contributed to enhancing quality of life for our community."* (2012)

— *"As a person with a diverse ability, my NSG project has helped me realize all that I can do to contribute to society."* (2013)
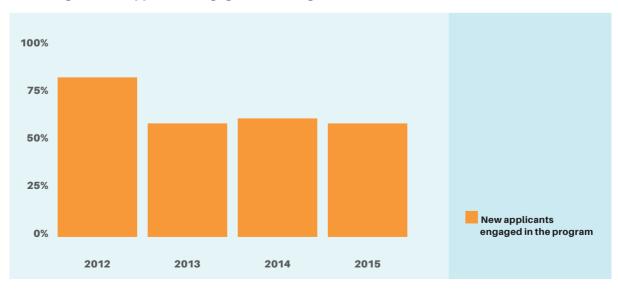
— *"It empowered me personally. As a newcomer 6 years ago, I started being a project leader for NSG. The trust that I was given through this project validated that even a small person like me has a voice in the community."* (2015)

The percentage of new applicants engaged in the program experienced a significant increase in 2012. This was the result of four emerging community partners with highly dense populations (downtown Vancouver, Westside Vancouver, North Shore, and North Surrey) joining the program, and the addition of New Westminster as a new pilot community.

The percentage of new applicants held steady at 58-60% in 2013-2015, as many new applicants from 2012 continued to be involved in the program. Richmond joined the program in 2014, followed by Victoria and Clayoquot Sound in 2015. Relatively modest start-up budgets, as well as demographics, were likely factors in the lessor number of people involved in these communities.

"I feel like I contributed to enhancing quality of life for our community."

Percentage of New Applicants Engaged in the Program (2012-2015)

New applicants engaged in the program

What Remains a Challenge?

Creating deeper and meaningful interactions through NSG projects remains a challenge, as most projects tend to be one-time events that help facilitate new connections. According to data captured in 2014 and 2015, the number of projects that enabled frequent interactions between participants is lowest at 38-39% compared to other types of projects.

Reaching out to other ethnic communities and Indigenous people remains a challenge. Comprehensive demographic data of applicants have been captured for the past two years and results show:

- The percentage of youth applicants under the age of 24 is relatively low at 6-8%.
- The diversity of grantees—when comparing the percentage of Canadian born (60%) to immigrants at (40%), or length of time that applicants have lived in their communities—demonstrate that the outreach by partner organizations is successful. The majority of applicants, however, are English, French, and Chinese-speaking.

The **common and consistent challenges that project leaders have experienced** when planning and implementing their projects include:

- High cost and restrictions on venues has impacted their ability to deliver activities, especially indoor ones, within reasonable time and large enough space.
- The longer time required for city permit processes, especially for creative and unique projects, delayed and in some cases prevented implementation of projects.
- Difficulty in recruiting enough volunteers resulted in leaders taking on more responsibilities than they originally anticipated.
- Project leaders' limited experience of promotion resulted in low number of participation in some projects.
- Difficulty was noted in modifying annual projects with new themes and content so they can stay relevant and open up opportunities to engage new people.

Overall, communities are built successfully through each individual project supported through NSG. However, the social capital that exists within each granting area, or in the larger NSG network as a whole, remains untapped.

In spite of high interest from grantees and RAC members, there are few-and-far-between networking and mentorship opportunities for them to interact with one another. This is due to limited human and financial resource capital.

As indicated in the 2015 evaluation report, *"…connections and resources built through NSG should be used and maintained throughout the year. Best practices should be shared perhaps through an online forum or a quarterly newsletter throughout the NSG network. Neighbourhoods are important and they ought to be empowered, but they should not act as geographical limits to information-sharing, communications, or helping each other out."*

Grant Amounts Over Six Years

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Applications received	456	753	751	1190	1110	1123
Projects supported	350	604	612	807	897	974
Neighbourhoods/cities	5	9	10	10	11	13
Community partners	11	15	16	16	17	18

"It empowered me personally. As a newcomer 6 years ago, I started being a project leader for NSG. The trust that I was given through this project validated that even a small person like me has a voice in the community."

Overall Reflection of Evaluation & Lessons Learned

So where does this leave us in our thinking about NSG? Here is what we've learned and how we're following up:

• Community Impact Indicators: Continue to capture relevant quantitative and qualitative data including anecdotes, photos, and videos so as to focus on best practices and emerging data and trends in the literature.
• Trend Analysis: Ensure that impact data are captured over time to determine trends of successes and challenges.
• Program Expansion Indicators: Develop a secondary set of indicators to be used alongside the community impact indicators to measure the outcomes of the program's expansion and partnership and network development.
• Connect and Engage: Continue to use NSG evaluation data as a way to understand how to inspire social connections and community engagement at the grassroots level.
• Celebrate: Share the experiences, learnings, and accomplishments of residents participating in NSG.

Our Collective Impact

Below, we provide first-hand experiences and sample stories that support the achievement of Neighbourhood Small Grants outcomes according to the Impact Framework.

Connect and Engage Neighbourhood Residents

a) Build new relationships amongst neighbourhood residents

Terra Nova—Musgrave Crescent Block Party, Richmond: This "Meet your Neighbours" event was organized by four block watch captains in the Terra Nova area who provided coffee, tea, snacks, and a gathering place for residents. The first event was so successful that organizers decided to host a similar event the next year. Below is a quote from the organizers:

"In the Terra Nova area, where two NSG block parties have been held, neighbours not only say hello to one another now, they also come out of their houses to help one another in case of crisis! When one neighbour's house alarm went off in the middle of the night, many neighbours came out to try and help."

b) Deepen existing relationships amongst neighbourhood residents through frequent interactions

Food connection, Central Vancouver: Food enthusiast Joey Liu and her friends created a group called the Food Connections in 2013 with seed funding from NSG and space from Mt. Pleasant Neighbourhood House. Joey's primary interest was to establish meaningful interactions among like minded foodies: *"Through volunteering and attending food-related events I met a lot of people, but found it difficult to establish deeper connections. I decided that if this opportunity didn't really exist, I would create it myself."*

The participants meet for potlucks and free food workshops every last Wednesday of the month. Joey describes frequent interactions as *"genuine, safe and welcoming."* She also states: *"The workshops are not just a forum for neighbours to connect, they also nurture deeper connections beyond the workshops, as friendships develop and neighbours support one another. For example, one participant not only made friends she now meets outside of the workshops, she even found her current housing through the Food Connection. So over time friends have become neighbours, and neighbours have become friends."*

More information about the food connection group can be found here: www.thefoodconnection.ca

Sharing Skills and Knowledge with Neighbourhood Residents

a) Local residents share their skills and knowledge with other residents in the neighbourhood

Quilting in Burnaby: Irene Harvalias is a senior who lives in Burnaby and had a desire to share her quilting skills with moms and other neighbours. She has been holding quilting sessions once a week at Maywood Community School along with volunteer helpers for nearly 10 years with funding support from NSG.

In 2015, 18 new members were able to join the group. Irene describes quilting as a *"wonderful tool for co-operative learning. Some of the individuals who join the group have never even used a sewing machine, so the whole learning experience is "shared" with the more knowledgeable members of the group. As many of the ladies are recent arrivals and don't speak English, those who speak their language are happy to translate and explain how things work."*

Watch a video about this project.

b) Provide opportunities for participants to exchange skills and learn from each other

Surrey Skill Share Fair, North Surrey: After attending the Whatcom Skill Share Fair in Washington state, Peter LeBlanc was inspired to organize a similar event. With help from two friends, $1,000 in NSG funding, and a space donation from the Nature Centre, he was able to organize the Surrey Skill Share Fair in 2014.

This free event is about teaching and learning useful, handy, and practical skills with community members. The inaugural event brought 18 presentations and workshops including beekeeping, reiki, bike maintenance, singing acapella, and even a death doula, and was attended by 200-300 people. This event has become an annual tradition.

One of the participants, Jennifer Swanson, reflected *"I felt it was a community building event and it was accessible to everyone. It didn't matter if you had money or not, there were things that you could participate in."* **Watch a video about this project.**

The inaugural event brought 18 presentations and workshops and was attended by 200-300 people. This event has become an annual tradition.

Build Sense of Ownership and Pride

a) Showcase and use local resources that includes public and private spaces, talent, arts, culture, and food

West End Games Night, Downtown Vancouver: Jim Balakshin was interested in creating a public welcoming space for West End residents so they could come out and interact with one another through games. He and a friend successfully applied for NSG funding. They bought $500 worth of board games to spread on picnic tables at Bute Plaza for people to play on Thursday evenings in the summer of 2014.

The tables quickly filled up with people from all walks of life. Christmas light decorations and local musicians added more ambiance to the event. Many local businesses made contributions. The project was covered by various media outlets and is currently being piloted as an animation tool by the City of Vancouver's Public Spaces program.

b) Engage residents to make meaningful contributions or give back to their communities

The Marpole Walk Map, South Vancouver: This project was organized by Imu Chan and Josephine of South Vancouver in 2015 with Soo Lei providing support for the graphics and design of the map. The Marpole Walk Map is based on the accumulation of the informal encounters and discussions of people from different ethnic backgrounds and age groups in the neighbourhood.

A community conversation was organized by the project leader for residents to contribute to the map as well as share stories of Marpole. As a graphic tool, the map reflects their observations, insights, and experiences. Imu reports that translating residents' experiences into a graphical information map was a steep learning curve. With a dedicated team of volunteers, however, they were able to pull off a meaningful community resource based on the knowledge, pride, and ownership of residents.

Respect and Celebrate Diversity

a) Showcase and profile the diversity within the community

Hijab Awareness and Fashion Show Event, Quadra Village, Victoria: After learning that people in Victoria were interested in why Muslim women wear the hijab, Shazia Rashid decided to organize her first community event and spread hijab awareness.

Shazia held a hijab fashion show as a way to showcase the diversity of Muslim culture, with representation of 10 styles of hijabs from different countries and 25 models participating. The event was open to all, involved dozens of volunteers, and took over the Quadra Village Community Centre for a whole day.

One of the models, 16-year-old Manahil Hassan said, *"As a Muslim woman, and as a Muslim young woman, you don't get much opportunity to do a fashion show, so I can show off my personality while still being me, comfortable in my own skin".*

b) Connect people across boundaries of age, ethnic backgrounds, income level, sexual orientation, or physical abilities

Meeting on Common Ground, Strathcona, Vancouver: Sharon Bayly is a performing artist who believes that creative expression is everyone's birthright. She finds working with puppets to be a wonderful and fun way for bringing people together from across all ages and cultures.

Her project involved Chinese elders and youth from the Strathcona neighbourhood making small hand-puppets in a series of workshops. The theme, Meeting On Common Ground, included a story-sharing component about places in the neighbourhood that hold special meaning for each participant.

The two groups came together to share a meal and stories through their puppets. Many of the youth spoke Cantonese, which was a wonderful way for the seniors and youth to connect. For those who did not speak Cantonese, a translator was able to help bridge the communication gap. According to the project leader, *"The youth declared their favourite part of the project was meeting and talking with the elders! They were surprised by how interesting the seniors were. They enjoyed hearing their stories, and were delighted by how much they laughed and enjoyed themselves together."*

c) Include and promote accessibility and social inclusion practices

Sign Language, North Surrey: The family of Kimberly Wood and Barry Ranger moved to a Surrey neighbourhood of Whalley in late 2011. Wood and Ranger are both deaf and their children have varying degrees of hearing loss. Wood had moved her family to the Vancouver area from Edmonton so that her children could attend the BC Provincial School for the Deaf in Burnaby.

While her kids Zak, Zimar, and Zander were thriving at school, they were not comfortable in their own neighbourhood. Wood decided that she and her children would provide the equivalent of Deaf Culture 101, calling their project Hands-On Fun Week. The plan was to show the local kids how to communicate simple phrases in sign language and explain some of the finer points of deaf etiquette. With a grant of $1,000 from NSG, Wood was able to put her plan to action.

Over five days, she and her kids taught the participants many sign language gestures, including basic greetings such as "Hi" and "How are you". The sign for "I love you," was a big hit. They also taught residents that deaf people don't consider themselves disabled, but look at themselves able- bodied who can do anything except hear. About 30 kids attended the workshop and 100 people showed up at the barbecue on the final day.

Wood says, *"Before the workshop, this community wasn't very close-knit. But afterwards, it was. A lot more people started talking with Zander and socializing with Zak."* Similarly, one of the workshop participants, Laura Corrigan, 12, said the workshop changed the apartment complex. *"Everything has changed. Now everyone comes out and goes to the park together. We go swimming or ice skating. And it all started after the workshop. Just because one family came here and made a difference."*

"I consider my fellow RAC volunteers to be friends, mentors, peers that have formed what has become a very important network in my life. In fact, in my professional life, I have used my RAC team as an example of a group that works well."

Linking and Leveraging for Greater Connection

The Neighbourhood Small Grants program plants a big footprint for relatively little costs. Here are a few examples of how NSG is inspiring policy discussion and change from the ground up:

Public Spaces—the experience of the West End Games Night project, described above, has sparked dialogue and outreach from the City of Vancouver and community organizations about the role public spaces play in creating vibrant neighbourhoods.

The use of public space was also at the heart of early NSG projects that saw the creation—and rapid replication—of mini-lending libraries cropping up on public boulevards and in parks. This led to a championing of using parks for more possibilities, like local book exchanges, to build connections between neighbours.

Determining how municipalities might best design and steward public spaces so they are welcoming and relevant to local residents is of keen interest to many communities. What is being learned about public spaces through NSG offers lessons and opportunities that community foundations and others across B.C. can support in their own home towns.

Street Murals—what if the art project that engages and inspires residents is literally off-the-wall and on-the-street?

NSG project funding for street murals led to the City of Vancouver developing a prototype model for dealing with requests, issuing permits, engaging neighbourhood support, and even exploring different kind of paints for high traffic areas. The result: a new policy in 2015 that established guidelines for street murals, recognizing that supporting artists, calming traffic, and beautifying the neighbourhood can start at street level.

Greenest City—the City of Vancouver's award-winning commitment to a healthy and sustainable community is reflected in its financial support of Greenest City Neighbourhood Small Grants. Funding provided to Vancouver Foundation is directed to local grants of up to $1,000 per project.

Incorporated within the broader NSG program, Greenest City projects are premised on the same concept that resident-led ideas can help strengthen local assets. These projects focus on a range of goals—from growing and eating local food to creating zero waste, from conserving drinking water to accessing nature and promoting greener transportation and businesses.

What Lies Ahead

Neighbourhood Small Grants is growing—new communities continue to join each year and the level of interest across community foundations and municipalities in B.C. is strong. This bodes well for future participation.

But sustaining an NSG program is as important as creating one. And sustainability has to be underpinned by learning, impact, and knowledge-sharing to support new and existing communities in realizing the potential that NSG can tap. To this end, Vancouver Foundation will build and facilitate a regional NSG model to deepen our knowledge, and that of our partners, in best practices for grassroots granting.

Regionally and provincially, the NSG program is connecting and engaging residents in building healthy, vibrant, and livable communities. It all begins, however, where it started—and that's local: on this street, at that corner park, across from the community gathering place.

Wherever neighbours come together to become friends.

"I believe that as a direct result of our annual block parties, we have developed one of the most communicative, close and connected neighbourhoods in the city. Everyone comes out for the parties and we all have such a good time—the neighbours who barely speak English, the neighbours with brand new babies, the senior in her 80s who grew up on the block and whose daughter and family now live in the same house, the neighbour in her wheelchair, the neighbours who have lived on the block for 20 years and those who just moved in.

The block party serves as a foundation for communication so that during the rest of the year we stay in touch. This might take the form of mowing our neighbour's lawn, creating a food hamper for a neighbour with a sick child, using our e-mail tree to inform each other if there has been a break in, or letting others know that there is a bumper crop of raspberries to share in the backyard. All of these things add up to build a healthy, happy and strong community. Ask anyone on our block and we'll all tell you, **that's us."**

Neighbourhood Small Grants is delivered in partnership with community organizations. We currently offer the program in 17 communities throughout the province.

Abbotsford
Municipality of Abbotsford and
Abbotsford Community Foundation

Burnaby
Burnaby Neighbourhood House, Burnaby

Carnegie, Strathcona, Ray-Cam
Carnegie Community Centre, Vancouver
Strathcona Community Centre, Vancouver
Ray-Cam Community Centre, Vancouver

Cedar Cottage, Hastings-Sunrise, Renfrew
Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House, Vancouver
Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, Vancouver
Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House, Vancouver

Central Vancouver
Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House, Vancouver
Little Mountain Neighbourhood House, Vancouver

Clayoquot Biosphere Reserve Region
Clayoquot Biosphere Trust

Downtown Vancouver
Gordon Neighbourhood House, Vancouver

Maple Ridge
Cities of Maple Ridge and Pit Meadows

New Westminster
Family Services of Greater Vancouver, New Westminster

North Shore
North Shore Neighbourhood House, North Vancouver

North Surrey
Oak Avenue Neighbourhood Hub, Surrey

Richmond
Richmond Cares Richmond Gives

South Okanagan and Similkameen
Community Foundation of South Okanagan and
Similkameen in partnership with the Regional District
of Penticton

South Vancouver, Collingwood
South Vancouver Neighbourhood House, Vancouver
Collingwood Neighbourhood House, Vancouver

Victoria
Victoria Community Foundation in partnership with
Quadra Village Community Centre

West Side
Kitsilano Neighbourhood House, Vancouver

University of British Columbia

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