

# Transforming Systems Grants Frequently Asked Questions

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# Grant program details

## 1. HOW MUCH FUNDING IS AVAILABLE?

**Transforming Systems Grants (TSG)** will award around **\$9.5 million** for the 2026 cycle.

**Explore** grants offer **10 one-time grants of up to \$50,000**. They support organizations that are early in their systems-change work and are building the conditions needed to address root causes.

**Influence** grants offer **30 grants of up to \$100,000 per year for three years**. They support organizations that are putting systems-change plans into action or scaling their work.

Applicants may request up to \$50,000 for Explore grants and up to \$100,000 per year for Influence grants. Because demand for this funding will be high, applicants are encouraged to ask only for the amount they truly need.

## 2. WHAT CAN THE FUNDS BE USED FOR? DO I NEED A PROJECT IDEA?

TSG **cannot be used as flexible core funding**. Operational expenses are eligible only when they directly support community-led systems-change work.

Funding can support a wide range of systems-change activities, if they directly advance community-led systemic influence. **Eligible expenses include:**

- **Staffing for systems-change roles** — salaries, benefits, training, coaching, and professional development.
- **Planning, coordination, and administration** that enable the organization to lead and sustain systems-change efforts.
- **Capacity-building** such as strategic planning, governance development, and partnership building.
- **Relationship and network building** across sectors, communities, and systems.
- **Communications and outreach** that raise community voices, engage them in decision making, and shift narratives.
- **Community engagement supports** that enable meaningful participation of those most affected.

- **Evaluation and learning** to track progress, assess impact, and inform systems-change strategies.
- **Knowledge sharing** — community reports, videos, events, and other accessible formats.
- **Legal or policy consultation** that strengthens systems-change strategies.
- **Cultural and land-based practices** central to the systems-change approach, especially for Indigenous-led or culturally grounded work.
- **Technology and infrastructure** that directly support systems-change activities (e.g., data tools, storytelling platforms, community organizing tools).

These are all tied to advancing systems change — not general operations, not direct service delivery, and not activities outside B.C.

### 3. DO I NEED A PROJECT OR INITIATIVE IDEA?

It depends on the grant stream:

- **Explore:** You do not need a fully formed project idea. This stream is designed for organizations that are still exploring root causes, building readiness, mapping systems, or developing early ideas with community.
- **Influence:** You *do* need a clear systems-change strategy, initiative or project plan. This stream supports organizations ready to test, implement, or deepen their influence at a systems level.

### 4. CAN THESE GRANTS BE USED TO SUPPORT OUR ORGANIZATION'S ONGOING OPERATIONS?

No. These grants do **not** provide general operational or core funding. Transforming Systems Grants support work that is directly connected to **community-led systems-change**. Budgets must show how requested funds will advance activities that shift policies, practices, resource flows, relationships, power dynamics, or mental models. While a reasonable amount of administrative costs may be included when they are essential to delivering the systems-change work, the grant is not intended to fund an organization's ongoing operations or unrelated programs.

### 5. WILL THESE GRANTS BE OFFERED AGAIN?

The Transforming Systems Grants are offered once every year. You can stay informed by subscribing to our [granting newsletter](#), which shares updates on upcoming programs, timelines, and any changes to eligibility or criteria.

## 6. WHEN IS THE APPLICATION DEADLINE?

The Stage 1 deadline for both Explore and Influence grant types is **July 6, 2026 at 5:00 pm PT**. The online application portal will close at this time.

## 7. DO I NEED TO USE THE FUNDS WITHIN A CERTAIN TIME FRAME?

We trust that you intend to use the funding within six months of being awarded a grant and will use each year's funding within 12 months of receiving it. But we know things can change. If your plans change, we just ask that you keep us informed.

## 8. HOW WILL FUNDING BE DISTRIBUTED?

To help ensure that TSG funding is shared equitably across B.C., it will be divided across three geographic groups. Based on how many applications come from each group, funding is divided to roughly match that pattern. The three geographic groups are:

- **Large/urban:** organizations within Metro Vancouver, the Capital Regional District (Greater Victoria), and/or the Regional District of Central Okanagan.
- **Small/rural/remote:** organizations who work outside B.C.'s three major urban regions.
- **Multi-region/province-wide:** organizations whose work spans multiple regions or the entire province.

Applicants will self-select in the application where their work is based.

## 9. WHAT DOES VANCOUVER FOUNDATION MEAN BY "SYSTEMIC CHANGE"?

Systemic change means working to **shift the underlying conditions that keep complex problems in place**, rather than adding new programs or responding only to symptoms. Vancouver Foundation looks for work that influences one or more of the six interconnected conditions:

- **Policies** — the rules or laws that shape what institutions can do
- **Practices** — the routines and norms that guide everyday decisions
- **Resource flows** — how money, information, and other resources move
- **Relationships** — how people and organizations communicate, collaborate, and build trust
- **Power dynamics** — who makes decisions and who is excluded
- **Mental models** — the beliefs, assumptions, and narratives that shape how problems and solutions are understood

These conditions reinforce the status quo. Systemic change aims to influence them so inequitable outcomes don't keep repeating.

- Vancouver Foundation considers work to be systems-change when it:
- Goes beyond maintaining services and works to change how systems function
- Addresses root causes, not just symptoms
- Connects awareness to action with a clear pathway for influence
- Shares ideas and learning in ways that create change beyond one organization
- Centers people most affected, giving them real leadership or decision-making roles

The Transforming Systems Grants fund work that **changes how systems function and who they serve**, not standalone programs or services. The strongest applications show how their efforts influence deeper structures — policies, practices, narratives, relationships, and power — so communities can shape long-term, equitable change.

## 10. WHAT DOES VANCOUVER FOUNDATION MEAN BY “COMMUNITY-LED”?

Community-led systems change means that **people most affected by an issue guide the work from start to finish**. They help define the problem, set priorities, and make decisions about what meaningful change should look like:

- **Self-determination** — Communities set their own goals and solutions rather than having them defined by others.
- **Shared leadership** — Power and decision-making are held with, or by, those most impacted by the problem.
- **Accountability** — Trust is built by working in ways that reflect community priorities and respond to community direction.

Community-led systems change is about transforming systems with communities, not for them. This means communities shape the vision, influence decisions, and hold meaningful leadership roles throughout the work, not just during consultation or implementation.

## 11. HOW IS THIS PROGRAM DIFFERENT FROM PREVIOUS SYSTEMS CHANGE GRANTS AT VANCOUVER FOUNDATION?

TSG has the same core focus as our previous Field of Interest and System Change grant programs, which is **to support organizations addressing the root causes of inequality in B.C.** For the 2026 cycle, we updated the grant program to strengthen clarity, equity, and alignment with community-led systems change practices.

TSG now offers two grant streams (Explore and Influence) instead of the previous three streams (Develop, Test, and Scale). **A major shift is that the “community-led” criteria is now a required criterion rather than a strength.**

## 12. WHY TWO GRANT STREAMS? WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE, HOW DO I KNOW WHICH ONE TO CHOOSE?

TSG now includes two grant streams — Explore and Influence —to reflect the reality that systems-change work happens along a continuum. Organizations are not all starting from the same place.

**Explore grants** supports organizations in the earlier stages of systems-change work. This includes building relationships, validating root causes with community, strengthening governance and shared-power structures, or developing the conditions needed to pursue systems-change strategies.

**Influence grants** supports organizations with established systems-change strategies that are ready to test, implement, or deepen their influence at a systems level. These applicants can demonstrate a clear strategy, partnerships, and understanding of the system they are trying to shift.

**Choose the grant type that best reflects where your organization’s systems-change work is right now,** not where you hope to be by the end of the grant.

A few guiding questions can help:

- Are you still exploring root causes with community, building relationships, or developing the foundations for systems-change work? **Explore**
- Do you already have a defined systems-change strategy, established partnerships, and a clear understanding of the system you’re trying to influence? **Influence**

Both grant streams require that work be community-led, but they support different stages of readiness.

## 13. CAN WE PARTNER WITH ANOTHER ORGANIZATION? CAN WE CO-APPLY WITH OUR PARTNER ORGANIZATION(S).

Yes, you are welcome to partner with other organizations as part of your systems-change work. Partnerships are often essential for this type of work, and we encourage you to describe the partnership, shared roles, and how decisions will be made within the relevant sections of the application.

However, **Vancouver Foundation applications require one eligible applicant organization.** This organization will be the primary contact for the grant and the financial recipient if funding is awarded. Partner organizations cannot jointly submit or co-apply as co-applicants.

# Eligibility

## 14. WHO ARE THESE GRANTS FOR?

Organizations must **serve a community benefit (as defined by the federal government) and meet one of the following criteria:**

- Be a **qualified donee** operating in British Columbia
- Be a **registered non-profit society** that have been operating in B.C. since **January 1, 2025**
- Be a **registered community service co-operative** operating in B.C. since **January 1, 2025**

Each organization may submit **only one application** per cycle.

## 15. DO APPLICANT ORGANIZATIONS NEED TO BE REGISTERED CHARITIES?

No, registered non-profit societies and community service co-operatives are also eligible to apply. You can find our complete eligibility on page 10 of the application guide.

## 16. WHAT IF OUR ORGANIZATION IS NOT A REGISTERED NON-PROFIT SOCIETY?

To be eligible for funding from Vancouver Foundation, your organization must be registered, and therefore searchable under the public online directory OrgBook B.C.

If you're interested in becoming a registered non-profit society, visit the Government of B.C.'s website.

**Please note that all organizations must have registered status by the Stage 1 application deadline of July 6, 2026.**

## 17. WE'RE IN THE PROCESS OF BECOMING A REGISTERED NON-PROFIT SOCIETY OR COMMUNITY SERVICE COOPERATIVE, ARE WE ELIGIBLE TO APPLY?

If your organization will be registered by July 6, 2026 you are eligible to apply for a Transforming Systems Grant. The online application will not allow you to submit an application without a valid registration number.

## 18. WE ARE A FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITY/BAND BASED IN B.C. ARE WE ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING?

Yes, you can apply if you are a qualified donee or “other qualified donee”. First Nations are often registered as “other qualified donees” under the category “municipal or public bodies performing a function of government in Canada”.

## 19. WHY DOES VANCOUVER FOUNDATION REQUIRE ORGANIZATIONS TO BE REGISTERED?

In 2023, the **Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) updated their guidelines** allowing charities like Vancouver Foundation to grant directly to non-qualified donees, including registered non-profits and community service co-operatives operating in B.C., whose activities advance the charitable purposes of the foundation.

As we explore and apply the CRA’s guidance, including the best ways to expand the eligibility of grant programs, we will continue to explore opportunities that will enable us to fund other non-qualified donees whose activities advance the charitable purposes of the foundation.

## 20. OUR CHARITY IS NATIONAL, BUT WE DO SOME WORK IN B.C. ARE WE ELIGIBLE?

If your organization is based outside of B.C. but has eligible initiatives or projects in B.C. that benefit local communities, you are eligible to apply. You can complete the eligibility quiz or email us at [grants.admin@vancouverfoundation.ca](mailto:grants.admin@vancouverfoundation.ca) if you’re still unsure.

## 21. WHAT IF WE ARE REGISTERED IN ANOTHER PROVINCE OR FEDERALLY?

You can be registered anywhere in Canada or federally but must be operating in and/or benefitting communities in B.C. Your organization will also need to be listed on **Orgbook BC** as an ‘extraprovincial society’ for us to confirm eligibility. If your organization isn’t listed on Orgbook BC as an “extraprovincial society”, please **complete an extraprovincial registration** and maintain registered status while operating in B.C.

## 22. CAN MY ORGANIZATION APPLY IF WE’VE RECEIVED A GRANT IN THE PAST OR HAVE AN ACTIVE GRANT WITH VANCOUVER FOUNDATION?

If your organization received a Transforming Systems Grant in 2024, you are not eligible to apply again until 2027, which is the final year of your current funding. *This restriction applies only to 2024 TSG recipients, not to other Vancouver Foundation grant programs.*

### 23. CAN MY ORGANIZATION SUBMIT MORE THAN ONE APPLICATION?

Your organization can submit **only one application per TSG cycle**. This helps keep the process fair and accessible for all applicants. If more than one application is submitted, staff may follow up with the organization to confirm which request should move forward.

For larger organizations, such as post-secondary institutions or health authorities we kindly request that applications be limited to one per department, faculty, or distinct unit.

If your organization is considering multiple ideas, you're welcome to contact us and we can help you identify the strongest fit.

# Application process

## 24. WHO DECIDES WHICH ORGANIZATIONS GET FUNDING?

Funding decisions are made through a shared process between Community Advisors and Vancouver Foundation staff, with final funding recommendations approved by the Vice President of Grants and Community Initiatives and the CEO.

- **Community Advisors** review randomly selected eligible applications and provide recommendations grounded in lived experience, community knowledge, and systems-change expertise.
- **Vancouver Foundation staff** consider these recommendations alongside program requirements, equity considerations, and the geographic funding model before preparing final recommendations.
- The **Vice President of Grants and Community Initiatives** and the **CEO** review and approve the final funding recommendations.

## 25. HOW DOES VANCOUVER FOUNDATION USE A RANDOMIZED SELECTION PROCESS FOR STAGE 1 APPLICATIONS?

Vancouver Foundation uses randomized selection at the beginning of Stage 1 to make the process **fairer, more consistent, and more manageable** given the high volume of applications the program receives each year.

All submitted applications are assigned a random number, and staff then review them in numerical order to confirm they meet the basic requirements of the program. This includes checking for budget alignment as well as community-led systems-change criteria.

Applications that do not meet these requirements are declined. Staff continue reviewing applications in randomized order until they reach the **predetermined** number of eligible, well-aligned applications needed to move forward to Community Advisor review.

This approach creates a more consistent and equitable assessment process and reasonable decision timelines. While not all applications will receive staff review, the process still ensures that only eligible and well-aligned applications advance to Community Advisors for deeper assessment.

Community Advisors continue to guide final decisions, ensuring that funded work reflects community knowledge, systems-change principles, and the intent of the program.

# For selected organizations

## 26. WHEN CAN WE EXPECT TO HEAR FINAL DECISIONS BY?

All applicants will receive their **stage 1 decisions by email in September 2026**, confirming whether they have been awarded Explore funding or invited to submit an Influence stage 2 application.

For **Influence applicants, final funding decisions** will be communicated by email **by the end of December 2026**, following Community Advisor review and senior leadership approval.

## 27. WHAT ARE THE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS?

Progress reports are due once a year. They help us ensure funds are used as intended, understand how the work is unfolding, learn from grantee experience, and share examples of impact. They also help us improve the grant program. We aim to keep reporting reasonable, with a focus on learning.

## 28. I HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT THE GRANTS THAT IS NOT ANSWERED HERE. WHO CAN I CONTACT?

## Contact

For any questions about Transforming Systems Grants, including navigating and troubleshooting Vancouver Foundation's grant management system, please contact [\*\*grants.admin@vancouverfoundation.ca\*\*](mailto:grants.admin@vancouverfoundation.ca).