

# Transforming Systems Grants Application Guide

This guide explains the grant's purpose, timeline, eligibility, and how to apply. We encourage you to read the whole guide to see if the Transforming Systems Grants are right for your organization.

Thank you for your ongoing work contributing to your community and creating lasting change in British Columbia.



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# About Transforming Systems Grants

Transforming Systems Grants (TSG) support organizations addressing the **root causes** of inequality and allow those most affected by systems that create unfair conditions to shape their own futures. The grant's funding supports efforts that influence one or more of the six conditions of **systems change**: policies, practices, resource flows, relationships, power dynamics, and mental models.

## PURPOSE OF FUNDING

TSG supports work led by those most affected by deeply rooted issues. This work focuses on changing the conditions that keep those issues in place to support lasting change.

The 2026 program includes two funding streams. They support organizations at different stages of changing systems: those beginning to explore root causes and those ready to test, deepen, or expand their influence.

## WHAT WE MEAN BY SYSTEMS CHANGE

**Systems change** focuses on shifting the underlying conditions that keep complex problems in place. These conditions include:

### Structural conditions

- **Policies** — the rules or laws that guide decisions
- **Practices** — the routines and norms that shape everyday decisions
- **Resource flows** — how money, information, and resources move

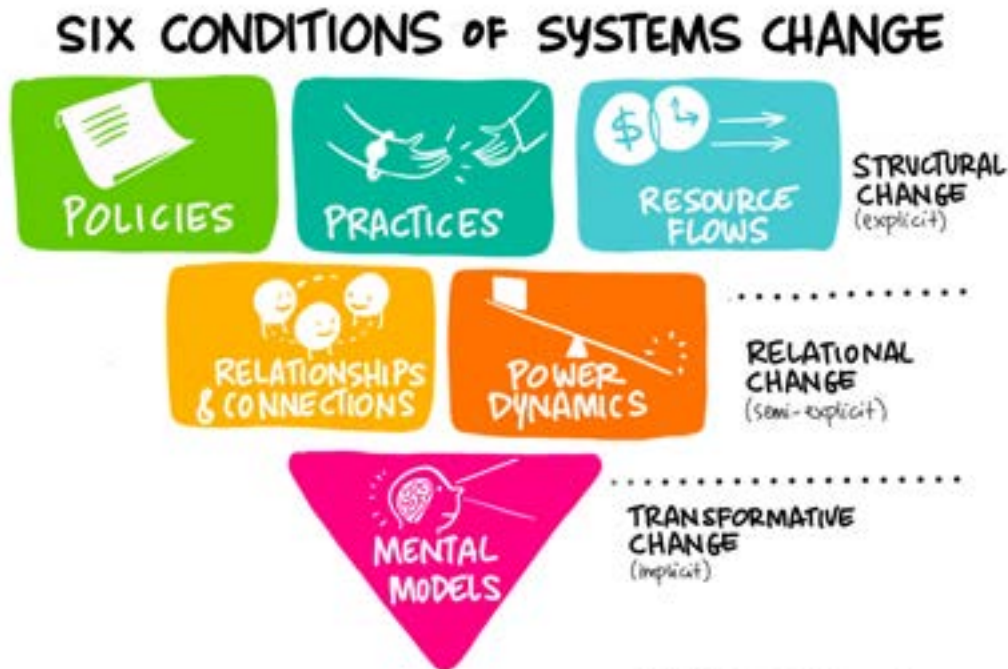
### Relational conditions

- **Relationships** — how people and organizations work together and build trust
- **Power dynamics** — who makes decisions and who is left out

### Transformational conditions

- **Mental models** — the beliefs, assumptions, and stories that shape how people see problems and solutions

These six conditions work together to keep the status quo. Systems-change work aims to shift these conditions, so the same problems do not continue.



Adapted from Kania, Kramer, Senge  
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### WHEN WE THINK OF SYSTEMS CHANGE, WE THINK OF WORK THAT:

- Goes beyond maintaining services and seeks to change how systems act
- Deals with root causes, not only symptoms
- Links learning to action with a clear path for change
- Creates impact beyond one organization through shared learning and collaboration
- Centers the people most affected by the issues, with meaningful leadership and/or decision-making roles

### WHEN WORK IS NOT SYSTEMS CHANGE

Work falls outside systems change when it does not affect the conditions that hold a problem in place, including:

- Delivering services without changing how the system works
- Responding only to symptoms without examining deeper causes
- Awareness-raising without a plan for action
- Innovations or pilots that stay within one organization and do not connect to wider change

This table shows what systems change outcomes can look like, and what they are not.

Condition	TSG-aligned example	Not systems change
<b>1. Policies</b>	A school board adopts a district-wide policy requiring all schools to have lessons that reflect students' cultures and lived experiences. The change was shaped by community input.	One school pilots a learning program that reflects students' cultures and lived experiences without any plan to influence broader policies.
<b>2. Practices</b>	Hospitals build trauma-informed care into everyday practice across departments, by training staff, holding them accountable, and committing to a long-term plan.	One organization offers trauma-informed care while other surrounding organizations continue using harmful or outdated practices.
<b>3. Resource flows</b>	A government commits part of its arts budget to Black-led organizations over time, shifting how public dollars are spent.	A single, one-time grant is given to a Black-led organization without changing how funding decisions are made.
<b>4. Relationships and connections</b>	Coalitions build long-term partnerships and share power with communities who have been left out of decision-making.	A single meeting is held with community members, with no ongoing relationship, shared leadership, or follow up.
<b>5. Power dynamics</b>	Youth-led groups have real decision-making roles that allow them to shape funding and public systems.	Short-term projects are funded without addressing who holds power or how decisions are made.
<b>6. Mental models</b>	Communities, organizations, and policymakers treat addiction as a public health issue, shifting outdated messages and responses across systems.	Awareness is raised, but stigma and harmful responses remain unchanged.

## COMMUNITY-LED SYSTEMS CHANGE

Community-led systems change means the people most affected by an issue lead the work. They define the problem, set priorities, and make decisions. Their lived or living experience drives the work, not just informs it.

This approach centers:

- **Self-determination:** Communities set their own goals and solutions.
- **Shared leadership:** Power and decision-making are shared with those most impacted.
- **Accountability:** Organizations build trust and work in ways that reflect community priorities.

At its core, community-led systems change is about transforming systems with communities, not for them.

# Grant stream: “Explore”

## PURPOSE

Explore grants support organizations **in the early stages of systems change work**. They support learning, planning, and testing ideas that prepare organizations to take on systems change work. They help teams explore and confirm root causes alongside those who are most affected by the issue(s).

## GRANT CHARACTERISTICS

- Grants: **up to \$50,000 total**
- Shorter timelines: **up to one year**
- Focus on capacity-building, not system-wide impact or interventions yet
- Work is co-led and co-designed with those most affected by the issue(s)

## EXPLORE GOALS

### 1. Build shared understanding of a systemic issue

Support teams in developing a common understanding of an issue they are already working on, examining root causes, and identifying a shared direction or plan for addressing them.

### 2. Build internal readiness

Build the skills, structures, and organizational conditions needed to engage in long-term systems-change work

### 3. Build inclusive partnerships and networks

Support relationship-building and shared leadership with people most affected by inequality, ensuring that community voices guide the direction and design of future systems change initiatives.

# Grant stream: “Influence”

## PURPOSE

Influence grants support organizations with **established systems-change plans** who are ready to put those plans into action. They help teams test, apply, and strengthen strategies aimed at shifting conditions that create inequity. They also support organizations to deepen partnerships, expand their influence, and advance changes alongside the communities most affected.

## GRANT CHARACTERISTICS

- Grants: **up to \$100,000 per year**
- Multi-year commitment: **up to 3 years**
- Requires **evidence of prior systems change work**, including a clear strategy or project plan, established partnerships, and demonstrated understanding of the system and how to leverage it
- Work is co-led and co-designed with those most affected by the issue(s)

## INFLUENCE GOALS

### 1. Put systems change plans into action

Support organizations to advance strategies that shift policies, practices, resource flows, stories, and power dynamics toward lasting systemic change.

### 2. Influence real-world conditions

Provide resources to pilot, adapt, assess system change practices, and learn how they function within complex, real-world environments.

### 3. Scale-up approaches that are working

Strengthen and expand approaches that have demonstrated success so they can be adapted more widely.

### 4. Strengthen cross-sector partnerships and advocacy

Bring partners from different sectors together to work toward a common goal, build shared strength, and create change across systems.

### 5. Build learning to support long-term change

Produce learning and data that help scale what works and can be adopted widely by institutions to create long-term system-level change.

# Key dates

## **JUNE 3, 10, 15, AND 25**

Online information sessions. Register for [June 3](#), [June 10](#), [June 15](#), or [June 25](#).

## **JUNE 8**

Stage 1 applications open online at 9am PT.

## **JULY 6**

Stage 1 applications close at 5pm PT.

## **JULY-SEPTEMBER**

Explore and Influence stage 1 application review.

## **MID- TO LATE SEPTEMBER**

Explore and Influence stage 1 decisions shared by email to all stage 1 applicants.

## **SEPTEMBER 10-OCTOBER 19**

Influence stage 2 applications open.

## **OCTOBER-NOVEMBER**

Influence stage 2 application review.

## **MID-DECEMBER**

Influence stage 2 decisions shared by email to all stage 2 applicants.

# Available grants

TSG will award around **\$9.5 million** for the 2026 cycle.

- Explore grants — around 10 grants of up to \$50,000
- Influence grants — around 30 grants of up to \$100,000 per year for up to three years

## EXAMPLES AND CASE STUDIES

To learn more about previously funded TSG grants, [click here](#).

To read “Explore” case studies and see how they align with TSG funding criteria, [click here](#).

To read “Influence” case studies and see how they align with TSG funding criteria, [click here](#).

# Eligibility

To apply for TSG (Explore or Influence), your organization **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 has been operating in British Columbia** since January 1, 2025.
- Be **a registered community service co-operative** operating in British Columbia.

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 funding.

Each organization may submit only one application. This keeps the process fair and accessible because TSG uses randomized selection. If you have multiple funding requests, Vancouver Foundation staff are available to discuss which one is the best fit for TSG.

## EXAMPLES OF ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

TSG funds activities and expenses that support community-led systems change. This may include:

- Staffing costs for roles related to systems-change work, including salaries, benefits, training, coaching, and professional development.
- Direct project costs, including reasonable administrative overhead tied to the work.
- Planning, coordination, and administration that help the organization lead and keep systems-change efforts.
- Capacity-building activities 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 allow for meaningful participation.
- Evaluation and learning activities that track progress, assess impact, and inform systems-change strategies.
- Knowledge sharing, such as community reports, videos, or events.
- Legal or policy consultation that strengthen systems-change plans.
- Cultural and land-based practices that are needed for the initiative's systems-change approach, particularly for Indigenous-led or culturally grounded work.
- Technology and infrastructure that support systems-change activities (e.g., data tools, storytelling platforms, and community organizing tools).

## EXAMPLES OF INELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES AND EXPENSES

TSG does not fund activities or expenses that are unrelated to advancing community-led systems change. This includes:

- Work outside British Columbia.
- Large public infrastructure projects (libraries, schools, and hospitals).
- Direct services or assistance programs without a plan to address root causes or systemic conditions.
- General operating costs not related to the project (such as rent, core administrative salaries, or utilities) are not eligible unless the organization's primary work is systems change.

- Expenses incurred before the application submission date.
- Travel or attendance at conferences, competitions, symposia, or annual events unless clearly part of a systems-change initiative.
- Event sponsorships, bursaries, scholarships, or awards unless part of a systems-change initiative.
- Endowment funds or capital campaigns.
- Operating deficits, retroactive funding, debt repayment, financial reserves, or mortgage paydowns.
- Activities not considered charitable under CRA guidelines, including fundraising. • Staffing costs including salaries and benefits, professional development, training and coaching etc.

Not sure if the Transforming Systems Grants  
is right for your organization?

**Take the online eligibility quiz.**

# How to apply

## *Explore and Influence grants*

### STEP 1:

Read this guide, attend an information session, and **take the online eligibility quiz**.

### STEP 2:

When **applications open on June 8**, log into the online grant management system to access the application portal.

- **Returning applicants:** Log in using your existing username and password.
- **New applicants:** Create a profile using the “Register Here” button at the top left of the portal. You can watch a short video on “How to Create a User Account” for guidance.
- **Forgot your password?** Use the reset option on the login page and check your spam/junk folder for the reset email.

### STEP 3:

In the portal, go to the “Apply” section (top right) and select *2026 Transforming Systems Grants* for the grant stream you wish to apply for (Explore or Influence).

### STEP 4:

Complete and submit your Explore (full application) or Influence (stage 1) application by **5 pm PST on July 6, 2026**. A confirmation email from “@smartsimple.ca” will be sent after submission.

### STEP 5:

Final Explore decisions and Influence stage 1 decisions will be emailed to applicants by **mid to late September 2026**.

## ***Influence grants (stage 2)***

If you are invited to submit an Influence stage 2 application:

### **STEP 6:**

Log into the online grant management system to complete and submit the full online application by **October 19, 2026**.

### **STEP 7:**

Final Influence decisions will be emailed to applicants by **mid-December 2026**.

# Selection process

## EXPLORE (ONE-STAGE)

Explore grants use a one-stage application process.

All submitted applications go through randomized selection. Applications that are randomly selected and meet eligibility requirements move directly to Community Advisor review. Community Advisors then assess the applications and make final funding recommendations.

## INFLUENCE (TWO-STAGE)

Influence grants use a two-stage application process.

**Stage 1:** All submitted applications go through randomized selection. Staff review the randomly selected applications to confirm eligibility. Eligible applications then move to Community Advisor review, where Advisors recommend which applicants should be invited to submit a Stage 2 application.

**Stage 2:** Applicants invited to Stage 2 submit a full application. These Stage 2 applications undergo another round of Community Advisor review and adjudication, resulting in the final funding decisions.

## RANDOMIZED SELECTION

Vancouver Foundation uses randomized selection to make the process fairer, more consistent, and more manageable given the high volume of applications received each year. Given the anticipated volume of applications, it is not feasible for staff and Community Advisors to review every submission in depth. Randomized selection is used to determine the order in which applications are reviewed.

1. All submitted applications are assigned a random number. Staff then review applications in that random order, one by one, to confirm that each meets the requirements for the grant stream. This includes confirming eligibility, budget alignment, and that it fits with the community-led systems-change criteria.
2. If an application does not meet the requirements, it is declined. Staff continue reviewing applications in the selected randomized order **until a set of eligible, well-aligned applications have been identified** to move forward for Community Advisor review.

(For questions related to the randomized selection process, refer to the [FAQs](#).)

## EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION ACROSS B.C.

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 proportionally. 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.

## Reporting requirements for grant recipients



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.

## Contact

Need help confirming eligibility or navigating the application portal?

Please email [grants.admin@vancouverfoundation.ca](mailto:grants.admin@vancouverfoundation.ca) and our granting team will follow-up with you.

You can also check out our [FAQs](#).

# Glossary of key terms



**Direct service delivery or assistance programs** provide hands-on support directly to individuals or families—such as legal aid, health care, food programs, housing support, or counseling. These services address immediate needs and help people work within existing systems, but they do not change the policies, structures, or power dynamics that create those needs in the first place.

**Large urban population centres** in B.C. are Metro Vancouver, the Capital Regional District (Greater Victoria) and/or the Regional District of Central Okanagan. These metropolitan areas have substantial population sizes and infrastructure development that bring unique urban challenges and opportunities.

**Registered community service co-operatives** (co-ops) are owned and operated by the people who use these essential products or services. They develop communities and create jobs by offering a range of support like housing, food, or health care. Community Service Cooperatives must be registered and listed on OrgBook B.C. to be eligible.

**Registered non-profit societies** in B.C. are also known as “societies.” Societies are independent, democratic organizations that are required to comply with the Societies Act and their own constitution and bylaws. Societies do not earn any profits for their members. All money is donated to the organization’s cause or goal. Not-for-profit / non-profit societies must be registered and searchable under OrgBook B.C., to be eligible to receive a Transforming Systems Grant.

**Root causes** are the underlying conditions that drive a problem, not its symptoms. A community experiencing rising crime rates, for example, may be contending with deeper conditions like systemic poverty, unequal access to education, and limited economic opportunity. Systems change work focuses on transforming those underlying conditions rather than responding to their effects.

**Self-determination** means having the freedom to make your own choices and control your own life. It’s about deciding what’s best for yourself or your community, without being forced or influenced by others. People or groups with self-determination can set their own goals and take action to achieve them.

**Small population centres, rural and/or remote communities** are areas outside of B.C.’s three large urban population centres: Metro Vancouver, Capital Regional District (Greater Victoria), and the Regional District of Central Okanagan. Smaller population centres have lower population densities and limited access to urban services which can lead to experiences of isolation, economic challenges, and need for specialized resources and development initiatives.

**Randomized selection:** A process where applications are assigned a number at random and reviewed in that order. Staff review applications sequentially to confirm they meet basic program requirements. Reviews continue until there are enough eligible and well-aligned applications to move forward for deeper assessment. This approach helps keep the process fair, consistent, and manageable, while ensuring final decisions remain guided by community expertise.