
Subject: Niagara Prosperity Initiative Update and Appointments to the Niagara Prosperity Initiative's Request for Proposals Review Committee

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, February 19, 2019

Recommendations

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information;
2. That three members of the Public Health and Social Services Committee **BE APPOINTED** to Niagara Prosperity Initiative's Request for Proposals (RFP) Review Committee for a four year term (2018-2022).

Key Facts

- Since 2008 (COM 53-2008) Regional Council has authorized staff to invest \$1.5 million annually towards Niagara Prosperity Initiatives (NPI).
- NPI focuses on neighbourhood-based interventions to help build capacity and improve the quality of life for residents living in poverty.
- To date, 362 projects have been funded with over 85 different community agencies and groups, affecting over 100,000 people living in poverty.
- Niagara Region approves funding applications on the recommendations of an independent review committee.
- In 2011, Regional Councillors were added to Niagara Prosperity Initiative's Review Committee (COM 44-2011).
- The 2019 Niagara Prosperity Initiative's Request for Proposals (RFP) is open from February 4 – March 1, 2019.
- In 2018, Community Services Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities (SAEO) obtained funding in the amount of \$476,763 from the province's Local Poverty Reduction Fund (LPRF) for a three year research project. In partnership with Brock University, a comprehensive report including an analysis on the impacts, outcomes, and efficacy of NPI, and recommendations for the initiative will be completed early 2021.

Financial Considerations

An investment of \$1.5 million is included in the 2019 Community Services Operating Budget for the Niagara Prosperity Initiative. Of the \$1.5 million, \$150,000 is allocated to the Convener (Niagara Community Foundation) and Secretariat (United Way Niagara) functions to support the administration and stakeholder engagement associated with this initiative.

Analysis

Background

It is well recognized that poverty reduction is a commitment that needs to be made by all levels of government; federal, provincial, and municipal.

Since 2008, Niagara Region has annually re-invested \$1.5 million in cost savings that resulted from the implementation of the Ontario Child Benefit, with the goal of increasing prosperity for Niagara families living in poverty.

NPI focuses on neighbourhood-based interventions to increase prosperity for Niagara residents living in poverty. Research shows that strong neighbourhoods are ones that engage residents and are essential to healthy, safe and prosperous communities. Neighbourhoods in need of attention have been identified throughout the region based on key indicators such as the Low Income Measure, unemployment rates, and educational attainment.

Administration

SAEO staff provide oversight and leadership to NPI. United Way Niagara and Niagara Community Foundation hold five-year contracts (ending December 2021) with Niagara Region for the role of NPI Secretariat and Convenor, respectively.

The role of the Secretariat is to provide operational management of the funding and delivery of the prosperity projects. Responsibilities include issuing the RFP, managing applications, setting out the expectations and requirements of the evaluation process, chairing the Review Committee, execution of contracts, oversight of projects/programs including monitoring and auditing of financial and operational reports.

The Convener position builds collaborations and partnerships within the community to meet the goals of NPI and provides support to the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network (NPRN), working to reduce poverty through education, collaboration and advocacy.

Outcomes

To date, 362 projects have been funded with over 85 different community agencies and groups, affecting over 100,000 people living in poverty.

Projects can receive funding for up to two years. A summary of the evaluation of completed projects is provided to Council at the end of each funding cycle. A committee report outlining the 2015 – 2016 project outcomes is scheduled for PHSSC on April 16, 2019.

Application for Funding

NPI provides funding through an annual RFP issued by United Way Niagara. This process allows any non-profit organization registered under the Income Tax Act to submit a proposal. Project ideas are generated from the community through working with local residents in identifying needs or gaps in service within housing, health, employment and neighbourhood/community empowerment. An information session is held prior to the release of the RFP to increase awareness, review the application process, share neighbourhood mapping identifying local demographics, community resources, and previously approved projects, and reinforce expected outcomes.

United Way Niagara held an information session on Monday, February 4, 2019 at Four Points by Sheraton, Thorold.

The 2019 RFP is open from February 4 – March 1, 2019. Instructions and questions are available under the Resources menu at www.niagaraprospertyinitiative.ca.

Review Committee

Niagara Region approves funding applications based on the recommendations of an independent Review Committee. This committee consists of a wide range of community members including members from the business sector, government, students, community leaders, people living in poverty, and up to three members of PHSSC.

Reviewers provide written comments on the proposals they review and all proposals are thoroughly examined with discussion on how projects meet NPI criteria and objectives and their impacts on individuals and the community. Proposal reviews are based on a scoring system that is made available in the RFP.

Proposal reviews occur throughout March and April each year, in order for approved projects may start in May/June.

Call for three volunteers from PHSSC

In 2011, Regional Councillors were added to the Niagara Prosperity Initiative Review Committee. The recruitment process includes:

1. Community Services staff prepare a report or memo to PHSSC requesting appointments to the NPI Review Committee.
2. The Chair calls for up to three volunteers from members of PHSSC to participate on the NPI review committee (operating under the direction of United Way Niagara). The volunteers are noted in the minutes of the meeting to be ratified by Regional Council.

3. Members must be able to commit to six half-day meetings per review cycle and submit written documentation of their review.
4. All NPI Review Committee members are required to sign a Declaration of Conflict of Interest.
5. Appointed members shall serve for a term of four years. At the end of the four-year term, any retiring member may be re-appointed for consecutive terms up to a maximum of eight years. The next cycle of appointments will occur in 2022.
6. At the end of a term or should an appointed position become vacant during an ongoing term, Community Services staff shall prepare a memo to PHSSC requesting backfilling of the vacant appointment.

Research Study

In 2018, SAEO obtained funding of \$476,763 from the province's Local Poverty Reduction Fund (LPRF) for a three-year research project.

This funding, in partnership with Brock University, will develop an updated report outlining the state of poverty in Niagara using data from the 2016 census, provide analysis on the impacts, outcomes, and efficacy of NPI, and offer recommendations on best practices moving forward. A part of the review will include an assessment of the evaluation methodology used by NPI to measure project outcomes. To date, key areas of focus for Brock's research team have been a communication strategy, literature reviews, interviews with NPI funded project leads and analysis of NPI service users' testimonials.

Alternatives Reviewed

Not applicable.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Not applicable (pending the development of Council's new Strategic Priorities).

Other Pertinent Reports

COM 53-2008	Increasing Prosperity for Niagara Families Living in Poverty
COM 44-2011	Niagara Prosperity Initiative Update (<i>Building a New Legacy: Building Prosperity by Improving the Quality of Neighbourhood Life</i>)

COM 21-2016	2016 Niagara Prosperity Initiative Update
COM 28-2016	Evaluation of 2014 Niagara Prosperity Initiative Projects
COM 18-2017	NPI Update
COM C 7-2017	Local Poverty Reduction Fund Application

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