
Subject: An Evaluation of the use of Granting for the Building Safer Communities Grant Program Pilot

Report To: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, May 7, 2024

Recommendations

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to update committee on the use of granting for the distribution of funds for the Building Safer Communities Program.
- Through the Building Safer Communities Fund (BSCF), Public Safety Canada selected the Niagara Region to receive \$3.4 million over four years to address and/or prevent gun and gang violence locally.
- In August 2023, Niagara Region staff leveraged best practices in youth crime prevention, local data on youth crime in Niagara and community engagement to create the multi-year Gun and Gang Prevention Strategy 2023-2026.
- To mobilize the strategy, the Building Safer Communities Grant program was approved by Council (pursuant to Confidential COM 30-2023) as a pilot to use granting to redistribute funds to community-led programs as opposed to traditional methods of procurement.
- To build on the insights gained through the Building Safer Communities Grant program pilot project, and better understand the potential for a broader corporate grants policy for allocating funding to advance a variety of Community Services' program and initiatives, staff will propose conducting a second pilot for the grant program, for Niagara Prosperity Initiative (NPI).

Financial Considerations

As indicated in COM 30-2023, the objective of the federal Building Safer Communities Fund is to provide designated funds to municipalities and Indigenous communities to develop and deliver community-based gun and gang prevention and intervention programming. Niagara Region's allocation from Public Safety Canada for eligible activities under BSCF is \$3.4M, effective from March 23, 2023, up to March 31, 2026. Niagara Region Community Services has redistributed these federal funds locally to community partners through the Building Safer Communities Grant Program as a pilot

project. Grant recipients will receive funding for up to two years, ending in 2025. All funds related to this grant have been provided by Public Safety Canada pursuant to a Contribution Agreement with Niagara Region.

Analysis

Process:

In September, applications opened for the Building Safer Communities (BSC) Grant Program. Using a grant management electronic platform, 15 agencies applied for funding for various programs that aligned with the Gun and Gang Prevention Strategy. The call for applications remained open for four weeks, and closed Sunday, October 29, 2023.

Grant Selection:

As a first step in the grant selection process, Niagara Region Community Services staff completed an initial review for program eligibility to ensure that organizations met the minimum criteria as outlined in the grant guidelines to apply. A community-based Grant Selection Panel was assembled to complete the second stage of reviewing. Using a standardized evaluation matrix, Panel members were tasked with scoring individual applications. Taking into consideration the priority populations identified by the Federal government for the Building Safer Communities Fund, Niagara Region staff developed an equity-based funding framework as a tool to ensure equitable funding across target populations. This framework is data-driven and considers Niagara Region's diverse community along with available crime, gang involvement, victimization, and incarceration rates of federally identified priority populations. Recommendations were then presented to the Commissioner of Community Services for final approval.

Outcome:

As indicated in CWCD 2024-30, there are nine successful applicants for the BSC Grant Program.

Agency	Project Name
Community Addiction Services of Niagara (CASON)	Youth Empowerment Program (YEP!)
Contact Niagara for Children's and Developmental Services	Stop Now And Plan® (SNAP) for Niagara
Crimestoppers of Niagara	Human Trafficking Prevention Campaign
Family and Children's Services Niagara (FACS)	Navigating Adulthood 101: Transitional Youth Program (TYP)
Future Black Female	Empower Youth Program
John Howard Society of Niagara	Strengthening Families for the Future
NPAAMB – Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Area Management Board	Indigenous Youth Employment Training Program
Quest Community Health Centre	Youth Outreach and Mental Health Services
Niagara Resource Service for Youth (RAFT)	Family and Natural Supports Program (FNS)

Evaluation of the Granting approach:

Prior to BSC Program implementation, and throughout the process, staff engaged with multiple municipalities to compare experiences, establish best practices, and share lessons learned. These conversations helped to shape the BSC grant program, allowing for Niagara to build on the experience of other municipal partners. To further gain

insight, staff also conducted multiple evaluations with applicants, individuals who registered in the granting platform but did not apply, and Grant Evaluation Panel members to measure the success of the pilot. A mixed-method approach to evaluation included online surveys and in-person discussions and showed that the majority of respondents had a positive experience with the granting process. Respondents reported that information sessions, grant guidelines and other information sharing documents were easily accessible, clear, and concise. Additionally, Grant Selection Panel members reported feeling well equipped to score applications and supported by Niagara Region staff (See Appendix A: BSC Grant Process Evaluation Key Findings).

Post Award Agency Debrief:

All applicants were given the opportunity to request a follow-up meeting with staff regarding the outcome of their grant application. Debriefs include application feedback and details regarding the decision-making rationale.

Overall Benefits of Granting:

Over the years, granting has become a common practice among other municipalities including Ottawa, Durham, Peel, Hamilton and Halton for the allocation of funding related to community services programs. Using a granting model as an alternative to traditional methods of procurement to fund agencies provided multiple benefits for both applicants and Niagara Region Community Services. These benefits provide opportunities to reduce barriers and include the following:

- A simplified application process
- No cost associated with application submission
- Decreased administrative inefficiencies
- Partnerships with community

(See Appendix 2: Benefits of Granting).

Lessons Learned:

As shown through the initial evaluation of the Building Safer Communities Grant Pilot Program, granting has proven to be an effective option when redistributing funds in the community. Most agencies found value in the granting process, noting the simplified application process, expedited timelines and community collaboration. Guiding Principles were used to support decision making at each step of the process, ensuring that each decision was consistent, effective, and supported clearly communicated grant

guidelines. The flexibility afforded in the granting model decreases barriers for agencies, including financial and administrative resources, while still upholding a rigorous, fair, and transparent funding process.

Future Implications:

Piloting the Building Safer Communities Grant Program provided staff with learnings to support the future development of a rigorous granting policy and procedure. To further refine this process, Community Services will likely seek to engage in continued evaluation through a second pilot program using the funds allocated to the Niagara Prosperity Initiative (NPI). NPI is an annual investment by the Region towards poverty reduction which has historically used traditional Request for Proposal (RFP) methods. A second pilot of the grant tool and approach will provide staff the opportunity to continue to revise the current framework, collect additional data, and ensure that policies and procedures are applicable and transferable across other divisions in Community Services before recommending broader application as part of a corporate grant policy and procedure. Similar to Building Safer Communities, the Niagara Prosperity Initiative is inherently collaborative as it will be used to mobilize the Poverty Reduction Strategy, which represents the voices of Niagara residents and their lived experience with poverty. Using granting to redistribute the funds allocated to NPI is anticipated to further allow for community involvement and enhance the current granting policy and procedures that are well underway. Staff will be bringing a report to committee related to NPI and the proposed use of granting in the summer of this year.

Alternatives Reviewed

Alternative methods of awarding human service funding through traditional procurement methods (e.g., Request for Proposals) can be utilized but may impede the ability to redistribute funds to community organizations within constrained project timelines, it can be administratively burdensome to community organizations, and it can present additional costs to community organizations to access and submit bid documents. Granting allows for flexibility in design and equity-based considerations when awarding funds to successful recipients.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

This recommendation is aligned to Council's strategic priority of ensuring an "Equitable Region" by listening and responding to community needs and planning for future growth.

Other Pertinent Reports

COM 30-2023 – Building Safer Communities Fund & Grant Pilot Program

CWCD 2024-30 – Recipients of the Building Safer Communities Grant Program

Committee of the Whole Presentation, Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy, March 7 2024

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Appendices

Appendix 1 BSC Grant Process Evaluation Key Findings

Appendix 2 Benefits of Granting