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**Subject:** Niagara Prosperity Initiative Update  
**Report to:** Public Health and Social Services Committee  
**Report date:** Tuesday, February 11, 2020

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## Recommendations

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

## Key Facts

- This report provides information on the evaluation of 2017 Niagara Prosperity Initiatives (NPI) funded projects, the dates for the 2020 NPI Request for Proposals (RFP), an update on Brock University's research study on NPI and the Ontario Poverty Reduction survey.
- Funded by Niagara Region since 2008, NPI focuses on neighbourhood-based interventions to help build capacity and improve the quality of life for residents living in poverty.

## Financial Considerations

Between 2008 and 2019, Niagara Region has provided \$1.5 million in annual funding to the Niagara Prosperity Initiative. Of this amount, \$150,000 is allocated each year to the Convener (Niagara Community Foundation) and Secretariat (United Way Niagara) functions to support administration and stakeholder engagement associated with this initiative. For 2020, responding to a number of critical budget pressures, Council approved a one-year \$250,000 reduction of the funding for NPI, with \$1.25 million allocated for 2020 NPI projects.

## Analysis

### Evaluation of the 2017 NPI Funded Projects

NPI focuses on neighbourhood-based interventions and development to increase prosperity for Niagara residents living in poverty. In 2017, 21 projects were funded at a total of \$1,459,105. Funded projects are required to submit quarterly and final reports that include:

- Number of children, youth, adults and/or seniors served
- Outcomes achieved and measured
- Lessons learned and recommendations for future initiatives
- Specific examples of impact to neighbourhood/community
- Testimonials from project participants.

The NPI Secretariat completed site visits/program reviews throughout the funding period to ensure contractual obligations were being met. All the 2017 funded projects stayed within their approved budgets, provided reports and passed their site visits/program reviews. Individual project review details are provided in Appendix A.

Project testimonials are required from agencies and 542 testimonials were provided. The following are some examples:

- **Mental Health and Addictions Coaching program** – *“I feel more empowered in a very positive way. I have really grown and flourished as a human being in the short time we have been working together.”*
- **Manufacturing Supply Chain Project** – *“I am currently involved with handling projects in the warehouse, helping deliver to clients and picking up donations. I became more active and have more enjoyment in my life because of having more money and stability in my life. I haven't been involved in employment for some time and this was the perfect opportunity to start back up. I have been hired on by the furniture bank.”*
- **Housing Stability Program** – *“Prevented my utilities from being shut-off and provided my family with food. I had somewhere to turn to for help when I was in desperate need, especially with food and medical assistance. People of low income need programs that help when they are in desperate need.”*
- **Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound** – *“My whole lifestyle has changed being involved in something, getting a schedule. Because it changed my life for the better. Getting a home, being stable and starting a career path.”*

### **2020 NPI Request for Proposals (RFP)**

The 2020 RFP was issued by United Way Niagara on February 3<sup>rd</sup> and will close on February 28<sup>th</sup>. NPI projects can be funded for one or two years. Consistent with past practice, an independent review committee will be formed to review proposals, and decisions on funding for 2020 will be announced at the beginning of April.

### **Research Study of NPI**

In 2018, Niagara Region was awarded funding of \$476,763 from the province's Local Poverty Reduction Fund (LPRF) for a three-year research project, to examine 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. The final product will be an assessment of poverty reduction strategies with recommendations that will be beneficial for Niagara and for the province's poverty reduction strategy.

Brock University is on track to complete the project on time, within scope and on budget. Activities to date include literature reviews, interviews with over 50 NPI funded

project leads and analysis of NPI service users' testimonials. Brock has completed interviews with administrators of other Canadian regional poverty reduction programs. In addition, the team has developed and administered a life satisfaction survey to previous NPI project participants and low-income Niagara residents. A Community Advisory Committee has been formed, along with a [Brock website](#) developed to solicit feedback. The next two phases of the review include:

Impact Evaluation:

- Quantitative and qualitative comparison of expected and actual project outputs
- Quasi-experimental subjective well-being study
- Qualitative evaluation of literacy programs
- Reporting Evaluation
- RFP and Funding Process Evaluation

Needs Assessment:

- Review and assess existing poverty reduction strategies
- Evaluation of Niagara Region poverty reduction strategy

Brock University will be hosting focus groups and feedback sessions with various groups including the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network, NPI funded agencies and people with lived / living experience in poverty to validate preliminary findings and develop further recommendations.

The final report will outline the state and the cost of poverty in Niagara, provide analysis on the impacts, outcomes, and efficacy of NPI, and offer recommendations moving forward on best practices to address the issues of poverty in Niagara. The report will be completed in December 2020 and presentations will be available in January 2021.

Preliminary research findings suggest there are immediate opportunities to improve reporting practices. As a result, 2020 NPI reporting practices will be augmented to better demonstrate project outcomes and make reporting less onerous for service providers. These changes will provide better insight into poverty reduction efforts across Niagara and will inform the ongoing systematic optimization of NPI.

## **Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy**

The Ontario government is in the process of developing their new five-year strategy in accordance with the Poverty Reduction Act, 2009. In December 2019, they launched province-wide consultation "to help drive actions to reduce poverty by setting a specific and realistic target, as well as prioritizing actions and initiatives across sectors and at all government levels to help lift Ontarians out of poverty."<sup>1</sup> An online survey is to be

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<sup>1</sup> <https://news.ontario.ca/mcys/en/2019/12/ontario-looking-for-innovative-ideas-on-how-to-help-reduce-poverty.html>

posted on [Ontario.ca](http://Ontario.ca) in January 2020 and will be open for 60 days. Anticipating that Regional Council may wish to make a written submission, staff are preparing a written report for committee consideration for the March PHSSC meeting.

### **Alternatives Reviewed**

Not applicable.

### **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

Healthy and Vibrant Community. Foster a high quality of life through safe, inclusive neighbourhoods and delivery of quality, affordable and accessible human services

### **Other Pertinent Reports**

COM 04-2008	A Legacy of Poverty? Addressing Cycles of Poverty and the Impact on Child Health in Niagara Region
COM 44-2011	Niagara Prosperity Initiative Update ( <i>Building a New Legacy: Building Prosperity by Improving the Quality of Neighbourhood Life</i> )
COM C 6-2017	Local Poverty Reduction Fund Application
COM 04-2019	Niagara Prosperity Initiative Update and Request for Review Committee Members

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*This report was prepared in consultation with Marc Todd, Manager Community Services.*

### **Appendices**

Appendix A            2017 Individual NPI Project Evaluations