

Hello Toronto resident leaders!

We hope this message finds you well.

We recently finished reading the reports from resident-led groups who had a Neighbourhood Grant during Phase 1 and did their activity/event in 2017. It was really amazing to read and learn more about the creative and engaging ways you are building community in each of your neighbourhoods.

We also found it very helpful to read your feedback about the Neighbourhood Grants' program. As the Neighbourhood Grants' program is still very new, we are learning as we go. It is a Toronto resident program so we want to do whatever we can to make it better. We have already made some changes to improve the Neighbourhood Grants' program from the first phase. Other difficulties are still being discussed and we hope to have some possible solutions soon. Lastly, there are other challenges where changes are harder to make. We are writing to you today to help highlight the feedback and what steps we are taking. We also want to engage you in coming up with solutions to some of the challenges. We have three students from the University of Toronto who will be reaching out to various residents and Neighbourhood Planning Tables to learn more and to help gather information to make some changes. Outlined below are the various challenges.

Timeframe

Challenge(s):

- Short time for grant: longer grant period (more than one day or week)
- Poor flow of funding: more notice and better communication about when funding will be received
- Poor timing: We received our funding around the end of August and we had to finish out project by December. It's hard to host out-door events during fall since the weather is so unpredictable.

Response:

- We have extended the maximum length of an activity/event from one week to one month. This period is for when the activity/event is taking place. We know that it takes much longer to plan for the actual event/day.
- We are adjusting our timelines to allow a longer time period for you to receive grant information and carry out your activity. We know that many of you want to have your activity/event in the summer months. This year, applicants will find out if they are a Neighbourhood Grant recipient by the end of June. They should receive their funds by mid-July. Next year, we are hoping to do this even earlier.

Honoraria

Challenge(s):

- No financial benefit for the organizer - need to build in an honorarium system.
- Group member residents involved in organising/implementing the grant should be able to allocate honoraria in the budget for ourselves as we put in hours of work unpaid in the time spent on the activity/event
- No honoraria for family and/or friends of the group member

Response:

- Honoraria for volunteers (e.g. entertainment, child-minding, etc.) is an eligible expense. However, fees or honoraria paid to group members receiving the Neighbourhood Grant and/or project partners is not an eligible expense.
- We recognize the leadership and work that you are putting into the activities and events. It is very much appreciated and we want to honour it.
- Part of the way resident leaders benefit from the Neighbourhood Grants' program is through the trainings that Social Planning Toronto provides
- We are looking at ways to decrease barriers for resident participation in Neighbourhood Grants.

Amount of Neighbourhood Grant and Eligible expenses

Challenge(s):

- Higher grant amount: \$1,000 is too tight
- Need to be very clear and up front what the City of Toronto can or cannot fund.
- Capital purchases: a portion of the grant should be allowed for capital purposes

Response:

- In response to your feedback, we increased the maximum grant amount from \$1,000 to \$3,000. Residents of the [31 Neighbourhood Improvement Areas \(NIAs\)](#) and [8 Emerging Neighbourhoods \(ENs\)](#) can apply for \$1,000 - \$3,000 grants for activities/events that advance the key themes of the [Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy \(TSNS 2020\)](#). A maximum of \$5,000 will be available in each of the 39 neighbourhoods in 2018.
- In response to your feedback, we created the list of eligible and ineligible expenses. This will help you in your grant application and also help reviewers when they look at your application
- Capital purchases: The purchase of art supplies or sporting equipment is okay but resident-led groups will need to provide a letter to Social Planning Toronto about how these items will be used after your funded activity is over. The art supplies and sporting equipment must be stored at an organization or TCHC building so that they can be accessible to members of the public.

Forms

Challenge(s):

- Too many forms that are repetitive and bureaucracy: recommend combining forms and streamlining process
- Forms should be made shorter and more clear
- Forms contain too much legal jargon which is difficult to understand
- Need a budget reconciliation form
- Reporting is too much work for the amount of money given
- Registration and photo release templates: Because we are all volunteers and events take a lot of time to organise, having registration and photo release forms provided will be helpful so we can be more organised

Response:

- Social Planning Toronto has received this feedback, and have further reduced the number of forms. They are continuing to explore options to reduce the number of forms. Social Planning Toronto has created an orientation kit that explains the legal jargon and the need for the different forms.
- Social Planning Toronto put together the following information to assist groups with the process:
https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/socialplanningtoronto/pages/1851/attachments/original/1525799137/1_SPT_INFO_BOOKLET_TO_EXPLAIN_FORMS-v19.pdf?1525799137
- The City of Toronto will only require resident-led groups to sign a Letter of Understanding with Social Planning Toronto, not also with the Community Funding Unit at the City of Toronto
- We will continue to try to make the process as accessible as possible while balancing that with the needs of the City of Toronto's accountability requirements

Application process

Challenge(s):

- Lengthy application form
- Challenging for people whose first language is not English

Response

- We have reduced some parts of the application form
- The Neighbourhood Grants Planning sessions are to help groups submit an application

Permits

Challenge(s):

- Delays in getting a permit: had to go through the Councillor's office to ensure the event went forward
- Charges for permit: If the nearest city spot can be rented free as well as the insurance for this program will be helpful
- Permit difficulties: challenges in getting a permit; need help from City to make process easier

Response:

- More details about how to get a permit from Parks, Forestry & Recreation division are found in the Frequently Asked Questions on the Neighbourhood Grants website
- The Manager and Supervisor for the Community Funding Unit met the Parks, Forestry & Recreation division with feedback on how difficult the permitting process is. Some items that came out of that meeting include:
 - Document when you have difficulty with the permitting process and share it with Social Planning Toronto
 - Training will be provided to help make the permitting process more clear
- We suggest that resident led groups reach out to your Neighbourhood Planning Table for assistance

Workshops/Trainings

Challenge(s):

- Orientation session: The orientation session is very helpful but let's do it by showing an example of an event to get through all the forms that have to be completed. That way it will be clearer
- Need more workshops on planning, budgeting, implementation and partnership collaboration
- Accessibility/distance to workshops: hold local or online orientations and workshops
- Workshop on how to write the grant or fill the relevant forms should be arranged prior to the announcements of the grants

Response:

- In terms of workshops/trainings, we have provided this feedback to Social Planning Toronto, the Neighbourhood Grants capacity building partner and trustee, and they are looking at providing trainings in venues outside of the downtown core. There are other possibilities that we are exploring and hope to roll out as the Neighbourhood Grants Program continues.
- To assist groups in completing the application forms, we held Neighbourhood Grant Planning Sessions in March and April in various neighbourhoods. The purpose of the planning sessions were to help answer questions around the application form and to also connect groups with others at the Neighbourhood Planning Tables who can provide support to the activity/event. We are continuing to improve the process and appreciate any feedback.

Distance

Challenge(s):

- On-line reimbursement process (taking pictures of receipts and sending them in).
- More efficient way of transferring funds to applicants. Some people have to travel far to the office to receive their cheque.

Response (from SPT):

- Cheques can be mailed, made available for pick up, or they can be delivered by one of the NGrants Ambassadors that have just joined the SPT team. By engaging Local Champions (1 for the West and 1 for the East), we are hoping that will make the process more accessible for the groups.
- Travelling to the SPT office to collect cheques and/or deliver receipts and forms is the choice of the group. Most of the groups use the mailing system.
- As long as all the forms have been filled out correctly and/or receipts have been provided, it is possible to prepare a cheque within 24 to 48 hours.
- Social Planning Toronto accepts photos or scanned copies of receipts for previous cash advances when the group confirms that they mailed the original receipts. This option was created so groups don't have to travel to the office to drop off receipts to request the rest of their funds. Groups can skip this step and drop off, mail or request an NGrants Ambassador to pick up original copies of receipts before requesting the next cash advance.

Social Planning Toronto (SPT) / Trustee

Challenge(s):

- If Social Planning Toronto will be still the trustee, all the staff involved should be at the orientation so that everyone is on the same page or SPT staff should be on the same page for the grant logistics
- Money given upfront: challenge to receive only half the funds at one time
- First disbursement of funds should at least be 80% as we needed to spend a good amount of the money in executing the event.

Response (from SPT):

- Changes are being made to the cash advance system to provide more funding upfront.

Administration

Challenge(s):

- Limited or no support from CDO due to role changes was challenging on moving our initiative forward.
- Need clear communications from funder. City needs a contact person for these grants.
- It would also be helpful if the funding can be more flexible so that we can make small budget changes without having to fill out forms for approval.
- No attendance by City of Toronto or Social Planning Toronto at event – disappointing
- Communication of timelines and contact at the City of Toronto

Response

- We are always looking to improve the way Neighbourhood Grants runs. Please feel free to reach out anytime. You can email Carolyn Doyle at Carolyn.Doyle@toronto.ca or call her at 416-392-9343.

Mentors

Challenge:

- I hope that the role of the mentor will be further defined upon the completion of the event. It was slightly unclear as to whether or not the mentor will continue to maintain his/her role during communication with Social Planning Toronto.

Response:

- We have drafted mentor guidelines to assist in defining the relationship more clearly. You can find the outline on the Neighbourhood Grant website, under the 'Additional Resources' tab

Conflict resolution

Challenge:

- Examples of conflicts between group members and/or group members and mentors

Response:

- Social Planning Toronto has partnered with St. Stephen's to provide conflict resolution training and to also help facilitate discussions between groups where there is a difficulty

Thank you for the feedback and please continue to share your thoughts with us. We wish you continued success in your work in the community.

Best Regards,

Neighbourhood Grant Team
Community Funding & Community Development Units
Social Development, Finance & Administration