

External Grant Review Committee Report

External Grant Review Committee
Report to Council
June 13, 2019

INTRODUCTION

In October 2017, Council received a report on the pilot project initiated in 2017 to use an external grant review committee to assist it in its annual deliberations on Strategic Plan Grants. The mandate of the pilot “Strategic Plan Grant Review Committee” according to its Terms of Reference was to

“... review all applications received by the City under the Strategic Plan Grants program and to make recommendations to City Council on the annual Strategic Plan Grants to be funded by the City.

The Committee’s recommendations will be guided by the City’s Strategic Plan and in particular the evaluation matrix specifically established for Strategic Plan Grants.”

Council decided to formalize this approach and created the External Grant Review Committee. This Committee has provided recommendations on the Strategic Plan Grants since 2017. Currently, all but one member of the pilot committee have completed their terms or resigned due to other commitments. Council appointed new members to the Committee at the beginning of the 2019. Members of the Committee include:

- Shannon Alderdice (Chair), returning Committee member
- Colleen Kasting
- Lee King
- Athena Madan
- Chris Tilden

In October 2017, Council agreed to a number of recommendations to update the application process itself. The changes were greatly appreciated by the Committee and facilitated review of the project applications. A few more suggestions for improvement have been made to staff as a result of the 2019 review process, and are outlined in the section called “Suggestions for 2020”, below.

The committee received support from the City Clerk’s office and Finance Department. The committee would like to take this opportunity to thank staff for their support preparing material and providing the committee with background information essential to a full assessment of the applications. Christine Havelka, Deputy City Clerk, kept the committee on track and organized. Jennifer Lockhart, Manager, Revenue, provided invaluable input during the May 22 deliberations, with quick answers to members’ questions.

It should be noted that this year’s review of Strategic Plan Grants was based on the 2015-2018 Strategic Objectives, as applications were received while these objectives were in effect. A total of \$483,050 is available for the grant program in 2019. Forty-nine eligible applications totaling \$1,005,393 were received.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

The Committee met three times:

April 4, 2019:

- New members were introduced.
- Staff reviewed with the committee the grant process and how the applications were reviewed by the previous committee.

April 15, 2019:

- Set up a process for determining the allocation of the grants.
- Reviewed opportunities for improvements to applications and the review process.

May 22, 2019:

- A full-day meeting to review and discuss committee members’ results to make the final determination for grant allocations.

The Committee’s timeline was designed to meet deadlines for Council’s meeting on June 13, 2019.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The elements of the evaluation framework adopted by the Committee are the same as those used in 2018 and include:

1. Council Weighted Strategic Plan Objectives:

OBJECTIVE	COUNCIL RANKING
Facilitate Social Inclusion and Community Wellness	3.67
Engage and Empower the Community	3.22
Enhance and Steward Public Spaces, Green Spaces and Food Systems	3.11
Create Prosperity Through Economic Development	3.00
Nurture our Arts, Culture and Learning Capital	2.56

In 2018, grant applications were instructed to select the one objective that was most applicable. This process was continued for 2019. Applicants could select multiple objectives but were only weighted on the objective that was most applicable.

2. Criteria used for analysis grant applications.

Strength of Organization (20%): project aligns and advances organization mission and mandate; organization has experience and capacity to undertake project successfully; the people who will lead and implement the project have relevant experience; and strong leadership is evident.

Evidence of Need (20%): Demonstrated strong evidence of need for the project, project addresses a Vital Signs indicator or priority issue (in this case, City's strategic priorities).

Community Impact (30%): Project benefits a priority target population (or environmental area); expected results are well-considered and will have significant impact; applicant identifies appropriate methods for evaluating project results; project will involve appropriate partners/amplify impact through collaboration; community impacts are reasonable, well-considered and are applicable to the project.

Project Feasibility (30%): Work plan is detailed and feasible with stated timelines; budget expenses are appropriate and well considered amounts are identified for proposed activities; budget revenues include adequate funding sources to meet project expenses; other sources of funding are identified as potential or confirmed, including in-kind sources.

Each application was given a score between 1 and 5 in each category and scores were weighted according to the percentages above.

3. Overall Evaluation Taking Multiple Factors into Consideration

The combination of scores from 1 and 2 above resulted in a total "Merit Score" for each grant application. Scores ranged from a high of 16.15 to a low of 6.66. The average was 11.94 and the median was 12.11. Twenty-five applications scored at and above the mean while twenty-four fell below.

Specific details of each application were also taken into account to determine recommended grant amounts. This resulted in some cases where applications with relatively low merit scores received funding and a number of high scoring applications received less funding than would be expected given their score. The Committee's rationale for specific funding decisions is contained in Table 2, below.

Given demand relative to funds available, only one application received full funding. No notional maximum was set, but awards of \$40,000 (or 8% of total funds available to be awarded) for a single grant were considered at or near maximum.

For most of the high merit scoring applications, most grants amounted to between 60-80% of the amount requested. The average being 53%, the mean 60%.

The largest grant amount recommended is \$40,000 (Victoria Sexual Assault Centre; Victoria Women's Transition House Society); the smallest \$2,250 (Story Studio Writing Society); average \$9,858; median \$7,650.

RESULTS

Each Committee member completed the agreed upon template and the results were consolidated. The Committee met on May 22, 2019 to review and make final decisions and recommendations to Council regarding the allocation of grant funds.

The results, including recommended grants and comments on each application, are summarized in the tables below. Table 1 shows applications sorted by merit scores; Table 2 shows comments for each application.

Table 1. Victoria Strategic Plan Grants: Total Merit Scores and Suggested Awards
(The Merit score represents the average of the committee members individual scoring results prior to the meeting on May 22, 2019)

ORGANIZATION NAME	REQUESTED	ELIGIBLE	MERIT	SUGGESTED AWARD
Our Place Society	40,000	40,000	16.15	30,000
Peers Victoria Resource Society	15,000	15,000	15.69	12,000
Greater Victoria Bike to Work Society	7,500	7,500	15.05	4,500
Together Against Poverty Society	10,000	9,000	14.59	8,000
Bridges for Women Society	40,000	40,000	14.50	30,000
Victoria Literacy Connection	9,500	9,500	14.50	7,000

KidSport Greater Victoria	25,000	25,000	14.31	15,000
Burnside Gorge Community Association	25,000	25,000	14.13	20,000
Victoria Women's Transition House Society (VWTH)	55,000	55,000	14.13	40,000
The Victoria Youth Empowerment Society (YES)	13,000	13,000	14.04	10,000
Crisis Intervention & Public Information Society of Greater Victoria dba NEED2 Suicide Prevention Education & Support	22,000	22,000	14.04	18,000
Victoria Sexual Assault Centre	70,000	70,000	13.95	40,000
Pacific Training Centre for the Blind Society (PTCB)	15,000	15,000	13.76	13,000
Greater Victoria Cross Guards Association	69,000	51,750	13.67	25,000
The Mustard Seed Street Church	11,000	11,000	13.30	4,500
Cerebral Palsy Association of British Columbia	5,000	5,000	13.30	3,500
The Proulx Global Education and Community Foundation	32,220	32,220	13.30	14,180
CanAssist at the University of Victoria	15,000	15,000	13.21	7,000
Canadian Paraplegic Association (BC), Operating as Spinal Cord Injury BC	9,000	9,000	13.21	9,000

Pacifica Housing Advisory Association	25,000	25,000	13.12	15,000
Ballet Victoria Society	12,500	12,500	12.94	6,500
Society for Kids at Tennis (KATS)	10,000	10,000	12.75	8,000
LifeCycles Project Society	20,000	20,000	12.44	12,000
Ready to Rent BC	10,425	1,500	12.39	-
Stigma-Free Society (Formerly Bipolar Disorder Society of BC)	9,000	9,000	12.11	5,100
Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society	15,320	14,940	12.08	9,500
Oaklands Community Association	5,302	5,302	11.99	3,500
Victoria Rainbow Kitchen Society	10,000	10000	11.90	7,500
Victoria Disability Resource Centre	11,800	11,800	11.67	9,000
Friends of Learning and Living Through Loss	16,232	14,049	11.65	10,000
South Island Centre for Counselling and Training	15,000	15,000	11.51	7,650
1Up Victoria Single Parent Resource Centre Society	13,540	13,540	11.40	10,000

Vancouver Island Counselling Centre for Immigrants and Refugees	85,000	85,000	11.19	-
Tides Canada Initiatives Society - Keeping it Human	12,000	12,000	11.03	5,000
Victoria Cool Aid Society	6,298	6,298	10.69	5,000
The Bateman Foundation/The Robert Bateman Centre	26,300	26,300	10.38	-
Pandora Arts Collective Society (PACS)	16,530	16,530	10.28	-
Synergy Sustainability Institute	10,000	10,000	10.22	-
Victoria Compost and Conservation Education Society (Compost Education Centre)	11,000	11,000	9.95	6,000
Greater Victoria Visitors & Convention Bureau	24,000	24,000	9.68	18,760
Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria	34,600	31,388	9.60	-
Story Studio Writing Society (Story Studio)	4,000	4,000	9.34	2,250
Maritime Museum of BC	25,000	25,000	9.28	10,000
Victoria Community Micro Lending Society	13,727	13,727	8.48	9,000
Gonzales Community Network Association	10,300	10,150	8.45	4,000

Greater Victoria Sport Tourism Commission	5,000	5,000	8.25	2,500
Cine-Vic Society of Independent Filmmakers	6,000	6,000	7.49	-
Theatre SKAM Association	25,000	23,000	7.23	-
One Small World Community Society	28,300	28,300	6.66	6,110
TOTAL	\$1,005,393	\$970,294	11.94	\$483,050

Table 2. Victoria Strategic Plan Grants: Application Comments

ORGANIZATION NAME	COMMENTS
Our Place Society	Enhancing and building on pilot program. Diversified funding, clear timeline and outcomes.
Peers Victoria Resource Society	Organization with strong history in program delivery in this field. Program and benefits are clearly outlined
Greater Victoria Bike to Work Society	An event focused program with strong history in delivering awareness to alternative transportation. Application mentions improving safety/cooperation of all road users but focuses on bike transportation as opposed to other road users.
Together Against Poverty Society	Innovative and unique program to assist to address barriers.
Bridges for Women Society	Long history of delivering programs. Program has a small number of people that will benefit from it, but need is evidenced. Application could have provided more outcomes and increasing accessibility was not documented in measurements or success .
Victoria Literacy Connection	Applications articulates clear need. Partnerships were mentioned with other community partners/service providers but not documented as part of the application

KidSport Greater Victoria	Good program with regional reach. Funding should be encouraged from other municipalities as well.
Burnside Gorge Community Association	Organization with a long history and an established program. Demonstrated results with focus on families.
Victoria Women's Transition House Society (VWTH)	Long standing program and delivery. Overall organization has diversified funding streams, for this grant application funding was primarily to the city. Encourage multi-funders or other municipalities.
The Victoria Youth Empowerment Society (YES)	Strong established program. Milestones and measurements clear.
Crisis Intervention & Public Information Society of Greater Victoria dba NEED2 Suicide Prevention Education & Support	Strong program with regional reach. Significant other funding sources documented
Victoria Sexual Assault Centre	Strong demonstrated need with good measurements for success. Number of people impacted (6k) appears high and could be better demonstrated.
Pacific Training Centre for the Blind Society (PTCB)	Strong program with a unique approach and focus.
Greater Victoria Cross Guards Association	New organization. Seeking funding from multiple municipalities. Committee suggests that for funding for a key safety initiative could be better considered directly through a direct funding by council and not through granting committee
The Mustard Seed Street Church	Need evidenced. More detailed itemization of program costs to improve application for future.
Cerebral Palsy Association of British Columbia	Long standing program that removes barriers for participation by all.
The Proulx Global Education and Community Foundation	Innovative concept and creating working relationship with another organization. Objectives were clear, success measurements could be better demonstrated.
CanAssist at the University of Victoria	Organization is strongly supported by many funders, both in kind and financial. Objective and success measurements clear and is unique and innovative working with participants and employers
Canadian Paraplegic Association (BC), Operating as Spinal Cord Injury BC	Strong ongoing program. Measurements could be improved with more metrics.
Pacifica Housing Advisory Association	Long history and well evidenced. Consider expanding funding sources.
Ballet Victoria Society	Innovative program. Clearer measures of impact to indicate a stronger case for need.

Society for Kids at Tennis (KATS)	Many partnerships with schools and social agencies indicated. Large impact with diverse participants.
LifeCycles Project Society	Strong partnerships and well evidences objectives and success measures.
Ready to Rent BC	Organization with innovative and great programs, this particular application was a wrong fit for strategic grants.
Stigma-Free Society (Formerly Bipolar Disorder Society of BC)	Long history of supporting those it serves. Application should be clearer in indicating that it is supporting a Victoria/CRD session as was not clearly mentioned.
Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society	Good program that is working with newcomers with objectives and success measures clearly articulated.
Oaklands Community Association	Application clearly addresses need for future strategy.
Victoria Rainbow Kitchen Society	Strong and diversified funding supporting many residents and partnerships in CRD.
Victoria Disability Resource Centre	Articulated need and program fits within mandate.
Friends of Learning and Living Through Loss	Clearly articulated program and long history in this work. Measurements could provide better metrics.
South Island Centre for Counselling and Training	Long history in program delivery. More or more detailed success measurements would improve application.
1Up Victoria Single Parent Resource Centre Society	Organization with excellent track record. With ongoing facility concerns, confirm with organization program can be still delivered. Recently City Staff received correspondence from 1Up confirming they are able to offer the program in their temporary location at 612 David St.
Vancouver Island Counselling Centre for Immigrants and Refugees	Clearly outlining partnerships with other organizations and higher education institutions-UVic in delivering services would improve application. Future applications showing more diversified funding would improve future funding.
Tides Canada Initiatives Society - Keeping it Human	Pilot program strong, experiential. Evidence of need present, feasibility criteria could be improved.
Victoria Cool Aid Society	Innovative program to create opportunities and provide peer facilitation.
The Bateman Foundation/The Robert Bateman Centre	Application could more clearly indicate how the program will improve mental health and awareness and whether professionals accredited will be involved in this.

Pandora Arts Collective Society (PACS)	Feasibility appears low as no art therapist is included in the plan despite focusing on an art therapy component (solely focuses on a peer support program).
Synergy Sustainability Institute	Key measures of success lacked target indicators. Partial funding was considered but application indicated program cannot proceed without full funding.
Victoria Compost and Conservation Education Society (Compost Education Centre)	Long standing programs and organization. Plan is clear and well thought out.
Greater Victoria Visitors & Convention Bureau	Invaluable impact for those impacted, but large ask for small impact. Impact to city (tourism) and ambassadors is important. The application could be as well considered for a direct funding through council or another means.
Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria	An event focused symposium, however partners and collaboration plan not provided or included. Does not necessarily demonstrate actionable impact that will happen after event.
Story Studio Writing Society (Story Studio)	Small grant request with evidence of successful ongoing work.
Maritime Museum of BC	Measurements of success could be improved as well as schools being part of partnering program.
Victoria Community Micro Lending Society	Clear and focused program. Could improve measurement metrics. One committee member deferred to review due to potential conflict of interest.
Gonzales Community Network Association	Providing small seed funding to start work.
Greater Victoria Sport Tourism Commission	Creating new programs and involving students with some of the bids. Small grant ask.
Cine-Vic Society of Independent Filmmakers	A single event, with a low amount of impact.
Theatre SKAM Association	Objectives/collaboration with other partners not clear and was appeared to more benefit tourists and not residents.
One Small World Community Society	Measures of success could be clearer with the number of those expected to benefit from the program.

SUGGESTIONS FOR 2019

The committee (EGRC) has a number of recommendations for improving the Application Form and the Application Process, as outlined below.

1. Application Form

Revise Application Form to make funding criteria more robust. Specific revisions to the form that the committee suggests are as follows:

a. In Section Five:

- *Suggestion:* Rephrase Objective to Outcomes. Permit more than 1 line of text per row.

Rationale: This would greatly facilitate the EGRC's understanding of how the grantee proposes to spend the funding from the grant, as well as facilitate both specificity and accountability in the potential grantee's final report. Many applications this year listed few or unclear objectives and lacked quantifiable measures of success, which made the merit and feasibility of these applications difficult to assess. Focusing on Outcomes may assist organizations to formulate output specific to their grant ask, as well as communicate stronger and more measurable evaluation indicators.

b. In Section Six:

- *Suggestion:* In the subsection with check boxes, revise text to read:
 - First checkbox subsection: "Select the **primary** Strategic Plan Objective that the project or program best aligns with or supports..."
 - Second checkbox subsection (or Council may consider removing this subsection entirely): "Select any other secondary Strategic Plan Objective that the program aligns with or supports."

Rationale: This removes a requirement from the EGRC to determine or discern which Strategic Plan Objective best fits with the application, thereby making the EGRC's work more efficient. The EGRC found that some applications' selections of Strategic Plan objectives did not actually match the purpose or intent of the proposed activities.

c. In Section Seven:

- *Suggestion:* Require itemized budgets.

Rationale: This would greatly facilitate the EGRC's understanding of how the grantee proposes to spend the funding from the grant, as well as facilitate both specificity and accountability in the potential grantee's final report. In some applications, it was difficult to discern what was asked of the City to actually fund.

- *Suggestion:* For confirmed partnerships or sources of funding: Require letters of support to accompany application.

Rationale: Confirmed letters of support are a required formality in many other funding application processes, which are typically of lesser amounts than these awarded by the City.

2. The Application Process

- a. *Suggestion:* Consider hiring or allocating staff to support the grant application process in the following areas:
 - Continuous feedback to unsuccessful applicants
 - Mechanisms to track grant impact over time
 - Opportunity to refine how potential grantees apply

Rationale: These action points would assist EGRC in their assessment and evaluation process and provide “institutional memory” for the City’s granting portfolio. It would also provide data / baselines for success of the City’s funding program.

3. Funding schemes

- a. *Suggestion:* Consider different funding schemes that organizations can then identify best purpose of their application, such as:
 - Seed Funding or Microgrants
 - For pilot projects, new initiatives, or events
 - Operational Grants
 - For sustaining programs
 - Scaling Grants
 - For expanding a proven, successful pilot project or initiative
- b. *Suggestion:* Consider allocating a protected amount of funding for: (a) ongoing services; and (b) particular sectors, such as Tourism.

Rationale: This would improve the efficiency of both application and evaluation processes, whereby organizations communicate their intent and EGRC understands that intent.

4. Weighting Criteria

- a. *Suggestion:* Consider adding extra points or weighting for applications intending to deliver a new program, or for “innovation” in general.

Rationale: Many organizations delivering pilot programs identified that they were working with underserved populations, who by definition receive less funding for their services. This would give them equal opportunity to explore solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

The External Grant Review Committee makes the following recommendations to Council:

1. Approve the Grants and amounts proposed in Table 1, above.
2. Approve recommendations to improve the process for 2020, as proposed in “Suggestions for 2020”, above.