

Guide for Local Communities to Support Access to Provincial Government Funding for Municipal Poverty Reduction Strategies

Introduction

As part of *TogetherBC*, British Columbia's Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Province is providing \$5 million to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) for the **Poverty Reduction Planning & Action program**. Interested communities can apply for funding to support local initiatives and plans. This guide provides support in considering:

1. Guiding principles for the work you may undertake, and
2. Ideas for potential actions and initiatives.

New projects will be funded that focus on one or more of TogetherBC's priority actions areas, including:

- housing
- families
- children and youth
- education and training
- employment
- income
- social supports.

Projects must involve key community partners, such as community-based poverty reduction organizations, people with lived experience of poverty, businesses, local First Nations or Indigenous organizations.

Municipalities and regional districts can partner and apply with other local governments for regional grants. The program includes two streams of funding:

- up to \$25,000 to develop or update poverty reduction assessments or plans; and
- up to \$50,000 to undertake local poverty reduction projects.

For regional applications, the funding maximum for both streams is \$150,000.

The deadline for the application is February 28, 2020:

<https://www.ubcm.ca/EN/main/funding/lgps/poverty-reduction.html>

The intent of this program is to support local governments in reducing poverty at the local level and to support the Province's poverty reduction strategy, which has set targets to reduce the overall poverty rate in British Columbia by at least 25%, and the child poverty rate by at least 50%, by 2024.

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1. Guiding Principles to Strengthen Your Application

- **Adopt the Stream Framework**

You're seeing increasing levels of poverty and homelessness in your community and you want to take action. This funding stream is a great opportunity to do that within your local community but careful consideration must be taken in connecting initiatives to meaningful outcomes that will help meet the poverty reduction targets.

Using the Stream Framework involves defining and being intentional about how much of your activities will be focused **upstream** in tackling the root causes and how much will be **downstream** dealing with the immediate symptoms showing up in your community. Without this, there is the danger that much good work will be downstream without realizing that this work will not ultimately make the long-term difference you hope to see. You need both approaches within your community and you need to be clear about which activities are aiming at which outcomes. Food security is a great example in relation to these concepts. As the Provincial Health Services Authority states:

"Community gardens and other local efforts can support important goals like social connectedness and a more sustainable food system, but research shows that household food insecurity can't be fixed through food-based initiatives or charitable efforts. Household food insecurity is an income-based problem and needs income-based solutions. Policies to improve household income are the most effective way to lower food insecurity."¹

While local governments can play an important role in poverty reduction – see below for some specific ideas – part of that role must include strong advocacy to senior levels of government to impact their priorities and necessary investments because many of the root causes of poverty are influenced through provincial policy. The poverty reduction targets will primarily be achieved through increasing incomes and providing universal basic services, such as access to housing and health care.

- **Support the Leadership of People in Poverty**

Involve people in poverty at the very beginning of your project (in particular, indigenous people) otherwise you risk defining them as the objects of research and not active participants and self-advocates – embed them in the process from the outset, your work will be stronger for it. Do not just include one person, it takes more to shift the power balance and ensure meaningful participation and integration – consider perhaps 50% of your committee.

This may involve leadership development for people in poverty and anti-oppression training for the others involved. This also involves investing resources in ensuring there are no barriers for participation – honoraria, transportation, childcare, food, ASL, translation, etc.

The provincial government's application explicitly defines this as an important principle that will be funded. Eligible activities include: "engagement of people living in poverty or with a lived experience of poverty in planning activities."²

¹ <http://www.bccdc.ca/pop-public-health/Documents/food-security-infographic-2017.pdf>

² <https://www.ubcm.ca/assets/Funding~Programs/LGPS/PovRed/poverty-reduction-planning-action-program-guide.pdf>

Potential Poverty Reduction Initiatives

Leadership Development for People in Poverty

For the past 3 years, the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition has developed, tested and run a leadership development initiative called the Community Action Network. We have facilitated small cohorts of people in poverty three times in Vancouver and once in Kelowna, and these leaders have gone on to gain successful experiences in public speaking, media opportunities, facilitation and political engagement through consultations, advisory committees and other avenues.

We welcome the opportunity to share best practises that inform our successful leadership training initiative with a municipality keen to support people in poverty from the local community in engaging in their poverty reduction planning or action.

To provide more detail, the Community Action Network (CAN) aims to increase civic engagement for those most disadvantaged or excluded. CAN provides leadership development for people in poverty through a facilitated and structured initiative providing transferable skills to participants and promoting resiliency and empowered involvement in anti-poverty advocacy. Connecting personal experiences to structural issues through targeted training, participants come out of the initiative with confidence, skills and ongoing support to provide media commentary, conduct community organizing activities, give public presentations, engage in consultation processes, with government and other decision makers, and meet other opportunities.

All workshop content and pedagogy have been developed with a multi-literacy levelled approach and a robust intersectional approach is embedded in the teaching material and practice. We also include best practice guidelines for providing supports to ensure full and meaningful participation including childcare, transportation, ASL, translation, honorarium and support provided for speaking engagements.

Transit Equity

Transit is a significant cost for low-income residents in your community and may mean that they cannot access employment, school, health care or their social needs leading to increased social isolation. The funding guide explicitly mentions that eligible activities can include: “pilot projects to evaluate the impact of providing supports such as reduced-fare transit, recreation passes, or other service opportunities for low-income residents.”³ This initiative would ensure transit equity for the most marginalized in your community, including homeless people, people with disabilities, youth who have aged out of care, single parents, low-wage workers, and improve the health and well-being of all in your community.

We have experience in working on transit equity through our AllOnBoard campaign for free transit for children and youth under age 18 and a low-income sliding scale pass for adults. We would welcome the opportunity to support your application through providing research and support.

Investing in transit equity is a way to meet your community’s social and environmental goals. Local climate solutions and climate-friendly communities are key to our progress towards a low-carbon society. A significant increase in investment in public transit is essential, as well as cycling networks and all forms of active, sustainable transportation. In particular, free transit for children and youth levels the playing field for all youth while building the next generation of transit riders.

It is also imperative that we grow and expand our total transit infrastructure in BC. As our transit systems expand, we have an opportunity to reform our systems to ensure they are truly equitable. A sliding scale pass based on income ensures that as we grow and expand our transit systems nobody is left behind.

For more information about affordable transit models impacting poverty reduction including the AllOnBoard ask, please contact viveca@bcpovertyreduction.ca.

Read more:

#AllOnBoard Campaign Website
<https://www.allonboard.ca>

³ <https://www.ubcm.ca/assets/Funding~Programs/LGPS/PovRed/poverty-reduction-planning-action-program-guide.pdf>

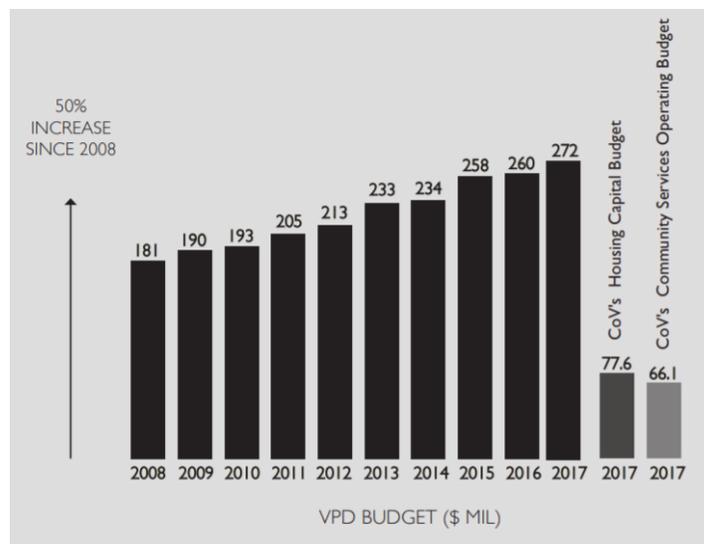
Stigma Audit

Municipalities are primarily responsible for the criminalization of poverty so addressing this is a potential area of focus that would make a significant difference in the lives of people in poverty and would be supported by this funding.

Many local governments across British Columbia have bylaws and local law enforcement practices that violate the human rights of people living in poverty. They have the potential to criminalize people who live in public space, increase stigma and restrict the delivery of harm reduction programs, emergency shelter, and other services for marginalized people. Local governments should listen to people living in poverty and address the ways that their bylaws infringe on their human rights and increase stigma and discrimination.

Municipal governments could use this funding to run a stigma audit⁴ (as proposed by Pivot Legal Society) to stop criminalizing poverty by revoking laws that penalize or discriminate against people for engaging in behavior necessary for survival because of homelessness and poverty, such as sleeping and erecting shelter in public spaces.

This stigma-auditing process could also be applied to municipal budgets and the priorities that are expressed through differing levels of investment. That's exactly what the Carnegie Community Action Project did in their analysis of the Vancouver Police Department funding within the City of Vancouver's budget.⁵ Here you can see the dramatic increase of almost \$100 million over 10 years, and the comparison to the City's housing investment and community services budget, which is far below public spending on the police.⁶



In addition to stopping the criminalization of poverty, municipal governments have an important role to play in combating discrimination against people in poverty. In particular, improperly managed public

⁴ http://www.pivotlegal.org/project_inclusion_full

⁵ Carnegie Community Action Project, *No Pill For This Ill: Our Community Vision of Mental Health*, <http://www.carnegieaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/MH-REPORT-FINAL-1.compressed.pdf>

⁶ This is up for debate again in Vancouver in December 2019 with the police budget proposed to reach one fifth of the total city budget while community groups call for more community services.

municipal consultations have become a forum for inappropriate language, harassment and the silencing of marginalized people. Having monitored and learned of countless attacks at public hearings against people with addictions and other disabilities, and people experiencing homelessness, Pivot Legal Society argues that “it is incumbent on municipalities to ensure that all people feel safe and welcome at public hearings on issues that matter to them and they have duties to protect people from discriminatory statements and ensure hearings do not become forums for abuse.”

Municipal planners and human rights advocates have developed special procedures for how councils should carry out public consultations concerning new affordable housing projects including:

- Layout clear ground rules.
- State that the only issues open for discussion are legitimate land use issues such as location, size, setback and parking requirements.
- Advise attendees that the meeting will not be a forum to make negative comments about the people who will be living there.
- Be clear that they will actively interrupt and object to discriminatory language or prejudicial comments.

We recommend using this funding for local governments to develop proactive measures to ensure that everyone is treated with respect.

Read more:

Pivot Legal Society submission on Human Rights in Canada

https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/pivotlegal/pages/1850/attachments/original/1455843171/UN_submission.pdf?1455843171

“Community outcry should not block health and safety measures for people who are homeless” Pivot Legal Society Blogpost

http://www.pivotlegal.org/community_outcry_should_not_block_health_and_safety_measures_for_people_who_are_homeless

“In the zone: Housing, Human Rights and Municipal Planning” Ontario Human Rights Commission

<http://www.ontla.on.ca/library/repository/mon/26002/315300.pdf>

Housing

BC has a housing crisis throughout the province with thousands of homeless and people facing housing insecurity struggling to survive in our communities, spending a huge share of their income on rent and/or living in sub-standard, over-crowded housing. According to the BC Non-Profit Housing Association, 45% of renters in BC are living in housing insecurity, spending more than 30 per cent of their income on rent; and 1 in 5 renters are spending more than half their income on rent leaving them with little left over to support themselves and their families.

Local governments can play an important role in building and protecting affordable housing through partnerships with local non-profits, co-operatives, and, in particular, other levels of government, which have the necessary resources. Municipal contributions can include:

- providing public land and funds toward the creation of non-profit affordable housing
- protecting existing affordable housing supply through retention and replacement policies including policies that protect against the demolition of existing affordable housing and replacement with more expensive homes
- zoning specifically to retain and encourage rental housing in their communities, and through inclusionary zoning, they can require developers to create non-market housing as a condition for new development sites
- streamlining permitting and rezoning processes specifically for non-profit affordable housing

Applying a poverty reduction lens to existing plans or policies, including zoning and development permit requirements, is explicitly highlighted as a potential use of this funding.

In all this work, it is important to emphasize that affordable housing must meet a diversity of needs. A set percentage of the housing to be built should be at welfare shelter rates and another set target should be tied to the senior shelter level. There also is a dire need for specific units for accessible, adaptable housing options and 3 and 4 bedroom units suitable for families with children.

Much of the focus is on municipal governments at the moment as we are seeing increasing levels of visible homelessness within our communities and we look to our closest level of government for action. However, the root causes of homelessness and the responsibility primarily lies with senior levels of government, which have not invested the resources they have over the last decades.

Read more:

BC Non-Profit Housing Association's Make Housing Central Campaign

https://housingcentral.ca/SITES/HousingCentral/2018_Civic_Campaign/HousingCentral/2018_Civic_Campaign.aspx

BC Society of Transition Houses: BC Municipal Election Toolkit

<https://bcsth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/municipal-election-toolkit-2018-09-24.pdf>

Vancouver Tenants' Union's Renters Report Card

https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/vancouverrentersunion/pages/135/attachments/original/1538619170/Renters_Report_Card_-_Website_Information.pdf

Health and Food Security

Poverty is a fundamental determinant of health, and the health care costs of poverty add up to \$1.2 billion per year in BC. So, all of the other policy recommendations outlined here will have a direct impact on improving the health of low-income people.

However, local government can enhance and expand access to health initiatives, including:

- providing free or discounted recreational services and access to programs for low-income children, youth, families and individuals
- if people are not being housed, supporting them where they are, including developing public amenities like water fountains, public washrooms and public showers – careful consideration needs to happen to ensure these amenities are universally accessible and safe
- increasing food security through zoning that would ensure low-income neighbourhoods have access to reasonably priced, quality fruits and vegetables
- supporting community gardens and community kitchens to provide affordable, nutritious food; schools can also provide healthy meals and nutritional information to students

The epidemic of opioid overdose deaths, at a rate of 4-5 overdose deaths each day is a public health emergency. While federal laws often get the most attention, municipal bylaws and local law enforcement practices also have the potential to increase stigma and restrict the delivery of harm reduction programs, emergency shelter, and other services for marginalized people.

Local governments need to ensure that they do not restrict access to health services including harm reduction programs and addiction treatment options in their communities.

Read more:

First Call Municipal Election Toolkit (See page 8)

<https://firstcallbc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/2018-Municipal-Election-Toolkit.pdf>

Municipal Election Engagement Toolkit for Food Security Advocates

<https://gateway2.phabc.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/10/Municipal-Election-Toolkit-revised-Oct-1-2018.pdf>

BC Poverty Reduction Letter about water fountains to the City of Vancouver

<http://bcpovertyreduction.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2016-COV-Water-Fountains.pdf>

Open Letter to the Government of BC about the need for an Opioid Action Plan

<http://bcpovertyreduction.ca/2017/11/bc-needs-an-opioid-action-plan-open-letter-to-the-government-of-bc>

Equity

There are multiple ways that municipal governments can address the over-representation of poverty amongst particular groups to ensure equity. Here's just one example:

- Indigenous people are far more likely than non-indigenous people to live in poverty and experience homelessness. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has five Calls to Action that directly apply to municipal governments:
 - fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation
 - repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and lands, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius, and reform those laws, government policies, and litigation strategies that continue to rely on such concepts
 - provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations
 - work with other levels of governments, churches, Aboriginal communities, former residential school students and current landlords to develop and implement strategies and procedures for the ongoing identification, documentation, maintenance, commemoration, and protection of residential school cemeteries or other sites at which residential school children were buried
 - work collaboratively with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to identify and collect copies of all records relevant to the history and legacy of the residential school system, and provide these to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

These actions are just a starting point to address the ongoing effects of colonialism.

Read more:

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action

http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside

<http://dewc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/MMIW-Report-Final-March-10-WEB.pdf>

Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

<https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>

Childcare

Local governments are responsible for many local regulations, such as development zoning, and can require that child care spaces be included in new buildings. School Boards can ensure stability for the many child care programs that operate on school sites.

Given that senior levels of government have far more responsibility and potential to invest, local governments can also endorse the \$10aDay Child Care Plan calling on the provincial government to begin building a better child care system. The \$10aDay Child Care Plan is the community's solution to BC's child care crisis. 32 local BC governments support the Plan but they do not have the resources or mandate to implement it alone. The provincial government has made significant investments in child care and needs to keep moving towards universal child care. Local governments who have already endorsed the Plan support the next steps the campaign is calling for at the provincial level.

Read more:

First Call Municipal Election Toolkit (See page 4)

<https://firstcallbc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/2018-Municipal-Election-Toolkit.pdf>

\$10aDay Child Care Plan Website

<https://www.10aday.ca>

Education

The under-funding of public education has meant an increase in school fees, such as those now collected for field trips, supplies, sports and arts, and specific course materials. This causes great family stress, and children from low-income families often exclude themselves from activities and programs. The role of public education in giving every child an equal chance is seriously undermined by the inequity created by school fees. Municipalities can work with public school boards to reduce or eliminate fees that act as barriers to inclusion for low-income students as well as continuing to advocate to the provincial government for adequate funding.

Almost 1 in 4 LGBT youth in BC are forced out of their homes so, without guaranteed family support, school safety and inclusion can have a direct impact on reducing queer and trans homelessness and long-term poverty. **Municipalities can work with school boards to publicly support the SOGI curriculum and implement strong gender identity and sexual orientation policies to allow schools to fully support queer and transgender students and ensure their safety and inclusion.**

Read more:

First Call Municipal Election Toolkit (see page 8)

<https://firstcallbc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/2018-Municipal-Election-Toolkit.pdf>

BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils Submission on Provincial Public Education Funding

https://bccpac.bc.ca/images/Documents/Resources/BCCPAC_SSC-Submission_Oct-11-2018.pdf

Poverty is an LGBTQ Issue, BC Poverty Reduction Coalition (see submission to Vancouver School Board)

<http://bcpovertyreduction.ca/campaigns/lgbtq>

Low Wages

Despite public perception, poverty in BC is primarily working poverty. The majority of poor children in BC live in families with parents in the paid labour force, many of them working full-time and often multiple jobs. Local governments have a responsibility to avoid contributing to the problem of low-wage poverty.

We recommend that local governments become living wage employers to embed the responsibility to pay all their employees a living wage and only contract for services with companies that pay a living wage.

However, the provincial government is responsible for legislating the minimum wage and exemptions to that wage (for example, piece rate farmworkers who harvest fruit and vegetables) so local governments should advocate to them to increase the incomes of low wage workers. The provincial government is also responsible for employment standards, which desperately need to be enhanced and adequately enforced; for example, BC is the only province without the provision of paid sick leave.

Read more:

First Call Municipal Election Toolkit (see pages 8-9)

<https://firstcallbc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/2018-Municipal-Election-Toolkit.pdf>

Living Wage for Families Campaign Website

<http://www.livingwageforfamilies.ca>

BC Employment Standards Coalition

<http://bcemploymentstandardscoalition.com>

Level the Playing Field campaign for paid sick leave

https://www.leveltheplayingfield.ca/sick_leave_petition

Income assistance

The current income assistance system in BC is fundamentally broken. People in desperate need are being denied assistance and, if lucky enough to navigate all the structural and administrative barriers to welfare and have their application accepted, they are subjected to a life of “survival,” struggling to meet the most basic needs of shelter and food. This is a big reason that more and more people are becoming homeless in your community.

Local governments do not have jurisdiction over income and disability assistance so you should advocate to the provincial government for increased income and disability assistance rates as part of an effective poverty reduction plan. Other measures suggested in this document can help reduce costs for people living on deeply inadequate income and disability rates.

Read More:

Raise the Rates Campaign Website

<https://www.raisetherates.org>