



**ACTION FOR HEALTHY
COMMUNITIES**

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

Community Initiatives Summative Evaluation

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Prepared by:



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Introduction and Evaluation Methodology



Action for Health Communities Society of Alberta (AHC), a non-profit organization, commissioned Pivotal Research Inc. to complete summative evaluation and impact assessment of the Community Initiatives model, specifically community initiatives (CIs) it has supported in the last two years. AHC has provided support to CIs in Edmonton since 1995 to foster capacity building essential to driving meaningful community development by and from within communities experiencing disparities affecting health and wellbeing of members. Since then, AHC has expanded its reach to supporting and mobilizing communities in Central and Northern Alberta in 2020. AHC's Community Initiative model provides engagement, mobilization, skills development, organization, networking and implementation supports with and without seed grant funding to equity-deserving groups from immigrant, refugee, and ethnocultural communities among others.

The objectives of the summative evaluation and impact analysis were to:

- Provide a current state assessment of the relevance and effectiveness of community development practices, including supports and facilitation, implemented in the last two years;
- Provide a current state assessment of the impact of community mobilization, organization, and other support strategies implemented through CIs with seed or without seed grants;
- Ascertain strategy and systemic gaps in current state and recommend course-correction measures to address identified gaps to inform policy-making for government and the not-for-profit sectors; and
- Provide key considerations and recommendations to strengthen community capacity building and development, specifically supports for project/organizational development of emerging grassroots communities.

Evaluation Methodology

Our approach to evaluation adhered to a participatory program evaluation approach, which focuses on involving all who are impacted by the outcomes with the goal of taking action and influencing change. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection strategies were leveraged in this approach to provide a more comprehensive picture of overall impacts, including communicating of impact stories. Participatory Program Evaluation Approaches yield results that inform what is working well and what can be improved, while also resulting in relationships being strengthened due to the emphasis on inclusion.

The evaluator's role was that of a "collaborator" in recognizing the knowledge implicit within stakeholders with lived experiences. The evaluation methodology was based on the premise that only through exploring and integrating the diverse perspectives and experiences of varying stakeholders can knowledge be co-created to provide direct benefits that are relevant to all stakeholder groups (i.e., impact practice).

The multi-phase summative evaluation and impact assessment was designed to include four distinct stages:

Internal Stakeholder Workshops

The evaluation commenced with an internal stakeholder consultation, featuring a 120-minute workshop involving key management and staff members. This collaborative session served as the project's starting point, offering valuable insights into AHC's current operational processes, limitations, successes, and opportunities.

The kick-off internal stakeholder workshop insights supported review of internal program documents and data, informed development of data collection instruments that engaged program stakeholders, and supported development of considerations for program improvement. Further, the internal stakeholder workshop informed the development of customized impact typology to drive impact assessment of the program.

Further, the evaluation team conducted a results workshop with internal stakeholders following data analysis with the goal of co-creating program improvement solutions to identified gaps.



Internal Document and Data Review

A comprehensive document review was conducted, encompassing an array of strategic documents central to the organization. This document review included an in-depth analysis of critical materials, such as the Community Development Framework, Community Initiative Process, and the Community Development Unit (CDU) documentation. Additionally, review was conducted on data collected on the supported CIs, training manual materials, and various tools, including those related to community needs assessment and outcome measurement framework.

Program Experience Survey with Members of Supported CIs

As a next step, a program experience survey was administered to a diverse group of participants, including community leaders, members, and volunteers who interacted with AHC through the Community Initiative Process in the last two years.

The development of the survey instrument was informed by the document/data review and internal stakeholder consultation and primarily sought to capture stakeholders':

- Experiences with AHC's community development model including mobilization, organization, and/or implementation supports with and without seed funding;
- The degree of uptake, usage, and relevance of AHC-provided community development supports;
- The extent to which AHC's community development supports with or without seed funding are contributing to program stakeholders' community development and/or capacity building objectives/processes/goals (degree of effectiveness) and are meeting their needs (relevance);
- Perceptions of the impacts of community development supports and the CI Process; and
- Suggestions for increased relevance and effectiveness of process/model.

Survey outcomes informed key driver analysis that facilitated impact assessment.

Pivotal Research developed the survey instrument and created an online open-link for AHC staff to send out via email along with three reminders and distributed printed surveys to community members during the events they attended while the data collection period was open. The data collection period took place from August 21 to September 9, 2023. The total number of responses received was 46.

In-Depth Interviews with Members of Supported CIs

To gain deeper insights into the community perspective, a series of in-depth interviews were conducted with community members that provided a deeper dive experience and richer context.

Seven representatives of CIs who were supported by AHC in the last two years were interviewed for this part of the evaluation. To facilitate the interview recruitment process, Pivotal Research drafted interview invitations that AHC staff shared with all active CIs from the past 24 months. Interested CIs contacted Pivotal Research directly, requesting participation in the in-depth interview. The interviews were conducted via Zoom and varied in length from 20 to 40 minutes.



The AHC Community Development Framework

In alignment with its mission, AHC addresses building stronger and healthier communities by facilitating a well-established unique Community Development model honed over nearly three decades working with hundreds of groups taking collective actions to address important issues of disparities in the determinants of wellbeing.

AHC's Community Development model positions a combination of targeted strategies, specialized tools and facilitated supports designed to work in tandem to foster capacity development to reinforce intentional contributions towards Community Development by and from within communities; and specifically targeted to improve health and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

The AHC Community Initiatives (CIs) model and process is one of the key instruments AHC uses as a tool along with specialized strategies to foster capacity building for the reinforcement of Community Development that is community driven as well as building assets for sustainable development.

The AHC CI model is deployed to intentionally foster capacities of individuals and build leadership resource through experiential means of engagement in a wide range of result driven Community Initiatives. Fundamental to the CI model and process is the community leadership and ownership at the center of each CI.

CIs emerge from ideas and identified needs by active and engaged community members passionate to act on important issues in their communities. CIs are created, led and nurtured by and from within communities. AHC works in collaboration with each CI group to facilitate diverse and curated supports that positions each CI as an instrument to nurture skills, knowledge, resources and to acquire the assets that can propel the groups to meaningfully contribute towards community development needs of the communities that the CI engages.

Hence, this evaluation project examines the CI model and process from the lens of a sample of the CIs AHC supported in the last two years, to help draw learning, insights to drive efforts towards an improved ecosystem where community groups play an important role in building stronger and healthier communities for all.

The following sections of this evaluation report outlines key important findings through voices of community leaders and volunteers engaged in the in this evaluation project.



Key Findings from Internal Document and Data Review

Below are key findings from the internal document and data review evaluation phase.

The Community Initiative model is primarily focused on building the capacity of community-driven initiatives initiated by a group of three or more (non-related) individuals representing a self-defined community. These community initiatives either approach AHC to seek community development supports or are guided to AHC through word of mouth or referral.

AHC establishes formal engagement relationships with the CIs and provides them with both short- and long-term community development supports. This includes identification and development of leadership skills, community assets, human social capital, and connections to funding and in-kind resources that build the capacity of these community initiatives and equip them with the tools to shape, drive, lead, and sustain their own initiative outcomes.

The Community Initiative Process, with recent improvements made in June 2022, serves as a comprehensive guide to curate targeted CI supports equipping Community Animators and the team of other AHC staff involved in facilitating the CI strategy with detailed directives to establish rapport and kick-start the community development and capacity building supports and tools with CIs.

The following section provides an overview of key stages of supporting CIs:

Phase 1

The initiation of the CI Process involves the establishment of a trusting relationship with the community group in order to support development of the CI Plan. This includes organizing community dialogues, and gaining insights into the specific needs and assets of the community. Furthermore, Phase 1 supports CI members in crafting actionable plans to address identified needs. The identification of CIs may occur through proactive outreach by Community Animators or initiated by the CIs themselves.

An important step within this phase is conducting a Community Needs and Assets Assessment, intended to serve as both an initial step and an ongoing resource guide throughout the community development process.

Phase 2

In Phase 2, the focus shifts to creating a concrete plan for the CI, including budget development, completion of an Outcomes Measurement Framework, CI networking and learning, and the preparation of seed grant applications, if the needs assessments require such funding supports. Community Animators play a central role in supporting CIs throughout these activities by providing ongoing consultations.



The seed grant applications for CIs are then typically reviewed and considered by the Community Development Advisory Committee (CDAC). The CDAC is a collective of community volunteers who bring unique knowledge and skills in community development practice in order to more effectively guide the decision making process to allocate resources for seed grant applications submitted by CIs that are supported by AHC. Seed grants determination and allocations are made by CDAC independent of AHC management and are considered final.

Phase 3

Phase 3 focuses on implementation of planned CI activities. Community development supports provided during this phase include leadership development, facilitating community connections, encouraging resource development and peer learning, and mobilizing collective action to improve health and wellbeing of community. In cases where seed granting is provided to the CI, additional accountability measures are added to the list of resources provided by AHC to ensure effective resource management.

Phase 4

Phase 4 focuses on offering continuous support, evaluation and reflection for both individuals involved in the CI and the community group as a whole throughout the initiative's lifecycle. AHC supports during this stage include observations by Community Animators of the development process of the group and leadership, helping CI leaders complete individual and group evaluations, conducting progress tracking and financial monitoring and reporting, and supporting identification and resolution of any issues or challenges that CIs may encounter during implementation.

Phase 5

The last phase of the CI process focuses on sustaining the community initiative beyond direct supports by AHC through supporting CIs to seek new resources for continued collective action and effectively use the planning, implementation and evaluation tools provided to them during the process.

Supports Provided to Date

In the last 2 years, AHC has supported a total of 36 unique community groups with community development and seed grant supports in 4 cycles.

As discussed above, community development supports provided in the last two years included the following activities:

- Facilitated community meeting or dialogue
- Community needs and assets assessment
- Skills development
- Mentorship and/or coaching
- Leadership training
- Support with seed grant application
- Strategic planning
- Implementation of initiative
- Community of Practice and learning events
- Reflection and growth
- Evaluation support
- Community networking events

In addition to the community development supports, community groups working with AHC can apply and receive seed grant support to increase their capacity to provide and/or expand their offerings throughout their community. Community Animators support the groups through this process, helping them prepare applications and presentations.



Supported communities requested funds for a variety of initiatives, such as education (English as a Second Language and ethnic languages classes), sports and cultural activities (fitness classes, sports clubs for youth), mental health, women empowerment and other such initiatives.

Seed funding grants are provided through the following breakout:

- Tier 1 grant is \$1,000;
- Tier 2 grant Option A (\$1,000 + \$1,000) full grant, but provided in stages provided the CI fulfills requirements, such as implementing part of their plan; and
- Tier 2 Option B is full grant of \$2,000, typically awarded to an established community group.

Cycle 1 Supports - The first cycle of supports took place in December 2021 with 16 organizations provided with community development supports, half of which received additional grant funding support.

Cycle 2 Supports - The second cycle, which took place in March 2022, had less organizations supported compared to the first cycle. In total, 10 CIs were provided with community development supports, 7 of which received additional grant funding support to help increase their capacity.

Cycle 3 Supports - The third cycle, which took place in November 2022, supported the least number of CIs in the last two years. The third cycle had a total of 7 CIs provided with community development supports, 4 of which received additional grant funding support.

Cycle 4 Supports - The fourth cycle of supports took place in March-April 2023 supporting 9 CIs with community development support including receiving the \$2,000 seed grant funding. It is notable that the last cycle provided funding to all CIs that applied demonstrating high level of support provided to organizations with their grant applications and other aspects.

Reasons for Seed Grant Applications Rejected or Partially Approved

For the CIs that were supported with community development activities and applied for additional seed grant funding, about two-thirds were approved.

Some supported communities applying for additional supports through grant funds were rejected or partially approved. According to CDAC determinations, which makes seed grant application determinations independently of AHC, reasons for seed grant application rejections and partial approvals include following gaps indicative of areas for capacity development for the groups:

- | | |
|---|--|
| • Need for more comprehensive details; | • Deficiencies in project management; |
| • Lack of clarity regarding strategies or activities; | • Lack of clarity on the community building plan; and |
| • Absence of focus; | • Instances of low membership numbers within the initiative. |
| • Confusion in project activities; | |



Key Findings from CI Process Experience Survey and Interviews

Below are key findings from the community initiative process experience survey and interviews with representatives of CIs.

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Survey Respondent Profile

Survey respondents exhibit diverse roles within the CIs they are part of. Almost an equal amount of survey respondents identified as community members (41%) and CI group representative (CIGR) or community leaders/coordinators (39%). This is followed by 20% who identified as CI volunteers.

Fig 1. Role within CI

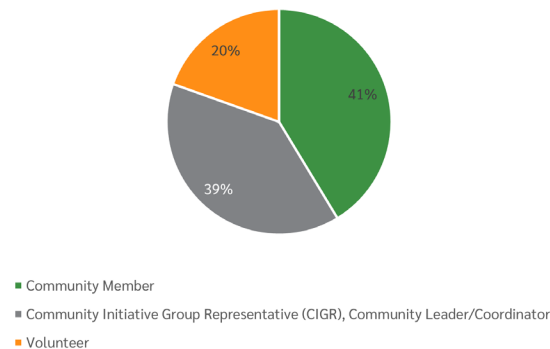
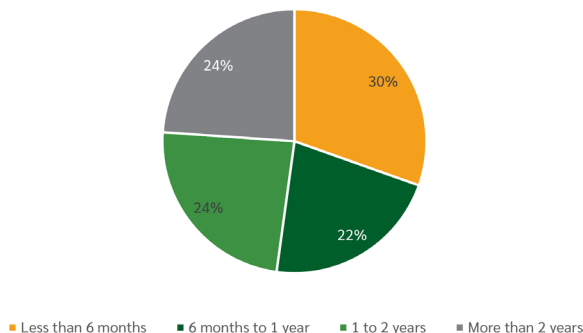


Fig 2. Duration of Involvement in Community Initiative



Approximately a third (30%) of respondents joined CIs within the last six months, indicating a fresh wave of engagement. This is followed by about a quarter (24%) of respondents who have maintained their involvement with CIs supported by AHC for over two years, demonstrating long-range community development and another quarter (24%) who have actively participated for a duration ranging from one to two years.

Interviews Respondent Profile

Seven representatives of CIs who were supported by AHC were interviewed for this evaluation. CI representatives included CI leaders (titles varied: president, executive, committee chair, founding member) as well as CI members and volunteers.

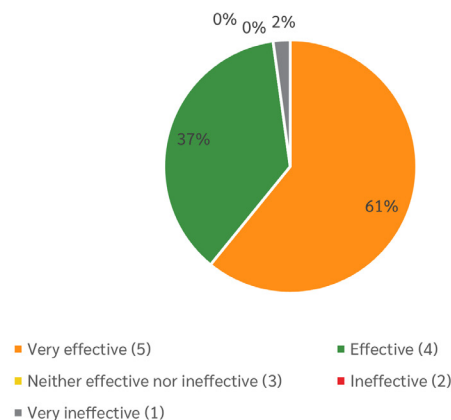
CIs engaged in in-depth interviews included small cultural organizations that focus on their ethnic cultures in Canada through cooking events, fitness and language classes, empowerment, child and youth education, assistance with basic needs, immigrant support, job search support, mental health and stress management, socializing opportunities and resources for newcomer families.

Some CIs have existed for several years and have various target audiences – women, youth, seniors, etc., while others are relatively new and were founded in the last few years. Some have known AHC for a few months, while others have been working with them for a longer period of time.

Effectiveness and Relevance

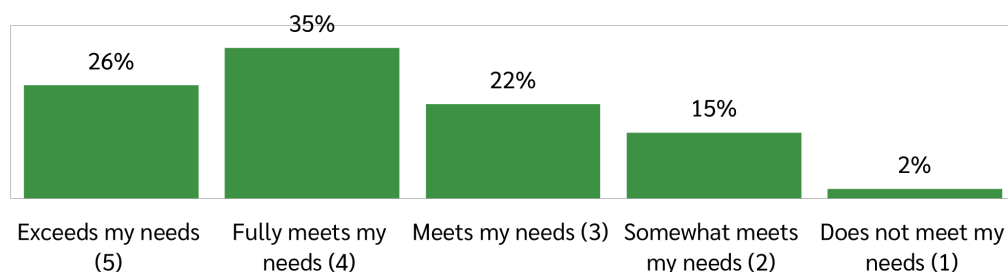
Almost all (98%) survey respondents rated the overall assistance offered by AHC as very effective or effective.

Fig 3. Effectiveness Rating of Overall Assistance from AHC (1-5 Scale)



Survey data further shows that many CI participants found good alignment and relevance of the supports provided by AHC with their community initiative. Close to two-thirds (61%) of respondents indicated that the assistance either fully meets or exceeds their needs, followed by 37% who found the assistance provided adequately or somewhat fulfilling their needs.

Fig 4. Meet Needs Rating of Overall Assistance from AHC (1-5 Scale)



Additional Insights from Interviews - Overall Experience and Supports Provided

Overall, interview respondents expressed gratitude for the support provided by AHC. They are grateful for the help they received and some said their CI would not have grown as fast, if they did not receive the community development supports and seed grant funding.

Most of CIs interviewed received the seed grant support of \$ 2,000 from AHC within the last two years, and one CI applied and is currently waiting for the next steps.

All interviewed CIs received a variety of community development supports and services from AHC, including:

- Mentorship and coaching
- Opportunities to participate in networking and community dialogues
- Guidance on organization of events
- Evaluation of initiatives and community development process
- Community needs and assets assessment
- Grant application preparation
- Guidance on other grant funding opportunities available for the community
- Provision of community physical gathering space

Effectiveness and Relevance by Support Categories

Survey respondents were asked to identify their ratings for effectiveness and relevance for various community development support categories they received from AHC in the past 24 months. Top Two-Box Score methodology was used, which aggregates responses based on the highest levels of effectiveness/ meet my needs on a rating scale 1-5.

Effectiveness by Support Categories

Overall, survey respondents found various community development supports provided by AHC as effective to their initiatives.

Facilitated community meeting or dialogue and **Support with seed grant application** are viewed as highly effective, with 100% of respondents rating them positively.

Pre-seed grant and post-seed grant approval are also seen as quite effective, with 97% of respondents giving it a positive rating.

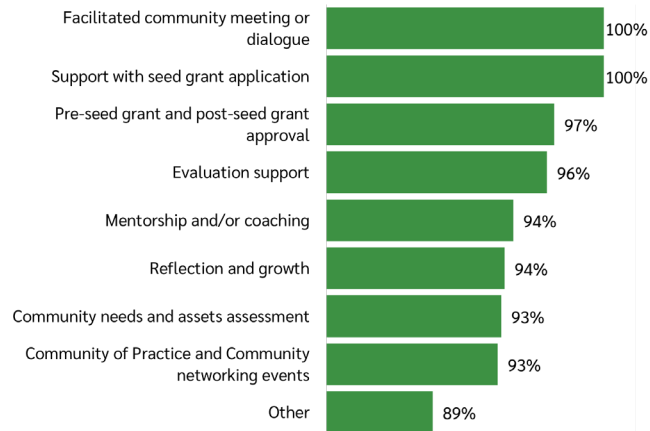
Evaluation support, **Mentorship and coaching**, and **Reflection and growth** are generally viewed positively, with 94% of respondents indicating their effectiveness.

Community needs and assets assessment, **community of practice** and **community networking events** are rated slightly lower, with 93% of respondents finding them effective.

Other services have a slightly lower effectiveness rating, with 89% of respondents finding them effective. These encompass services related to:

- Communication
- Guidance and follow-up support
- Accessibility and social inclusion
- Resource provision (particularly space and equipment)

Fig 5. Effectiveness of AHC Services (1-5 Scale) in the Last 24 Months



Additional Insights from Interviews - Plan Development and Grant Application Support

Since most community groups were founded by volunteer newcomers who do not have extensive experience in community development, several CIs shared that they learned a lot from CI planning and grant application support provided by AHC. While they had ideas about the benefits from their initiative, they did not know how to correctly write a proposal and develop a specific plan with targets, milestones and deadlines for success.

One CI representative shared that they learned patience through working with AHC, as they wanted to see results immediately, but did not understand that meticulous planning is required after receiving the grant. Some CI representatives discussed that while they mostly developed plans on their own, AHC assisted them with answering questions and helped them acquire budget writing as a new skill."

"I think they're doing a good job supporting that grant application process and monitoring project implementation."

"AHC helped us to really focus our efforts...We've come a long way in terms of really clarifying our vision, determining what we want, and focusing...on what really interests us."

Select Impact Stories

Select impact stories are shared based on the immersive interviews conducted with various CIs supported by AHC in the last two years.

These impact stories demonstrate a collective passion and entrepreneurial spirit by a group of community leaders, champions, and volunteers to provide unique experiences specifically tailored to their ethno-cultural, lingual, or faith-based communities that might be missing or not currently provided where they live and work.

Goals of these services vary from helping community members bridge into Canadian life, address social isolation that might lead to mental wellness challenges, and provide experiences that remind community members of their home culture and language.

The impacts of these shared experiences show that support of grassroots, bottom-up community development enriches community and increases diverse service offerings that complement available community services provided by service provider organizations.

Story #1

A community group was established in 2015 to help newcomers arriving from this specific community, of whom many arrive as refugees. The association started with 40 members and now has 100. They currently manage 7-8 initiatives that teach children culture, language, religion, and learning how to live in Canada.

The association has gotten involved with AHC's Community Animators in the past few months and are providing them with various critical supports to enable their growth. For instance, AHC helped them develop a specific plan, which they sought seed funding for and that structure expedited the implementation of their new initiative. The association has also never previously sought grant funding; however, receiving supports from AHC is increasing their knowledge of how best to diversify their funding sources at the association.

Capacity building and community development supports already provided to the association included mentorship, evaluation, support with seed grant applications (which has resulted in their ability to rent classrooms), and recommendations to pursue other grant opportunities available in the community. AHC has also extended a community assessment and networking event supports, which the association has not yet utilized; however, they plan to attend all their hosted events and discussions.

The association leaders are listening to their community members who are noting interest in increasing the association's capacity to sponsor refugee families each year. This sort of sponsorship requires more capacity and funding. The association representative noted that \$2,000 seed funding is not enough to help them meet these ambitious goals.



Relevance by Support Categories

Overall, survey respondents found various supports provided by AHC relevant to their initiatives.

Support with seed grant application received the highest ranking, with 93% of respondents indicating that it meets their needs.

Pre-seed grant and post-seed grant approval meet the needs of 87% of respondents.

Support related to grant applications is considered both effective and as meeting needs/relevant for most participants.

Facilitated community meeting or dialogue, mentorship and coaching, as well as community of practice and community networking events are deemed as meeting the needs of 84-85% of respondents. While these services are considered effective, the extent to which they meet the needs/are relevant is slightly lower, indicating that there may be room for improvement.

Evaluation support, despite a high effectiveness rating of 96%, meets the needs of 78% of respondents. This suggests an opportunity to align the service more closely with the specific needs of the CIs.

Reflection and growth meets the needs of 81%, while **community needs and assets assessment** received one of the lowest ratings at 77%, both in terms of effectiveness and meeting needs. This highlights the need for revisions in this area.

Open-ended responses in the 'Other' category, rated at 67% for meeting needs, did not provide specific improvement suggestions but reiterated participants' positive perceptions of AHC's supportive and approachable nature.

Fig 6. Extent of Meeting Needs by AHC Services (1-5 Scale) in the Last 24 Months



Additional Insights from Interviews - Evaluation

Similar to development of a specific plan for community activities, some CI representatives shared that they lacked knowledge on how to measure the impact of their initiative correctly and how to evaluate whether the outcomes it produces is what they initially expected. Guidance provided by AHC offered more clarity.

However, several interviewees stated that while AHC sent them follow-up forms for evaluation, they have not completed them yet. There may be a need to follow up with CIs to make sure they understand the importance of mid-term evaluation and how to fill out the forms correctly, ensuring relevance of the forms to the needs of the CI.

While many services are rated as highly effective, their relevance and alignment with the specific needs of CIs appears to be somewhat lower. **Evaluation support**, in particular, stands out as being effective but not meeting needs to the same extent.

Further, of concern is the rating for **Community Needs and Assets Assessment**, which ranks among the lowest in both effectiveness and meeting needs/relevance, suggesting a need for substantial improvements in this area.

Additional Insights from Interviews - Guidance on Event Organization

Another aspect of support discussed during the interviews was guidance on planning more meaningful events, particularly understanding the goals of the CI better and using events to share awareness about issues affecting the community and how everyone can help instead of simply planning socializing events.

One CI interviewee shared that guidance from AHC expanded their horizons and made them think more broadly about the value they can create for their community. More specifically, while the CI was planning to focus entirely on cultural heritage events, AHC suggested to also include Canadian culture components to their events, including lectures on diversity and inclusion.

Some CI representatives shared that the events they conducted have been life-changing to some of their members. For example, an older woman attended her first swimming lesson, or children took classes to learn their heritage language and other cultural aspects.



Story #2

Another non-profit ethnic community group has benefitted from AHC's community development supports, which came in the form of seed grant funding, to help them host three new activities: swimming lessons, a yoga class, and a cultural event. Their first events supported by AHC started over the summer of 2023.

For one of the CI volunteers, participating in the swimming lessons supported by AHC helped her focus on her health and wellbeing as well as to communicate and socialize with others and be in the community.

Community development supports, such as creating a growth plan, connecting CI leads with other CIs through community dialogues, helping with the community needs assessment, preparing a proposal that clearly describes those plans, securing seed funding (in addition to the constant fundraising this community group undertakes), receiving guidance on project implementation, and extending mentorship, are particularly helpful to small community groups that are comprised entirely of volunteers passionate about promoting their ethnic culture. In particular, the CI lead talked about the impact that some of these supports have increased the leadership skills of their youth to lead their own community project.

The benefits to the increased capacity and visibility of the hosted sports events have enabled people from other ethnic communities and newcomers to join the community group's events and activities because they might not have their own community association. They have also "helped a lot of women" to improve mental health through yoga sessions or improve their skills through swimming lessons. The AHC supported initiative, for example, helped a 75-year-old woman to get into a first ever swimming lesson.

The CI lead is optimistic about the future. They see a "win-win" partnership with AHC. "We spread the word about AHC activities so more people are learning about them and they can help more communities. And meanwhile, we are developing our youth and we're healing our community members."



Story #3

An ethnic community group helps community members in Edmonton in various ways through immigration support, job search, native language classes for children, children's activities, and mental health supports.

In their interaction with AHC, they were advised to expand their activities and ways to make their programming more beneficial and meaningful, such as helping community members better adapt to life in Canada, like talking to them about diversity, tolerance, and mental health. AHC helps this community group to put together such programs. AHC has also extended free-of-charge physical gathering space to host events.

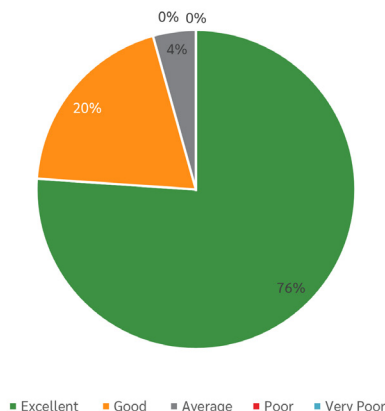
Mentorship and coaching and seed fund supports have been the most beneficial, according to the CI lead; however, they would benefit from support in getting someone to do the teaching on Canadian culture, tolerance, respect and diversity, equity and inclusion principles.

Other AHC community development help they received was in completing their community needs assessment and in evaluation strategy. "Organizations need help understanding how to evaluate their activities."

Communication and Collaboration

Almost all (96%) respondents rated the communication and collaboration between CIs and AHC as excellent or good. A small proportion (4%) represented by two respondents, described it as average.

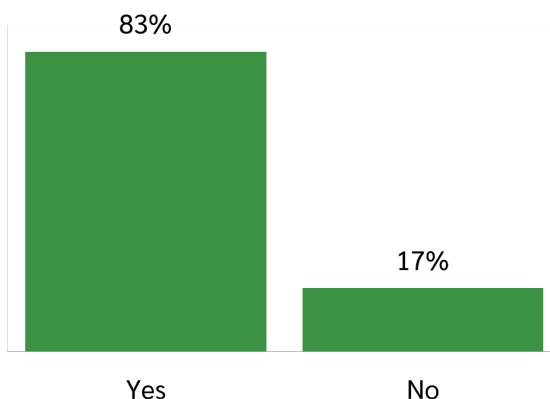
Fig 7. Rating of Communication and Collaboration Between CI and AHC



Seed Funding Support

A majority of respondents (83%) received seed funding support from AHC, in addition to the community development supports extended to them. Only 17% of respondents did not receive seed funding from AHC. 37% found the assistance provided adequately or somewhat fulfilling their needs.

Fig 8. Proportion of CIs Funded through Seed Grants



Additional Insights from Interviews – Effect of Seed Grant Funding

Since the CIs interviewed are still relatively small, the seed grant funding provided by AHC was integral to their success and first community-building efforts. Several interviewees shared that funding enabled them to organize activities that are beneficial to the health and overall well-being of their communities. Those who started working with AHC recently, wished they had known them sooner.

“It’s a great partnership.”

“To tell you honestly, if it was not for them (AHC), we wouldn’t accomplish (this).”

“Thanks to that funding we’re able to have those activities. I think providing seed grants is huge for such smaller ethnic minority communities.”

“Huge thanks to AHC, just because of their funding, we’re able to organize those events and classes.”

“We never received what they offer from any other organization. They give us plan, help evaluate, they give us tools.”

Most (89%) survey respondents agreed that the impact of seed grant/funding on their initiative's contributed "quite a lot" or "a great deal" to their success.

Fig 9. Perception of Impact of Seed Funding on Initiative Success (1-5 Scale)

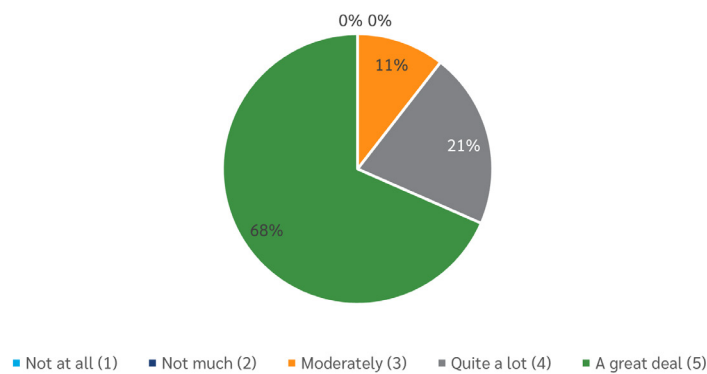
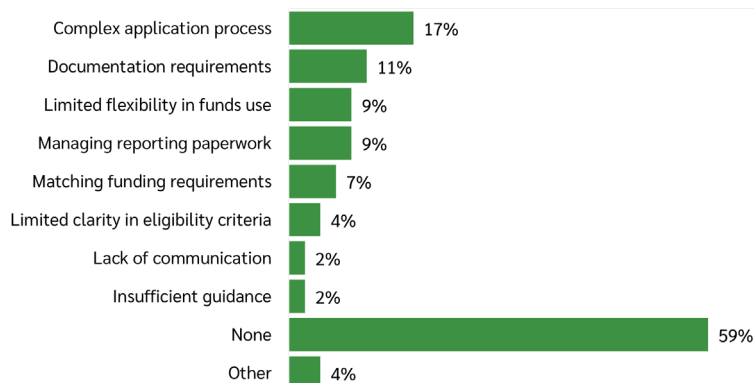


Fig 10. Challenges or Barriers Faced in Accessing and Utilizing Seed Funding



Survey respondents were asked about challenges or barriers they have faced in accessing and utilizing seed funding. More than half (59%) of the respondents encountered no challenges regarding the accessibility and utilization of seed grant funding.

A subset of survey respondents faced various obstacles, including:

- Complexity of application process (17% of mentions)
- Documentation requirements (11% of mentions)
- Limited flexibility in fund utilization (9% mentions)
- Management of reporting paperwork (9% mentions)
- Matching funding requirements (7% of mentions)

Story #4

A community initiative supported by AHC primarily focuses on helping people to cook together, cook for their families, and make affordable choices to cook ethnic and Canadian foods. In cooking together, participants are able to work together in a relaxed environment to solve problems and receive or give advice to address life issues.

AHC helped this community initiative organize the project plan for the initiative, write a better plan and seed grant fund proposal (which won), plan towards growth goals, and recruit two new participants on the project. Specifically, the CI lead shared that the seed grant from AHC helped her community to meet, learn how “to cook cheaper” and “help my mind.”

The initiative’s current limitation that have not been addressed is the need to accommodate French and English speakers simultaneously by securing translation support during the cooking classes. The initiative is primarily geared to community members who speak French. Another challenge is cooking classes are held outdoors with limited ability to host these sessions indoors.

The initiative is planning a December holiday cooking series, hosting online presentations on how to take care of children and prepare school lunchboxes, among other activities.



Story #5

An ethnic womans group, currently being supported by AHC, is focused on women’s empowerment, especially immigrant women, helping them navigate financial literacy, inform mental stress management, network, and share their stories.

The need for a hall prompted connection with AHC. AHC is currently providing the group with a hall free of cost, which is a motivating factor for the community. They also find it beneficial when Community Animators share with the CI group leader request for proposals from around the city that they can tap into to increase their capacity.

Other supports included networking events and information sessions primarily focused on ways to improve seed grant proposal writing, community needs assessment, evaluation, and coaching. These supports are highly effective especially for newcomers.

Outcomes of the supports provided are higher membership numbers.

Impact of Community Development Supports

Key driver analysis was employed to uncover which of the current community development supports significantly impact **effectiveness** and **relevance** for CIs currently partnering with AHC. This analysis also facilitates the process for identifying what service attributes to prioritize for improvement in relation to their **impact**.

Scatter plots shown below, divide the data into four distinct quadrants based on the factors of “Impact” (High or Low) and “Effectiveness” or “Relevance” (High or Low). Subsequently, a regression analysis is performed to quantitatively measure the relationships between the independent variables (CI program supports/service attributes) and the dependent variables (effectiveness and relevance). The outcome of this analysis identifies the key drivers – those service attributes that wield the most substantial impact on overall effectiveness and relevance. These key drivers then inform strategic recommendations, enabling AHC to focus its resources on areas with the greatest potential for enhancing effectiveness and relevance of community development supports.

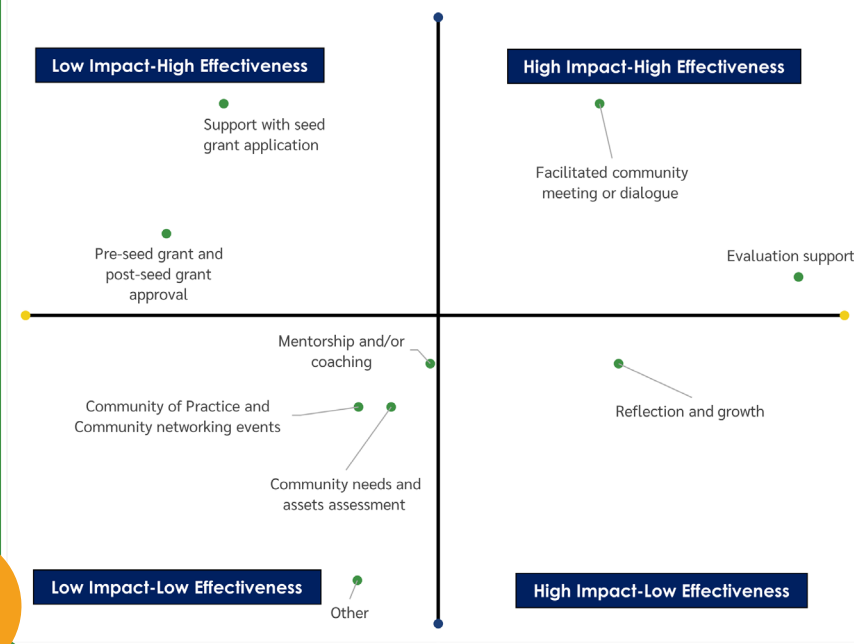
Impact and Effectiveness of Program Supports

Analysis shows that **Reflection and growth** is a high-impact factor, however, currently sitting at a low effectiveness scale. AHC might want to focus on prioritizing improvement to this support type to quickly increase effectiveness of the program and elevate the quality of program supports.

Facilitated community meeting or dialogue and **evaluation support** are currently scoring as high impact, high effectiveness. This shows the importance of these supports to the CIs currently connected with AHC and signals the need to continue to provide them consistently to the CI community.



Fig 11. Impact-Effectiveness Matrix

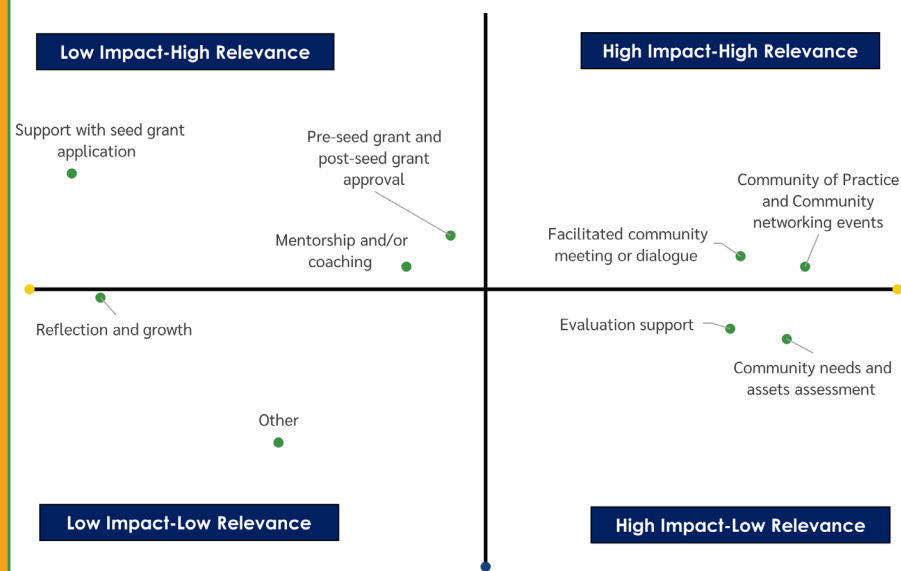


Impact and Relevance of Supports

In terms of relevance, analysis shows that **evaluation support** and **community needs and assets assessment** are a high-impact factor, however, currently sitting at a low relevance scale. AHC might want to focus on prioritizing improvement to this support type to quickly increase their relevance to CIs.

Facilitated community meeting or dialogue and **community of practice and community networking events** are currently scoring as high impact, high relevance. This shows the importance of these supports to the CIs and signals the need to continue to provide them consistently to the CI community.

Fig 12. Impact-Relevance Matrix



Story #6

Another women-led community initiative focuses on cultivating strong relationships and self-empowerment among women through educational and health-related activities, such as fitness or mental health, as well as other cultural and heritage related activities to increase interactions between generations. This initiative, which is supported by AHC, has grown in followership and has seen participants react positively to workshops held.

One seasoned AHC program leader made the connection between the woman group and AHC's community development unit (as well as other organizations in the city that could support the goals of this initiative) and encouraged and helped the group pull together their plans. The AHC program leader has volunteered at this group's events, embedded herself into the group's planning meetings, extended meeting room space when the group wanted to collaborate with other community associations for International Day, and guiding the team on every aspect of seed grant application, planning and implementation post-award.

The woman group leads noted that the seed grant application process has helped them crystallize their thoughts and plans and think of the details beforehand. The evaluation requirement every 6 months is beneficial but is time-consuming. The community dialogue was another support that was helpful to understand where the woman group sits vis-à-vis other supported initiatives.

The woman group is eager to increase awareness of its offerings and find a location at low cost to host events. They see that AHC could be impactful by helping them secure physical gathering space or offering their spaces after hours. Plans for the future include hosting a fitness workshop, an annual Educational Speakers Series event focused on mental health (which always sells out), and a heritage/cultural celebration event. The woman group also wants to widen the scope of their work to include youth, senior, and newcomer focused initiatives.

The seed \$2,000 this group received has helped them expand on their ideas and grow larger than what the initiative leads have imagined initially.



Challenges and Improvement Suggestions

Survey and interview CI participants were invited to share their reflections and recommendations for how AHC could enhance their experience with community development supports.

Close to half of survey respondents (21) and all 7 interviewees expressed a sense of contentment and gratitude, emphasizing that the existing support received from AHC was already exceptional and met their needs.

Recommendations to improve supports from survey and interview feedback included:



Need for Community Space - Most CI representatives shared the common pain point of renting a community space to host community meetings. They would like to receive more support from AHC regarding community space they can use to host their meetings more regularly, as socializing is critical to building their communities.

While some CI members have donated funds to rent community halls for events, others are not able to do so or can only afford it for not more than a couple of hours. Representatives of some CIs shared that they ask their members for monthly donations or sell food at cultural events to raise funds for community hall rentals.



Lack of Awareness of Supports Provided to Communities - Another issue is lack of awareness about support options available to community initiatives, in particular availability of seed funding.

Several CI representatives shared that they found out about the available supports that are provided by AHC through word of mouth or being directly reached out to by AHC. There is a need for better awareness about AHC and the community development supports they offer.



Being More Present – There is a desire among CIs engaged in this evaluation for more in-person meetings to evaluate progress and plan for the future. Some interviewees noted that they would like AHC to be present following receipt of seed grant support, such as following up regularly and attending networking events or conferences that CIs organize.

Feedback from CI members was mixed: some interviewees said that they feel supported by AHC consistently and appreciate AHC showing up at their events; however, a few said that they would like to see AHC representatives at their events more often. Through continuous support, CI members would feel more connected to AHC and potentially other organizations AHC works with.

Additionally, one CI member said that they would appreciate communicating with AHC more in-person, as most communication happens through email.



Connections to other CIs - Not only do CI representatives want to feel continuously supported by AHC and be more connected to them, they also would like to network and be connected to other CIs that are supported by AHC.

A few of those interviewed said that it would be beneficial to know what other projects or initiatives AHC supports to open possibilities of collaboration in the future. This is especially if the potential area of collaboration is a common topic, such as mental health, for instance.

It was suggested for AHC continue to be proactive in facilitating events to which several CIs are invited or share updates about other CIs through newsletters or WhatsApp group. Some CI representatives were interested in what other organizations receive in terms of community development supports, such as whether they receive mentoring or other services from AHC at the moment. Few other interviewees shared that they feel more motivated when they come together with other CIs and network.

Another related suggestion included holding events at times after working hours, as some CI members have to ask for time off work to attend the meetings.



Professional Development of CI Members - Participants expressed an interest in training programs focusing on proposal writing, communication and presentation skills, social organization techniques, project management, as well as monitoring and evaluation. Notably, one participant advocated for the introduction of employment workshops, particularly aimed at youth community initiative members.

Creating Unaided Grant Application Support Tools - Since CI representatives lack knowledge on how to write grant proposals to increase their capacity and further develop their community initiative, some shared that if AHC developed comprehensive guidelines with specific criteria for grant proposal writing, they would find that beneficial.

While most say AHC staff are helpful in answering their questions and assisting them in an efficient manner, it would still be useful to have a resource that CI representatives can consult, while navigating their grant application process independently. Relevant suggestions included providing classes for budget writing, proposal development, and requested clearer resource documents for applicants to reference.

Need for More Seed Funding Support - The current \$ 2,000 seed fund is helpful to most CIs to get started, but many have significantly grown or even doubled in their membership numbers (e.g. from 50 to 100 members), and now require higher amounts of funding to hold more regular events with larger capacity. Most CI representatives shared that they plan to apply for additional seed funding in the future and few are hoping that the fund amount could be increased from \$2,000 to \$4,000 to enable more activities.



Since most CI members are volunteers who come together outside of their working hours to organize events for their communities, they express frustration with lack of funds to support their initiatives. One CI member shared that the growth of their initiative soon made them go above the budget when organizing events. Funds are needed for renting community spaces, printing materials, books (for teaching), and snacks. Another interviewee shared that it is difficult to attract people's attention with a low budget.

Other CI respondents suggested expanded grant opportunity where AHC would apply for funding on behalf of CIs, greater flexibility in fund utilization, funds for hosting special events, the establishment of grant programs tailored to daycare services, and resources to assist low-income families with back-to-school needs.

Better Information Sharing - Some interviewees shared that they would like to receive information about other grants or similar opportunities and supports available that they can apply for, which AHC can also share through newsletters.

Guidance and Expertise in DEI - One CI asked whether AHC could help bring someone to teach the values of diversity, inclusion, tolerance and respect



Additional Insights from Interviews – Future Plans

All CIs are planning to keep working with AHC in the future - whether to apply for more funding, or to obtain any other supports they can provide, such as guidance in event organization, mentorship and others.

Many plan to expand their community initiatives to focus on more target groups (for instance, including seniors and youth in addition to adults) and organize more community activities.

Key Considerations and Recommendations

Below are key findings from the internal document and data review evaluation phase.



In Summary

Overall, survey and interview findings show positive sentiments expressed by community initiative members supported through AHC's Community Initiative Process. The majority conveyed appreciation and contentment with the community development supports they have received. CIs consistently emphasized that seed grant funding played a major role in their initiative's success.

- In terms of **effectiveness**, analysis shows that facilitated community meetings or dialogues and evaluation support are two support areas that are impactful and effective. This demonstrates the significance of these supports to the CI beneficiaries and the need to continue to provide them consistently.

The reflection and growth program support, on the other hand, is high-impact for CI beneficiaries but currently sits at a low effectiveness scale. Prioritizing improvement for this support service would increase the effectiveness and impact of the overall community development supports provided.

- In terms of **relevance**, facilitated community meetings or dialogues and community of practice and community networking events are high impact and currently sit high in terms of their relevance to the needs of the community. It is necessary to keep providing these supports consistently to the CI community.

Evaluation support and community needs and assets assessments are high-impact support services, however, they are currently not meeting the needs of the CI beneficiaries as delivered. It is important for AHC to prioritize improvement to these supports to increase their relevance to CIs.

Below are key considerations and recommended actions to ensure that impact of current AHC community development supports evolves from a singular capacity-building intervention into a sustained community development journey.

Community Needs and Assets Assessment

Inconsistent Completion of Highly Effective Support - Evaluation data shows that the community needs and asset assessment support service, is highly effective and quite impactful to the community development process; however, this particular support service still lags in terms of its relevance to the needs of CI beneficiaries.

Despite its critical role as a primary resource guiding the community development process, the Community Needs Assessment faces inconsistencies in completion. Some interviewees claimed to have conducted it independently of AHC support. Another CI initiative has received various community development supports from AHC and has gone through various process phases, but have not yet completed the needs assessment, which typically needs to happen at the initial phases of the CI process.

Recommendation

Require Completion of Needs Assessment - Revise and standardize the process to ensure that all participants complete the Community Needs Assessment comprehensively with full understanding and support early on in the CI process. The Community Needs Assessment should become an integral and universally followed component of the Community Initiative Process. We recommend it be a required step at the outset of interaction with a new community initiative.

Evaluation Support

Effective Support but Not Highly Relevant - Evaluation support is generally viewed as effective. However, it ranks lower than other services in meeting the specific needs and relevance for CIs. Advanced analysis shows that evaluation support is a service attribute that is considered of high impact and importance to CI members and, as such, should be prioritized for improvement. A deeper understanding of CI needs is also required to better align evaluation support with expectations of CI beneficiaries.

Recommendation

Engage with Program Stakeholders on Needs - Conduct in-depth assessments to gain a comprehensive understanding of CI expectations and requirements in terms of evaluation support. Use these insights to refine and enhance evaluation support services, ensuring they directly meet the unique needs of CIs and contribute to their overall success and sustainability.



Grant Application Process

Survey and interview findings underscore the effectiveness of AHC in providing communication and guidance to supported CIs during the seed grant application process. However, the complexity of the application process was consistently mentioned in interviews, emphasizing the need for improved clarity and guidance to navigate grant application forms effectively.

Effectiveness of Revised Process - The recently revised grant application process, implemented a year ago, has proven to be an effective and comprehensive system. It follows the Community Initiative Process, ensuring that CIs receive various forms of support as outlined before grant application submission. This support encompasses guidance from Community Animators, who assist CIs in areas, such as budget development, grant writing, and identification of assets and needs. The inclusion of CDU staff reviewing applications before committee assessment is an additional layer aimed at reducing incomplete applications and boosting approval rates before applications are presented to CDAC.

Complexity Challenges - Despite the improvements, there are notable challenges related to the complexity of the grant application process. Both interviews and survey findings indicate that participants find the process somewhat complicated. While participants highly appreciate the support provided by Community Animators and view it as effective, some feel the need for supplementary resources to independently navigate the process. Some express uncertainty about the specific requirements and expectations, especially those who have little to no prior experience in writing grant applications, proposals, or developing event budgets. Survey data shows that complex application processes and detailed documentation requirements are among the most commonly reported challenges.

Recommendation

Clear Process Tools - Provide clear, user-friendly tools to CI representatives that comprehensively explain the grant application process for AHC seed funding opportunities and for other grant opportunities provided elsewhere in the community. These tools will empower CIs to work on funding applications independently. The aim is for CIs to gain a deeper understanding and be capable of navigating the process on their own, reaching out to Community Animators when needed. This shift will encourage self-sufficiency in grant application tasks and foster a better understanding of the process among CIs.

Training and Workshops - Conduct specialized training and workshops, particularly focusing on proposal writing and budget development. These sessions will empower CIs with the skills needed to effectively prepare their applications and seek out additional grant funding support to help them grow. This suggestion came from participants' survey responses.

Uniform Requirements - Establish uniform and transparent requirements for the application process. This standardization will facilitate information storage and accessibility, especially considering that some grants were filled out in handwriting rather than online versions. Consistency in application format will simplify the process for all stakeholders.



Clear Communication and Role Definition - Improve clarity of the role of CDAC as an independent entity making decisions at arms-length from AHC as well enhance understanding of the CDAC decision-making process. A clear and transparent explanation of how decisions are made will help CI representatives better understand the Committee's role and decisions, thus enhancing trust in the process.

Incremental Funding - Consider increasing the value of seed grants in an incremental approach. While the current \$2,000 grant is helpful, successful CIs often require more funding to organize events for larger participant numbers. As CIs grow and demonstrate their effectiveness, providing increased funding can enable them to have a greater impact within the community.



Funding of Community Development Model

Low Financial Support for Model - Evidence gathered from this evaluation shows positive impact of the AHC community development model on developing and sustaining grass-roots, equity-deserving groups in the Edmonton region. However, through internal stakeholder consultations, it was made clear that this model receives little financial support by various levels of government and its processes and impacts are not well understood. AHC is currently operating this model with inability to scale up given these systemic barriers.

Inconsistent Supports to Community Animators - The resulting impact is inconsistent funding towards this effective approach to community development that lead to inability of AHC to sustain robust community development supports. Community Animators serve as key points of contact for CI representatives, guiding them through the CI support continuum and attending their events to demonstrate additional support. They tend to have lived experiences, in addition to professional expertise, that enable increased insights and understanding into the grass-roots initiatives they guide.

Recommendation

Create Sustained Funding for Community Development Model - Before with adequate administration carve-out in order to sustain the roles of Community Animators. Establishing trust and building enduring relationships with CI representatives relies on the continuous presence of Community Animators to ensure that AHC is not only extending one-time capacity building interactions, but cultivating a sustained community development approach.

With limited resources allocated to this community development model, AHC might want to consider opportunities to blend or braid seed funding with other service provider organizations, through strategic partnerships that are facilitated by government within a regional/municipal ecosystem. Such dedicated support would enable scaling up and replication of effective community development strategies with new community initiatives and enhance

increased and incremental funding to community initiatives that want to grow and be successful within their communities.

Affordable Physical Gathering Space - Create opportunities for affordable physical gathering spaces. This can be achieved through partnerships or by making AHC spaces available to CIs. Access to suitable spaces is crucial for CIs to organize events effectively. Space and funding are the primary barriers that CIs currently face.

Data Recording and Accessibility

Varying Strategies and Record Keeping - Community Animators employ varying outreach strategies, and their record-keeping practices differ. This variation creates inconsistency in documenting outreach activities. For example, record-keeping at this moment does not provide good distinction of the types of AHC community development supports received if the CI does not receive seed funding.

Additionally, some process documents are not organized in such a way to make it clear which documents are currently in use and applicable for program operation. In some spreadsheets designed to transparently display organizations that received community development and seed grant supports, only select organizations that received supports are listed, while others lack details regarding the outcomes of their grant applications.

Recommendation

Standardize Data Recording – Create a unified database and implement a uniform data recording methodology for Community Animators to ensure consistent data organization, accessibility, and year-to-year comparisons.

Complete Spreadsheet Documentation - Enhance the completeness and transparency of spreadsheets used to record community development and grant funding supports outcomes. Ensure that all organizations receiving supports are accurately documented, including the specific results of their grant applications.





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