



building pathways to vibrant communities

NeighbourGrants

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## **GOOD NEIGHBOURS**

A Look at the Impact of the Neighbour Grants Program

*March 2008*



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The Calgary Foundation, established in 1955, facilitates collaborative philanthropy by making powerful connections between donors and community organizations for the long term benefit of Calgary and surrounding area.

The Calgary Foundation provides grants to promote a healthy, vibrant and diverse community by engaging citizens in community building at all levels, strengthening the charitable sector to accomplish its work effectively, and nurturing a giving and caring community that values collaboration and learning.

**Report and Photo:** Julie Black

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**Photo:** Bowness Community Intergenerational Mural Project, Bowness Seniors' Centre, Calgary

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## THIS REPORT

In these pages, you'll see the results of several ways of looking at the impact of the Neighbour Grants Program. You'll see an introduction to the program, an overview of the number of projects supported and the kinds of project themes, and analysis of feedback and stories shared by people who have been part of funded projects.

These results were gathered in preparation for the opportunity in fall 2009 to renew the Neighbour Grants Program for a third five-year cycle. These results are currently fueling discussion within The Calgary Foundation on how to proceed. This report widens the circle of conversation. We welcome your feedback.



## The Neighbour Grants Program

The Calgary Foundation believes that strong and vibrant neighbourhoods are the bedrock of a strong and vibrant city. At the heart of these neighbourhoods are people who care about their community and are willing to share their gifts and talents. They are supported by local organizations that are able to respond to community concerns and a local culture of cooperation among residents and groups in the neighbourhood.

The Calgary Foundation's Neighbour Grants Program aims to build participation and leadership in neighbourhoods. It supports residents in transforming their ideas into actions that benefit their neighbourhoods, encourage the involvement of other residents and build cooperation among different groups.

The funds will support projects with grants of up to \$5,000. Proposals are reviewed every two months by an advisory committee composed of knowledgeable community volunteers.

## Goals of the Neighbour Grants program

- To increase the involvement of residents in the well-being of their neighbourhoods (*good neighbours*);
- To increase the capacity of neighbour groups to plan and implement community improvement projects and strategies (*strong neighbour organizations*);
- To increase cooperation among resident groups, service agencies and other organizations in neighbourhoods in responding to community concerns (*effective neighbourhood networks*);
- To increase support and interest from other agencies and institutions in neighbourhood initiatives (*supportive environment for neighbour initiatives*).

## Stepping Stones

In 2006, The Calgary Foundation and partner First Calgary Savings introduced Stepping Stones, a granting program that aims to support neighbourly first steps at an even earlier stage in their development. For further information on Stepping Stones, Neighbour Grants and other granting programs, visit The Calgary Foundation online at [www.thecalgaryfoundation.org](http://www.thecalgaryfoundation.org)

## Context

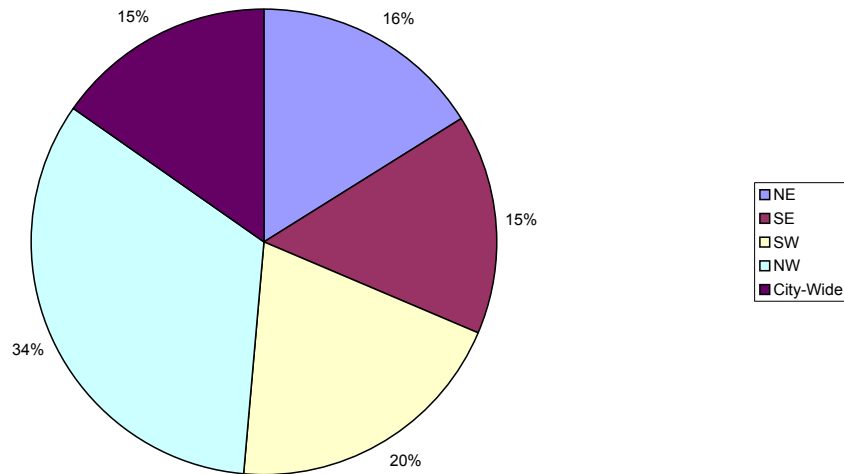
From program inception in September 1999 to the release of this report in March of 2008, the Neighbour Grants Program approved \$1,282,000 of grants to support 239 projects. In 2004, the program changed its name from Neighbourhood Grants to Neighbour Grants to better reflect that the grants are an investment in people.

Of the 101 projects approved for granting from September 2004 to March 2008:

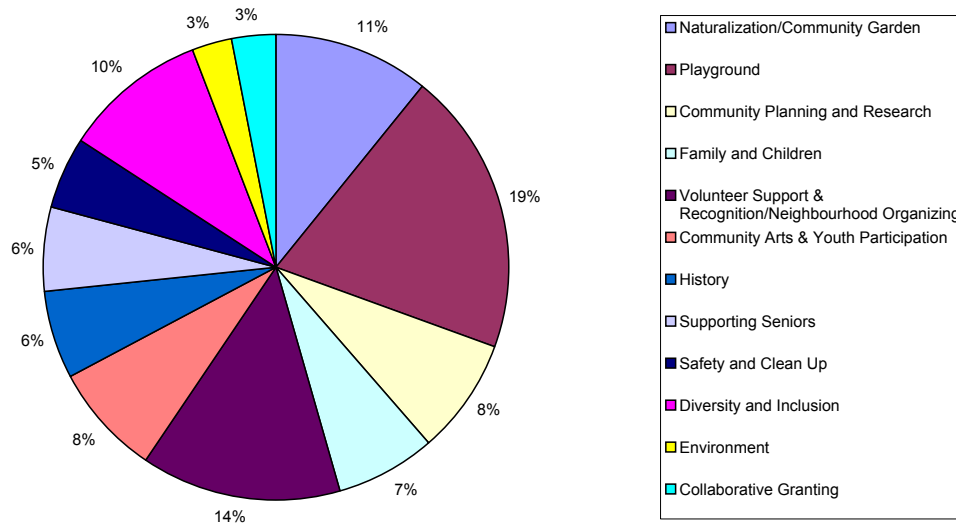
- Project themes were fairly evenly spread across theme categories. The most common themes by a slight margin were playgrounds, volunteer support & recognition/neighbourhood organizing, and naturalization/community gardens. (See next page for details.)
- Projects were spread across the city. The NW quadrant of the city saw the greatest number of projects, followed by the SW, the NE, and a tie between the SE and city-wide projects. (See next page details.)
- One notable geographic trend: 29% of the projects occurred along the route of Bus #1. (Bus #1 connects Bowness, Montgomery, Parkdale, Hillhurst/Sunnyside, Downtown, Inglewood and Forest Lawn.)



**Neighbour Grants by Quarter (% of total number of 101 projects)**  
September 2004 - March 2008



**Neighbour Grants by Theme (% of 101 projects)**  
September 2004 - March 2008





## Result from Hearing From Grantees: Conversation Circles

### *Methodology*

In October 2007, The Calgary Foundation held five Conversation Circles across the city with people who had participated in a Neighbour Grants funded project.

Of the approximately 150 people invited, 38 participated, representing:

- Twenty-nine projects in 19 neighbourhoods.
- Plus 1 city-wide, 1 five-neighbourhood and 1 two-neighbourhood project

Eight neighbourhoods had run several Neighbour Grants-funded projects.

Some people attended the Conversation Circle closest to their neighbourhood while others crossed the city to attend a Conversation Circle that better fit their schedule.

The Conversation Circles asked participants (“grantees”) to:

- Share stories that illustrate the changes they saw in the community as a result of their projects that received Neighbour Grants;
- Suggest ways the Neighbour Grants Program could better support their work.

Data was analysed in several ways:

- At four of the Conversation Circles, grantees were asked to list the most important changes they heard in the stories and group them into categories.
- Calgary Foundation staff person Julie Black and consultant Louise Griep drew common themes from the results.
- Data has been shared with community volunteers in the Neighbour Grants Advisory Committee, program donors, grantees, other grassroots volunteers and agency project partners.
- Dialogue will continue over the course of the next few months in preparation for the opportunity in Fall 2009 to renew the Neighbour Grants Program for a third five-year cycle.

### *Note on Methodology*

Some grantee stories may serve as more substantiated evidence of community change than other stories. This evaluation process did not set out to establish direct correlation between project activities and community change.

Rather, we were interested in hearing grantees’ perspectives and seeing if those perspectives align with the goals of the Neighbour Grants Program and with the literature of community and neighbourhood change.



## Changes

Grantees shared stories to illustrate the changes they were seeing in their communities

As a result of projects that received Neighbour Grants, grantees believe they see:

1. Improvements to Social Capital.
2. Improvements specifically to Bridging Social Capital.
3. Greater capacity for their groups and organizations.
4. Improved health and mental health outcomes for project participants, and a strengthened sense of being able to accomplish goals.
5. Improvements to the public places where neighbours gather (“placemaking” or “bumping spaces”).
6. Improvements to environmental concerns (“greening” the neighbourhood).

*Improvements to Social Capital refers to connections between people and between and within their networks ... is generated by networks of relationships, reciprocity, trust and social norms (definition from Wikipedia.com).*

***In their discussion of their various projects, grantees said they saw:***

- New people joining groups and projects.
- New partnerships and connections.
- New opportunities to give back to the community.
- New opportunities to talk with social policy makers.
- New programs started, which they’ve maintained for at least two years.
- Local resources identified and mobilized.
- Outside resources being drawn into the community.
- Increased expression of community belonging/trust/pride/identity.
- Increased opportunity to share local history.
- A shared vision for the community being developed.

*“I’m wearing lots of hats now in my community because of that first small grant”  
— Haysboro Conversation Circle*

*“We met so many people through the project who had an investment in our community, such as Fort Calgary, who loved what we were doing to improve their view and work”  
— Haysboro Conversation Circle*

### **Improvements specifically to Bridging Social Capital (Term from Gital & Vidal)**

... the Social Capital built between heterogeneous (diverse/unlike) groups.  
... advances community cohesion and can help address equity issues.

In their discussion of their various projects, grantees said they saw:

- People coming together to work on projects across age groups, economic statuses, cultures and expertise.
- Neighbourhoods that are side by side finding common cause and working together.
- Seniors being able to stay in their own homes and to keep participating in the neighbourhood.
- People in subsidized housing working together and alongside market-value renters and homeowners.
- Increased women’s leadership.
- Program clients becoming program and community leaders.
- Positive interactions between adults and youth in a neighbourhood.

*“One woman told us that a few years ago, she would have pulled into the parking lot and yelled at the kids to move. Now they come running over to her, now she knows her neighbours” — Haysboro Conversation Circle*



*“A Round Dance is a traditional Aboriginal dance and social event. It involved people who had never volunteered before and they have committed themselves to long-term volunteering. We wanted it to be inclusive, open to the whole community. And the turn out! We stopped counting at 400! [A neighbour] is Aboriginal himself; he lived in the city and had never been to a Round Dance, so it was a connection for him to his own culture. We involved the [neighbourhood] plus wider. It gives me shivers down my back”*  
 — Brentwood Conversation Circle

*“We enjoyed the week and enjoyed doing something for the community. Plus we met many people, shared songs with the kids. We didn’t feel away from our family because everyone became part of our family; we were going through the same thing. And we shared lots of food, multicultural, and learned how others cooked. Plus we practiced our language”*  
 — Brentwood Conversation Circle

**Greater capacity for their groups and organizations**

*In their discussion of their various projects, grantees said they saw:*

- Increased financial stability for the group.
- Increased ability to maintain volunteers by being able to hire-out mundane or tiresome pieces of the project and/or being able to complete the project in a timely fashion.
- New board members attracted to the group by the project.
- Increased opportunity to link people to services.
- Increased understanding and experience in systemic change, public policy intervention and collaborative processes.
- Enhanced opportunity for community engagement.

*“One hundred beds equals financial stability.” [A grant to help volunteers build more garden beds allowed the community garden to rent more garden beds, attract more members and build their financial base]*  
 — Village Square Conversation Circle

*“We haven’t named political power. It’s who you know. And also, if you can get people together, you can have people political power”*  
 — Haysboro Conversation Circle

*“For us, without the money, we couldn’t have done what we did. We had no money at all. Everyone knows the changes in our neighbourhood, prostitution on the corner, drug dealing. There were twenty crack houses in [our community] alone and now there are [only] two or three in [the] District.”*  
*“We got more police involvement when they saw we really did care about our community”*  
 — Inglewood Conversation Circle

**Improved health and mental health outcomes for project participants, and a strengthened sense of being able to accomplish goals.**

*In their discussion of their various projects, grantees said they saw:*

- An increase in personal development and empowerment.
- A decrease in social isolation.
- Increased opportunity for recreation and fitness.

*“A person went from sitting on her couch all day watching TV; now she’s doing art and visiting people. She just used to go out for groceries and now she’s visiting someone every-day”* — Inglewood Conversation Circle

*“It’s not a surprise but it was a surprise that I suddenly understood that I could make a difference. I’m now involved in five volunteer groups”*  
 — Brentwood Conversation Circle

**Improvements in the places they have to gather in the neighbourhood (placemaking or bumping spaces)**

**Placemaking** is creating squares, plazas, parks, streets and waterfronts that will attract people because they are pleasurable or interesting. (Definition from Wikipedia.com)



**Bumping spaces** are places where people have to bump into each other on a regular basis. (Expression used by Jim Diers and attributed to a colleague, Calgary Nov 16/07.)

*In their discussion of their various projects, grantees said they saw:*

- Increased and diversified community use of public space.
- Possible prevention of graffiti.
- Creation of a space for community to meet.
- Increased community safety in public spaces.
- More community ownership of public space.
- More neighbourly use of private space.

*"The mural was one of the most popular. Everyone on the street it is on loved it. It's on a school for kids thought of as 'difficult.' Well, they like it. And we see the neighbours across the road sit on their front porches now"*  
— Haysboro Conversation Circle

*"It's been a huge morale booster for our community. Our morale was in the toilet. 540 volunteer hours over the weekend, so they got the people out – young families, seniors – and it gives everyone a place to go. Meeting people there, we're excited about our community. In the last six years, maybe even sixteen years since the community was started, there haven't been any upgrades in the community"*  
— Brentwood Conversation Circle

*"The community turned a garage into a meeting space. Our BBQ, held during Ramadan, was held after sunset to show respect for their beliefs. And we added a needs assessment process so that residents identified their needs and made plans"* — Inglewood Conversation Circle

### **More "greening" in their community**

*In their discussion of their various projects, grantees said they saw:*

- Decreased organic waste going to the landfill.
- Decreased pollution and costs related to food supply (reductions to transportation and to use of petroleum-based pesticides and fertilizers).

*Sixty-five households now compost what they grow in the garden and also their kitchen scraps and leaves.*  
— Village Square Conversation Circle

*"The City agreed to plant trees around the mural"*  
— Haysboro Conversation Circle

*"Before, besides being a fire hazard, it was a great place for illicit activity. Now, you'll see, it's very open, with beautiful sculptures. What I noticed, people were afraid to go through there. But now I see mothers there with their children. We still have homeless people, they are part of the inner city community everywhere, but there's not such a feeling of foreboding now"*  
— Haysboro Conversation Circle



## Capacity Building

Grantees suggested ways to support grassroots projects that aim to strengthen neighbourliness and neighbourhoods. Some strategies were identified as things the Neighbour Grants Program does well and some were identified as areas for improvement.

In-person support from grants staff helps applicants think through their projects and find useful new partnerships and information. A simple application form with detailed instructions helps guide thinking and project development.

*"The instructions in the pamphlet are good. We followed it step-by-step and it got us thinking. We sent it in but needed more detail on the budget. Cathy said she'd come see us; well, that was huge. We felt like you actually wanted to give money to us. You weren't tight-fisted. The help seemed novel. You gave us the information we needed. And meeting her in person felt very supportive and helpful."*  
— Haysboro Conversation Circle

*"I liked [that it's not] just go get money, it's capacity-building. It's set up to increase your ability to do all this stuff, to get more people involved."* — Haysboro Conversation Circle

*"TCF were the first people we ever got a grant from. It encouraged us. We thought, 'My God, we can do this.'"* — Haysboro Conversation Circle

*"You get goal-oriented because you have to report to TCF. It gets you focused!"* — Haysboro Conversation Circle

The jargon of community development can be a barrier and should be avoided. Since it won't always be possible, serve as a bridge between interested grantees unfamiliar with the field and the literature and professionals of community development.

*"I didn't understand the website—what do you mean by 'community building?'"*  
— Village Square Conversation Circle

*"Yours are simple applications but the hurdle is no volunteer wants to fill out grant applications."*  
— Village Square Conversation Circle

*"Of all the ideas we have, which one appeals to you?"*  
— Village Square Conversation Circle

*"Don't ask us to specify the budget at the outset. It changes."*  
— Village Square Conversation Circle

*"It was painful; ours didn't fit nicely in the box. Without Cesar helping us, there's no way."*  
— Bowness Conversation Circle

## Specific ideas

- Have volunteers look over the application and suggest changes.
- Promote existing and organize new community development learning opportunities.
- Provide support, encouragement and technical assistance.
- Communicate funder expectations and program parameters.

Neighbourly project organizers can learn a lot from each other and help each other keep their projects growing. Support grantees to come together as people doing community development work in their communities.

*"Put grantees in touch with each other. This is inspiring."*  
— Haysboro Conversation Circle

*"Help us to feel part of the city as well as part of the neighbourhood. We want both."*  
— Inglewood Conversation Circle

*"I came tonight to listen to people doing the work. You can feel quite isolated, inviting people together. So it's an opportunity to connect with people on the ground. It's easy to find professionals but harder to find people doing it on the ground, on our time and on our dime."*  
— Bowness Conversation Circle



*"I'm struck by the problems with project execution. Things we're learning over and over on the projects, there has to be a way to learn them before the project starts. But people won't come out to learn." — Bowness Conversation Circle*

*By communicating with each other, neighbourhoods can prevent police from simply shifting crime from one neighbourhood to another — Bowness Conversation Circle*

**Specific ideas:**

- Neighbourhood fairs – where grantees talk about their projects with each other.
- Leadership training – a grassroots version for volunteer leaders interested in learning how to enhance and sustain projects (building on work of Centre for Newcomers and Leadership Calgary).
- Mentorship between groups doing similar work.
- Promote learning opportunities and award opportunities (to help maintain momentum).

Grantees face resource limitations, particularly in volunteers, staffing, transportation, space and finding sustaining support. Help connect them with new partners and resources and support innovative ideas.

*"Face of volunteers is aging. Research indicates changes for people coming up to retirement now – may have to restructure for part-time jobs rather than volunteer jobs." — Bowness Conversation Circle*

*"We're burnt out!" — Bowness Conversation Circle*

*"If you always have to try for something new to get money, or reframe it, it's tough. It's so hard to keep looking for money, especially for projects that are inexpensive." — Bowness Conversation Circle*

**Specific ideas:**

- Use funding as a 'carrot' to encourage groups to further engage their community and for the community to get involved.
- Phase in the funding so that groups get more funding for involving more people.
- Maintain a list of free community spaces and ways to tap into volunteer banks and other programs.
- Introduce grantees to other prospective funders and supporters.

Help grantees communicate their stories and find their audience. "Get out the good news stories."

*"Media gives status to local initiatives; when community people aren't [already] involved in it and see it on TV, it gets people involved." — Bowness Conversation Circle*

*"Help Hawkwood Turn Over a New Leaf.' \$700 was a lot of money and it had huge impact. It looked professional. Whimsical signs on the street aren't working anymore. That changed in 1988, with the Olympics." — Haysboro Conversation Circle*

**Specific ideas:**

- Provide media training for grantees.
- Suggest and provide marketing assistance to groups.
- Develop a 'brag page' website – with an article on each project, and photos, contacts and a link to project websites if they have them.

People with neighbourly project ideas need to know about these funding opportunities. Neighbour Grants Program should be better known. Grantees should help.

*"In our project, people didn't know there was anything in the city that would support small projects that were just neighbourly; nice surprise to them. They were just five people and TCF said, 'Yes, that's just what we're looking for.'" — Brentwood Conversation Circle*

*"I'd like to see TCF better acknowledged publicly; it should be a household word. Beneficiaries should all do it—call the media." — Haysboro Conversation Circle*

**Specific Ideas**

- Provide more help to grantees so they can acknowledge Neighbour Grants support, especially grantees running the smaller projects.
- Run 'Ideas Cafes' and Grant Writing Sessions in neighbourhoods to attract people with neighbourly project ideas who don't know how to proceed or that there is support available.