



# **Grassroots Community Organizing for Community Well-Being**

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## 1. Executive Summary

Grassroots organizations are well-known for their role in directly addressing the needs and interests of equity-seeking groups. In contrast, large-scale non-profit organizations (NPOs) have been questioned in the literature as their functioning, sources of authority, and knowledge could exclude the communities they intend to serve from decision-making processes (McKnight, 2013). Yet, research has shown that large-scale NPOs usually receive more support and higher amounts of grant funding than those organizing at the community level (Hornung et al., 2020; McKnight, 2013; Submittable, 2022). The City's Social Policy Division is interested in examining if its current granting practices follow this pattern suggested by the literature, preventing grassroots organizations from accessing these resources. In view of that, this project aims to understand how the City can better foster broader community well-being by supporting grassroots community organizing (GCO) practices. Two research questions guided this study:

1. How does the City define GCO?
2. How can the Social Policy Grants team more systematically identify and connect with grassroots organizations in the City to support them better?

The literature (e.g., McKnight, 2013; Soteri-Proctor & Alcock, 2012) and the community organizers interviewed for this study suggest that the boundaries between formal and informal non-profit sectors should not be firmly established, as organizations tend to move between informality and formality. Following this approach, rather than categorically classifying grassroots organizations versus formalized NPOs, this study focuses on defining GCO as an activity through which informal groups and organizations establish horizontal relationships with the communities shaping their social fabric. The six interviews conducted for this study also help understand that GCO fosters spaces of trust, especially among equity-seeking groups, that facilitate: a) Mutual support and service delivery, b) relationship building, c) processes of identification and cultural understanding, and d) advocacy and community empowerment.

A preliminary analysis of how the City has supported GCO in the last six years was conducted by examining Grant Council Reports and other internal documents to answer this study's second research question. Through these documents, The City has shown its commitment to eliminating barriers for equity-seeking groups to access grants and build capacity as organizations, especially during the last three years. This finding was confirmed by the study's participants, who mentioned that the City has fostered: a) More openness to dialogue and relationship building, b) Experimentation with granting practices supporting their work, and c) Training support. However, the participants also identify challenges that prevent them from accessing funds. Granting

procedures could still be intimidating and time-consuming, especially for groups that are not legally registered as charities and experience volunteer burnout. The organizations consulted also questioned the corporative/colonialist pathway toward formalization as the only way to access grants. According to the participants, formalizing means changes in their administrative structures that could limit their possibilities to include their communities in their decision-making processes. They argued that building capacity should not be a synonym for a corporative pathway to formalize their operations. Among other recommendations, they suggested addressing these issues by establishing more public dialogues and reaching their communities to include their voices in possible solutions for these limitations.



## 2. Introduction

The City of Vancouver (the City) has been advancing an Equity Framework that includes strategies and actions to promote sustainable, anti-racist, reconciliation, and decolonial practices. The City's Social Policy Division is in charge of making policy, infrastructure, and funding decisions to tackle systemic inequities following the goals and outcomes of the Healthy City Strategy. This consists of paying attention to social indicators to make decisions toward a healthier, more equitable, and safer city for all people in Vancouver.

Grassroots organizations are well known for their direct impact on the needs and interests of people in equity-denied groups (Hornung et al., 2020; McKnight, 2013). However, research has shown that formalized non-profit organizations (NPOs) benefit more from grants than those more informally organized at the community level (Hornung et al., 2020; Submittable, 2022). This project aims to understand how the City can better foster broader community well-being by supporting community organizing practices. To this end, the City's objectives are:

- Defining the scale, nature, and role of grassroots community organizing (GCO)<sup>1</sup> in addressing the needs and interests of the City's communities.
- Developing a preliminary assessment of the degree to which the City's social policy grants currently support grassroots organizations versus larger formalized NPOs.
- Identifying unique and critical community benefits that may be compromised by the City not directly supporting GCO practices.
- Identifying how the City might better address the needs of equity-denied groups by directing more of its support directly to grassroots organizations, whether via grants or other mechanisms.

This report consists of 5 sections that will address the following questions:

1. How does the City define GCO?
2. How can the Social Policy Grants team more systematically identify and connect with grassroots organizations in the City to support them better?

Section 2 frames this study's background and scope by providing a picture of how GCO is defined in the literature and identifying general methodological criteria to operationalize this term.

Section 3 describes the methods utilized to develop a working definition of this term for the City

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<sup>1</sup> We are using "grassroots community organizing" (GCO) as a term that describes grassroots organizations' functioning; as an activity through which these organizations establish relationships with their communities given their nature and characteristics. It is defined as GCO considering several criteria suggested in the literature and by this study's participants' voices. While the literature usually refers to grassroots organizations, the reference to the community in the term GCO emphasizes the relationship between GOs and the communities they serve.

to guide its policy and funding decisions. Section 4 shows the findings in detail, while sections 5 and 6 recommend and discuss future actions for the City to identify, connect with, and support GCO practices.

### 3. Study's Background

The City's Social Policy Division is interested in examining how its current granting practices impact organized activity that directly responds to its communities' particular needs and interests. Research indicates that formalized NPOs usually receive more support and higher amounts of grant funding than those organizing at the community level (Hornung et al., 2020; McKnight, 2013). However, the structure, sources of authority, and functioning of more formalized NPOs have been questioned in the literature. For example, McKnight (2013) argued that formalized NPOs are usually characterized by hierarchical relationships among paid members or employees. This structure leads them to perform based on specialized knowledge provided by professionals and experts, which may exclude the communities they intend to serve from decision-making processes.

The City aims to explore if its granting practices follow the pattern found in the literature, preventing grassroots organizations, especially those from equity-seeking groups, from accessing these resources. Finding a term to define the diverse nature of GCO as an activity requires a method that captures the specific contexts shaping grassroots organizations' functioning. In this study, a literature review was conducted to identify the methods utilized in previous research to construct a GCO working definition that builds on the City's community leaders' voices. The following sub-sections focus on framing this term by considering research findings and criteria suggested by academic and practitioner discussions. First, section 2.1. examines the literature defining GCO as an activity performed by grassroots organizations shaping particular relationships with the communities they serve. Then, section 2.2 expands on the methodological criteria usually reported in the literature to identify GCO. In sections 2.3. and 2.4., GCO role in general and BC contexts is examined. This review informs the preliminary methodological criteria this study used to identify GCO practices within the City.

#### 3.1. Defining GCO: A way to frame grassroots organizations' activity

The complexity of the non-profit sector challenges researchers, funders, policymakers, and stakeholders in their attempt to come up with a unique concept defining this sector's scope, nature, and activities (Hornung et al., 2020; McCabe & Mayblin, 2010; Mohan et al., 2010; Soteri-Proctor & Alcock, 2012). In practice, the variety of terms describing non-government and non-profit activities that support communities makes bounding the sector even more complicated. Yet, academic and policy discussions acknowledge the importance of recognizing differences between informal and formal non-profit organizations, their activities, and their capacity to



respond to particular communities' needs (Dean, 2019; McCabe & Mayblin, 2010; Soteri-Proctor & Alcock, 2012). Some authors consulted for this study define unregistered groups' activities as informal, given their lack of legal status as charities or non-profits. However, McCabe and Mayblin (2010) argue that defining these groups and their activity based only on their legal formalization could leave behind operations from small organizations registered as non-profits to access funds. Therefore, criteria like finances, resources, administrative functioning, leadership, and organization's role in their communities are usually considered to identify GCO practices. According to Soteri-Proctor and Alcock (2012), the boundaries between formal and informal non-profit sectors should not be firmly established, as organizations tend to move between informality and formality. Moreover, an organized activity could shape hybrid bodies that may impact communities' primary interests and needs but no longer operate under the informal-unregistered model. Following Soteri-Proctor and Alcock (2012) approach, rather than categorically classifying grassroots organizations versus formalized NPOs, this study focuses on defining GCO as an activity shaping specific relationships between the organizations and their communities.

The theoretical debates about the sector's boundaries lead to empirical challenges to operationalizing GCO and ways to measure its impact. Only a small number of studies outlined a general term to define the activity held by informal organizations working at the community level, and these studies were conducted mainly in the UK (i.e., Hornung et al., 2020; McCabe & Mayblin, 2010; Mohan et al., 2010; Soteri-Proctor & Alcock, 2012). Most of the research providing a picture of North American and the Global South<sup>2</sup> contexts (e.g., Bucklaschuk, 2018; Dumitrica & Bakardijeva, 2020; Hart et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2021) referred to specific kinds of grassroots organization's activity, such as community organizing practices held by cultural identity groups, Indigenous communities, rural producers associations, refugee and immigrant organizations, among others. In general, unregistered organizations with minimal financial resources are usually conceptualized as below-the-radar, grassroots organizations, or community-based associations, among the different terms found in the literature (McCabe & Mayblin, 2010; McKnight, 2013).

Given the diversity of organized activity created by and impacting communities' particular needs and interests, other authors recognized the importance of developing innovative methods to identify GCO scale and role in their communities based on the organizations' local operations (Mohan et al., 2010; Soteri-Proctor & Alcock, 2012). In other words, these authors recommend shaping working definitions of this term that portray each context's demands by following

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<sup>2</sup> This term is usually used to refer to regions in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania.

general methodological criteria. The next section summarizes typical methodological approaches to defining and mapping GCO.

### 3.2. Methodological approaches to define GCO

The literature reviewed for this study suggests several criteria to define GCO. These criteria have been defined by building in different methodological approaches that identify general features shaping GCO nature and role in promoting communities' wellbeing. Specifically, this study recognized four criteria that draw on four approaches to distinguish grassroots organizations' activity from more formalized NPOs' operations. Not all the literature consulted used these four criteria together to define GCO. However, most research findings seem to report general patterns that could be synthesized into four aspects to distinguish differences within the non-profit sector's operations. The methodological approaches focused on differentiating organizations' nature define GCO by establishing binary classifications between informal activity performed by unregistered groups operating with meager budgets at the community level and formal NPOs operations. These approaches define GCO by classifying organizations according to their legal and/or financial statutes first and then describing their functioning as follows:

1. Defining GCO by classifying organizations according to their **legal status**, where GCO is the activity held by unregistered groups.
2. Defining GCO by classifying organizations according to their **financial status**, where GCO is the activity held by organizations that operate with low budgets.<sup>3</sup>

The other two methodological approaches found in the literature to define GCO are more focused on understanding organizations' functioning and role in their communities as follows:

3. Defining GCO by recognizing organizations' **governance or administrative functioning**<sup>4</sup>, which usually builds on the first two criteria (legal status and financial resources) to add another layer to define GCO better and compare it with big-scale NPOs' functioning.
4. Defining GCO by recognizing organizations' **role in their communities**<sup>5</sup>, which also builds on the first two criteria (legal status and financial resources) to add another layer to define GCO better and compare it with big-scale NPOs' operations role in the communities they serve.

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<sup>3</sup> Organizations that usually spend less than \$15000 per year to implement their operations (Hornung et al., 2020; McCabe & Mayblin, 2010). These studies were conducted mainly in the UK. More research is needed to calculate this threshold better for the City's case. For this reason, this aspect should not be considered alone to identify GOs.

<sup>4</sup> Grassroots organizations tend to work with volunteers who identify the issues of concern for them, implement solutions and take decisions horizontally, whereas NPOs work with paid staff holding authority positions and making decisions hierarchically.

<sup>5</sup> An example of GCO's role in the community's well-being could be promoting mutual support and cultural understanding among multicultural and single cultural identity groups.

These criteria should not be understood as fixed boundaries shaping isolated categories (e.g., grassroots organizations and/or formalized NPOs). Instead, Soteri-Proctor and Alcock (2012) suggest understanding the non-profit sector as a continuum in constant movement and interaction with the social fabric shaped by and shaping these organizations. Continuous research is also suggested in the literature to register this movement. In what follows, four general methodological approaches to define GCO are described to provide some background about the methodological decisions taken for this study.

### 3.2.1. Legal status

Most research on the differences between community-based and larger formalized NPOs practices has followed the legalistic or regulatory approach (Hornung et al., 2020; McCabe & Mayblin, 2010; Mohan et al., 2010). This approach identifies organizations' legal status using multiple methods. For example, Mohan et al. (2010) mapped what they defined as below-the-radar activity to refer to the practices of informal groups operating at the community level. They used directories and databases from local governments, universities, and private institutions in the Northern region of the UK to find organizations that were not legally registered and describe their operations.

These authors supported the idea that even quantitatively mapping below the radar activity requires local rather than national efforts and sources of information, as it could drastically vary according to the context. In view of that, they conducted small-scale surveys to provide a more detailed portrait of the kind of activity held by the unregistered groups they identified through local data sources. By classifying and describing the organizations' characteristics, resources and activities, these authors found general patterns that were valid for the area investigated. They found, for instance, that these organizations were more prominent in areas where socio-economic inequality was higher. Also, this quantitative study showed that the scale, size, and nature of registered and unregistered activity vary in terms of their financial and human resources. Registered NPOs tend to manage larger budgets and paid staff than unregistered grassroots organizations.

### 3.2.2. Financial status

More recent literature has criticized the legalistic approach by arguing that GCO could be held by registered groups, umbrella organizations, or community hubs that directly impact community well-being, connectedness, and resilience (Hornung et al., 2020; Soteri-Proctor & Alcock, 2012). Even if an organization is formally registered, its operations can still be defined as GCO given its financial status, governance/administrative functioning, and role in its community. The financial approach classifies organizations' activity according to their revenue and/or resources. This approach bases its methods on previous research demonstrating that most unregulated activity

is performed with small budgets and few resources (McCabe & Mayblin, 2010). Grant datasets or funders' public listings usually inform this kind of research, allowing the identification of both registered and unregistered activity in relation to the organizations' budgets.

Hornung et al. (2020) mapped GCO<sup>6</sup> (what they call “below the radar activity”) across the UK by drawing on a public platform for grant-making foundations to publish data about their contributions. Building on this information, these authors identified organizations that were both registered and unregistered. However, the criteria utilized to define their activity as grassroots organizing was the limited resources with which they operate. They usually perform with little and irregular funding of less than \$15,000 (Canadian dollar equivalent) per year, typically dedicated to isolated activities, like an event, building or infrastructure maintenance, and/or equipment purchase. Also, their findings suggest that grassroots organizations’ activities differ in nature and scale from the services and supports provided by large-scale NPOs.

### 3.2.3. Governance or administrative functioning

This approach considers the legalistic and financial approaches together with aspects of leadership and administration as an extra layer to distinguish GCO. The governance criteria are mainly identified when the studies’ methods combine different kinds of datasets, interviews, and surveys to understand GCO qualitatively beyond their legal and financial status (McCabe & Mayblin, 2010). McKnight (2013) recognizes that the voluntary work of members solving organizations’ primary problems collectively is the main characteristic shaping GCO. Grassroots organizations<sup>7</sup> could even vary in terms of their formality and resources; some could have long trajectories and thousands of members, while others could even lack a name. However, what makes them unique in their functioning, according to McKnight (2013), is the power of citizens pulling together by a common goal, mutual will, and commitment. This will is the genesis of mutual care and support shaping grassroots organizations’ social fabric.

Although big-scale NPOs could also require voluntary work, in this kind of organization, "the citizen usually takes on the function of a paid employee but is not paid" (McKnight, 2013, p. 5). Volunteers' role in grassroots organizations differs as they tend to assume more power in defining problems and goals, creating solutions, shaping strategies, and implementing actions to solve their problems. Volunteers in large NPOs tend to take on more menial tasks, whereas, in

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<sup>6</sup> Hornung et al. (2020) used the term below the radar (BTR) to refer to activity impacting communities’ particular interests and needs. This term is originally used in studies conducted in the UK following the legalistic approach to identify the activity of organizations that are not formally registered. Given that most recent literature has described community-based activity using criteria that go beyond the legalistic approach, in this study, the term GCO was chosen as it reflects other aspects distinguishing organizations working at the community level from the more large-scale ones.

<sup>7</sup> Associations is the term used by McKnight (2013) to define GCO.

grassroots organizations, volunteers comprise leadership and shared power. For example, McKnight (2013) describes grassroots organizations' characteristics and their members' roles as follows:

- They were generally small with face-to-face knowledge of the capacities of each member.
- They were performing their functions without pay, although they may have a paid person, such as a pastor or clerk. However, the key was that the essential work of the group was performed by unpaid.
- They [the volunteers] were taking on the power to define problems or goals.
- They [the volunteers] were taking on powers to create solutions or define actions to achieve goals.
- They [the volunteers] often took on the function of implementing the proposed solution or action so that they were the producers of the outcomes of their own planning (p. 3).

From this perspective, to operationalize GCO, researchers should pay attention to aspects such as the number of the organization's paid staff and/or working boards. The boards do not necessarily take the traditional hierarchical shape (e.g., president, vice-president, etc.). Instead, the decision-making process is led by a collective that usually establishes more horizontal relationships among the members.

#### 3.2.4. Role of GCO in the communities

Similar to the governance approach to defining GCO, other authors identified general patterns or features describing its role in the communities. Together with legalistic, financial, and governance criteria, aspects such as services and support these organizations provide to their communities are also considered in the literature. Soteri-Proctor and Alcock (2012) gave a good example of this approach by micro-mapping two small urban areas in England. These authors argued that although grassroots organizations could vary significantly even in small areas, their study found six main types of GCO practices among 58 self-organized groups that could be categorized as follows:

- Arts and music
- Multicultural and multiple faith and ethnic activities
- Niche and specialist interest
- Self-help and mutual support
- Single identity cultural, faith, and ethnic activities
- Social club-based activities

Although these activities may look similar to the ones addressed by NPOs' programs, according to these authors, many of these groups were not in receipt of any formal funding, were self-

organized, and able to generate their financial and human resources and even distribute their outcomes within their communities. Moreover, Soteri-Proctor and Alcock (2012) highlighted the role of umbrella organizations, community bricoleurs, or hubs in pulling together the resources of several groups to sustain each other and directly benefit their communities. Umbrella organizations usually take the form of community anchor organizations, which are not necessarily a single grassroots organization with a common goal or purpose, but neighborhood associations with more resources, such as paid staff, building infrastructure, and basic equipment.

These findings echo other authors' insights regarding the role of grassroots organizations in communities they serve. For example, Hornung et al. (2020) and Mohan et al. (2010) found that most of the organizations mapped through their studies were located in the UK's most economically deprived areas, suggesting a relationship between the needs of these communities and the type of associational activity led by groups of people facing inequity. Hornung et al. (2020) also found that artistic, cultural, multicultural, training, and faith are the most prominent funded activities among grassroots organizations. Similarly, McCabe and Mayblin (2010) conducted a literature review through which five GCO types were identified based on studies that focused on five categories:

- GCO held by black, minority ethnic, refugee, and immigrant organizations
- GCO held by faith-based organizations
- GCO held by tenants and residents groups
- GCO held by rural organizations
- GCO held by art-based collectives

Summarizing, artistic, ethnocultural, and faith-based groups looking for self-help, mutual support, and taking care of social and communal spaces represent some typical roles grassroots organizations have in their communities. According to the literature, these activities are usually led by people facing inequity, who identify the problems and implement possible solutions. Therefore, the activity of organizations led by equity-seeking groups promoting self and mutual support in their communities was considered as preliminary criteria to identify GCO in this study. This *role in the community aspect* is considered together with the already described legal, financial, and administrative structure criteria as preliminary parameters to identify GCO in the city. Although previous researchers did not necessarily use the four criteria altogether, interactions of these aspects are usually reported in the literature consulted.

Figure 2.1 provides examples of how these aspects can interact to practice grassroots community organizing. For example, any activity held by unregistered groups operating with minimal budgets is defined by nature as GCO. In addition, organizations' governance/administrative functioning and role in the community add another layer to



understanding the kind of associational activity led by equity-seeking groups organizing at the community level. Usually, unregistered groups operate with low budgets, and, as such, they are often volunteer-led or can pay only a few staff. These groups are reported in the literature as being led by equity-seeking groups providing self and mutual support, among other roles in the communities they serve.



Figure 2.1. Examples of interactions between the four criteria preliminary defining grassroots community organizing as an activity led by groups or organizations that meet at least two of the four criteria identified in the literature.

Most of the time, these four aspects describe unregistered groups' nature, function, and role in the communities. However, the literature suggests paying attention to aspects beyond organizations' nature (legal and financial status), such as their administrative functioning and role in their communities. Therefore, combinations of the latter two aspects are also contemplated in this study to identify GCO as a type of associational activity usually led by equity-seeking groups, making decisions based on their needs and interests. Therefore, figure 2.1 also shows that GCO could be practice by legally formalized organizations that operate with larger budgets than the ones reported by Hornung et al. (2020), McCabe & Mayblin (2010), and Soteri-Proctor and

Alcock (2012). These organizations' trajectories may represent what Soteri-Proctor and Alcock (2012) described as organizations' movement from informality to formality. This idea will be expanded later in the findings section of this document. The following section provides more examples of grassroots organizations' typical roles in their communities.

### 3.3. Grassroots organizations' roles in the communities they serve

The literature consulted for this study revealed that most studies focused on specific kinds of grassroots organizations (e.g., Cravino & Vommaro, 2018; Florian, 2018; Sams et al., 2021; Zemsky & Mann, 2008). Consistent with the findings of Hornung et al. (2020), McKnight (2013), and Soteri-Proctor and Alcock (2012), grassroots organizations facing inequity are the most reported in recent studies. For example, when searching by "Grassroots Organizations," the UBC library search engine displays 80 peer-reviewed articles for the period from June 2021 to June 2022. Of those 80, 74 documented community organizing processes addressing equity-related issues. In general, five subcategories of grassroots organizations facing inequity were identified through this search. Figure 2.2. shows the topics most frequently reported.

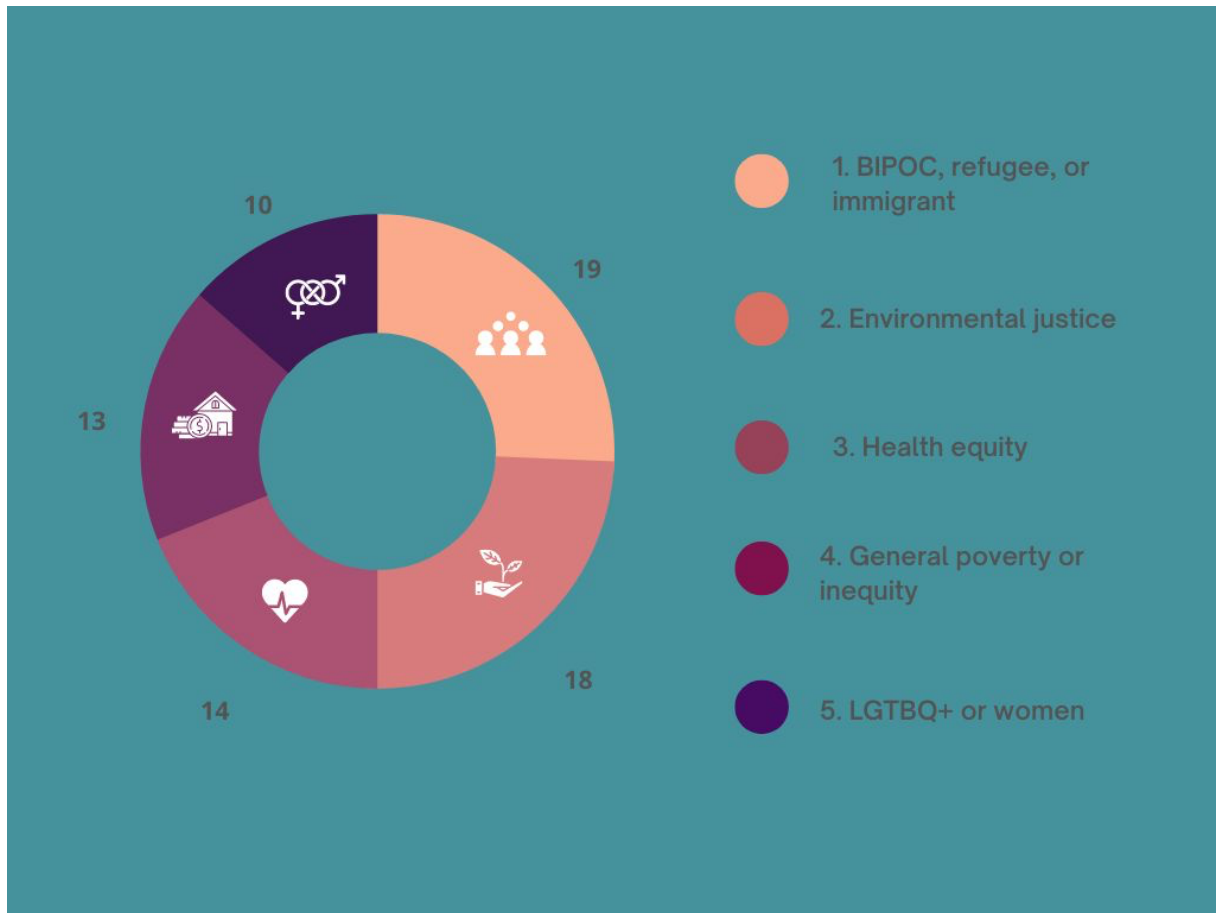


Figure 2.2. Topics reported in peer-review articles found through the UBC library search engine when searching by "Grassroots Organization" for the period June 2021-2022.

Journal articles documenting the work of black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), refugee, and immigrant organizations were the most frequent (n=19) in the literature consulted. These studies showed that grassroots organizations' activities vary, from providing services that more formal institutions do not offer to facilitating tools for advocacy and ethnocultural solidarity. For example, Gonzalez Benson (2021) revealed that refugee grassroots organizations have a wider scope of services targeting people usually neglected by work-oriented policies in the USA. Given their geographical and sociocultural proximity to the communities, these organizations tend to establish closer relationships with their members, providing emotional support, cultural understanding, and spaces for socialization. Another example of this category is given by Perone (2021), whose study focused on the role of grassroots organizations that contest anti-migrant mobilizations of populist radical right movements in Germany. This study revealed that organized activity at the community level is helping to uncover the mechanisms through which border policies oppress and racialize immigrants. Furthermore, these struggles seem to facilitate the production of discursive, advocacy, and cultural means to combat the ideology of racist groups looking for government representation.

Environmental justice organizations' efforts were the second most frequently reported in the literature (n=18). This category includes topics related to sustainable community development, tourism, and agricultural practices in rural areas. Unlike immigrant and refugee grassroots organizations, environmental justice groups were more commonly reported in studies conducted in the Global South. For example, Sarmiento et al. (2021) examined the role of organized rural communities in preserving an Ecuadorian forest through sustainable practices like ecotourism, non-traditional forest product harvest, and subsistence mining of water. A similar study conducted in Brazil demonstrated that community organizing is resisting transnational corporations applying extractive and pervasive agricultural methods that destroy ecosystems and impoverish communities through labor exploitation (Londres et al., 2021).

The work of organizations facing equity health issues also represents a frequent topic in the literature consulted (n=14). Most of these studies focused on organizations' role in promoting public health initiatives, such as sex workers' health, COVID-19 responses, and substance abuse issues in socioeconomically deprived areas. Gaydos et al. (2022) emphasized the role of these groups in prioritizing relationship building as a precursor for action to advance health equity, mutual aid hubs, distributing food, and personal protective equipment during the pandemic. Grassroots organizations that mediate between industrialized urban communities (e.g., in France, the USA, or England) and healthcare government initiatives are also frequently reported in the literature. Examples of this mediating role were provided by Giametta and Bail (2022), Grenfell et al. (2022), and Simon et al. (2021). They reported that groups organized at the grassroots level

create trust spaces that build on communities' needs and concerns to promote government programs focused on sexual health and substance abuse.

Grassroots organizations that do not necessarily work with a target group but confront poverty-related issues in socioeconomically deprived areas were also frequently reported in the articles examined (n=13). Organizations resisting poverty, organized crime, and informal settlement difficulties were mainly reported in the Global South countries. For example, Zapata Campos et al. (2022) conducted a study to understand the collective action of community organized groups in coping with infrastructure limitations in informal urban settlements in Kisumu, Kenya. Their findings suggest that organizational processes at the community level emerge to address basic infrastructural needs of their residents. Similarly, Tarlau (2021) examined grassroots organizations' role in creating nonformal educational spaces in Brazil for the communities to reflect on the structural reasons for their poverty and take organized action toward socioeconomic change.

LGBTQ+ and women-led organizations were the last category identified in the literature consulted (n=10). Scheadler et al. (2022) provided a good example of this category by demonstrating the impact of grassroots activism on LGBTQ+ people's resilience. This study showed that by engaging in grassroots' activism, their members developed a sense of belonging that facilitated identity exploration and affirmation, psychological skills, and coping strategies, among other benefits. Another study conducted in China emphasized grassroots organizations' advocacy role in promoting closer relationships and understanding between parents and LGBTQ+ children (Wei & Yan, 2021). As for women-led organizations' efforts, Aceros et al. (2021) reported similar results regarding the psychosocial benefits of grassroots activism. These authors showed that grassroots organizations' advocacy role strengthened the social ties, sense of community, opportunities for sharing stories of oppression, and psychological empowerment of domestic workers from Latin America settled in southern Spain.

The articles examined revealed that by creating opportunities for building horizontal relationships among their members and spaces of trust, grassroots organizations provide psychosocial support and facilitate coping strategies for communities' resilience. Specifically, the sense of belonging these organizations promote among community members who share stories of oppression and resistance is one feature that distinguishes their role in empowering communities to take action over the issues that affect them. Beyond creating spaces for mutual support and relationship building, grassroots organizations' role consists of unifying communities through advocacy and mediation between equity-denied groups, government institutions, and the systems of oppression shaping these power dynamics. The following section focuses on examples of grassroots organizations' roles in BC communities.

### 3.4. Role and function of GOs in BC contexts: Equity seeking groups organizing at the community level

A similar search to find examples of grassroots organizations operating in Vancouver or British Columbia was conducted through the UBC library search engine. However, the period for the date of publication was extended from June 2012 to June 2022. Again, when searching by "Grassroots Organizations," only five peer-reviewed articles were displayed. Using the categories previously defined to classify the topics found in the literature, the results of this search could be categorized as follows:

- Two articles on **health equity** issues and the role of grassroots organizations in addressing them
- One article on **environmental justice** issues and the role of grassroots organizations in addressing them
- One article on **General Poverty** issues and the role of grassroots organizations in addressing them
- One article on **LGTBQ+** issues and the role of grassroots organizations in addressing them

This search shows that more research is needed to understand the nature, role, and impact of these organizations in BC. However, the articles consulted confirmed a general pattern regarding GCO as a type of associational activity led by equity-seeking groups. For example, Mogo et al. (2020) recognized the mediator role that grassroots organizations tend to assume between families with children with disabilities and public policymakers in promoting inclusion and access through community-based leisure programs. Similarly, Jozaghi (2014) investigated the impact of a supervised smoking facility run by a grassroots organization in Vancouver DTES in preventing HIV and hepatitis and promoting wellbeing in that area.

As for the environmental justice issues addressed by grassroots organizations in BC, the article of Wittman et al. (2017) builds on their role in promoting sustainable and alternative food systems by advocating for community-based land reform. Regarding the LGTBQ+ organizations in BC, Herbert (2014) highlights their historical advocacy role in pushing *gay ski weeks* forward. The project of Loo (2019) also highlights the advocacy and mediator role of the Strathcona Property Owners and Tenants Association (SPOTA), another grassroots group operating in DTES in the 60s and 70s, promoting the rehabilitation of residential buildings. Although two of the articles cover historical vignettes, they provide relevant information that resonates with research conducted in other contexts regarding the role and impact of grassroots organizations led by equity-seeking groups. It is interesting that of the five articles about the grassroots work in BC, the only two referring to issues in Vancouver build on their role and impact on DTES.

## 4. Research Approach [Methodology]

This section synthesizes the procedures considered to answer this study's research questions, namely:

1. How does the City define GCO?
2. How can the Social Policy grants team more systematically identify and connect with grassroots organizations in the City to support them better?

The literature review for this study revealed that GCO's diverse and dynamic nature challenges researchers and practitioners to distinguish this activity from big-scale NPOs' operations. Thus, building a working definition of this term requires methodological efforts to capture the specific context dynamics shaping their activities. In this study, four preliminary criteria were identified in the literature to recognize organizations practicing GCO in Vancouver:

- Legal status (registered/no-registered)
- Financial status (low budgets)<sup>8</sup>
- Governance or administrative functioning (few paid staff, board operations led by community members)
- Role in the community (mutual support, relationship building, cultural understanding and advocacy roles)

Following the findings and methodological insights suggested in previous research, combinations of these preliminary criteria were considered to identify GCO in the City. As this is an exploratory study, using preliminary criteria had two goals:

- Identifying grassroots leaders to bring their voices and build a GCO working definition that captures the specific context dynamics shaping the activities of the groups or organizations consulted.
- Conducting a preliminary assessment of how the City has supported these organizations.

Interviews and content analysis of grant reports to Council and other documents were conducted to reach these goals. The data analyses built on the principles of content, thematic and comparative analyses in social sciences (See Greckhamer, 2020; Patton, 2002; Schreier, 2020). NVivo qualitative data analysis software was used to help systematize the outcomes. Table 3.1 summarizes how these methods and data sources help answer this study's questions.

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<sup>8</sup> As this is an exploratory study, the \$15000 mark was determined following previous research findings (Hornung et al., 2020; McCabe & Mayblin, 2010). However, these studies were conducted mainly in the UK. More research is needed to calculate this threshold better for the City's case. For this reason, this aspect should not be considered alone to identify GOs.



Table 3.1. Research questions and the data sources and methods used to answer them.

Research Question	Literature review		
	Data	Analysis	
<i>How does the City define GCO?</i>	Transcripts of the interviews	Thematic analysis	
<i>How can the Social Policy grants team more systematically identify and connect with grassroots organizations in the City to support them better?</i>	Council Grant reports and other documents	Content analysis	Comparative analysis
	Transcripts of the interviews	Thematic analysis	

#### 4.1. Interviews: Bringing community organizing leaders’ voices to define GCO

Five online interviews and one in-person interview with key informants were conducted to bring community organizers' voices and shape a GCO working definition for this study. The interviews also helped to learn about the participants' perspectives on how the Social Policy Grants team could better support their work. At first, the research team detected four key informants considering the four criteria suggested by the literature to identify GCO. Later, two more participants were identified through snowball sampling. Two different semi-structured protocols guided the conversations with the participants: One to collect information about the unregistered groups and small-scale registered organizations and another for the umbrella organizations supporting unregistered groups (See Appendixes 1 and 2). The protocol questions explored aspects such as the organization's financial and administrative structures, activities, roles, and impact on their communities. Barriers, opportunities, and suggestions to support their work were also consulted throughout the interviews.

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed using Shift eLearning content development platform<sup>9</sup>. Finally, following Patton's (2002) recommendations, thematic analysis help recognized general patterns from the interviews' outcomes using NVivo qualitative analysis software. Table 3.2 shows the name of the organizations and their classification within the GCO continuum from informal, unregistered status, to formal umbrella organizations that collaborated in this study. The other three criteria suggested by the literature to identify GCO are also exhibited to provide more information about the organizations consulted.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.shiftelearning.com/en/home>

Table 3.2. Description of GOs participating in this study, according to the criteria suggested by the literature to identify GOs

Organization	Legal status	Financial status	Administrative functioning	Role in the community
<b>1. Sliced Mango Collective</b>	Unregistered	Small budget of less than \$15000 through Arts and Culture Grants	No paid staff. Seven board members that also work as volunteer staff.	Space to empower Filipino youth (advocacy, cultural identity exploration, relationship building)
<b>2. Tulayan</b>	Unregistered	Small budget of less than \$15000 through an umbrella organization (Collingwood Neighborhood House)	No paid staff. Four board members that also work as volunteer staff.	Space to address different Filipino community needs and connections (advocacy, cultural identity exploration, relationship building, service delivery).
<b>3. Downtown Eastside SRO Collaborative Society</b>	Registered	Medium/large budget between \$250,000-\$400,000. In the last years	Five board members who represent the target group.	Improving habitability, safety and housing security in Single Room Occupancy Hotels (Service delivery, mutual support)
<b>4. Tonari Gumi</b>	Registered	Medium/large budget between \$250,000-\$400,000. In the last years	Eight paid staff who represent the target group  Eight volunteer board members who represent the target group and are not involved in administrative issues	Space for intergenerational Japanese community connection (advocacy, cultural identity exploration, relationship building)
<b>5. Hua Foundation</b>	Umbrella organization (registered)	Medium budget of less than \$250000	Three paid staff who represent the target group  Eight volunteer board members who represent the target group and are not involved in administrative issue.	Space to empower Chinese community, other groups (advocacy, cultural identity exploration, relationship building)
<b>6. Watari</b>	Umbrella organization (registered)	Large budget of more than \$400,000	24 paid staff who represent the target group. Six volunteer board members who represent the target group and are not involved in administrative issue.	Space to address different DTES community needs and empower other groups (advocacy, relationship building, service delivery).

4.2. Content analysis: Preliminary assessment of how the City has supported GCO Grant Reports from 2017 to today, and other internal documents were analyzed to assess the degree to which Social Policy Grants currently support GCO practices directly or indirectly through umbrella organizations or community hubs, such as Neighborhood Houses. Also, application forms and guidance were reviewed to identify if these instruments could improve for grassroots organizations to access these resources more easily. Specifically, the following documents were examined following content analysis principles (Schreier, 2020) and, again, using Nvivo:

- 2022 Core Support Grant Council Report<sup>10</sup>
- 2017 to 2021 Direct Social Service (DSS) and Organizational Capacity Building (OCB) reports<sup>11</sup>
- The Social Policy Non-Profit inventory
- Application guidance for Core Support
- Application form for Core Support

The Grant Reports to Council were analyzed from the most recent one to 2017 to build a sample of possible organizations that meet the preliminary criteria suggested in the literature (see Figure 2.1). At first, the amount granted by the City (financial criteria) was considered to identify organizations within the grant reports. Small grants of around \$15000 were identified to explore the recipients' websites. Although organizations could have larger budgets, small budgets were used as an initial indicator of grassroots status to point the researcher towards further information via these organizations' websites or to approach their leadership for an interview. Given that the organizations must be registered to apply for the grants examined in this study, only the financial status and administrative functioning and their role in their communities were taken into account to determine whether they were practicing GCO. Using their websites and information posted on Blumberg's Charities database<sup>12</sup>, the following aspects help distinguish if they meet at least two of the four preliminary criteria:

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<sup>10</sup> Core Support Grants combine the former Direct Social Service (DSS) and Organizational Capacity Building (OCB) <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/core-support-grants.aspx>

<sup>11</sup> 2017: <https://council.vancouver.ca/20170411/documents/a3.pdf>

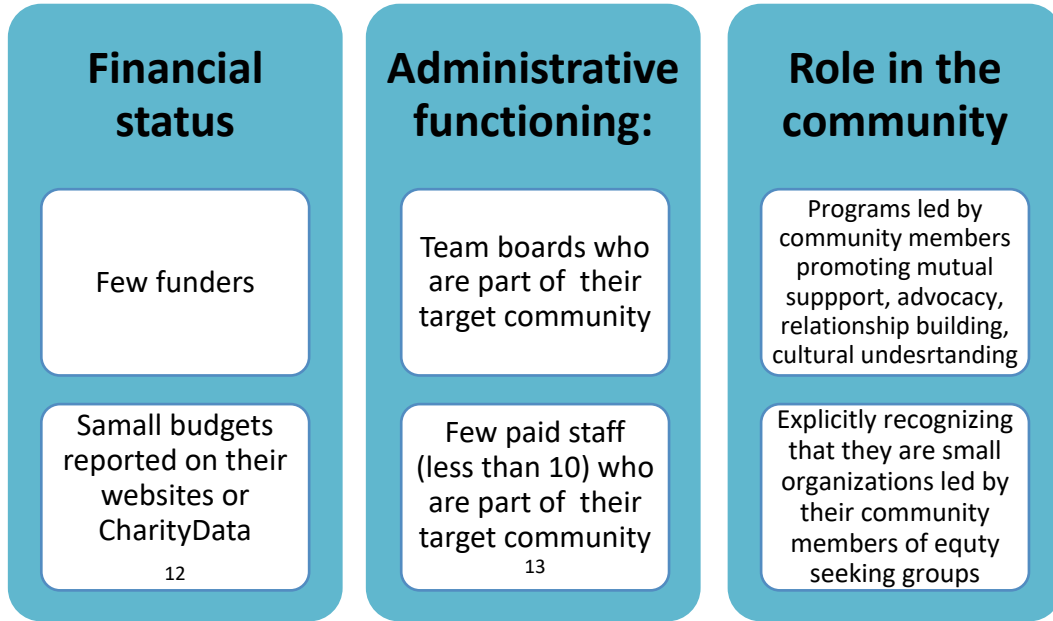
2018: <https://council.vancouver.ca/20180417/documents/a8.pdf>

2019: <https://council.vancouver.ca/20190312/documents/a3.pdf>

2020: <https://council.vancouver.ca/20200226/documents/cfsc2.pdf>

2021: <https://council.vancouver.ca/20210309/documents/r3.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.charitydata.ca>. This tool calculates budgets of \$30000 or less as a threshold between small and medium/small revenues for registered charities in Canadian contexts. However, calculating a budget specific for the City is part of this study's recommendations.



Once detected, examining how the City has supported these organizations in the past six years was the next step. Also, their budgets were confirmed using lists from the City's internal documents. Explicit mentions of the City's actions to mitigate the administrative burden to access resources and/or support community organizations were considered to understand the City's efforts based on these documents' information. Also, to learn how the City understands GCO from 2017 to today this analysis considered explicit mentions of support for:

- Equity-seeking groups
- Community organizations
- Grassroots organizations

Finally, these insights were contrasted with interviewees' perspectives regarding the same aspects.

## 5. Findings

This section structures the findings from the data sources (interview transcripts, grants reports, and other internal documents) examined to answer this study's research questions. Section 4.1 describes the nature, functioning and role in the community of the organizations consulted to help shape a working definition of GCO that better captures some of the specific context dynamics shaping their characteristics. Next, section 4.2 presents the preliminary assessment of

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<sup>13</sup> The budget criteria was just exploratory and there was no a specific amount, given the lack of research on this aspect specific for the City.

<sup>14</sup> An example of team boards or staff representing the community they serve is an organization seeking equity health conformed by sex workers organized to take action on their issues.

how the City has supported GCO in the past 6 years. Based on the interviews' outcomes, this section also focused on possible grassroots organizations' barriers and opportunities highlighted by the interviewees.

5.1. Nature, functioning, and role in the community of the organizations consulted

Considering the information this study's participants provided, this segment focus on how the four criteria interact to explain the nature, functioning and impact on their communities. These findings help answer this study's research question, namely: *How does the City define GCO?*

5.1.1. GCO's nature and functioning

The findings echo Soteri-Proctor and Alcock's (2012) argument about understanding the non-profit sector as a continuum in constant interaction with the social fabric shaped by and shaping these organizations. Instead of categorically classifying grassroots organizations versus larger NPOs, the literature suggested conceptualizing this continuum and considering GCO as a type of associational activity rather than an isolated category. category (Hornung et al., 2020; McCabe & Mayblin, 2010; McKnight, 2013; Soteri-Proctor & Alcock, 2012). The four criteria considered in this study to identify GCO help recognize the organizations' operations beyond their legal status and understand their GCO practices located in different parts of this spectrum. For example, the findings are consistent with previous research regarding the relationship between grassroots organizations' legal and financial status (Hornung et al., 2020; McCabe & Mayblin, 2010). As shown in Table 3.2, the unregistered groups consulted for this study reported operating budgets of less than \$15000. In contrast, registered and umbrella organizations reported considerably larger operating budgets. Based on the information provided by the participants, three different forms of GCO practices could be identified following the four criteria combination<sup>15</sup>:



1. Unregistered groups that operate with low budgets moving to formalization:

Undoubtedly, the combinations of **legal status** and **low unstable budgets** characterize GCO. For example, when asked about their trajectories as organizations, three of the four registered organizations consulted told stories about their processes from informality to formality. For all the organizations consulted, access to grants means moving to formality regarding their legal

<sup>15</sup> These terms were used based on the words the participants used to describe each kind organizing activity.

status and administrative functioning (board, executive team, staff, etc.). They need to build capacity in terms of staff, time, and technical knowledge to go through the complexity of the grant application processes.

When referring to the work of unregistered groups, one of the participants articulated the relationship between having funding and building capacity as follows: “*Capacity money is a really big reason why people can't dedicate more time to advance that work*”. Another participant added that building capacity means having paid staff with technical knowledge that can focus on administrative tasks:

*If there are other organizations, if they have a focused paid staff and it's their job to apply, apply for their grants, then of course they're going to do a good job and fulfill that grant application because they're getting paid for that. But none of us, have the capacity or experience to do so. And so, it takes time, right? And of course, it's all volunteer efforts.*

GCO informal activity is mainly sustained by volunteer work that makes their efforts as organizations fragile and unsustainable. Volunteers do not have the time, energy, or technical/administrative knowledge to deal with the demands of the formalization process:

*To build capacity within our community, you know, because we've been through that kind of whole trajectory and jumped through all the hoops of, you know, grant writing and all those types of things (...) And then our capacity building portfolio is kind of the one that was kind of mentioning where we are trying to formalize, it's been kind of done, you know, off the side of our desks over the course of the last few years. But basically, we're trying to formalize the structure to make it easier to, you know, whether it's like building out resources that you know, we can share with others in terms of like, you know, how do you formalize.*

The complexity of this trajectory was clearly articulated by all the participants. For informal unregistered groups, building capacity requires volunteer time and effort to access grants. Getting funding to build capacity demands formalization, which needs the resources such as paid staff who can dedicate full time to the administrative tasks this process entails. Figure 4.1 illustrates the continuum from informality to formality by showing the organization's locations in this continuum according to their capacity to sustain their operations.



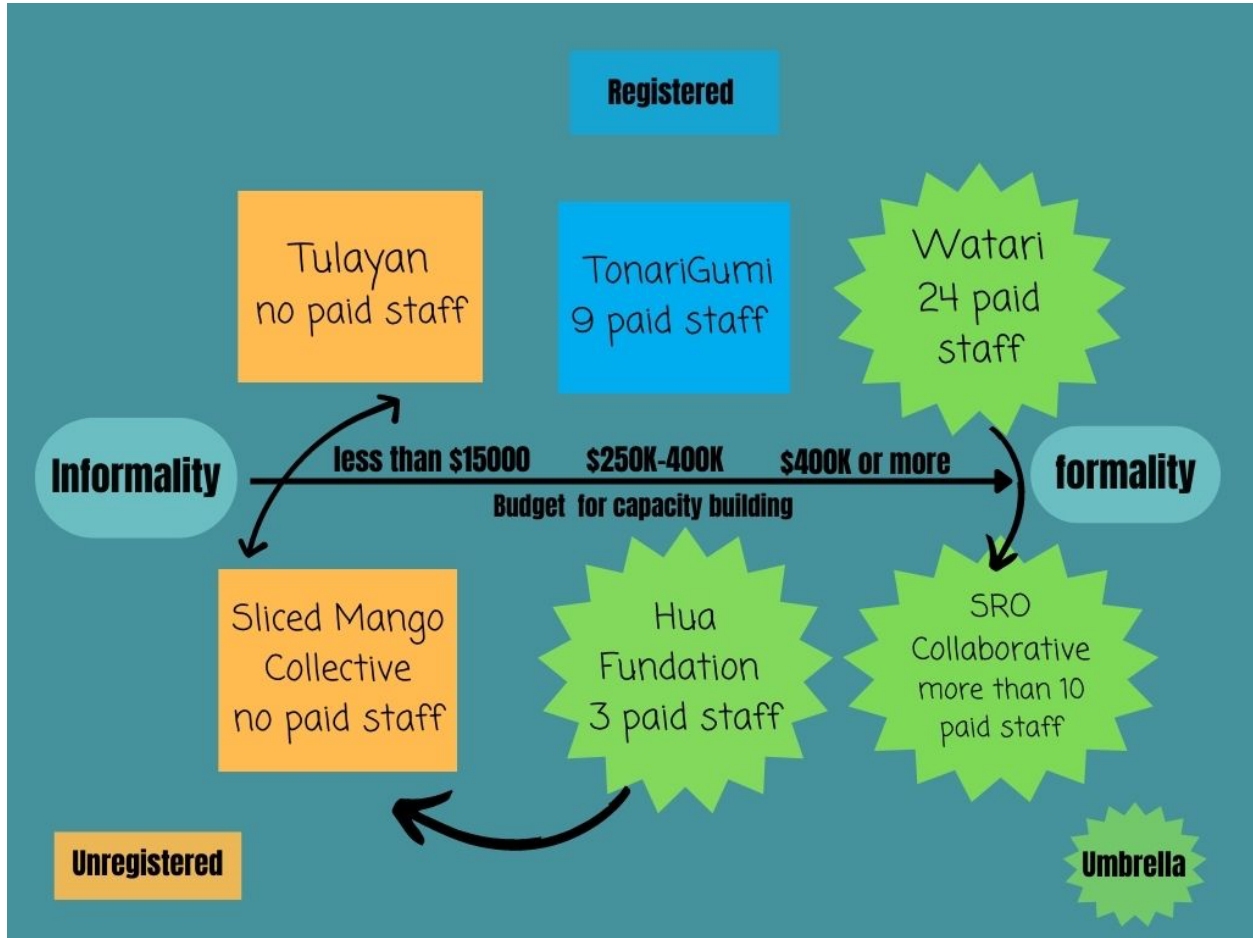


Figure 4.1. Continuum from informality to formality and the organizations' locations in this line. The arrows indicate mutual support between unregistered groups and umbrella organizations.

## 2. Registered organizations that operate with larger budgets practicing GCO:

This study's findings also resonate with previous research regarding the role of registered organizations that operate with larger budgets but are structured in a way that they serve their communities similarly to unregistered groups (Hornung et al., 2020; McKnight, 2013; Soteri-Proctor & Alcock, 2012). Therefore, the criteria about the governance or administrative functioning and their role in the communities they serve were considered to illustrate GCO activity located in different parts of the continuum from informal to formal operations. As for the registered organization consulted, the criteria of **few paid staff** (administrative functioning) compared with larger NPOs was considered to define this organization's activities as GCO. Also, they defined themselves as a grassroots organization because of their **relationship or role in their community**. One of the participants described this relationship as follows:

*When they come into the center they will talk with somebody, somebody will talk to them because it's so small that you won't go unnoticed, somebody will notice that*

*you walked in (...) I think sometimes like a larger organization feels like it's an organization to funnel funding to do programs or events or something like that. Whereas for us, our main purpose, it still feels like we're here to serve, so we're not a professional fundraiser, we never got to be there because our focus is always on helping people, whether it be with recreational things or supporting them with their day to day living.*

This comparison between small and large NPOs is consistent with McKnight's (2013) categorization of GCO, who argued that larger organizations work as corporations and are radically different from grassroots organizations "in structure, sources of authority, incentives, and knowledge base" (p.3). Large NPOs are legally controlled by a few and conformed by paid employees using specialized knowledge to perform their functions, while grassroots organizations build on the experience and knowledge of their community members.

Most participants criticized the idea of formalizing by taking the shape of a business corporation. They argued that it is expected that their associations follow a corporative/colonialist pathway as if it was the only way to administrate their alliances and resources.

*A lot of like nonprofit governance structures and training and a lot of those types of things were just adopted from a very corporate structure and that doesn't necessarily translate super well into a community sense, right? And so a lot of time you'll see, you know, it's like a very standard, you know, president of the, of the board and the secretary treasurer and like very standardized roles and those types of things. And a lot of that is just kind of adopted into every organization just because it's expected of us, (...) that's kind of been a limitation in the last of a while, where communities that may be less organized or less formally organized don't necessarily have roots to be involved in those types of traditional, more colonial systems.*

All the registered organizations consulted, including the umbrella ones, have adopted the legal, financial, and administrative structures expected to build capacity and sustain their operations. However, the way they keep horizontal relationships with the community by including them in their decision-making processes is essential to shaping their operations at the grassroots level.

Community members making decisions is a key feature of the administrative structure criteria describing GCO in this study (McCabe & Mayblin, 2010; McKnight, 2013; Schreier, 2020). The boards and/or staff members of all the organizations consulted are part of the communities they serve. Having staff or board members who are part of their communities is key to bringing

the community's voices in making decisions. The findings showed that this GCO particular feature is related to their impact on their communities, as their decision-making processes take place in consultation with community members. Another way to involve their community in shaping the organization's actions is articulated by one of the participants as follows:

*We just decided as a group or we consulted with other members of our community through like outreach of what they would want to see, um, like in this community. Or what does, um, this community space mean to them. So we don't really make decisions, but we more of like conduct outreach.*

As McKnight (2013) described, GOs “generally use the experience and knowledge of member citizens to perform their functions” (p.3). In this way, they build horizontal relationships with their communities and create trust spaces that foster their members’ sense of belonging. This GCO feature is essential to promote community well-being and resilience, especially among equity-seeking groups.

### **3. Umbrella organizations practicing GCO by supporting smaller unregistered groups:**

Umbrella organizations were considered in this study **because of their role in their communities**. Although umbrella organizations' administrative structure does not necessarily fit the criteria of few paid staff, such as Watari, their role in the communities they serve keeps an essential feature of GCO. Namely, the people running their programs and boards represent community members or smaller unregistered groups working within their communities in constant dialogue, identifying their needs and interests. Talking about their umbrella organization, one of the participants expressed their relationship with the community in this way:

*Talking about, you know, issues within our community, things that mean a lot to us, but it's also morphed into a lot of advocacy projects. And also we've supported a lot of other groups within our community who wanted to do other similar projects. And, so, and a lot of like workshops. Now we've done a few around, workshops and connection spaces is what we really hope to do. And so it's kind of grown into this.*

All the participants mentioned workshops or gatherings to talk about issues that matter to the community members and/or sessions to discuss tips about getting funding or building capacity together with other groups. Figure 4.1 also shows the role of umbrella organizations supporting smaller groups by:

- Facilitating workshops and/or events for smaller groups
- Administrating funding

- Providing spaces for gathering
- Facilitating processes of formalization for smaller groups
- Organizing events or activities together

One of the participants from an unregistered group highlighted the role of umbrella organizations as follows:

*I don't know, but if there was an organization that solely was responsible for admin and it would funnel through all of the work, that would still be, it's not ideal. But it would be helpful like, like for example, like Neighborhood Houses.*

According to the participants, informal organizations should develop their capacity to administrate their own functions. However, umbrella organizations seem to represent an interim solution to reduce unregistered groups volunteer burnout and support them in their trajectories towards formalization and/or access to resources. To better understand GCO as an associational activity, the next section will expand on the GCO role in the participants' communities.

#### 5.1.2. Role of GCO in the participants' communities

The findings are consistent with the literature regarding the role and impact the organizations consulted have on their communities facing inequity. Although large-scale NPOs could address inequity issues, GCO's responsive nature to the communities' needs and interests distinguishes this type of associational activity (Hornung et al., 2020; Mohan et al., 2010). GCO's capacity to mobilize resources in socioeconomically deprived areas and in times of crisis is related to the particular way equity-seeking groups lead actions to confront their issues. Thus, GCO is led and shaped by the groups facing inequity, whose actions build on the community members' efforts and experiences. Large-scale corporative NPOs, in contrast, could exclude the communities from their decision-making processes, as they tend to establish hierarchal relationships among their board members, paid staff, and sources of knowledge (McKnight, 2013).

Large organizations that follow a corporate structure tend to rely on specialized technical knowledge, which could shadow the communities' sources of information. Instead, all the organizations consulted are conformed by community members and make decisions in consultation with them. Their motivation to get together comes from their needs and interests as members of their communities. One of the umbrella organizers described their relationship with the community as follows:

*We have created our programs based on what the community asks us (...) our staff or volunteers leading the programs, all of them have experienced the issues they are working on (...) It is that experience that articulates the needs, the understanding... we all here are community organizers.*

By taking the lead in articulating their problems, all the organizations consulted have created trust spaces for:

- Mutual support and service delivery
- Dialogue and relationship building
- Cultural understanding and identification
- Community empowerment and advocacy

These GCO positive roles in the communities are all related to each other but could be categorized to provide a better picture of the impact of this type of associational activity on the participants' communities. Appendix 3 summarizes these GCO outcomes articulated by the participants.

All the participants highlighted the role of these spaces in promoting horizontal **relationships** as their primary goal. As one of the participants described their gatherings:

*There's a lot of energy a lot of times in those types of spaces (...) It's not just like a one-off contract or like an individual project that they are kind of assigned to, they complete and are done, but like really um to try and build out that network for folks to keep coming back and to stay within the community, and to care for each other and maintain our relationships because we really see the value of relationship building and how it's made.*

Building relationships by sharing stories of oppression and resistance in these spaces promote a sense of belonging among their participants. This is crucial for equity-seeking communities' resilience, as the psychosocial effect of feeling emotionally connected to others facilitates coping strategies.

Feeling **identified** with a community empowers its members to assume an active role in solving their problems. This active role leading to **advocacy** or activism is described by one of the participants as follows:

*We are talking about equity-seeking groups being on the table. Or... are we asking for a bigger table, or are we making our own table? You know, that's why advocacy or activism it all comes hand in hand, and you know, we can't be apathetic about it because again, there's there's so many of us, we have all those barriers to break.*

Having a space to connect and feel identified facilitates the possibility for community members to speak out and articulate their needs, interests, and solutions to address their issues. Five participants referred to this empowerment process as organically occurring as their organizations change with the transformation they actively promoted in their communities. These findings

suggest that GCO could open the possibilities for social change led by the groups that have been historically and systematically oppressed. Figure 4.2 shows the four roles of GCO in the participants' communities. The next section presents the GCO working definition that builds on this study's findings and participants' voices.



Figure 4.2. Community empowerment process through the four GCO roles in the participants' communities.

### 5.1.3. GCO working definition

The working definition of GCO this study is shaping consists of conceptualizing organizations' associational activity. The organizations that participated in this study helped identify three types of associational activity that could be located in different locations of the continuum from informality to formality by using the four criteria suggested by the literature (legal status, financial status, administrative functioning, and role in the community). Although organizations could advance in their formalization process, it does not mean that their role and relationships with the community must change radically. On the contrary, supporting them to build capacity and make their work more sustainable could foster broader community well-being. Even when organizations are registered and manage larger budgets, their administrative/governance

functioning could foster horizontal relationships with the communities they serve. The constant dialogue grassroots organizations maintain with their communities makes them responsive to their needs, which at the same time shape their functioning. One of the participants describes how their organization changes as the community changes as follows:

*We've changed with the community, if the community says we should do this or this, then we do it (...) It has changed, it has changed a lot. In the past, it only focused on counseling. I was the one who started the outreach. Then, I started to bring people to the office, and everyone was scared that I brought too many people (...) And then, we started with the community kitchens and the communitarian gatherings.*

All the participants mentioned means to involve their communities in their organizations' decision-making processes. As a result, they bring their communities' voices to shape their operations, even when their locations in the formality continuum are consolidated.

These findings suggest that the combination of unregistered legal status and low budgets of less than \$15000 per year definitely define grassroots organizations activity. As organizations formalize, they could change their administrative functioning and, therefore, their relationship with their community. The more organizations involve their communities' knowledge in their decision-making processes, as staff or board members, and/or through outreach mechanisms, the more their practices could be defined as GCO. Most of the participants distinguish between what they identified as informal groups and registered organizations. One of the participants articulated their mutual support with unregistered groups as follows:

*We organize together, and we do many things altogether (...) Organizations and groups, they are groups, because they are... many of the groups are not registered organizations or they are not registered with the municipality, and others do.*

Based on this conceptualization, three kinds of associations practicing GCO could be recognize within the informality/formality continuum:

1. **Unregistered groups** that operate with low irregular budgets.<sup>16</sup>
2. **Registered organizations practicing GCO** that operate with larger and more stable budgets to pay few paid staff (less than ten according to this study's evidence)<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> The Charity Data tool consulted for this study calculates budgets of \$30000 or less as a threshold between small and medium revenues for registered charities in Canadian contexts. However, a better calculation for the City is part of the recommendations of this study.

<sup>17</sup> This could also be recalculated once a "low budget" amount for the City is determined.



3. **Umbrella organizations** operating with larger budgets to pay for more staff but clearly practicing GCO supporting smaller unregistered groups. Figure 4.3 visualize these distinctions.



Figure 4.3. Continuum from informality to formality and the locations for the different kind of organization practicing GCO.

For registered and umbrella organizations practicing GCO, their activity could be identified by paying attention to the number of paid staff and board members representing the communities and their mechanism to involve them in their decision-making processes. Examples of GCO practices are hiring staff from the target groups to run the programs or consulting their communities through social media or regular gatherings. Examples of GCO practices of umbrella organizations are:

- Hiring staff from the target groups to run the programs
- Consulting their communities through social media or regular gatherings
- Organizing workshops, events, and activities with unregistered groups
- Administrating funding

- Providing spaces for gatherings
- Facilitating process of formalization for unregistered groups.

This conceptualization of GCO informs the preliminary assessment of the degree to which the City's Social Policy grants currently support grassroots organizations versus larger corporative NPOs. The next section expands on this assessment.

## 5.2. Preliminary assessment of the degree to which the City's Social Policy grants currently support GCO

This section shows the findings from the analyses conducted to learn how the City has supported GCO in the last six years. These results build on the internal documents content analysis and the participants' perspectives about how the City has supported their organizations. This section begins to answer this study's second research question: *How can the Social Policy grants team more systematically identify and connect with GOs in the City to support them better?*

### 5.2.1. The City initiatives supporting GCO

This section structures the findings based on the content analysis conducted to detect explicit mentions of the City's actions to mitigate the administrative burden to access resources and/or support community organizations. Also, to start learning about how the City understands GCO from 2017 to today, this study considered explicit mentions to supporting:



- **Support to equity-seeking groups**

Based on the documents examined, the City has been supporting equity-seeking groups since at least 2014, when the council adopted policies such as the Healthy City Strategy and the City of Reconciliation Framework. Explicit mentions to support Indigenous peoples, women, LGBTQ+ groups, immigrants, or community organizations through, for example, Community Services Grants (CS) or Neighbourhood Operating Grants, were found in the documents from 2017 to today examined. These grants have been recommended following different Healthy City goals and Council priorities that explicitly declared the City's commitment to supporting these groups in achieving equity. For example, the 2017 Community Services and Other Social Grants report explicitly mentioned that CS grants took an intersectional view to guide the City's staff in making decisions:

*In the past staff have reported on the primary population served by each program receiving a Community Services grant. The challenge with this approach is that it suggests that social issues and the populations impacted are singular rather than multi-faceted. For example a person served by a program that identifies as Aboriginal may also be a youth, LGTBQ2S and/or have a mental illness etc. To address this issue staff are taking a more intersectional approach to assessing how grant funding is supporting different population groups and social challenges. (CS and other Grants Council Report, 2017, Appendix 3, p.1)*

This perspective has been translated into funding initiatives to support groups whose access to social, economic and cultural resources have been denied. Thus, by following different priorities and frameworks, the City has declared its commitment to support NPOs addressing inequity in the City.

- **Community organizations**

The City is also clear that community organizations have been essential in addressing Vancouverites' needs, interests, and wellbeing since at least 2014 with the adoption of the Healthy City Strategy. However, in the 2017 Report, the only explicit mention of these organizations is related to the implementation of the Food Strategy:

*Facilitating the achievement of the Vancouver Food Strategy goals and targets through grants supporting **community organizations** that build coalitions of individuals, agencies and businesses to work collaboratively to achieve food systems goals; and empowering residents including school staff, children, and youth to engage in their food system. (CS and other Grants Council Report, 2017, p.6)*

This commitment was translated into supporting 14 Sustainable Food Systems Grants that year, but not necessarily community organizations working on different issues. Therefore, considering what is explicit in the documents examined, it seems that by then, the City had a different understanding of the terms "community organization" and "NPOs" working with equity-seeking groups.

Later, from 2018 to 2020, the term *community organizations* seems to apply to a broader spectrum of social issues in the Grants Council Reports:

*Social Policy Grants further Healthy City Strategy goals by providing operating and capital funding to non-profit organizations to: (...) Enhance the ability **of community organizations** to successfully address social issues and bring about positive social change. (CS and other Grants Council Report, 2018, p.3)*

In those reports, beyond the food systems, the City reported having recommended one Organizational Capacity Building (OCB) grant for a program that explicitly mentioned supporting community organizations to enhance their operations. This program was part of a large-scale NPO called Disability Alliance BC Society<sup>18</sup>.

In the 2021 report, the City also recommended 15 Social Policy Small Capital Grants and Social Policy Medium-Large Capital Grants “to community organizations to deliver programs and services in safe and appropriate facilities” (CS and other Grants Council Report, 2021, p. 4). Later, the 2022 report mentioned, for the first time, supporting community organizations “to stabilize operational funding and to reduce the administrative burden” (Core Support Council Report, 2022, p. 6) through the Multi-Year Funding (MYF). From 2017 to 2022, the City’s explicit mentions of supporting community organizations increased, suggesting changes in their understanding of community organizing and/or GCO and how to foster these practices.

- **Grassroots organizations**

It wasn’t until 2021 that explicit mention of supporting **grassroots** community organizations emerged. In the 2021 Grants Council Report, the City announced that they recommended an OCB grant<sup>19</sup> that:

*Brings together **grassroots community organizations** in the Filipino community to identify common goals and develop short and longer term plans for a cohesive approach to addressing this diverse community’s needs. (CS and other Grants Council Report, 2021, Appendix D, p.1)*

According to the terms adopted in this study’s GCO working definition, these Filipino organizations can be defined as **unregistered groups**. This report documented the first time that the City used the term *grassroots community organizations* to refer to unregistered groups supported through an **umbrella organization** (the Collingwood Neighbourhood House Society).

On July 20, 2021, the City Equity framework was adopted. According to the last two grant reports examined (2021 and 2022), it seems that the adoption of this policy affected the City’s approach to the work and role of grassroots organizations in their communities. The Core Support Council Report published in 2022 mentions larger support<sup>20</sup> to another **unregistered**

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<sup>18</sup> Details about this organization can be found at CharityData <https://www.charitydata.ca/charity/disability-alliance-bc-society/106777758RR0001/>

<sup>19</sup> They recommended \$8000 for these unregistered group.

<sup>20</sup> They recommended \$80000 for these unregistered group.

**group** (Moccasin Mafia) through a different **umbrella organization** (Watari). The description of this program explicitly states some of the GCO roles identified through this study:

*Supported by Watari, Moccasin Mafia is a grassroots outreach program in Vancouver that reaches people who are highly isolated due to systemic and COVID factors. A team of peers delivers food and provides support to urban Indigenous people experiencing homelessness during the evening when most services are closed. The flexibility of this program allows the team to support the community in a variety of ways including: relationship building; referral to resources; information sharing re: Covid and safety; supporting young people struggling to survive in the DTES to return to their home communities; and, advocacy. (Core Support Report, 2022, p. 9)*

Mutual support, relationship building, cultural understanding, and advocacy can be identified in this description. Although the differences between *community organizations* and *grassroots community organizations* are unclear in the last two reports, the support for both is more explicit.

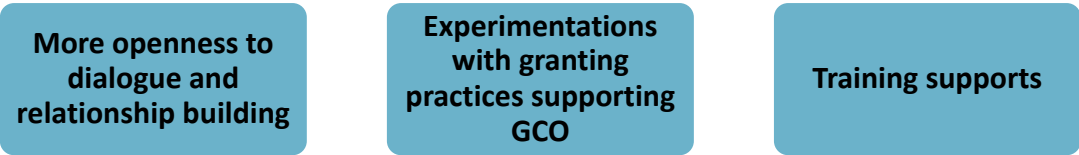
In addition, changes in the application procedures and intake periods are mentioned as a way to decolonize the granting process. These changes are even clearer in the Core Support Grants Information Guide, which states that the primary function of the transformation of the granting practices is to eliminate barriers to ensure more equitable access to the City's resources. The application guidance clarifies that organizations that focus on fostering community organizing, advocacy, mutual support, and empowerment of smaller groups are encouraged to apply. Moreover, the eligibility criteria urge unregistered groups to partner with other organizations to access grants. Regarding the application form for the Core Support, the questions are relatively simple and ask about partnerships and associations with other organizations. Still, it could be time-consuming and complex for unregistered groups or small organizations with few staff members dealing with volunteer burnout.

Through these documents, The City shows its commitment to eliminating barriers for equity-seeking groups to access grants and build capacity as organizations. After adopting the Equity Framework in 2021, these initiatives are more explicit regarding the importance of supporting GCO. The four GGO roles in the communities identified through this study have been endorsed or encouraged through the granting practices or application processes. However, it is not clear, based on the documents, how the City understands this term. Appendix 4 shows a sample of organizations that seem to practice GCO, given the type of associational activity they reported on their websites. The four criteria defined in this study to identify GCO for each organization are also presented. This sample confirms that the City has supported the GCO of

registered small-medium organizations since at least 2017. However, the last two years have been relevant for smaller organizations that have been recommended for grants, such as Black Women Connected, Afro Van Connect Society, and BC Coalition of Experiential Communities Association. The next section brings the participants' voices regarding the City's initiatives and supports.

5.2.2. Participant’s perspectives on how the City has supported GCO

The grant reports and other documents examined confirmed that the City is committed to advancing its Equity Framework by supporting CGO practices. Although according to the documents examined, the City explicitly funded unregistered groups through umbrella organizations for the first time in 2021, registered organizations practicing GCO have been supported since at least 2017. In addition, funding for umbrella organizations has been recommended before 2021. However, their role as administrators of unregistered groups has been explicitly promoted until the last two years. These changes in the City’s approach to GCO were noticed by this study’s participants, who mentioned actions such as:



- **More openness to dialogue and relationship building**

The participants mentioned having noticed changes in how the City approaches their communities and organizing efforts. All of them recalled moments of interaction or conversations with the City staff, signaling that there is more openness to listening to their needs and interests. For example, one of the participants articulated their interactions with the City as follows:

*I think that's something that we've seen that's been exciting, and the trajectory that the City has been moving towards, is really being open to a little bit more exploration and experimentation on how they work with communities. For example, with the recent Vancouver plan engagement and stuff like that, we had some, myself but some, my colleague had some good discussions with folks on that team about, you know, like how do we make sure that we can pay individuals for their work.*

It was evident from the interviewees' perspectives that the City has been paying attention to their needs. For example, volunteer burnout is one of the main barriers reported by unregistered groups. Beyond the grant initiatives launched in the last two years discussed in the previous sections, the City is encouraging and supporting umbrella organizations to

administrate and facilitate capacity-building opportunities for these groups. However, the application process is reported still to be intimidating and time-consuming, especially for smaller organizations facing inequity:

*The way that the applications are made is kind of like, you know, of course like, you know, trying to tell a white person, you know and explain what you need or even trying to put it down on a computer. It's like a young person is going to have to translate that (...) it's intimidating. It's like Western and it's intimidating. And then you will not (...) I think if we felt empowered and supported it would be, it would be a lot different because everybody always has their idea (...) they always say the City of Vancouver Grant team is very open to questions and stuff, but we're not speaking the same language and it's very intimidating.*

All the participants criticized the colonialist structure of the formalization process. It is common that when working with equity-denied groups, Western institutions, especially from the Global North, have tended to patronize or lecture non-Western groups about what is assumed to be universal (Dengler & Seebacher, 2019). Although this might not be the case, the City must consider how these dialogues with diverse communities are established and how to foster intercultural understanding. The discussion section expands on how the City could avoid patronizing attitudes when interacting with ethnically racialized people.

- **Experimentations with granting practices to support GCO**

The participants also appreciate the last City's efforts to experiment with granting practices to support unregistered groups or small registered organizations to build capacity. Among the supports mentioned they highlighted Arts and Culture grants and contracts to serve as language translators or cultural mediators to promote Healthy City strategies:

*We do as I mentioned, do a little bit of revenue generating, like consulting work and that's generally, you know like the city of Vancouver, we have an established relationship with the City in terms of like, we know quite a few staff in different departments and we have done a little bit of work in terms of um engaging specifically with like non-English speaking communities and because we've done that with some departments, sometimes other departments will reach out to ask if we want to do something similar for like a project or a plan that's forthcoming.*

The relationship of these groups with the City and its approach to community organizing seem to be moving towards more support to GCO. Still, the participants expressed that



unstable sources of funding do not alleviate their volunteer burnt out. Talking about this issue, one participant commented:

*As the City has built out their operational and capacity building grants, it does open up a little bit more, but that is, has been quite a major limitation for ourselves and it's something that we're still working through and trying to like, you seek out funding for ourselves, you know?*

The participants noticed that the City is moving towards supporting their capacity building. However, their limitations are still preventing the sustainability of their work. Partnership with umbrella organizations is a good way to solve this problem in the meantime. Yet, all of them expressed the necessity to find ways to fund them without necessarily adjusting to the corporative/colonialist formalization process.

- **Training support**

Training and workshops were the last kind of support mentioned by the participants. They all appreciated this initiative and expressed the workshops are useful. Especially for the registered organizations consulted:

*I was very fortunate to come across and have to, have a conversation with Vantage Point, that City of Vancouver works very closely with and when I was having a conversation with a staff about my concerns with the board. And they suggested a training, (...) and then also, to tweak it for an ethnic minority group and that's why this was made possible. But otherwise, I don't know where to look for this training because I'm not an HR specialist. And my main concern is more training for my staff not ready, and the board. So it was, it was a blessing that I came across this and it happened.*

Training and information about how to navigate administrative and legal structures are definitely helpful to push the organizations toward a more specialized/corporative functioning to sustain their resources. However, most interviewees expressed that their organizations' associational activities and ways of organizing do not necessarily fit those patterns. So, they feel obligated to transform decision-making processes and ways to organize with the community to adjust to those models:

*It's ok, but most of this training has colonialist principles. And they are, they are focused on Western organizations (...) From the moment your board, your directors, you can't pay them, you can't do this or that. This is already colonialism (...) The*

*boards, unfortunately, you can't tell them, come, and be our board! And it's because that person needs to survive.*

For all the participants, adjusting to what is required to formalize and get funding represents a cultural shift. GCO is characterized by the horizontal relationships among community members making collective decisions. Therefore, transforming from listening to the community to shaping boards with few people legally controlling the organizations prevents them from continuing practicing GCO. The registered organizations consulted have dealt with these constraints by including community members on their boards and staff. However, the legal and administrative structures they must follow may affect the spontaneity of the associations occurring at the grassroots levels, most of the time responding to inequity. The next section synthesizes these barriers and recommends possible ways for the City to address these issues.

## 6. Recommendations for the City to better support GCO

The finding sections elaborated on the obstacles the organizations consulted have to operating at the grassroots level. This section synthesizes what the participants considered barriers to their work and suggestions for City to address these issues. Given that GCO is an activity that could be identified in organizations functioning regardless of their legal or financial status, most of the barriers and suggestions identified apply to the three kinds of GCO found in this study. However, this section is structured in three segments to refer to specific barriers and recommendations for each of these GCO types. Table 5.1 summarizes the barriers and the participants' suggestions to address them. Notice that there are barriers and ways to face them that each type of GCO shares, given their locations in the continuum from informality to formality.

### 6.1.1. Barriers and recommendations for unregistered groups

As expected, unregistered groups reported facing more obstacles than the registered and umbrella organizations consulted. Their nature, determined by their **legal status and very low budgets**, limits their possibilities to get funding and the other way around. To advance in their pathway to formalization, they need capacity in terms of funds, time, and human resources. Supporting them through **umbrella organizations** has been a good temporary solution, but they suggested more **dialogue spaces** and the City reaching them and their communities to come up with better solutions to build capacity in their own. Also, some of their suggestions were finding legal ways to support them to build capacity, like hiring them through **contracts** or creating **special kinds of funding** for individuals<sup>21</sup> instead of organizations. This could allow them to build capacity to advance in their pathway to formalization and alleviate **volunteer burnout**.

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<sup>21</sup> They mentioned a Small Neighbourhood Grants from the Vancouver Foundation that individuals can apply to.

The grant **application processes** could be more intimidating for unregistered groups than for other organizations with more capacity. GCO usually develops in times of crisis or from the needs of communities facing inequity. Therefore, many of these groups have survived abusive relationships within the systems that oppress them. Approaching them by **listening** instead of patronizing and prioritizing **building relationships** instead of training them are some of their suggestions. Reaching them and their communities was another suggestion to support their lack of information about funding opportunities. Organizing events or conducting outreach in their communities in person could help the groups that feel more intimidated, have language barriers and are unfamiliar with digital tools. Additionally, they highlighted the responsive nature of their work does not necessarily fit the intake periods. Therefore, opening constant or **additional periods to receive applications** from unregistered groups would be a solution for this issue.

6.1.2. **Barriers and recommendations for small registered organizations practicing GCO**  
The registered organizations consulted, including the umbrella ones, celebrated the changes that the City has been advancing in the last two years. Although the application procedures could still be inaccessible or complicated for unregistered groups, the small registered ones practicing GCO commented that promoting capacity building for their organizations is a good way to prevent **volunteer burnout**. These organizations are still dealing with the demands of the formalization process to get more funding, as they still have very **low-paid staff and volunteers**, which makes their operations unstable.

These organizations also celebrated the **training** that the City suggested helping them to administrate their organizations more effectively. However, they also criticized these workshops, as their approach pushed them to adopt an administrative structure they defined as **corporative and colonialist**. To address this issue, they suggested **training more interculturally oriented** by fostering more dialogue to come up with solutions that fit their necessities. Even better if the City could organize **networking**, meetings, or events so the organizations could learn from others how to practice GCO. A good way to learn from each other would be by **presenting the results of their work publicly**, in events or gatherings, and not necessarily by writing long reports that follow colonialist/scientific structures to legitimate their efforts.

6.1.3. **Barriers and recommendations for umbrella organizations practicing GCO**  
Umbrella organizations also highlighted the **corporative/colonialist pathway** to formalize as a limitation for their work. They agree with unregistered groups that their **role as administrators** could be a temporary solution to support these groups while building capacity. However, their role as funding administrators could be problematic for them, as there are Federal legal restrictions to support groups that are not necessarily related to what is stated in their missions. A solution for this concern is providing legal advice and dialogue sessions to understand their

scope and role in supporting smaller unregistered groups. The umbrella organizations consulted also expressed that these legal restrictions and administrative adjustments force them to fit into a corporative colonialist structure that could impact their decision-making processes in consultation with their communities. Therefore, they suggest conducting **outreach with legal advice or community dialogues** to develop ideas together on building capacity without following those patterns.

**Table 5.1. Synthesis of GCO barriers and recommendations to address them according to the participants**

Kind of organization	Barriers	Suggestions to address them
Unregistered Groups	Legal status to access funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loosening the requirements by creating small grants that individuals can apply for.</li> <li>- Inviting them or reaching their communities to create funding opportunities together.</li> <li>- Hiring unregistered groups through contracts or consultancy work to start building relationships.</li> <li>- Continuing working with umbrella organizations.</li> </ul>
	Rigid and intimidating granting processes and sources of information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opening constant or more intake periods special for unregistered groups, as GCO is responsive to communities' needs.</li> <li>- Paying attention to patronizing attitudes and colonialist ways to understand their problems.</li> <li>- Approaching these groups, by listening first, without making assumptions about their work.</li> <li>- Reach these groups through snowball or other methods to invite them to attend events and apply for small grants.</li> <li>- Visiting their communities to conduct outreach or attend their meetings.</li> <li>- Continuing having a person of contact and fostering relationship building to guide these groups through the granting process. Ideally, this staff person is someone they can identify with (e.g., shared identity).</li> </ul>
Registered organizations	Volunteer burnout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continuing mitigating administrative burden and barriers for capacity building funding.</li> <li>- Training for organizations' staff is ok, but it could be more interculturally oriented. Even better if the organizations can learn from others how to practice GCO.</li> </ul>
Umbrella organizations	Corporative/colonialist pathway to build capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organizing events or workshops to talk about different pathways to build capacity once registered. More dialogue about this.</li> </ul>
	Federal legal restrictions to support groups that are not necessarily related to what is stated in their missions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Networking by presenting the results of their work in public events.</li> <li>- Visiting their communities to come up with solutions that fit their organizational culture. Conduct outreach with legal advice or dialogues to develop ideas for this.</li> </ul>

#### 6.1.4. General recommendations

Beyond the recommendations to overcome GCO barriers, general recommendations for the City to expand its understanding of this type of associational activity and support its practices could be synthesized as follows:

- This study's literature review showed the need to conduct more research about the role and impact of GCO in Vancouver. Some suggestions to investigate this topic are:
  - Conduct a survey to identify GCO practices within the nonprofit sector in Vancouver using the four criteria to identify GCO (legal, financial, administrative, and role in the community criteria).
  - Set the boundaries to calculate small, medium, and large operational budgets to use the a financial criteria specific for Vancouver to identify GCO. Then, based on that budget, calculate the numbers of paid staff for small, medium, and large organizations.
  - Micro-map geographical areas where GCO could be more frequent, such as DTES, to identify unregistered groups following the methods suggested by Soteri-Proctor and Alcock (2012). For example, walking small areas to identify possible spaces for group members to meet, searching their websites, and calling and interviewing them to have more detailed information about the nature, role, and impact of their associational activity.
  - Conduct participatory action research in collaboration with groups and organizations practicing GCO to understand better their nature, role, impact, barriers, and suggestions to support them and change structures.
- The content analysis and the participants' opinions about the Core Support Grant Application Guide, form, and website information revealed that it could still be intimidating, complex, and confusing for some groups looking for support. Beyond conducting outreach in their communities and connecting with them personally through events or meetings, these recommendations could be useful to simplify procedures for **unregistered groups**:
  - Create different kinds of funding and application procedures for these groups.
  - Have staff that could assist them with their cultural, language, and technological barriers while filling the forms or searching for information.
  - Display the information through different means so diverse learners can better access it, like videos or visual materials explaining the procedures.
  - Reduce questions that refer to their previous work as a list of results or outcomes, and ask for stories, pictures, social media, websites, and other means through

which they can demonstrate their work. Videos, pictures, visual presentations, and audio could be better means for diverse applicants.

- o Include questions that address the four roles of GCO identified in this study (mutual support, relationship building, advocacy, identification or cultural understanding). The current Core Support Grant application has some questions about the organizations' relationships with their communities. However, it could include more questions to identify GCO practices, such as advocacy actions, ways to promote relationship building and belonging, outreach means to connect with the community, and decision-making processes in consultation with the community.

## 7. Discussion

This study revealed that the type of associational activity shaped by equity-seeking groups has unique and critical characteristics and benefits that might be compromised if the City does not directly support them. Funding these practices promotes the inclusion and empowerment of these groups, as GCO directly responds to the needs and interests of their communities. Explicitly and directly supporting GCO practices and/or unregistered groups means giving voice to people and groups historically oppressed and advancing the City's Equity Framework. Larger corporative NPOs could assist these groups by solving some of their problems. However, their support models rarely give them voice in articulating their problems and finding solutions by themselves. Charity/philanthropic support models could assist equity-seeking groups but do not necessarily empower them to find the solutions to their problems.

This study demonstrated that although groups and organizations could advance in building capacity and formalizing, this pathway should not look the same or "universal" for everyone. The assumption about the link between "value" and "formalization" of GCO into formal non-profit operations and governance models fosters colonialist and capitalist views about how an associational activity must be shaped. The study participants expressed that their ways of organizing could differ from what is expected of their formalization process. Corporative governance and administrative structures foster hierarchical relationships and decision-making processes controlled by a few. Instead, GCO tends to form collective answers to issues that matter to them. Following this study's participants perspectives, building capacity should not be understood as synonymous of following a unique universalized Western corporative way to formalize.

Instead, supporting GCO through all the mechanisms discussed (e.g., training, networking, outreach, special grants, contracts) means promoting these groups' capacity building on their own terms, which could strengthen their possibilities to impact their communities. This

study's findings and the community organizers consulted raise a question: How to build capacity without turning into a corporation to funnel funding and produce massive programs? More dialogue with the communities is needed to answer this question. In the meantime, the registered and umbrella organizations practicing GCO by including their communities in their decision-making processes and supporting smaller groups are good examples of how building capacity could look without losing the essential feature that characterizes GCO. This study's last suggestion is to find ways to challenge the administrative and legal structures required to manage NPOs' resources. Interdisciplinary dialogues that include the communities could be a good way to start with this long-term project for social change. Figure 6.1 shows the pathway toward building capacity breaking the linear model that suggests a universal way to organize and serve communities. Instead of assuming a universal pathway to formalization that follows legal and administrative functioning shaped by colonialist and corporative structures, the participants of this study suggested more dialogue. Through dialogue and/or participatory methods, grassroots organizations could collectively imagine and create different pathways or branches, as the figure illustrates, to build capacity that fit their communities' necessities and contexts demands.

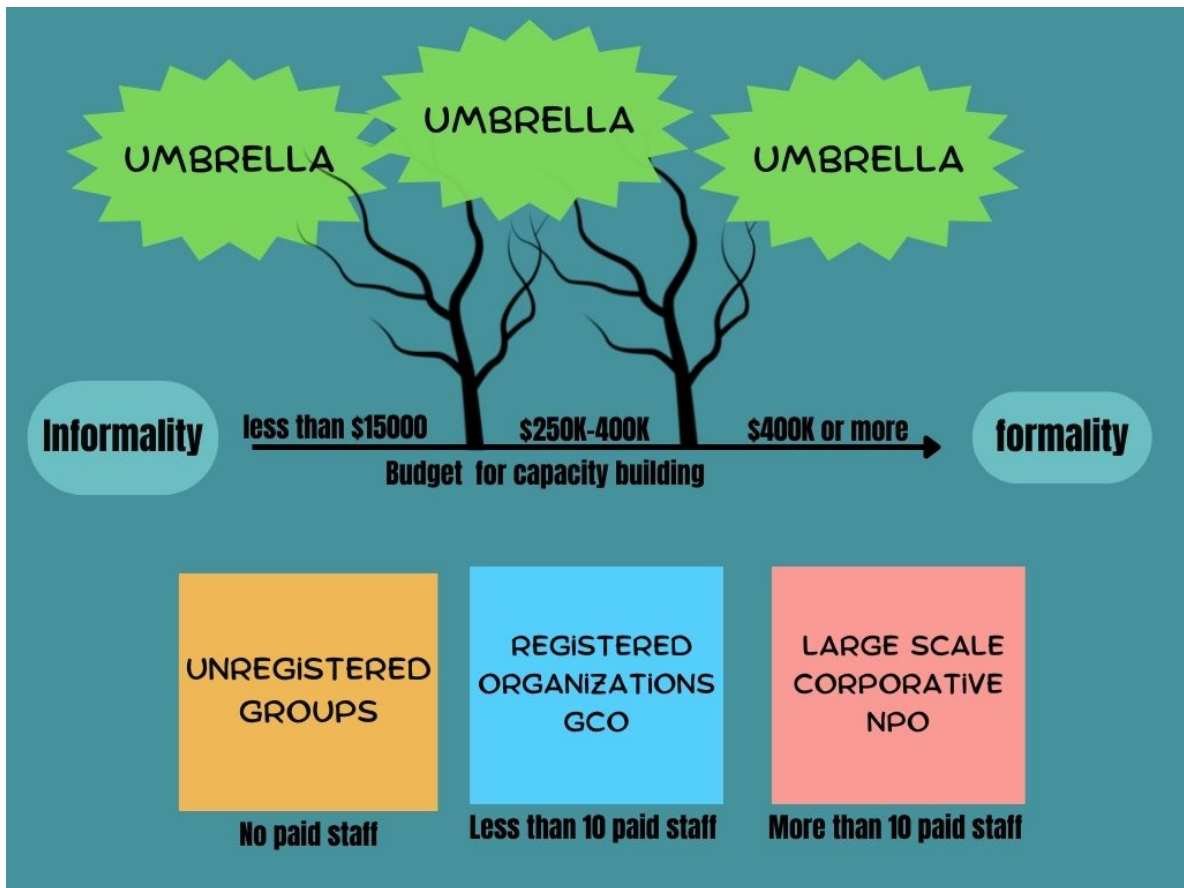


Figure 6.1. Continuum from informality to formality and the locations for the different kind of organization.



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### **Appendix: Interview questions for GOs**

1. Please tell me how and why your organization started? Tell me a bit about its history or trajectory.
2. What are the typical functions or activities your organization carries on in your community?
3. Is your group/organization registered as a non-profit or charity? Why or why not?
4. Does your organization have paid staff or are your activities and functions carried out entirely by volunteers?
5. How are decisions made within your organization? What is the typical decision-making process? How does the organization consult its decisions with members of the community it represents?
6. Where do you find the money or other resources (e.g., meeting or event space) you need to sustain your organization? Have you ever applied for grants – from the City or another funder?
7. What is the role or impact of your organization on the community it serves? How is what you offer different from what people may be able to get from other organizations?
8. What barriers does your organization face in performing its functions and how do you deal with these barriers?
9. How do you see the future for your organization in the short and long-run?
10. What would be a good way to support your organization to deal with challenges you experience? Why? Are there other supports the City could help provide besides funding (e.g. research, expertise, networking, convening)?



## **Appendix 2: Interview questions for umbrella organizations**

1. Please tell me how and why your organization started? Tell me a bit about its history or trajectory.
2. In this story, can you refer to aspects that made your organization change from an informal group to a larger and more formal NGO? What aspects changed from that moment to how Your organization operates nowadays (e.g., number of collaborators, formal registration, decision-making processes, administrative and financial structures, relationship with the communities you serve)?
3. Regarding your organization growing or developing process from an informal to a more formalized group, what kind of barriers did organization confront in performing its functions towards what it is today? How did Your organization deal with these barriers?
4. What is your organization's administrative structure in the present? How are decisions made within your organization? What is the typical decision-making process? How does the organization consult its decisions with members of the communities it represents?
5. How many paid staff does your organization have? Can you calculate how many volunteers are currently supporting your programs? Can you provide an example of the typical role/s that volunteers have implementing the activities, programs or initiatives of your organization?
6. Where do you find the money or other resources (e.g., meeting or event space) you need to sustain your organization?
7. What is the role or impact of your organization on the community it serves? How is what you offer different from what people may be able to get from other organizations?
8. How do you see the future for your organization in the short and long-run?
9. What do you think are the barriers that smaller grass roots organizations confront?
10. What would be a good way to support these organizations? Are there other supports the City could help provide besides funding (e.g., research, expertise, networking, convening)? What would be a good way to support these organizations to deal with challenges they experience through organizations like yours? Why?

Appendix 3 Examples of GCO roles in the communities according to the work their organizations are doing

Participant <sup>22</sup>	Mutual support and service delivery	Dialogue and relationship building	Cultural understanding and identification	Community empowerment and advocacy
<b>Bear</b>	<i>Too many times, the supports are with food.</i>	<i>We create spaces where the participants connect.</i>	<i>So, all our organizers speak the language and are part of the communities they work with.</i>	<i>Our organizer experienced that, she went through that difficult situation. And now, she is working on materials and spaces for women in that situation. And they are the ones that are guiding that work and informing the community and other institutions about their situation.</i>
<b>Flower</b>	<i>The COVID packages were really important because they weren't just, you know, canned foods. These were like foods that were comfort food that were familiar like rice and fish.</i>	<i>We did find ourselves doing a lot more, um, you know, a lot more dialogues with the community and how they felt.</i>	<i>But what we're really trying to do is to cultivate those conversations to keep them going and to kind of really reconnect everybody to their heritage, um and to who they are.</i>	<i>We are more like a movement where we don't want to be known as just an organization that creates this. We're about a movement that will live or will last a lifetime.</i>
<b>Ann</b>	<i>We've been doing work for um, that basically, um to engage with uh non English speaking communities.</i>	<i>Relationships and relation. It all has been such a key part of our work. Um and what we try to build into anything is we're going along.</i>	<i>Like trying to hold that space for, you know, young 2nd 3rd or more generation folks to really how to, kind of even experiment and explore what it means to have like two sides of our cultures um within us.</i>	<i>A lot of our work lives in the space of like Systems Change and that includes not only like pushing governments to... in an advocacy role, but even within ourselves and within our communities, it's like how can we change the systems and structures that we've kind of adopted just because that's what we see all around us.</i>

<sup>22</sup> The participants agreed to keep their identities anonymous, so pseudonyms were used instead of their names.

Participant <sup>22</sup>	Mutual support and service delivery	Dialogue and relationship building	Cultural understanding and identification	Community empowerment and advocacy
Flynn	<i>And that means our community services are required to do things that case managers or social workers are doing.</i>	<i>Like people who understand, yeah relationship, un relationship is really important. Yes, I think that's how we do things differently from other organizations.</i>	<i>So the core group that we are currently serving are the first generation immigrants who came in the seventies and eighties, and don't speak the language.</i>	<i>This organization did not address the advocacy topic.</i>
Rose	<i>We have speaking engagements or something along those lines.</i>	<i>The biggest thing is just offering community, like offering a place for youth to find community and connect, speaking from personal experience.</i>	<i>Our organization is offering that space for younger people, um, well to think about like their identity, and be able to express themselves in the way that they feel most comfortable and empowered.</i>	<i>But since we've launched, we also have expanded our, um, we focused to like general advocacy, like, of things are happening in the community and other important issues.</i>

Appendix 4. Sample of organizations that could be grassroots organizations according to the four criteria defining this term identified through this study.

Organization	Amount awarded/Year	Years and grant	How it meets the proposed criteria for GO	Annual Budget according to CharityData	Website
1. Black Women Connect	\$41000	2021 (OCB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administrative functioning</li> <li>Role in the community</li> </ul>	No data	<a href="https://blackwomconnectvancouver.com">https://blackwomconnectvancouver.com</a>
2. BC Coalition of Experiential Communities Association	\$68000	2022 (Core Multi-Year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role in the community</li> <li>Administrative functioning</li> </ul>	No data	<a href="https://bccec.wordpress.com">https://bccec.wordpress.com</a>
3. Street Saviours Outreach Society	\$3000	2021 (CAT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role in the community</li> <li>Administrative functioning</li> </ul>	No data	<a href="https://streetsaviours.org/our-story">https://streetsaviours.org/our-story</a>
4. PovNet Society	\$20000 \$10000 \$10,000 \$10,000 \$10,000	2022 (Core) 2020 (OCB) 2019 (OCB) 2018 (OCB) 2017 (OCB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role in the community</li> <li>Administrative functioning</li> </ul>	\$150K in 2021	<a href="https://www.povnet.org/team-board">https://www.povnet.org/team-board</a>
5. Afro Van Connect Society	\$75000	2021 (OCB Multi-Year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role in the community</li> <li>Administrative functioning</li> </ul>	\$170K in 2021?	<a href="https://www.afrovanconnect.com">https://www.afrovanconnect.com</a>
6. Leave Out Violence (LOVE) Society BC	\$34,628 \$34,628 \$34,628 \$34,628	2022 (Core) 2020 (DSS) 2019 (DSS) 2018 (DSS) 2017 (DSS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role in the community</li> <li>Administrative functioning</li> </ul>	\$225K in 2021	<a href="http://leaveoutviolence.org/bc/">http://leaveoutviolence.org/bc/</a>
7. PeerNetBC	\$48472 \$38472 \$38472 \$38472 \$38472	2022 (Core) 2020 (OCB) 2019 (OCB) 2018 (OCB) 2017 (OCB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role in the community</li> <li>Administrative functioning</li> </ul>	\$380K in 2021	<a href="http://peernetbc.com">http://peernetbc.com</a>
8. SWAN Vancouver	\$32000  \$30000 \$26040 \$26040 24,800	2022 (Core Multi-Year) 2020 (DSS) 2019 (DSS) 2018 (DSS) 2017 (DSS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role in the community</li> <li>Administrative functioning</li> </ul>	\$390K in 2021	<a href="https://www.swanvancouver.ca">https://www.swanvancouver.ca</a>
9. The Aboriginal Front Door Society	\$85000  \$10000  \$55900 \$55900 \$55900 \$55900	2022 (Core Multi-Year) 2021(Social Policy Grants) 2020 (DSS) 2019 (DSS) 2018 (DSS) 2017 (DSS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role in the community</li> <li>Administrative functioning</li> </ul>	Less than 400K in 2021	<a href="https://abfrontdoor.org/index.php">https://abfrontdoor.org/index.php</a>

Organization	Amount awarded/Year	Years and grant	How it meets the proposed criteria for GO	Annual Budget according to CharityData	Website
<b>10. Japanese Community Volunteers Association (Tonari Gumi)</b>	\$4,167 \$10000 \$10000 \$10000 \$10000	2022 (Brich) 2020 (DSS) 2019 (DSS) 2018 (DSS) 2017 (DSS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role in the community</li> <li>• Administrative functioning</li> </ul>	\$400K in 2021	WWW.TONARIGU MI.CA
<b>9. Jewish Seniors Alliance of Greater Vancouver</b>	\$10000 \$10000 \$10000 \$10000 \$10000 \$10000	2022 (Core) 2021 (DSS) 2020 (DSS) 2019 (DSS) 2018 (DSS) 2017 (DSS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amounts granted</li> <li>• Role in the community</li> </ul>	Approx \$480K in 2021	<a href="https://jsalliance.org">https://jsalliance.org</a>
<b>Umbrella organizations</b>					
<b>13. Watari</b>	\$110000 \$25000 \$72000 \$72868 \$72,868 \$72,868	2022 (Core Multi-Year) 2021(OCD) 2020 (DSS) 2019 (DSS) 2018 (DSS) 2017 (DSS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role in the community</li> <li>• Umbrella organization</li> </ul>	1.3M in 2021	<a href="https://www.watari.ca">https://www.watari.ca</a>
<b>14. Collingwood Neighbourhood House Society</b>	\$121162 \$134179 \$118000 \$116000 \$116457 \$115308	2022 (NOG) 2021 (NOG) 2020 (NOG) 2019 (NOG) 2018 (NOG) 2017 (NOG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role in the community</li> <li>• Umbrella organization</li> </ul>	\$9M in 2021	<a href="https://www.cnh.bc.ca">https://www.cnh.bc.ca</a>