



TURNING THE TIDE  
AN INSPIRING COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

# COMMUNITY CONNECTION GRANTS (CCGs)

Evaluation Findings & Recommendations  
Going Forward

November 2021

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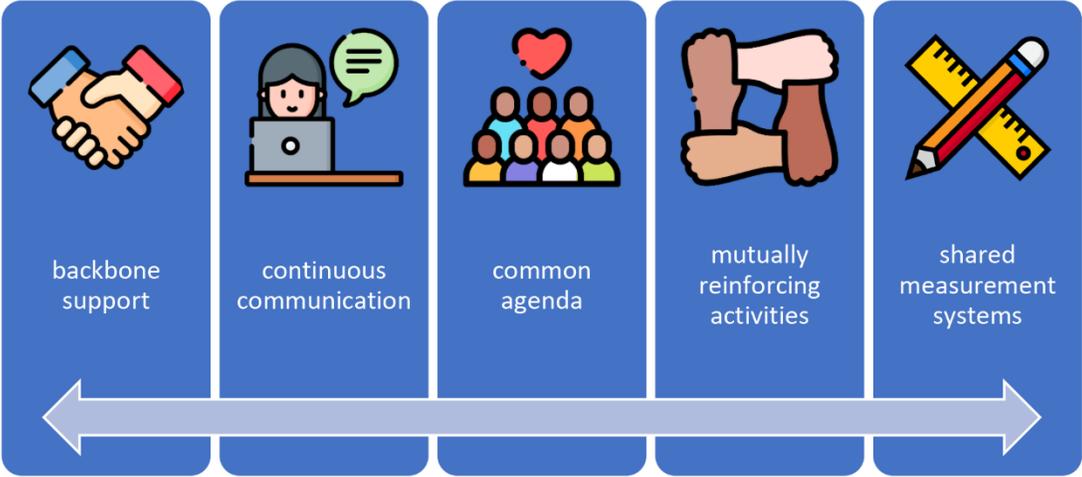
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# Section A - Introduction

## Turning the Tide

Turning the Tide was established in 2018 as one of three Collective Impact initiatives of Inspiring Communities; and offers support to Digby, the Islands, Bear River, Weymouth, and other micro-communities in the surrounding areas. Digby and its municipalities are comprised of 32 micro-communities each with their own respective cultural nuances. The Digby area was selected after data analysis revealed both complex social problems as well as the existence of extensive resources in the form of positive work already happening in the community. The initiative was founded using a Collective Impact Framework. *Collective Impact* is a practice that helps reimagine our approach to social change to create a just and equitable society where our cultural and group identities do not determine and are not a predictor of our life outcomes. Figure 1 shows the pillars of Turning the Tide (TtT), which TtT adopted from Inspiring Communities:



*Figure 1: the Pillars of a Collective Impact Initiative, reflecting the key aspects of Turning the Tide’s role: stewards for the community, coalition culture cultivators, and developmental evaluators.*

The project began with community consultations including interviews with government employees at all levels and discussions with community leaders and residents which led to the establishment of a cross-sectoral *Insight Team*. There were 27 research assistants hired who

surveyed the community to determine community priorities and strengths. In 2019 a name was chosen (Turning the Tide) and the Insight Team transitioned into the Advisory Committee.

Turning the Tide arrived at a common agenda by bringing community members, government officials, educational institutions and other stakeholders (referred to as a cross-sectoral coalition) to identify and prioritize community needs, gaps in services and the development of programs to address these needs. Turning the Tide provides programs that include but are not limited to: Community Ambassadors (CAs), Lunch & Learn, Community Connection Grants (CCGs) and Community Building Youth Futures (CBYF). Turning the Tide acts as a conduit and facilitates the process of eliminating the silos that have historically created barriers to service delivery; and to construct the environment in which collaborations and trusting relationships between the multiple and diverse members of the cross-sector coalition can be established and nurtured. In addition to building a cross-sectoral coalition, Turning the Tide recognizes the need for building trusting relationships within the communities and across communities; and these must be nurtured as a prerequisite for building community cohesiveness. To support this collaborative initiative, Turning the Tide in consultation with community members developed a *Framework for Change*.

## Framework for Change

Turning the Tide's Framework for Change describes the long-term vision that focuses on supporting the ability of community residents to work together collaboratively. Through the lens of TtT's Framework for Change, community cohesiveness is measured through strengthened community engagement and connections, collaborative initiatives, and information sharing within communities and across communities. Given that the most necessary condition for the success of collective impact is trusting relationships, building these must begin within the communities and later across communities. The three prongs of the Framework for Change are:

- **Engaged and Connected:** Residents feel connected to their community and are encouraged and welcomed to be actively involved in community activities and shaping the future of the area.

- **Positive, Celebrating Successes:** Residents take pride in their community because they are aware of its assets, accomplishments, and successes. Residents feel confident and positive about the future of their community.
- **Sharing Resources:** The community has established a clear and transparent pathway for residents to access resources that meets their needs. Residents are aware of where to go and how to access needed resources and information.

Turning the Tide believes that if the Collective Impact model is to be successful then it requires providing the micro-communities with the resources to build upon and/or create cohesive communities embedded in community engagement and connections, information sharing and communities working collaboratively to achieve their respective goals. A key aspect of the Framework for Change is an evaluation plan. The evaluation plan is complementary to the Framework for Change. a way to measure whether trusting relationships are being achieved.

Turning the Tide realized that for communities to implement the Framework for Change within their respective communities, the communities required support to implement projects which would facilitate and support the achievement of the three prongs of the Framework for Change. In 2020, Turning the Tide established the Community Connection Grants (CCGs).

## Community Connection Grants

The Community Connection Grants (CCGs) are short-term funding opportunities which were established in 2020 that are available to communities to implement projects that assist community members and build upon community cohesiveness. The CCGs are one-time funding for a community project. The maximum amount funded for a community project is \$3,000.00. A cross-sectoral committee comprised of members of 10 representatives from education, human services and the Black and First Nation communities was established to review and approve project applications submitted by community groups, schools and organizations. The goal of this committee is to support community projects, and where clarification was required in the review process, the committee would ask for additional information with the goal of endorsing the projects. At the time of this evaluation, 29 projects had received funding. The majority of the projects received \$3,000.00 (see Appendix A for descriptions of the projects). The diversity of needs in the communities is reflected in the range of projects developed by the community. The projects worked

in areas ranging from community gardens, a green house, free stores at the schools for students, free meals in the community, a library, community kitchen, universal playground, cultural intergenerational program, and others. The CCGs committee developed criteria using the Framework for Change that communities used as a guideline in the development of their projects:

- *Potential to strengthen community connections* - May help residents connect with their communities and with one another
- *Potential to encourage residents to work together toward a common goal* - Potential for residents to develop new relationships and/or for residents to experience working together
- *Provides opportunity to try new things and learn from the experience* - Encourages creative, relatively short-term projects that could be helpful in other communities, on a larger scale
- *Potential to provide positive community experiences* - To impact the community narrative

The criteria are intentionally broad to allow the communities to be creative in their project development.

## Purpose of the Evaluation

The purposes of the evaluation were to:

1. Determine whether the CCGs were able to:
  - strengthen community connections
  - encourage residents to work together toward a common goal
  - provide an opportunity to try new things and learn from the experience
  - provide a positive community experience
2. Determine what practices the CCGs Committee should keep or change for a future round of CCGs Committee.
  - The information collected from interviews with the CCGs committee members are presented as recommendations to improve the granting process for the next round of project applications.

## Section B: Evaluation Overview

The main evaluation questions addressed were:

1. Did the CCGs facilitate achievement toward any one of the three prongs of Turning the Tide's Framework for Change within their respective communities?
2. Did the CCGs achieve the intended goals, as laid out in the criteria?
3. What practices should the CCGs committee keep or change in future rounds of funding?

### Data Collection Methods

The evaluation process included interviews and on-line surveys with the seven members of the CCGs committee and interviews and on-line surveys with proponents of the projects. At the time of the evaluation in June, 2021, there were 29 projects that were funded by the CCGs. (Refer to the Appendix A for a list and description of the 29 projects). In total, 17 of 29 proponents of projects were interviewed. Not all projects were involved because:

- Some of the projects hadn't begun at the time of the evaluation due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- For three of the projects, the staff were on a leave of absence from work, and the remaining seven projects didn't return communication

Several data collection tools were used by the participants of the evaluation. The proponents of the projects and committee members selected how they wanted to participate in the evaluation process. The data collection tools included an on-line survey that was completed anonymously, phone interviews, and in-person interviews. In addition, the evaluation process included five project site visits, in which the evaluator went to the project sites and met with the project proponents who explained the project and provided a tour, and/or attended the project's grand openings. The following table illustrates the data collection methods.

### Data Collection Method Used

Method	# of Projects Participating in this Method	# of CCG Committee Members Participating in this Method
Online survey	12	4
Telephone interviews	12	6
In-person interviews	5	1
Site visits	5	
Total	34	11

The data collection tools are attached in Appendix B.

The quotes throughout this document are from all data sources above, with identities removed for anonymity.

## Section C - Findings

### Did the grants achieve their purpose? Overview of Findings

The responses from the proponents of the projects suggests that the criteria of the CCGs were met. However, depending upon the community and/or the project, the level of community engagement differed, with some project proponents reporting a higher degree of challenges. One proponent reported that, *“The 20+ volunteers who made it happen have all enjoyed the community spirit of developing something good and lasting and giving to the local foodbank”*. This quote supports that the project facilitated residents working collaboratively to build relationships which facilitated the creation of an identified needed service within the community. *“We are community and that we are in this together.”* This sentiment was a consistent theme by project proponents. A quote from another proponent illustrates this quite well. *“The community is taking care of their residents.”* In some communities, the pandemic forced residents to work together and provide support to community members. *“Yes, when under pressure you get creative. Led to collaborations, more systematic approach and organizing.”* The project proponents all indicated the key to their success was their willingness to cooperate with others

and develop a coordinated approach to address community needs and to identify and serve community members facing challenges. *“Cooperation between all existing groups and organizations. It engaged community members who would normally would not be engaged or volunteering. It increased volunteers.”*

On the other hand, several project proponents reported that, *“Cannot do in-person or gatherings”*, *“People are still afraid to gather socially”*, and *“Seniors are afraid to go to grocery store.”* These quotes suggests that the pandemic reduced socialization and created a sense of isolation for the most vulnerable populations in the communities. *“Concern about elders--completely cut-off-elders’ interactions are limited”*. In other instances, the projects were put on hold. *“COVID-19 put everything on hold, reduced ability to network.”* The responses in the tables documents the contrasting impact that the pandemic has had for the CCGs projects throughout the Digby area.

## Connections

*CCGs Criteria #1: Potential to strengthen community connections - May help residents connect with their communities and with one another*

Overall, the diversity of connections is impressive across the 17 projects. It is difficult to define the exact number of different connections made. An estimation of the number of connections as reported by project proponents is over 3,200. These connections include: personal connections with residents, with organizations, service clubs, schools, fire departments, churches; and with other projects locally and regionally. Several of the proponents reported that they made connections in other counties which in one instance provided training via Zoom and donations of materials and supplies. The CCGs allowed for a renewed sense of community which facilitated a more poignant and targeted approach to connect with community residents. In some communities the project, *“has become the focal point within the community”*. This has allowed projects to clarify and define needs and to develop a holistic approach and a wrap-around service to provide a coordinated service delivery for residents. Some projects have become, *“a central*

*focus for the community*”, as a result of the CCGs. The following connections table contains quotes from all data sources, with identities removed for anonymity.

Table x: Strengths and Challenges Reported Related to Connections

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Project teams shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I made wonderful connections I never thought I would make.</li> <li>• The idea of community taking care of each other</li> <li>• The project brings everyone together, seniors, businesses, children, youth, adults and families</li> <li>• The project targets the most isolated. And connected them with other groups/services</li> <li>• The project provides a community gathering space where people can come together</li> <li>• The project enabled the volunteer people of lower Neck and Islands to become part of the loop. Whereas, before few knew who needed help, now we are more alert to the suffering in our midst</li> <li>• The project enabled us to make 50-100 connections out of a community of 600 residents</li> <li>• The project created a comfortable and safe place for people to come and share their concerns</li> </ul>	<p>Project teams shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was fear and anxiety expressed by community members because of COVID-19</li> <li>• COVID-19 created supplies shortages, and caused our budget to doubled</li> <li>• COVID-19 put everything on hold including our project</li> <li>• Because of health restrictions our project was not able to fundraise which delay everything</li> <li>• COVID-19 limited our networking abilities</li> <li>• COVID-19 change how the project was delivered</li> <li>• Our community experienced a decrease in volunteerism which affected our project</li> <li>• We were in lock-down and had to suspend our on-site and take-out services</li> </ul>
<p>Committee members shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I learned a lot about other communities and felt more connected and aware of services in the Digby area</li> </ul>	<p>Committee members shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I didn't feel that I was able to make personal connections because all sessions were done remotely over Zoom.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I was able to connect the name to the person which is important when making connections</li> <li>• The committee bounced ideas and brainstormed-helped strengthen connections- this led to creating a healthy positive connection with committee members</li> <li>• I feel there is a stronger connection with fellow advocates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All members need to have their screen-on cameras on, as a requirement to participate in a meeting</li> </ul>
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The CCGs have also supported cross-cultural connections between and across communities. For example, an Acadian community connected with an Anglophone community in the Digby area, providing networking opportunities and resources and information, which supported the success of the Anglophone project. There was a cultural intergenerational project that highlights the importance of culture and cultural knowledge translation from the older generation to the younger generation. *“Elders are recognized for their knowledge and wisdom, and sharing it with children.”* Other projects engaged in facilitating an intergenerational activity allowing for generational knowledge transmission. *“Students/youth were keen to learn and I hope it brings up a whole new area of learning and knowledge.”* Still another project’s activities focused upon providing understanding and learning of the diverse cultural communities within the Digby area and their historical contributions to Nova Scotian society. *“Bringing races together to develop an appreciation of different cultures and races through cultural celebrations, cultural diversity and cultural understanding.”* The breadth and range of projects are diverse but the common thread between all the projects is building community cohesiveness which promotes the health and wellness of the community.

CCGs’ committee members stated they became aware of services and programs offered throughout the Digby area. One of the notable comments committee members made was that through dialogue and deliberations they learned about different perspectives from other committee members which has helped expand their understanding of the diverse communities in Digby.

Both the committee members and the projects proponents commented about the fear and uncertainty experienced by some community members as a result of the pandemic. There was agreement by both of these groups that this fear has led to self-isolation of some community members even when the health restrictions were lifted. The continuation of fear and uncertainty due to COVID-19 and its variances is still present in the communities.

## Collaborations

*CCGs Criteria #2: Potential to encourage residents to work together toward a common goal - Potential for residents to develop new relationships and/or for residents to experience working together*

The pandemic was seen as an external threat to community members and a threat to the health and well-being of the communities. Residents were afraid, fearful and this created a level of anxiety for some community members. This threat compelled all service providers to work in collaboration. Projects adjusted to the health restrictions and the establishment of collaborations took on new meaning and a sense of urgency. A project proponent's reflections summarize the collaborative efforts of projects, when they state that, *"Whereas, before we were spread out, inconsistent and unaware, now none of those things are true. We are focused, consistent and knowledgeable."* In one community all seven churches collaborated with the service clubs and organizations, with the CCGs project acting as a convenor of the collaborative service delivery. The collaborative delivery service put the health and wellness of residents at the center of their work by providing individualized service for community members. This holistic and wrap-around service provided delivery of:

- food boxes
- home visits
- coordinated emergency dental care
- navigated access to mental health counselling
- pick-up and delivery of groceries and prescription medication from pharmacies
- facilitated the securement of employment for residents
- assisted in the completion of applications to access other services and support

The following collaboration table contains quotes from all data sources: (The challenges experienced by the CCGs projects were directly related to the pandemic)

Table y: Strengths and Challenges Reported Related to Collaborations

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Project teams shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I realized-got me out of my silos, started networking with women’s groups, churches and organizations and the grant made this possible</li> <li>• Before I worked alone but through collaborations, I realized that there are others with the same vision as yours, the grant made this possible</li> <li>• The collaboration was amazing, all staff were involved from developing the project idea to the project development.</li> <li>• Led to collaborations, more systematic approach and organizing and this would not have happened without the project</li> <li>• This connection grant has given us the opportunity to connect/collaborate with the local school for the benefit of the students and community.</li> </ul>	<p>Project teams shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because of COVID-19, it reduced the ability to engage with others which impacted our project</li> <li>• Residents were fearful of being in public spaces and we had to rethink the delivery of the project</li> <li>• I had to do more door to door, home-visits to assess the needs of families and provide service which was very time consuming</li> <li>• People are still afraid to gather socially or to meet because of COVID and this has affected our project</li> <li>• Our Project and other projects were put on hold because of COVID</li> </ul>
<p>Committee members shared:</p>	<p>Committee members shared:</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We learned from one another through working on the project and created a collaboration</li> <li>• It brought the committee members closer together by working on a project and we took a collaborative approach in all of our discussions</li> <li>• It gave an opportunity for committee members to create something positive for communities</li> <li>• It allowed committee members to find collective ways to respond to community needs</li> <li>• It gave us (committee members) a morale boost by working together, sharing perspectives in the best interest of the communities</li> <li>• Committee members learned about the different communities and through sharing of perspectives we as a committee made great decisions</li> <li>• Committee members learned about the different needs of the communities, and we worked together to make the best decisions to support the communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zoom meetings didn't really support collaborations outside of committee meetings</li> <li>• The committee meetings were more like a business work meeting because of zoom</li> </ul>
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Collaborations in some cases were established via a social media platform. Digital platforms became the medium for which some of the CCG's projects, organizations, churches, fire departments, legions, service clubs and others, organized and co-created delivery of services. As noted by one proponent, *"Our meetings were on Zoom. It was unfamiliar to me but I got used to it-I think!"*. Other project proponents stated that, *"Our project did a web design and we used Instagram, Twitter and Facebook to inform community members of our project and the free items available to them"*. For some project proponents, the extensive use of social media was new to them. One proponent stated that, *"I am teaching my granddaughter how to cook, now she is teaching me how to use the Internet"*. Silos disappeared and the needs of community residents

was the priority. The CCGs supported projects to be established which ultimately led to some projects engaging in collaborative service delivery and sharing of information and resources. The use of a social media platform became a creative process to establish collaborations. *“When under pressure you get creative”*. In another community all service organizations collaborated to help their community members. It is important to note, the project proponents became conveners and facilitators of many of the collaborations.

## Relationships

*CCGs Criteria #3: Potential to encourage residents to work together toward a common goal - Potential for residents to develop new relationships and/or for residents to experience working together*

Overall, relationship building was a much longer process due to numerous COVID-19 lockdowns, and later other health restrictions. The determination of project proponents helped facilitate the process of relationship building. As one proponent noted, *“Perseverance and dedication is key during these times of COVID”*. Other quotes from all data sources are contained in the following relationship table:

Table z: Strengths and Challenges Reported Related to Relationships

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Project teams shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It allowed me to meet and make connections, friendships with strangers as a result of project, I have built relationships and made new friends</li> <li>• I became invested in the work of the project and relationships requires being invested in the work</li> </ul>	<p>Project teams shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many residents are still afraid and that impacts building relationships</li> <li>• Building relationships are difficult when it is not in person</li> <li>• It is difficult to build relationships via zoom-it becomes strictly business</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project allowed for creating a beautiful long-term gathering space that will bring joy and health into the community while, encouraging new social and community relationships</li> <li>• Relationship building and engagement with students was key for this project</li> <li>• The community spirit of our volunteers was critical to the success of this project and building relationships</li> </ul>	
<p>Committee members shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committee members-built relationships with the work</li> <li>• We were able to build a professional relationship</li> </ul>	<p>Committee members shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not being able to network interferes with relationship building</li> <li>• Did not feel that we could build relationships, not really because meetings were via zoom</li> </ul>

It is difficult to build relationships when you cannot gather in-person. COVID-19 health restrictions, forced many people to rely on social media to build relationships. The use of social media did hamper the number of volunteers depending upon the community the project was located in. Not all community members have access to the internet. For many of the projects, the combination of the inability to meet in person and the forced use of social media to build relationships created a convergence that reduced relationship building. However, for some projects, the internet appears to increase the range of connections that led to relationship building. Many proponents commented that even though social gatherings were permitted with some restrictions, residents were fearful to gather in person. There is, “*more fear about the COVID variants.*” Proponents noted in particular that students continue to be disengaged from extra-curriculum activities and in projects. It was surmised that, “*Students adjusted to not participating in extra-curriculum activities,*” and now it appears they continue not to participate. This disengagement has been stated as a general theme by project proponents. And as articulated by a proponent, “*It is easier to get a boulder rolling when it is in motion than it is to restart it.*”

## Trying New Things: CCGs Committee Members

CCGs Criteria #4: *Provides opportunity to try new things and learn from the experience- Encourages creative, relatively short-term projects that could be helpful in other communities, on a larger scale*

Many of the CCGs committee members reported that this was the first time that they were engaged in a grant review process. Of those committee members with experience participating in a grant review committee, one committee member stated that, *“Having diverse representation provided a fresh look on an old method.”* It was a learning process which encouraged experimentation and emergence learnings. *“It is not as cut and dry and as a committee member, you had to do research.”* Emergence learnings allowed for committee members to try new things and to experiment with different processes. *“It was a very progressive committee. We were always looking for ways to improve.”* The committee members reported an overwhelming sense of accomplishment and an enormous level of personal satisfaction for being able to contribute to community well-being. *“I learned about the community needs and it has helped me grow professionally.”* Additionally, committee members acknowledged new learnings from both participating in the grant process and new understandings of the diversity of the micro-communities located in the Digby area. As one committee member stated, *“I never knew about all the communities and how different they were based upon a particular community need.”* The Trying New Things table contains quotes from all data sources:

Table z(a): Strengths and Challenges Reported Related to Trying New Things

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Committee members shared</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We were able to try new things-different processes</li> <li>• We were able to have difficult conversations which was something new for many members</li> <li>• The granting process is not as cut and dry- there is a lot to endorsing projects which means a lot of new learning</li> </ul>	<p>Committee shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Due to discussions at the committee meeting- voting may change, conversation is critical- becoming problematic with advance voting which was something new that the committee tried</li> <li>• It was hard to judge comfort level of members via Zoom when exploring trying new things</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was a flexible learning process for the committee and we try new things</li> <li>• If something didn't work, we try something else to improve the application process and decision-making process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone is trying to be politically correct which may interfere with members saying what they really thought and trying or not trying new things</li> </ul>
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The responses from the committee members indicated that they were entrusted with the responsibility and the task to support the communities within the Digby area by supporting community projects via CCGs process. As a committee, members reported. *“This requires trying new things such as advance voting to endorse a project and/or to seek additional information from a project.”* Some members found advance voting to be problematic because members selecting advance voting, may not have considered all the information and the different perspectives that a committee meeting during their deliberations engages in. Members also stated that they recognized the need for continual learning and ongoing experimentation; and to incorporate best practices into the CCGs process in the interest of serving the Digby community.

## Positive Community Experience

*Criteria #5: Potential to provide positive community experiences - To impact the community narrative*

Project proponents explained how they with intentionality put inclusion as a central focus to their projects. One proponent stated that their project, *“Provides a community gathering space that is inclusive of everyone.”* Another proponent stated that, *“The project was not inclusive for a resident in a wheelchair, so we built him/her their own gardening lot.”* The five project site visits revealed the pride proponents exhibited when explaining their projects. As one proponent noted that the community, *“Take pride in taking care.”* As proponents showed the project to the evaluator, they did so with such a sense of accomplishment, it was more than just their words. A proponent explained that *“We have created something lasting!”* Another proponent noted that, *“I remember when this was just rocks and weeds; and look how beautiful this is, we really*

*accomplished something for the community.*” For many of the communities it was the residents who took the conceptual idea of a project and made it into a reality. *“So many people helped.”* A proponent sums it up quite well, when they relayed that they had been so afraid that the project would not materialize because of COVID-19. But, *“We came together to help each other.”* Another project site visit, demonstrated the importance of people gathering to enjoy an evening of entertainment. The imagery of this event as the result of CCGs creates a positive community narrative. People of all ages enjoyed the local musicians. The visual impact of this project was one of rejoicing after a year of lock-downs and that produces a visual positive narrative of the community.

The following table contains quotes from all data sources:

Table z(b) Strengths and Challenges Reported Related to Positive Community Experience

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Project teams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We design the project to be inclusive</li> <li>• We the community take pride in taking care</li> <li>• We have created something lasting</li> <li>• So many people helped that made the project successful</li> <li>• We came together to help each other even in times when people were afraid because of COVID-19</li> <li>• We created a community garden-lot to accommodate someone who was in a wheelchair and could not access the community garden</li> </ul>	<p>Project teams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because of COVID-19 prices skyrocketed and it affected our project</li> <li>• Project budget costs increased by 20-30 percent because of COVID-19</li> <li>• We need to learn how to re-engage youth, seniors and elders because of COVID-19 put people in isolation and fear is keeping them isolated</li> <li>• There was inability to fundraise from local businesses due to COVID-19 and prevented or limited the activities of the project</li> <li>• Drainage problem on land caused a delayed until the volunteers came to the rescue and fix the problem</li> <li>• We had to change the location for the project because of COVID-19, but thanks to community members, they donated the land</li> </ul>

	<p>for the project and for the betterment of the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2020 there was a seed shortage in Nova Scotia and people panicked, fearing there was going to be a food shortage and they could not plant gardens. The project was able to help by donating seeds, showing people how to plant gardens</li> </ul>
<p>Committee members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It gave average residents the ability to create something beneficial for their community</li> <li>• It brought new light and value-open your eyes to the needs of the communities</li> <li>• It helped some projects become established and made a lasting impression in the community</li> <li>• I learned about other communities</li> <li>• I learned about how people supported community members</li> <li>• The projects were a huge boost to the community</li> <li>• Pandemic made communities join forces to create projects that benefited the communities</li> </ul>	<p>Committee members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being mindful of gaps that you may not know had existed</li> <li>• Not able to make personal connections with committee members was difficult</li> <li>• Not able to socialize with members to build relationships I found frustration</li> <li>• Sometimes, I think that I have had enough of zoom, and just want to quit. But then I think about the other members and the community and I take a deep breath and go back on zoom</li> </ul>

**Other Areas/Impacts**

Overall, project proponents were very appreciative of the CCGs. These projects became the gathering place for residents of many communities. The community garden projects became a source of information regarding gardening and other resources in the community. For example, many residents began planting gardens out of fear that there would be a food shortage due to COVID-19. This contributed to a seed shortage in Nova Scotia. *“People tilled and planted*

*gardens which cause a seed shortage in 2020.” Some projects experienced, “Delayed construction, supplies shortages, budget doubled because of increased costs and design change”.* But communities refused to succumb to these challenges and as stated by a proponent, *“When you have lemons, you make lemonade.”*

The CCGs alleviated stress and anxiety for many community members. Those proponents who were actively engaged in volunteering in the community prior to the pandemic, they reported on the enormous amount of stress they felt because of COVID-19. The CCGs took that burden of worry and anxiety from them. And as one proponent stated, *“When our project got approved, I felt I could breathe again!”*. A project that provided free hot meals was amazed at the amount of donations they received from a good-will box that was placed in their establishment. The project proponent reported that, *“I thought we would get a couple of dollars but we raised \$3,700.00 which was reinvested into the community and administered by a church to help families in need. It was such a wonderful feeling and a deep sense of community.”* When communities come together to support their residents, it is more than just providing a service/product, it is giving people a sense of belonging—a belonging to something bigger than themselves. The CCGs gave rise to this sense of belonging for so many community residents. There were several unexpected impacts as outlined below. The following table contains quotes from all data sources:

Table z(c): Strengths and Challenges Reported Related to Other Areas/Impacts

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
<p>Project teams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I felt personal pride for all the work we done and the support we got from the community for the project</li> <li>• I did not realize how much work the teachers do for our children until I had to homeschool because of the school lockdowns. So, we did a Teacher Appreciation Dinner as a thank you</li> <li>• I never thought that I would use the internet as much as I did. Because of the increase</li> </ul>	<p>Project teams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We were not notified when funds were deposited into our account</li> <li>• Our project was approved in January but the funds were not deposited until May</li> <li>• We could not get our project started because of COVID-19 and lockdowns</li> </ul>

<p>usage of the internet, there was a lot I had to learn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The approval of our project reduced the stress that I was having so I could help community members. The CCGs reduced this stress and I was able to focus more on helping my community</li> <li>• We provided free meals at our restaurant and raised \$3,700.00 in donations from a free-will donation box. These monies were reinvested into the community to help families in need</li> <li>• Our project could not had happened without liability insurance. The Digby &amp; Area Board of Trade paid the cost of \$900.00 for the insurance</li> <li>• The volunteers for our project range from 15 years to 80 years. It was heart-warming to see</li> </ul>	
<p>Committee members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone had a voice on the committee and their opinions were respected</li> <li>• There was a 100 percent equal participation of all committee members during our discussions</li> <li>• I learned so much about the granting process and it has helped me in my professional and personal development</li> </ul>	<p>Committee members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At times, some members remain silent and I am not sure why</li> <li>• Not having in-person meetings makes it difficult to know if silence is disagreement or agreement when a decision is being made</li> <li>• There is more that we can improve upon regarding the granting process</li> <li>• We should review other groups that administer community grants to improve our process</li> </ul>

With lock-downs and school closures, parents had to coordinate homeschooling for their children with the schools. This experience provided parents with a different level of appreciation for the work that teachers do. In one community, they organized “a *lunch appreciation for the teachers.*” “*These CCGs created a sense of both personal and community pride.*” Several proponents commented that, “*Communities are building something good together.*” The age range of volunteers of one project was from 15 years. of age to 80 years of age. Although there

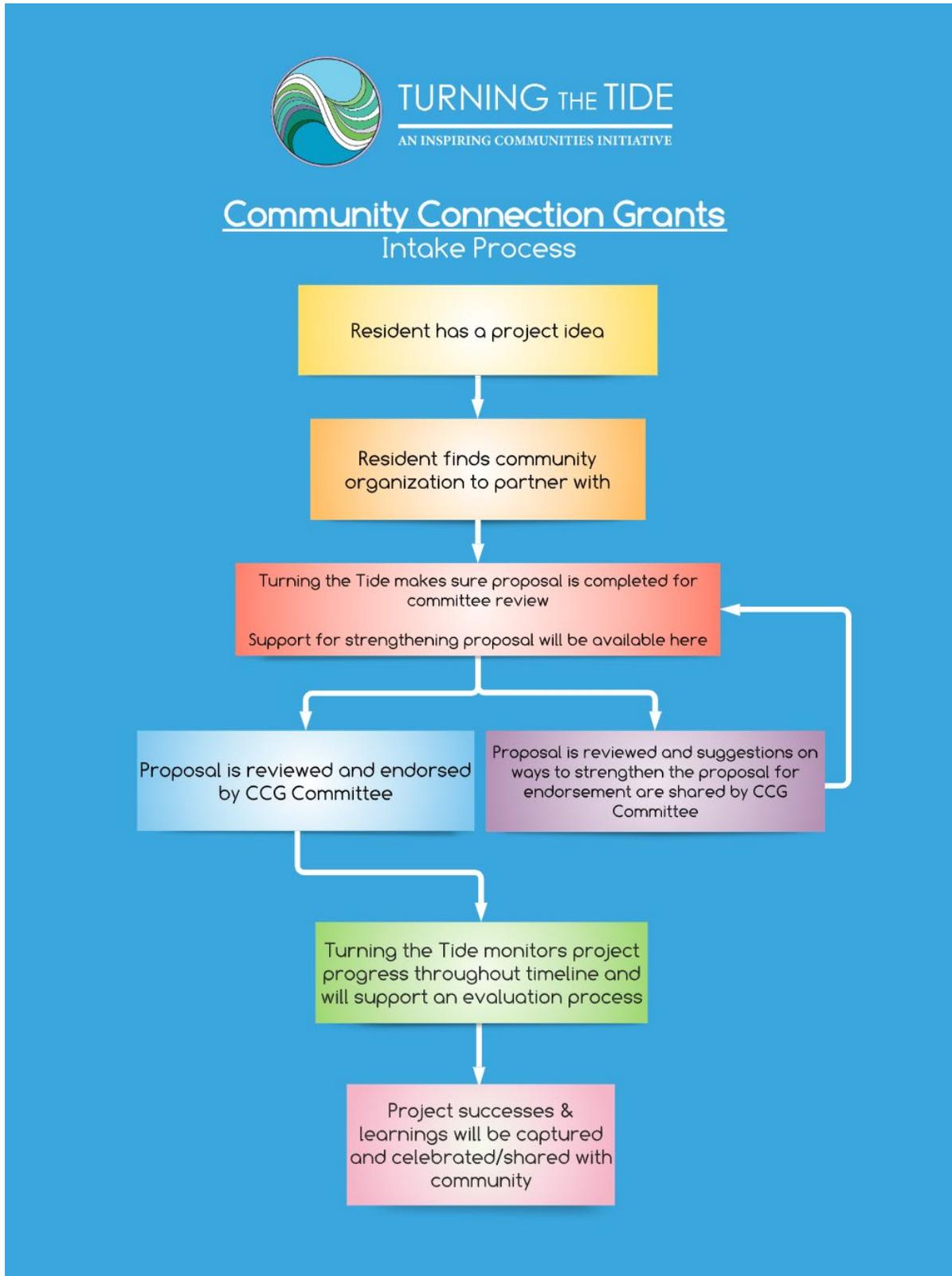
were delays for the majority of the projects, location changes and program adjustments, the CCGs allowed the communities to come together to build, support and care for the residents of their communities. Conversely, there were projects that were unable to start at the time of this evaluation. Committee members shared that their voice was heard and valued. Committee members also stated that they felt they were contributing, being a part of something very worthy by offering the CCGs.

## **Section D - Granting Process**

Proponents indicated that they were very grateful for the CCGs. They highlighted the importance of the Turning the Tide Community Coordinator's role as part of this process. Proponents reported that they were able to communicate and ask questions which helped them to understand the CCGs grant criteria and process. Committee members appreciated that the Community Coordinator found the answers that the committee was seeking and provided them with information to make decisions. Diagram A outlines the granting process from beginning to end: an idea for a community project to pre-vetting the project proposal, at which stage the Community Coordinator provides suggestions and recommendation to the project proponents on ways they can strengthen the project for endorsement, to the submission of the project proposal to the CCGs Committee, to the endorsement of the project, and to the monitoring of the project until its completion; and finally providing support for the evaluation process.

Diagram A: Community Connections Grant Intake Process

This diagram depicts the process for the submission, review and endorsement of a project



The following table contains quotes from all data sources:

Table z(d): Strengths and Challenges Reported Related to the Granting Process

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Project teams shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Michael (Community Coordinator) is always available to discuss ideas/plans I have. I feel more comfortable running things by someone with an interest in the funds before I do anything big.</li> <li>• I found speaking with Michael extremely beneficial to understanding the CCGs</li> <li>• I felt more stress free after speaking with Michael and confident in submitting an application</li> <li>• The process was easy and professionally done</li> <li>• I recommend that TtT does not change a thing regarding the CCGs process</li> </ul>	<p>Project teams shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was miscommunication and phone tag which I found very stressful</li> <li>• There was a lack of communication about endorsements</li> <li>• The notification of the status of project proposal, and notification of when the monies deposited into project’s accounts needs to be improved</li> <li>• The CCGs criterion was too broad-need examples to help proponents to increase their understand of the CCGs criteria</li> </ul>
<p>Committee members shared that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The CCGs process was a fresh look on an old method</li> <li>• The meetings were very productive</li> <li>• Michael made sure we-the committee had all the information we needed for decision-making of endorsements</li> <li>• The information regarding projects were sent out prior to meeting-very important</li> <li>• It was surprising how many small communities put projects together</li> <li>• Had to do research in order to obtain an understanding of the projects</li> <li>• It was a very progressive committee</li> <li>• The CCGs committee was always trying to help applicants-communities to succeed</li> <li>• The committee was always looking for ways to improve the CCGs process</li> </ul>	<p>Committee members shared that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A more formal process-rating system would be helpful for approving projects</li> <li>• I felt at times discussions were subjective for both approval and seeking more information from projects</li> <li>• It was hard to judge comfort level of members.</li> <li>• Everyone is trying to be politically correct so you really don’t know what they think or if they disagree.</li> </ul>

The support provided by the Community Coordinator was stated as an essential component for the CCGs grant process by both the proponents and the committee. The criteria for the CCGs for those proponents with a background in grant submissions was easy, clear, concise and professionally done. However, a few proponents without experience submitting grant

applications found the criteria arduous and at times too broad. A suggestion from proponents was to provide examples. One proponent stated that. *“I can see how someone unfamiliar with grant writing can get lost.”*

Many proponents reported that communication was wonderful. Conversely, other proponents stated that there needed to be improvements in communication and how communication occurred. Proponents suggested that the projects should be notified when funds are deposited into accounts and the deadlines for when funding had to be spent. Other proponents noted there was miscommunication on how to improve the project proposal and they felt unsure what was being asked and/or required of them for the project to be endorsed. Proponents suggested more clarity on, *“how grants work-deadlines”* for submissions, *“is it one time funding? Can you apply for another project? Can examples be provided for the grant criteria?”*

The CCGs committee appreciated that the Community Coordinator pre-vetted the project applications prior to the committee members receiving the submissions. This process allowed for the Community Coordinator to seek clarity from the proponents about their respective projects and to provide the necessary information the committee would be seeking. This pre-vetting increased the efficiency of the committee deliberations and allowed optimum success of endorsements of projects.

## Section E - Next Steps & Recommendations

This section includes recommendations shared by interview participants about how to strengthen the CCG process for the next funding round. Many of the recommendations are in reference to communication: which is easily rectified. The committee may want to consider a communication plan to address these items prior to moving forward to the next round of grants.

### **Scoring Process**

A few CCGs committee members recommended more clarity around scoring – and creating a rubric to support/ensure/increase objectivity of decision-making. This will increase transparency and limit the subjectivity of scoring.

### **Advance Voting**

There were instances in which not all committee members could attend the CCGs meetings via Zoom. The committee members voted to approve advance voting for those committee members who were not able to attend the CCGs committee meetings. Some CCGs members found this to be problematic as the scoring was not connected to a scoring matrix. It was noted that during discussions at the committee meetings, members provide different perspectives and information which informs the decision-making process. A few committee members stated that they had changed their scoring of a project based upon deliberations at the committee meetings.

### **Composition of the CCG Committee: Diversity & Representation**

Presently, the CCGs committee has only 7 out of 10 positions filled – the committee must determine the composition in terms of representation and the number of committee members.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

Members of the CCGs committee noted a need for a signed conflict of interest statement for both members and staff attached to the CCGs committee.

All committee members and TtT backbone team members involved in the CCGs, must sign a conflict-of-interest statement - MUST physically recuse themselves from a discussion for a project in which there is a conflict of interest - it needs to be made very clear who has a conflict of interest/stake in applications.

### **Proponents of Projects**

The findings from the evaluation based on data drawn from participant's comments suggests: The person applying for the CCGS must be a member of the organization, school, service club and/or a committee applying for project funding. Additionally, this evaluation found that unless the proponent has signing authority for the group, organization and/or entity, it is not legally binding, thus the organization is not legally bound to comply with the terms of the endorsement letter.

### **CCGs Funding Amount**

CCGs committee members suggested that they should be provided with clarity about the total amount of grants available to be invested into the communities. This will determine the maximum grant allotted for each project and the frequency of committee meetings.

### **Communication: More Clarity About Written Communications to Projects.**

Much of the communication was discussed via phone. For some proponents this led to confusion and miscommunication. Telephone conversations need to be followed up with written communication stating the nature of the conversation and the items discussed.

Projects should be notified in writing via email when funds have been deposited into their respective accounts. Some projects were not informed when and if the funds were deposited into their accounts. This led to delays of project start-ups.

Any further requirements by the CCGs committee and/ or reminders to projects need to be clearly outlined in writing and submitted in a timely manner. Some proponents reported that it was unclear to them from the telephone conversation of the information that the CCGs committee was requesting of them, in order for the project to receive endorsement from the committee.

## **Section F - Concluding Remarks**

The CCGs by all accounts from both proponents of the projects and members of the CCGs committee was successful. This success is determined based on responses to questions drawn from the framework for change, and the subsequent criterion developed for the CCGs.

Connections, collaborations and relationship building are the key highlights reported by the proponents. Without the CCGs, projects could not have been implemented. These projects were crucial during the time of the COVID-19 PANDEMIC. In many cases, the projects became the focal point of the community bringing community members together to work on a common agenda-that being providing needed services within the community. The projects acted as a catalyst for community cohesiveness where the mantra in several of the communities is that, “*We*

*take care of one another, we are community*". One project developed an innovative way to connect their activities to those most isolated-that being elders residing in a long-term care facility. With the construction and creation of community-based projects, this facilitates a positive imagery which supports and puts into motion a positive community narrative. Additionally, the outdoor activities of the CCGs projects, allowed for a celebratory event which is essential in developing a positive community narrative, not just for community residents but also visitors in the area.

However, as noted in the previous section, there are recommendations that the CCGs committee members must consider and address.

# **Appendix A**

## **Project Descriptions**

Legend: 1=Digby Area 2=Jordantown/Acaciaville/Conway 3=Barton/Brighton Area 4=Weymouth Area

5=Digby Neck 6=Long/Brier Island 7=Bear River 8=Bear River First Nation 9=Overall/Municipality

Project Name	Proponent Name	Community Partner	Community/Location	Amount Endorsed	Description	Community
DES Free Store	Courtney Phillips	SchoolsPlus	Digby Elementary School	\$3,000.00	Free Items for Students	1
DRHS Free Store	Penny Foster	SchoolsPlus	Free Store at Digby Regional High School, Room 212, 35 Mount Street, Digby	\$3,000.00	Free Items for Students	1
Weymouth Elementary Free Store	Candy Mullen	SchoolsPlus	Weymouth Elementary School	\$3,000.00	Free Items for Students	4
Digby SchoolsPlus Student Emergency Fund	Courtney Phillips	SchoolsPlus	Digby, Weymouth, Digby Neck & Islands areas	\$3,000.00	Free Supplies/Services for Students	1
Muinaq	Amber Harlow-Potter	Bear River First Nation Health Centre	Bear River First Nation Health Center	\$3,000.00	Intergeneration Cultural Knowledge	8
Digby Wesleyan Church Youth Programs (Grades Primary to 12)	Curtlen Peck	Digby Wesleyan Church	Mostly in the Church. One program at DRHS, one at the Deep Brook Lions Club	\$3,000.00	Programs/Activities for Youth	1
CONNECTCare Kitchen Appliances	Tim Long	Live Well Community Church	Live Well Community Church Basement	\$3,000.00	Food Boxes/Cooking Program	5 & 6
Meal & Heal	Saskia Geerts	Grace United Church	Sydney Street Pub & Cafe	\$1,000.00	Free Meal Program	1
Islands Food Bank	David Tudor	Freeport Baptist Church	Westport, Freeport, Central Grove, Tiverton, East Ferry, Tiddville, Whale Cove, Little River	\$3,000.00	Food Supplies/Services	6
Weymouth Community Garden	Maureen Langsford	Weymouth Waterfront Development Committee	Weymouth (next to Food Bank)	\$3,000.00	Fresh vegetables/ Garden Lots	4
Freeport Greenhouse	Rick Wallace	Freeport Community Development Association	Freeport and surrounding communities	\$1,000.00	Fresh vegetables/ Garden Lots	6
Undercurrent	Sharon White	Rossway United Baptist Church	Rossway and surrounding communities	\$3,000.00	Youth Programs	5
Universal Design Playground	Charlotte Sabean	Barton Volunteer Fire Department	Barton/Brighton Communities	\$3,000.00	Accessible/Inclusive Public Playground	3
Moving Up	Sharon Mac Alpine	DARC	Municipality of Digby	\$3,000.00	Playground Equipment	1
Tiny Free Library	Christine Callaghan	Freeport Community Development Association	Freeport and surrounding communities	\$1,000.00	Free Books	6
JAC Senior Activities Program	Wendy Balsler	JACBA	Acaciaville United Baptist Church Hall	\$3,000.00	Activities for Seniors	2
Health & Wellness Journey	Wendy Balsler	JACBA	Fundy YMCA	\$1,000.00	Activities for Community	2
BRFN Playground Fencing	Amber Harlow-Potter	BRFN Band Office	Bear River First Nation	\$3,000.00	Access to outdoor playground equipment	8
SMBA Natural Play Area	Janice Cromwell	SMBA	Saint Mary's Bay Academy	\$3,000.00	Co-create and develop playground with students/staff	4

DRHS Climbing Wall	Cara Sunderland, DARC	DRHS	DRHS	\$3,000.00	Physical Activities for Students	1
Venue Washrooms for Events	Peggy MacAlpine	Trinity Anglican Church	Trinity Anglican Church	\$3,000.00	Accessible and gender-neutral washrooms	1
Music on the Promenade	Al Dupuis	Digby Business Association	Downtown Digby	\$1,700.00	Social gathering to reduce isolation and enjoy local musicians and reconnect with residents	1
Outdoor Classroom/ Learning Space	Courtney Phillips	DES/DARC	Digby Elementary School	\$3,000.00	Facilitate outdoor learning for Students	1
Edible Seaside Park	Katherine Freiel	Village of Freeport	Town of Freeport	\$3,000.00	Community Fruit Garden	6
Bear River Eats	Angela McMullen	Bear River Legion	Bear River and surrounding areas	\$3,000.00	Provides hot meals	7
The Spirit Hall	Hal Theriault	Weymouth Historical Society	Weymouth and surrounding area	\$3,000.00	Facilitate cultural understanding through the arts-theatre	4
Community Cares (Round 2)	Meika Blandin	Islands Food Bank	Overall Digby and surrounding areas	\$500/\$3000	Couponing to reduce cost of groceries for families	9
Digby Cancer Help Fund Association	Alma Thibault	The Digby Cancer Help Fund Association	The Digby Cancer Help Fund Association	\$3,000	Provides free transportation to medical/treatment appointments	9
Music on the Sissiboo	Jeanne Nesbit	Weymouth Waterfront Development Committee	Weymouth Waterfront Development	\$1,000	Social gathering to reduce isolation and enjoy local musicians and reconnect with residents	4
Plympton Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery	Joan Nelson	Plympton Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery Society	Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery	\$3,000	Beautification of cemetery and to preserve historical knowledge	3

# **Appendix B**

## **Interview Guides**

Community Connection Grants Committee Members  
Proponents of Projects

**Interview Guide: Community Connection Grants (CCGs)**  
**Committee Members Interview Guide**

- 1 Please describe the overall Community Connection Grant endorsement process
  - What did you learn about the grant process?
  - Did you try new things/processes? If so, please provide examples.
  - Did Covid-19 change how committee operated and/or how your work was done? If so, please explain.
  - Did the process allow for equal participation and ownership of the work? Please explain.
  - How did the Committee adapt to the effects of Covid-19?
  
- 2 What was the process for decision making?
  - Did this process change? If so, how. Please provide examples.
  
- 3 Given that the CCGs was a new initiative, looking back, would you have done things differently? If so, please explain.
  
- 4 What advice or recommendations would you provide to someone starting up a CCG-like awards process?
  
- 5 Were you able to make connections and/or share information with other committee members? Please explain.
  
- 6 How do you think the community benefited from receiving grants? Please explain.
  
- 7 As a result of participating on the committee, did you learn about other communities in Digby, and/or community groups? If so, please explain.
  
- 8 As a CCG Committee member, what do you think your key learning are? Please explain.

**Interview Guide: Community Connection Grant (CCG)  
Project Proponents Interview Guide**

- 1 Please describe your project.
  - Did the project experience unexpected challenges, pleasant surprises? If so, please explain.
  - What difference did the project make in your community? Please list both positive and negative effects.
  - How did you find the process for applying for the Community Connections Grants? Please explain.
  - Do you have suggestions regarding the application process?
  - Could your Project had happened without the Community Connection Grants?
  
- 2 How did the Project support strengthen resident and community engagement and connections?
  - Please explain.
  
- 3 If possible, please list an estimate number and the types of connections made within and across communities.
  
- 4 Did your project support sharing resources? If so, please provide examples
  - If possible, please list the number and types of resources shared within and across communities. (Information regarding services, programs, and supports, i.e., Food Box)
  
- 5 Did Covid-19 Pandemic affect your project? If so, please explain how.
  
- 6 How did the CCG support your Project to celebrate successes? If so, please provide examples.
  - What were three main successes of your project?
  - How do you know that your project was successful?
  - What strategies or elements helped you achieve these successes?
  
- 7 Did receiving a Community Connection Grant help you obtain other funding?
  
- 8 What key takeaways or learnings did you gain from doing this project?

- 9 If you were to do this Project again, what would you do differently, do the same, or not at all?
  
- 10 Could other communities benefit from your project? If there was an opportunity, would you be interested in sharing your project with other communities?