

Municipal Partnership for Violence Prevention: City of Toronto Grants

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Summary

Grant programs are a model of partnership that support community participation in municipal agenda-setting, policy development, and effective service delivery.

The Breaking the Cycle of Violence Grants Program is a strategic funding program started in 1993 in the City of Toronto. Women convinced local politicians that such a grants program would be an appropriate way for the city to provide leadership on issues that it could not directly address since it did not have a mandate to address private violence or abuse issues (as social services belonged to the province and upper municipal tier).

Grants support non-profit community organizations in undertaking education, outreach, support, training, and other activities related to community safety and violence prevention. The key to the program's success is that it can respond to *whole community* issues through multiple organizations that each addresses the needs of different vulnerable groups (women, youth, seniors, disabled, immigrants, refugees, gay/lesbian...). Instead of following a narrow focus, the grant program supports organizations in responding to issues that they identify themselves.

Re-establishing agendas and understanding of issues as politicians change is required in partnerships with municipal government. A large challenge in Toronto has been maintaining the grant program through the amalgamation of seven different city governments into one new municipality. This has especially affected how community groups need to communicate their needs/interests to politicians and show results of their work to provide a new level of accountability for public funds.

I am very happy to be part of this panel today, and to share with you some of the violence prevention work we have been doing at the municipal level through the Breaking the Cycle of Violence grants program at the City of Toronto.

Partnerships

Before I talk about the Breaking the Cycle of Violence grants program, I want to say a bit about my assumptions about partnerships. Although we want to think of partnerships as conscious decisions, in real life, they are not always formal or even recognized. In the municipal arena it is probably useful to assume there is always an underlying partnership between the local government and other organizations in the community, even though it may not always be effective or active. The inherent purposes of the partnership are agenda setting, choosing policy directions and taking action. Although the municipality and the community, through local organizations may not see themselves as equal partners in these areas, each one is essential to the process of getting the agenda right, choosing the best policy directions and taking effective action.

In the City of Toronto, we use some models of partnership in the policy arena—such as task forces or special committees. Other types of partnerships, such as grant programs are usually developed where there is a need to take action at the community level, but they also support community participation in the areas of municipal agenda setting and policy development.

What do we do?

Breaking the Cycle of Violence grants program is a strategic funding program at the City of Toronto. We started in 1993, and over the last 9 years have provided over \$5 million dollars of funding to about 500 projects. That works out to about half a million dollars per year, to about 55 organizations per year.

The grants are intended to support community organizations in undertaking education, outreach, support programs, training and related activities to increase community safety and prevent violence. The program is for the non-profit sector, and addresses the needs of women and other vulnerable groups in the community, such as youth, seniors, people with disabilities, immigrants, refugees, and the gay, lesbian transgendered, transsexual communities. The key to

the success of the program is that it can respond to *whole community* issues, and support organizations in responding to issues they identify. We are not tied down to working only with a certain age group, or supporting only a predetermined strategy.

Where did the program come from?

About 14 years ago there were several incidents of violent attacks against women in public parks in the City of Toronto. The primary public response to these incidents came from the police who reflected common perceptions of safety, and included advice to women to stay out of parks at night. The implication of this advice was that the arm of the community responsible for safety could not respond to women's vulnerability.

Lots of sensible women and men understood that this was not an adequate response, and a series of community meetings was held to identify what other parts of the community could be called on to increase women's safety, so that women could use their city as freely as men. Out of this initiative came a formal "Safe City Committee" with politicians and community members, and a mandate to identify policy directions, specific actions and co-ordination with other levels of government for increasing safety.

The initial focus of the Safe City Committee was on public spaces, such as transit and parks, laneways and parking garages. The city did not have a mandate to address private violence issues and respond to child abuse or abused women—social services belonged to the upper tier municipality and the province at that point in time. But the Safe City Committee provided an arena to listen to community input and to be creative, and the grants program was developed to support community-based agencies to work in areas the city could not address directly. A lot of women worked very hard to convince the politicians that this approach was an appropriate way for the city to provide leadership.

What has been accomplished?

A program like the Breaking the Cycle of Violence creates significant challenges for us in counting things and identifying accomplishments. In addition to the high level overview of how much money we spend, and how many organizations are involved, I want to share a few of the specific success stories that community partners report to us.

- 1) Introduced art therapy with refugees and victims of torture in an organization that continues the work on its own.
- 2) Trained women in many newcomer communities in community services, violence prevention, peer education and supported them in outreach in their communities.
- 3) Developed assessment and response protocols for use in community agencies and a hospital for better detection and response to woman abuse.
- 4) Researched the needs of abused Chinese women and their use of the shelter system.
- 5) Supported developmental work on alternative dispute resolution training, delivery models and a framework for co-ordinated delivery with the justice system.
- 6) Supported the development of a volunteer peer support program for youth and adults affected by childhood sexual abuse.
- 7) Funded the development of a roundtable to co-ordinate culturally appropriate and integrated family violence prevention and support activities for the aboriginal community.
- 8) Assisted with the special recruitment efforts of a youth serving organization to increase the number of trained mentors available for at risk youth.
- 9) Funded the work of a local crime prevention committee to work with storeowners and local organizations to address street safety concerns of residents, many of them Vietnamese and Chinese speaking newcomers.
- 10) Enabled the local women's centre to do extra outreach and education in a community affected by a serial rapist.

- 11) Recommended projects that use theatre to engage at-risk youth or women or seniors in developing prevention messages and educating peers.
- 12) Supported the development of peer conflict resolution training for youth.

What are the challenges?

There are lots of challenges that come with any partnership relationship with a municipality. These include the usual list—government can be slow to respond to issues, programs are not always flexible enough to respond to community needs. As well, municipal politicians change every three years, and this may mean a need to re-establish agenda's and understanding of issues.

In the City of Toronto, one particular challenge in the past four years has been maintaining the grant program through the process of amalgamation of seven different city governments into one new municipality. Community groups in Toronto will tell you that the process of massive change meant changes to the way they communicated their needs and interests to the politicians.

When the partnership is through a grants program, the largest current challenge is managing in an environment with increasing accountability needs. The audit experience at the federal level with HRDC grant programs has had an impact at the municipal level as well, and organizations are being expected to provide a new level of accountability for public funds.

From the other side of the partnership, it is also true that the municipality must provide additional measures of accountability to the community. When programs are developed to address strategic needs in the community, there is a requirement to show the results of our work to the community partners who help set the agenda, inform the policy decisions, and do the day to day work of delivering programs in the community.