



# Nova Scotia Community Housing Sector: Funding

While people involved in the community housing sector (CHS) appreciate government commitments to invest in affordable housing, concern exists that many organizations need assistance to respond to funding opportunities when they are offered. Existing bureaucratic processes, which appear to be designed for large-scale housing providers, place too great a burden on CHS organizations. They recognize the critical opportunity the National Housing Strategy investment provides but fear they do not have the supports in place to access these funds that could make tangible and lasting improvements in their communities. Barriers to both core/operational and capital funding are thwarting the ability of CHS organizations to achieve and scale their goals. This is compounded by the increasing burden placed on CHS organizations to broaden their missions to include the provision of more comprehensive social supports when public services are either lacking or difficult to access.

Funding requirements and priorities are tied to the type and the age of the organization. Some have, over time, developed a strong base of volunteers or staff who maintain core functions. The priority of such groups is to identify avenues to access capital funds to implement their projects, as well as acquire the skills and information required to develop comprehensive proposals. Other organizations desperately need core support to become established and build their capacity before they can design and seek funding for capital projects. The broader non-profit sector has for many years criticized funding structures that are based on short-term project cycles. This is also true of housing organizations who are calling for longer timeframes and renewable funding options to reduce “red tape” and to make funding opportunities more accessible to groups with deep knowledge of their communities. Regardless of stage in organizational development, people in the CHS have expressed concerns that current funding regimes are not designed with an understanding of the smaller scale and scope of housing projects that are responsive and appropriate for the priorities of the communities where they operate.

“We were successful in getting the property despite many people wanting it, and we were awarded the property at a reduced price. We had to prove it was financially sustainable.”

As governments express their commitments to address historical and continuing injustices, housing groups have suggested that some of the funds allocated to redressing injustice be dedicated to improving housing for specific groups such as African Nova Scotian, Indigenous, and Acadian communities, for example.

Several suggestions have been offered to address a range of funding challenges experienced by the sector. Examples include:

- Developing innovative financing models that bring together government, private, and community stakeholders collaborating on projects.
- Creating a community housing trust, a model that operates almost like a foundation to combine activities such as action planning, fundraising, cost sharing, and pooling purchases at reduced costs.
- Dedicating funds to renovating/upgrading existing stock, and to repurpose available municipal properties. Groups have identified properties they could convert but lack the access to funds.
- Aligning diverse funding options to reduce replication in application processes, and to remove the restrictions on “stacking” grants to leverage multiple funding opportunities.
- Streamlining application processes and using plain language.
- Prioritizing access to funding for projects that are community-led, especially in rural areas.
- Reducing risk for organizations to try new ideas.
- Providing funding to improve the stability and effectiveness of organizations, strengthen project staff skills, and hire navigators to connect people with the “wrap-around supports” they are seeking.
- Coordinating the funding and provision of housing and other supports to improve efficiency and access to care, an expanded “housing first” approach.
- Providing sustainable funding for longer-term planning for the future.
- Building capacity to calculate and demonstrate financial sustainability to qualify for grants.

CHS organizations are concerned they are overlooked when funding frameworks and calls for proposals are developed. Project-driven funding models undermine organizations’ ability to develop longer-term plans and maintain their properties and ensure staffing exists to provide the social supports that vulnerable and marginalized people require to succeed in their housing transitions. Systems designed for large-scale urban development activities can be beyond the scale that is manageable or desirable for smaller communities. The desire for greater collaboration expressed by members of the CHS extends to funding issues where they see opportunities for creative problem solving among relevant stakeholders.

