

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, February 7, 2023

Committee Room

Community Improvement Grants

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COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

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In Attendance:

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

Tamer Nusseibeh
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage

Justin Huston
Deputy Minister

Bill Greenlaw
Executive Director, Communities, Sport and Recreation

Christopher Shore
Executive Director, Culture and Heritage Development



HALIFAX, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2023

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

10:00 A.M.

CHAIR
MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD

VICE CHAIR
John White

THE CHAIR: Order. I call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Community Services. I am Melissa Sheehy-Richard, the MLA for Hants West and Chair of this committee. Today, we will hear presenters regarding the community improvement grants.

I'll just remind everybody to please turn off your cell phones or put them on silent. In case of an emergency, please use the Granville Street exit and walk up to Grand Parade. Also, as a special note, they are going to be doing blasting today, so we might be entertained with three long horns and then a big bang. If you need to pause during your questioning or answering, that's fair, or we can just go through. It should be an experience. (Interruption) The Big Bang Theory, yes. (Laughter)

I will now ask the committee members to introduce themselves for the record by stating their name and constituency, beginning with MLA White.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: For the purposes of Legislative TV, we are also joined by Chief Legislative Counsel Gordon Hebb, and Legislative Committee Clerk Tamer Nusseibeh.

The topic today is Community Services community improvement grants. Again, I want to welcome the witnesses, and ask them if they would like to introduce themselves, beginning with Deputy Minister Huston.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: At this point, I would welcome Deputy Minister Huston to give his opening remarks.

JUSTIN HUSTON: Good morning and thank you for inviting us here today. It's nice to be back with you all again. I think I was here a couple months ago on treaty education. We look forward to discussing our community improvement grant program. I'll use my opening time to share an overview, and then Chris and Bill will provide some more details of the programming.

The mandate of the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage is fundamentally about supporting Nova Scotia's people and communities. A significant portion of our budget - about \$91 million this year - is invested directly into communities through grants and funding programs. We have over 77 grants and contributions that fall under five types of programs: annual investments, application based, proposal based, strategic investments, and awards and recognitions. We support everything from sport and recreation to artists and musicians, to African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw community organizations, to French and Gaelic language development, to active living projects that help build healthier communities.

In the past two years, film and tourism have joined the department, and we invest millions to help local creators and operators grow these important sectors of our economy. For example, we're investing \$15 million in the new five-year Screen Nova Scotia Content Creator Fund to support local creators. We're working to support a healthy and balanced industry where international productions find a home here while local creators also have the resources they need to grow and thrive. The department is collaborating with Screen Nova Scotia and the tourism industry of Nova Scotia to look at how to leverage the work of the film industry to promote film tourism. We want to understand what is possible and how film tourism has contributed to the visitor experience.

The investments in community infrastructure have social, environmental, and economic benefits. These investments support the construction of hard assets like trails, rinks, legions, and community centres, but also provide less tangible social assets that are linked to providing core services to communities. For example - and Bill will speak to this further later - we've done a lot of work with our sport and recreation partners on anti-racism and safe sport initiatives so that those activities are more inclusive and welcoming for all Nova Scotians.

We've also targeted our grants and adjusted on the fly where we've needed to over the last couple of challenging years. I joined the department in 2019, and a few months later, COVID-19 hit. The department has played a critical role in government's response to the pandemic. Impacts have been particularly challenging - as folks around this table would know - for the arts, culture, museums, sport, recreation, and tourism sectors. Staff were in constant conversations with these sector partners to create new funding programs and supports to help them navigate and recover from the pandemic. That work is ongoing.

Of course, Hurricane Fiona last September caused significant damage throughout Nova Scotia, particularly in the northern areas of the province and on Cape Breton Island. The department responded by opening some of our museum and library sites for Nova Scotians in the days following Fiona. Our three largest museums - the Museum of Natural History in Halifax, the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, here as well, and the Museum of Industry in Stellarton all opened their doors for free. They offered spaces for people to charge devices and warm up. Smaller sites opened when they were able to, including Highland Village in Iona, Fundy Geological Museum in Parrsboro, and many local libraries did the same. Libraries that had power and weren't dealing with their own damage also helped Nova Scotians access the online forms for Fiona program supports.

Speaking of which, following Fiona, within two weeks, I think, the Province introduced a new community generator program to help community groups purchase and install generators at community centres so that the centres are able to serve as gathering spaces during power outages. There was such a significant response to the call for applications that this year the Province increased the funding from the initial announced \$2 million to \$5.8 million, helping 180 community organizations.

The call for 2023-24 is now open, and will close on February 14th. If there are questions about that, we can assist.

As you can see, our department is well positioned to support communities. It's something that we take very seriously. We make sure all constituency offices are informed of grant programs, when applications are open, and when the deadline is to submit them. We work hard to be nimble and adaptive in how we meet the needs of communities that we serve, which is the heart of what we do. We are constantly balancing consistency and accountability with being responsive to varying community needs.

Over the past two years, we've undertaken an extensive program improvement project. We're in the final phase of it now. This is something that I highlighted with the Public Accounts Committee. We've worked to improve consistency in documentation, but we're also focused on equity, diversity, and inclusion. Staff have reached out to people who have received funding from our grant programs but also to those who have been unsuccessful in the past or have never applied to us before. We're identifying where the barriers may be.

One thing that's clear - especially in communities that have been historically underserved by government - is that we can't copy and paste our processes or take a one-size-fits-all approach. That's not equitable. So I'm pleased to say that we've made major progress. We've updated our guidelines, applications and reporting to ensure that applicants link their projects to the programs' objectives. We've developed tools and hosted training sessions to ensure that we're embedding risk assessment in all our programs. We're making sure that our processes are accessible and meet the needs of the communities we serve.

I'm going to leave it at that for now and hand it over first to Chris Shore and then Bill Greenlaw to say a few words.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Shore.

CHRISTOPHER SHORE: My name is Chris Shore. As I said, I'm the executive director of the Culture and Heritage Development Division. The Culture and Heritage Development Division supports the development of Nova Scotia's arts, culture, heritage, festivals, and major events through investment programs to enhance cultural, economic, and social growth.

My division is divided into four units, one of which includes the Special Places protection unit, which has responsibility for archeology in the province. Now, I know that is not the focus of today's committee, but I just thought I would mention it, because there's a significant number of very interesting files and interesting interactions with all government departments, including the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia.

The other three units in my division are Events Nova Scotia, Culture and Heritage Development, and Arts Nova Scotia. Events Nova Scotia works with communities and event organizers to attract and develop major sporting, cultural, and entertainment events across the province. We use the Nova Scotia Event Strategy as a guide and the Events Nova Scotia team works to position Nova Scotia as a leader in event hosting and works to ensure that we deliver events at a very high level.

A recent example of that would be the 2023 IIHF World Junior Championship hockey tournament that recently took place in Halifax and Moncton. Another example would be Devour! The Food Film Fest, which takes place every Fall in the Annapolis Valley. We recently announced a \$2.2 million investment in a community hub that will help the Annapolis Valley continue to grow as an international culinary and cultural tourism destination. Renovations to our studios in Wolfville will allow the festival to have a permanent home there, and provide space for arts events and local food retailers.

The other unit that we have is the Culture and Heritage Development unit, which manages programs that support creative industry sectors and the culture and heritage sectors. So the creative industries - film and television, music, publishing, crafts, visual

arts and performing arts - support the commercial capacity of arts and culture businesses and organizations. The program also supports export development projects with increasing the market reach of Nova Scotia creative enterprises.

This past year, my division assumed responsibility for the Nova Scotia Film & Television Production Incentive Fund. This is a \$25 million fund that supports film and television production in Nova Scotia. In 2022-23, we also invested an extra \$16.4 million and increased the cap for any one film and television project to \$10 million, up from \$4 million. We made these changes to keep up with demand and industry needs, as film production has really taken off in Nova Scotia in the past three years. We've seen a significant increase in the number of projects.

The unit also provides operating funding to 70 cultural organizations and 68 community museums. Community-owned museums employ over 250 people, mostly in rural communities in Nova Scotia. The unit also funds our heritage property programs and is responsible for the registration of heritage properties in the province.

Arts Nova Scotia is the provincial funding agency that supports professional artists and arts organizations, arts education programs, and several awards and prizes. Arts Nova Scotia has a unique governance model that maximizes its efficiency. It's governed by an 11-member board of directors. The unit operates at arm's length in terms of funding decisions, but the staff of Arts Nova Scotia are provincial public servants. This keeps the administrative costs at a minimum while maintaining the international standard of arm's-length funding model using peer assessment committees for assessing and evaluating grants. Arts Nova Scotia has eight funding programs and administers seven awards annually.

This is a general overview of my division and the programs that it offers in support of arts, culture, and heritage. I'd like to pass it over to my colleague, Bill Greenlaw.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Greenlaw.

BILL GREENLAW: Good morning. I'm just going to dive right into it. I believe that the best way to describe the division that I'm the executive director of, is that we work in community for community supporting them to become more vibrant, welcoming and engaging places for current and future residents.

While the title identifies sport and recreation - and these are important sectors of which you all, I believe, have an understanding - Communities, Sport and Recreation or CSR also promotes and supports physical activity through a number of initiatives, including our Active Communities Fund. We also support the Municipal and Mi'kmaw Physical Activity Leadership Program through that. There are over 50 people whom we support across the province in that program.

We all know and understand that sport is important to Nova Scotians and we engage these sectors primarily through provincial sport and recreation organizations. We also work closely with our colleagues at Sport Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and other provinces and territorial governments to ensure quality and safe opportunities for all to be active.

Through the physical activity file, we engage local communities and recreation units within municipalities to support physical activity goals outlined in the Let's Get Moving Nova Scotia action plan. CSR supports all forms of recreation, including those that may not be active recreation - examples would be photography, art, music-type programs. We also support the community halls in which these activities are engaged by supporting infrastructure investments such as heat pumps, windows, et cetera, through our community development grants and our recreation development grants.

[10:15 a.m.]

We are so much more to communities than sport, recreation and physical activity. We have six regional offices. Many of you know our regional managers and I know that they're quite familiar with your constituency assistants. Their focus is to connect communities with investment possibilities that our department has to offer.

CSR takes a whole-of-community approach where we spend time listening to community members to make sure that they can leverage our investments to maximize their potential. We support local infrastructure projects, including new ballfield dugouts, for example, community gardens, community halls, skate parks, splash pads, local trails, and active transportation pathways. These are just a few examples of the reach of my division.

CSR has a lot of tools to assist community with what I will call the wraparound supports, like: supporting local community kitchens to provide meals to those in need or a Meals on Wheels type of program or organization, to helping repair or replace furnaces with a heat pump or windows in a community space, or helping communities become more accessible through our accessibility grants. The staff in the department and in the CSR division often help new Nova Scotians or organizations by spending time with them to make sure that they understand our processes and help them with their applications. It is part of our culture to become more human-centric and client focused. In fact, we've helped emerging organizations with the basics of just getting set up, from how to secure a not-for-profit status with the Province to board governance. Anything related to that that you can think of, we've assisted local organizations with. If you can think of it, we have probably helped.

The Rink Revitalization Fund and the Community Generator Program are two important grant programs that my team has stood up and administered in the past 18 months. Since 2021, we've supported 55 rinks to make much needed repairs, and 180

organizations to purchase and install generators so community members are able to gather in a space during power outages.

We also make investments that address community accessibility needs for not-for-profits and the business community as well. The Community ACCESS-Ability Program and the Business ACCESS-Ability Grant Program support accessibility related capital improvements in accordance with Nova Scotia's commitment to equal opportunity and improved access to community facilities. Improvements can be for clients and customers, for employees, or both. They range from automatic door openers, to ramps, to planning grants, to assisted technology for employees.

We also have grants that are available for communities to help address food security for the most vulnerable members. These investments are really needed and deeply appreciated by volunteer organizations that support community members. We've heard how energized volunteers feel about their community when they know they are assisting people and families who need help in having a healthy and warm meal.

CSR has two grant programs that are available for communities to apply to. The food strategic initiative grant supports the farmers market of the Nova Scotia initiative, or, as some of you may know it, the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program. It provides low-income households with a dignified way to shop at member markets for free using a weekly credit. Last year, this program helped 600 households in communities across the province, which is quite impressive.

The second grant is the Community Food Access and Literacy Fund. It provides investments to help educate community members on food preparation, healthy eating, and shopping within a budget. I wish my sons would know that. (Laughter) Through this grant, we also invest in community gardens. (Interruptions) It is true. It's a conflict of interest for my children to go to the program, but I wish they would.

We do great work at CCTH and in my division. I'm so very proud of our dedicated problem-solving team. I know that you've witnessed firsthand our approach with working with your offices and with the citizens in your communities. We really do try to think outside the box and help the best that we can. We are constantly listening to community to make our programs and funding models work for them. We are very conscious of the accountability frameworks that government requires of us to ensure that our investments are getting both a qualitative and a quantitative return on public dollars that we invest on behalf of the government. I look forward to your questions.

THE CHAIR: At this point, we will go into questioning of the witnesses by members from the committee. I just want to remind everybody to wait until their name is called and their microphone turns red for Legislative TV purposes. We will start with the 20-minute round with the Liberal caucus. MLA Nicoll.

LORELEI NICOLL: Thank you for your presentation. It's all encompassing and very large to absorb. It's a lot of money from all of you, and the accountability piece - that's the hat I always wear so I'm always looking at that through that lens.

Bill, you mentioned about you're trying to adopt as many funding models to address the inflationary pressures that we are experiencing now and you mentioned the couponing program. Our caucus was calling for an inflation indexing across multiple government programs as a mechanism to combat that and help Nova Scotians with the soaring cost of living.

I'd like to ask in the context of CCTH, with the number of grant programs it has to administer, I just wondered how the program budgets are being reviewed for maximum effectiveness to address that need.

JUSTIN HUSTON: Certainly affordability and inflationary costs have been a big issue for a lot of the groups that we work with. We work with them on a daily and weekly basis, understanding what some of their pressures might be and looking at ways that we can adapt our programs to meet them. Or if we have funding available - slippage that wasn't used in a certain program. We look at ways that we can assist.

Part of our budget process is that we put forward our pressures every year, and then it goes to Treasury and Policy Board for government decisions on our budget. Our staff work very closely with all the groups, so we have a pretty real-time sense of where folks are at. Certainly we're feeling some pressure for the issues that you raise, but I would say that based on the last two years, I'm very confident in our ability to meet those needs and be adaptive on a regular basis. It's something that we have practised doing, but it is certainly a growing issue.

LORELEI NICOLL: The 2022 follow-up report from the Auditor General tells us that only 58 per cent of its recommendations from its 2018 audit on grant programs have been completed. That's almost half of its recommendations that haven't been implemented over that five-year period. Those include important recommendations like establishing performance indicators for grant programs and developing appropriate monitoring to ensure each stage of the process is followed correctly. Does the government still plan to meet these recommendations and if so, on what timeline?

JUSTIN HUSTON: Yes. Those questions were the line of questioning for the Public Accounts Committee a couple of months back. Yes, we're working to finish those. I think of the four that were remaining, two have been completed and we're on progress by the end of this fiscal year to complete the other two.

Part of the delay, frankly - COVID-19 hit, and our focus was on how we adapt and change programs. Also, when we got into looking at the program delivery, we wanted to focus on - first, just to note that the Auditor General found that there were no issues. They

just thought that it could be strengthened by greater accountability, which we totally agree with.

As we started to dig into programs, we didn't want to just add another layer of accountability without also looking at accessibility. Frankly, EDI was not a lens that we had on a lot of the programs when they were built. You can imagine over 77 different programs that have come in - it's kind of a bit of a Frankenstein's monster in some ways of all these programs and were they the most effective and were they meeting communities' needs the best they could?

That's where our program improvement project really got under way, was based on the Auditor General's recommendations. From that, I think we've built a really good process and we have put in place all the recommendations that the Auditor General made. The last two, I think, will be completed at the end of this fiscal year.

LORELEI NICOLL: With this process, accountability is on both sides: yours and the applicants. I just wondered if criteria are put out there publicly as to how you score each one? Also, who has the final approval, and are those scoring criteria public?

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'll start a general response to this and then I'll hand it to Chris and Bill for some examples. Because of the breadth of the different programs - we have so many - there are essentially different approaches. Some of those programs are application-based, so there would be very clear criteria on which their applications can be graded; Chris can speak to some of these. Others are proposal-based. They just come in and it looks like a good proposal. It's something that we entertain because it follows along with our program stream.

There is a level of accountability. For example, there's a hold-back on most programs until a final report is provided, which we can then make sure that the money was spent the way it was. Or, if it's a physical asset, we can go and check and see if its accessibility grant was completed, and was it built to the standard that was required? So there is that level of accountability.

Maybe I'll hand it first to Chris, who can give us some examples, and then Bill, because I think they'll give you a sense of the specifics.

CHRISTOPHER SHORE: As the deputy minister mentioned, there are a number of different ways that we evaluate. You can look at accountability in two ways: the accountability that we receive an application; and then the accountability piece after something is funded, and we want to make sure that the money that we've given is in fact given for the reason it was.

The first part is really about having guidelines and scoring grids and matrices that are there, and those are all available for all the programs that we have. We have about 44

of the 77 outward-facing application based. There are applications with guidelines, to say how you fill it out. It comes in to us and we have three different ways that we would evaluate that.

If it's an arts-based grant, Arts Nova Scotia uses peer assessment. Those are experts who are brought together. They look at and evaluate those grants, and they make a recommendation. We also use staff panels where we have a mixture of external experts and staff, and then we have internal review as well. Every one of them has to meet and be scored according to what a particular grant does.

In the case of infrastructure, it's the same thing. When an infrastructure grant comes in, it's reviewed by staff. There's a terms and conditions document that's developed. It has milestones. It has things that have to be met. There are meetings, inspections - all of those pieces.

In terms of the outward - the last part of accountability - there are final reports that have to come in. There are hold-backs in certain areas that are met, and all of that is checked. So that's all part of that accountability matrix.

BILL GREENLAW: I don't really have much else to add. That's pretty much how we do it in the department. My division is similar. It's fairly consistent.

The question is, ultimately the minister approves the grant. We don't fetter the minister's responsibility. All of the grant programs go to the minister for approval, so whoever the minister of the day is gives the final sign-off on the recommendations, depending on how it was juried. But at the end of the day, it's the minister who signs off.

Secondly, I just want to talk about measuring success, if you will, or the output. As I talked about in my opening remarks, there are qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative measures are easy: you get an ROI, so how much money did I get back on that, and was it two-to-one or three-to-one investment?

But our department is really about qualitative as well. It's feeling a sense of belonging to community - how do you measure that? So we're working with groups like Engage Nova Scotia on a quality of life index to figure out how we get a handle around those kind of measures. They are equally as important.

About 2018, we had a discussion with the Auditor General's Office about qualitative measures and about working with new and emerging groups that have been excluded from access to funding or excluded or new Canadians, et cetera. It gave us the ability to move into the qualitative space to measure that. If we have a sense about Nova Scotia and a sense of being in our community, it's that qualitateness that makes you feel proud. It's not that I make \$3 on my \$1 investment.

I think our department is a bit of both. I just want to say that the qualitative measures are equally or more important than the quantitative hard numbers. I'll just leave it at that.

LORELEI NICOLL: I thank you for that, having had many years of experiencing grants at a municipal level, where we had an actual grants committee. We don't have that at the provincial level, and that's why the qualitative piece is where the wiggle room is as well, I guess. Therefore that criteria is determined, as you say, by the minister. So good for you to be proud of what you put forward, but sometimes it doesn't land the way you would recommend. I just wanted to put that out there.

I'd like to ask a question now about the Community Food Access and Literacy Fund. We know that over the past year, we've seen more food insecurity and food bank usage than ever before in our province. Feed Nova Scotia were in here recently and were able to update us, and I think that's when Justin Huston - I think you were here that day, perhaps. I can't quite recall.

[10:30 a.m.]

Anyway, I'd like to ask about its subscription. How many organizations received funding through this program in the past year? Are we seeing the enrollment where it should be and could be qualitatively, and how could government improve the fund to make sure we're seeing fewer food deserts and more access points to food for Nova Scotia families?

JUSTIN HUSTON: Do you want to take this one, Bill, since this is in your world?

BILL GREENLAW: As I said in my opening remarks, we have two grant programs. There's the food securities initiative, which we like to think of as food in bellies - it's about feeding people. Then there's the Community Food Access and Literacy Fund, which is about gardens and learning. If you have a community garden or you want to do those education-type programs, or the budgeting as I referred to in my opening remarks - that would be a CFAL-type grant.

Of course, we support the food banks, et cetera, but during COVID-19 when the issue of food security was heightened because of people's inability to get food, we did an extensive look at what was available in community. You shouldn't be surprised, but, maybe, being in Halifax, we were surprised about how supportive the mechanisms already placed in community are. What was enlightening from that perspective was that we didn't need to find millions of dollars to support community. They just needed \$1,000 to go buy food, or \$2,000. Now that is a lot of money to them, but not in the amount of money that maybe makes the headlines, for example.

We were very successful in reaching into local community groups that organize the kitchens in community and distribute the food. We initially started off thinking that the

Meals on Wheels Nova Scotia program would be it, but realized through our own learning that that's not a universal thing across the province. We had to figure out how to manoeuvre. This would be an ROI - I don't have this specific, but for the amount of investment in investing in local food security issues, they leveraged that funding into feeding an impressive amount of people locally in community.

Recently, the food bank in Reserve Mines did an excellent job at meeting community needs during Hurricane Fiona where people were without power and kitchens. They fed the community. They ran out of their available funding, and we were able to find an extra \$100,000 in the department to reinvest in that community so they continue on supporting people of need in that community. I can give you feedback at that level, but I'd have to dig down to give you the specific numbers. It is impressive.

I think the key learning, because I'm in the communities file, is that if we look to communities, they just need support. They don't necessarily need a lot of support to activate things in community, and I know you all witness that first-hand. I think it is an issue. It's an issue that we're addressing. The Department of Agriculture is doing the food strategy, so we're waiting to see the results of that. That may solidify our ability to support food insecurity needs across the province.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Huston, do you have a comment?

JUSTIN HUSTON: Just a quick follow-up on that - I won't use up too much time. Just want to note that the application deadline is coming up on March 25th for the Community Food Access and Literacy Fund program, for your constituents or others that are interested. Just an example of one of the projects that CCTH has helped play a leadership role in supporting is the Mobile Food Market here in Halifax. It's a great example of a community idea, a need identified, and then coming together to make something happen. That funding comes through that program that I just mentioned.

LORELEI NICOLL: I was wondering because I've been involved in those programs when they were initiated at the ground level. I wanted to ask specifically - I've been wanting very much to go to the Wolfville Farmers' Market and decided to go up Friday, stay overnight, support local, and then that cold snap hit. I stayed an extra night. Good for Wolfville's economy.

I wanted to ask about the farmers' markets in particular. Some of the vendors who were there, who showed up in that storm, were there because that's their economy. I wanted to know if there are any available funding streams to help them on an operational cost. I've always supported local and bought local, but I just wondered how, in the future, can they get operational support to actually provide food that's in their neighbourhood?

BILL GREENLAW: Sorry, Madam Chair. (Interruption) I'm just excited. (Laughter) Who says they're excited to be at committee? (Interruption) Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. You know my tactic.

Actually, I've gone blank on the question.

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'll start. We actually don't have a specific funding program for farmers' markets, but we have worked with a lot since I've been here for three years. For example, we've done solar panels on one or two farmers' markets to help them in terms of cutting their costs and also moving in the direction of greening their energy sources. We've provided other funding in terms of - whether it be tourism related, a real link into an asset like - I go to the farmers' market in Wolfville all the time too. It's one of my favourite places to go. So the idea of how do you take something that is a community anchor and grow that?

Further to the comments that Bill made, every community is a little bit different, and everybody has a little different idea of what they need to take it to the next level. Our job is to listen, be adaptative, and hear what folks come to the table with. So that's an example of some of the things that we've done with the farmers' markets.

LORELEI NICOLL: How much time?

THE CHAIR: Two fifty-four.

LORELEI NICOLL: I would strongly look into that because they were there in the freezing cold. There was a young person who'd just started to get into microgreens, and I supported him mostly because he was just starting off. He may not know about grants. A lot of people there - a lot of people in Nova Scotia don't know where to apply for money. In part it's our role, but it's all about supporting that young person who's having the microgreens.

Okay. You can continue.

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'd just like to touch upon something. Thank you for letting me speak. One of the things that we've found with the program-improvement process is that one thing we can do better about is helping people understand all that is available for them to apply to - whether it's a small farmer who's starting off who might be able to access something in the Department of Agriculture or to us.

We've developed a tool - an online portal that we're going to go live with soon. We'll share it with folks when we're ready to go. It's essentially like a questionnaire that, when people get on - instead of trying to find the exact program that they need to apply to, and if they don't go down the right door, maybe they don't access the program. It's asking a series of questions that will then open doors for them.

Basically, every door that they eventually will open, there's always an option to call somebody in the department to find out more information. What we're finding is that some people - we try to do the best that we can. If you call Chris, Chris is like: That doesn't quite apply. Go talk to Bill's team. But we know that some people will just get discouraged because it doesn't relate to them: So I guess nothing's available to me.

So to your exact point, we're really trying to make sure that all Nova Scotians realize that there is funding out there to support the things that align with government's priorities.

THE CHAIR: MLA Nicoll. Just under one minute.

LORELEI NICOLL: Just quickly, I wanted to ask you if the Building Vibrant Communities fund still exists.

BILL GREENLAW: The Building Vibrant Communities grant program no longer exists. It was part of the poverty-reduction strategy of the previous government. DCS is in the process of developing a new plan, so those Building Vibrant Communities grants ended at the beginning of this fiscal year.

Just an add-on - the department invests in not-for-profit organizations. If the farm industry or the person who is growing that is a business, there is generally not a way to access that kind of funding from our department. The exception would be the Business ACCESS-Ability grants, where we fund businesses to become more accessible. Other than that, it's essentially not-for-profits. I just want to be clear on that.

LORELEI NICOLL: What day is the plan coming out?

BILL GREENLAW: Which one?

LORELEI NICOLL: The DCS plan.

THE CHAIR: The time for Liberal questions has ended. I just wanted to ask Deputy Minister Huston, maybe when the portal goes online, you could share it with the committee. It's excellent to hear.

We will now move on to the NDP caucus. MLA Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: First, thanks for being here, and on behalf of Reserve Mines, thank you for that funding. They work extremely hard and are constantly at our office.

I do have a question with regard to the grant review. Can you say which programs have switched some segments of the program from a grant model to one that would be more operating, with funding over several years?

JUSTIN HUSTON: We do have a stream of funding which is operating - and Chris can speak to that a little bit more around some of the arts and cultural organizations - and then we have other programs which are grant based. They don't necessarily switch over, but we do have that stream of funding that would go toward certain organizations that would qualify, and then they can apply for grant program funding over and above that.

There are some organizations which don't currently receive operating funding, and we look to try to support them through project funding where available so that they can continue to provide those services.

KENDRA COOMBES: With regard to the operating funding, do you know what the dollar amount of that is?

CHRISTOPHER SHORE: In terms of arts and culture, we have about four streams of operating support that are provided - four different programs that are there, more or less. I'm trying to think of the exact - I'll have to do some quick math.

KENDRA COOMBES: You can get back to me.

JUSTIN HUSTON: Yes, we can provide you with those exact numbers and provide that. We have them broken down, just trying to find this in the binder right now.

KENDRA COOMBES: On the same stream that my colleague, Ms. Nicoll, was talking about regarding inflation and funding, it was mentioned in opening statements that the department's being financially responsive to the film industry and their needs.

With inflation, costs for organizations have risen dramatically. Much of that has grown by 50 per cent and this inflation continues to grow. I don't think it's fair to ask them to be able to continue with the same funding that's been frozen for a very long time now.

With operating funding to many community organizations, with those being frozen for years, what can we expect from the upcoming budget? What is your ask to the department, regarding unfreezing those funds?

JUSTIN HUSTON: Thanks for raising that question and the issue. It's something that your colleagues have raised as well. It is an ongoing challenge around operating. Funding for operating, as you're aware, has not moved in over a decade. Recognizing that, however - like I said earlier, we do work within our budget to be adaptive and flexible. Certainly, we meet with organizations on a regular basis and they tell us some of the

challenges that come with going for project funding when they're having a challenge just keeping the operating. We understand that.

We are able to keep things moving on a year to year, but it is something that we're certainly putting forward in the budget. We've heard from the groups what they need, and they've been very clear with that. They've also met with the minister on a regular basis. We have a good understanding of where that is. Of course, though, as you mentioned, as inflationary pressures and other pressures are real, it's moving in that direction.

I do want to emphasize that while not perfect, we have been working closely with those organizations to help them navigate.

CHRISTOPHER SHORE: Just to further what the deputy minister said, I'll give you an example of that. I know we've been working really hard at the whole operating piece, and I know that the deputy minister has heard that from communities - I think from the day that you arrived in the department.

[10:45 a.m.]

We have, for instance, a Culture Innovation Fund. Within that fund, we have a community engagement stream. That is open to organizations - particularly arts and culture organizations, and others as well - to kind of help them develop new audiences. While we're trying our best to advance the request around operating, we're also recognizing that trying to give those organizations the tools to develop other revenue streams is really important. That culture innovation stream is targeted exactly at that. It's trying to allow organizations to find new ways to attract audiences and invest in their infrastructure to do that.

KENDRA COOMBES: I know you mentioned rinks and issues like that. Those are one of those organizations that really struggle for their operational funding. I have three of them that service my constituency and that is one of their biggest issues, trying to keep those rinks open. A generator's great, but it doesn't help them. I think when you keep in mind many of these are really small organizations that are volunteer-based, for the most part, I'm really hoping that through your advocacy and your work - and I know Bill has always been very much of an advocate for the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. I know his name quite a bit just from CBRM council. This is something that I think really does need to be advocated with the minister, so I hope that advocacy is happening.

I want to move on for a minute and ask more parts about the budget. The government asks community members to reach out through their MLAs' offices to provide input. With that, there was one that I was kind of surprised by. I'm just wondering if maybe any of you can shed light on it. They were talking about that when the government is reviewing grant eligibility requirements to allow more integration into collaborative work

between arts and culture organizations and educational institutions, what I heard was that the organizations can't get funding for programming that takes place during the school hours. Can you clarify if that is true?

JUSTIN HUSTON: That's not an issue I'm aware of. Chris might be able to speak to it, but if he can't answer it right now, we'll find out and get back to you on that issue.

CHRISTOPHER SHORE: I'm kind of guessing a little bit about the organization that you're speaking about. We do have a program offered through Arts Nova Scotia which is an Artists in Schools program. There are four different organizations that deliver it. We provide funding as does the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. It's specifically around engaging students outside of the regular school hours. That's the point of these Artists in Schools programs.

One is called the PAINTS program, which is about visual artists. One is called PERFORM!, which is about performing artists. There's a Writers in the Schools program and then there are two programs delivered through the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. They are specifically geared to after-hours engagement of students with arts practice. That might be what you're referring to. The point of those programs is actually engaging students outside of the curriculum hours.

KENDRA COOMBES: I want to explore that a little bit, because in many schools, arts is being almost diminished out of them. When I went to high school, there was a drama program. Now there are barely any drama programs. I heard someone say this: I went to Breton Education Centre and BEC had a great drama program and now it's gone. There are several others of these types of programs - arts, what have you - that are slowly leaving the schools for STEM and not STEAM. STEM is with the math and sciences and STEAM includes the arts, which I've been learning over the past few years.

I'm just wondering with that, wouldn't it be better at some point to have some of these programs also during school hours, considering we lose a lot of kids - some of them are bused students. They can't stay after school. Transportation is very difficult, so we lose a lot of the kids who we want to get with these after-school programs because of transportation issues or other issues within that. Is there a chance of getting some of these programs during school hours?

CHRISTOPHER SHORE: You're making a really good point there, and I'm a big believer in STEAM - including arts in that piece. One of the things to remember is that activity that happens during school hours is really about the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. It's about curriculum. It's about professional teachers delivering that curriculum that's been approved. The programs that we have - we don't have teachers. We have teachers present, but they're not actually delivering the content.

The Writers in the Schools program, as an example, would bring a professional writer into the school - there's a teacher present - and then they would give writing workshops to people afterward. Because we don't have jurisdiction over the curriculum or how that's designed necessarily, we will feed in where we can around it and provide students with the ability to actually interact with professionals so that they have a sense of what that is - whether that's writing, or visual arts, or performing arts. That's kind of where we feed into it.

JUSTIN HUSTON: To just take a step back, I think it's a very valid point and question and it's something that we can follow up with our colleagues at Education and Early Childhood Development about. The creative economy is a major driver here in Nova Scotia. People think of it, oh, well, it's the arts - no, it is one of our major industries here, and we need to support that next generation. Very good point, and I'll follow up with my colleagues around that.

KENDRA COOMBES: That's what I ask of the department: to follow up. As you said, with a teacher present or teachers are to provide programming, but if you don't have that teacher, that programming doesn't happen. That's why it's so important. I think departments breaking down silos is the most important thing that we can have here.

I'm glad to know that you're a believer in STEAM, because I'm also a believer in it. It was also mentioned that it's one of our biggest industries - it's bigger than fisheries. Actually, it's probably one of the biggest with our fisheries and a few others combined. In Cape Breton, it's highly important because when we lost our two big industries, it was our cultural sector that kept us alive. Bette MacDonald's always said: When coal left and steel left, the arts community kept Cape Breton alive and going. It's very important to us.

On that note, last year I believe, Mr. Huston, you confirmed that the department is working with the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing to determine how might CBRM be able to administer an arts grants program, which would include changes to the Municipal Government Act. Could you provide an update on that?

JUSTIN HUSTON: I will pass it over to Chris Shore who is intimately involved with this issue.

CHRISTOPHER SHORE: We have been working with our colleagues at the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. That is a specific request that came from CBRM, and in order for them to provide that direct support to artists or businesses requires a change to the Municipal Government Act. We reached out to our colleagues at Municipal Affairs and Housing, and they are, in fact, in the process of reviewing the MGA. They're doing that in stages. As we understand it, that component of the MGA is part of the economic development consultation that's going to be happening later this year.

What'll happen there is, they'll go out and consult with all municipalities, and they're bringing that specifically at our request - I'm not sure it's not only because of our request. We've asked them to bring that question as part of the consultation when they go out and consult with all of the 55 municipalities in the province. The responsibility for that piece really rests with them, but it's something that we've flagged with them, and we'd asked them, please make it part of your consultations.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you for that because the MGA has been being reviewed since I was a councillor in 2016. It's been being reviewed for almost a decade now. When you said that and I made a little noise, it was because it's been almost a decade and it's still being reviewed. Now it's in phases? It's getting a little long in the tooth. It's going to need to be re-reviewed.

I'm glad to know that you have been flagging this. My hope is that we will see something come the Spring session with that.

I'm going to (Inaudible) it over to my colleague Suzy Hansen.

THE CHAIR: MLA Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: How much time?

THE CHAIR: Four forty-two.

SUZY HANSEN: Perfect. Thank you, Madam Chair.

You may have seen that part of the cuts that are being considered through HRM's budget process include supports for arts and culture organizations. I know we've all heard this. If these cuts come to fruition, will the Province step in and fill that gap? I guess this would be to the deputy minister.

JUSTIN HUSTON: In principle, we'll work with any organization that comes forward and look at ways that we can find solutions.

That said, I don't really have the context, so I couldn't say. In some cases, we may already be providing funding, so it may not be possible, or we may need to look at ways that we could support an increase. When we typically fund a project or fund an organization, we're looking at leveraging with other levels of government. One of the things we look at is, where is the municipality coming in on it? Where is the federal government, if it's relevant, coming in on it?

Part of that equation is that we will have conversations with our municipal counterparts and federal counterparts to understand where their level of investment is.

My sense is that - I'm not privy to any of the conversations they're having, but I think they're just figuring out what the range of things to consider is. Further to MLA Coombes' comments, I think - I hope and I believe - that there is a good understanding of the value of those programs, not just for citizens but for the overall well-being and economy of the city.

SUZY HANSEN: To touch on the recommendations that my colleague spoke about, a recommendation is that the government double operating support for cultural and arts organizations that index them to inflation. I'm wondering, will the department be doing any of this when they talk about moving forward with support?

JUSTIN HUSTON: We're definitely aware of those operating pressures. We're not looking at indexing. That's not something we do across our programs, but we are looking at ways that we can increase their operating support.

SUZY HANSEN: Another recommendation is that the government commits to a minimum of \$3 million over three years for specific initiatives to be determined and adjudicated by Arts Nova Scotia and by the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage for new programs directly related to equity, diversity, and inclusion in the arts. Will the department be doing this?

JUSTIN HUSTON: Yes, certainly around the commitment - we are looking at ways of strengthening that. I'm not sure of the exact amount. We're still in those phases. But we are considering where we can dedicate additional funds to support the arts, particularly in the area of EDI.

SUZY HANSEN: Another one is that the government work with Arts Nova Scotia and the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage to ensure that organizations that were worst affected and are still feeling the effects of COVID-19 shut down to slow recovery have stabilization funds in the next two years. Will the department be doing this?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Huston with a minute and a half.

JUSTIN HUSTON: Yes. The short answer is that we continue to do so and we will continue as we hear from groups. I can think of a couple just over the last year. Things have not rebounded to the way that they were, and some sectors and organizations are feeling it more than others, just by the nature of the work that they do and the communities they serve. We'll continue to be responsive to that.

SUZY HANSEN: This next one is, can you give me an update on the new art gallery and when it will be built?

JUSTIN HUSTON: How much time do I have left?

THE CHAIR: Fifty-three seconds.

JUSTIN HUSTON: There are no set dates in terms of when, but the work continues within the board and Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. They continue to explore options. We're waiting to see when the time will be right, but don't have anything concrete at this point.

SUZY HANSEN: I will say that it will be interesting to hear how this works out, since there is no board for the AGNS.

JUSTIN HUSTON: There is a board. They have quorum now. They will be proceeding as a separate entity because now they're a separate Crown corporation.

[11:00 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: We will move on to the Progressive Conservative caucus, and we'll begin with MLA White.

JOHN WHITE: You guys have a wealth of knowledge. I feel like we could have brought three of you in independently because your departments are so big.

My first question is about the Community Generator Program which a lot of attention was brought to after Hurricane Fiona. Ironically enough, one year ago today, we had an ice storm in Glace Bay, and I was at a seniors' complex for 13 hours trying to help folks there. At one point, we were looking at transferring those folks to Sydney.

There are three seniors' complexes on one power line - I don't know how they designed that, but that's what they did. You have a lot of folks without power in a hurry. I could see Glace Bay fire department literally five minutes down the road, but we were looking at transferring to Sydney - a 20 to 25 minute drive. This program is extremely valuable. I'm happy to say that Glace Bay Volunteer Fire Department did get a generator, and so did Dominion Volunteer Fire Department, and the Glace Bay Universal Negro Improvement Association Hall - the three in my constituency. I'm very happy to see that because there was really nowhere to go. There's nowhere.

In 2022, we created the program, and obviously for great reasons - for gathering with people that are from your community and whatever else that you'd know. Can you tell us a little bit about how many applicants you received out of that program? Also, we kind of know why, but maybe you can elaborate a little bit as to why you decided to increase the funding for it as well.

JUSTIN HUSTON: Thank you for the question and I will let Bill speak to some of the details of it. Just at a high level, though, having dealt over the weekend with a burst pipe in my own home and losing power shortly, it's the worst possible time that those

things can happen. People need a safe, warm place - whether it's following a hurricane or it's during an ice storm.

When the program was stood up, we weren't quite sure what the response was going to be, frankly, but we knew that it was going to be significant. We thought \$2 million would be significant at least for the first call, and we received close to \$6 million in requests. These range from everything from a small community hall to a fire station - they range in scale. Bill can speak to it a little bit, but it was really about listening to what was coming in and figuring out ways to be adaptive, as well as how to flow the dollars and the accountability piece. I'll let Bill speak to it a little bit in terms of the actual numbers.

BILL GREENLAW: We had 180 applications in the first round and with the additional support this year of the \$4 million, everybody that applied has received funding. That's pretty good news, and the second call closes on February 14th. We expect good uptake on that. That's \$2 million back to the normal base.

We've had inquiries from not-for-profit health clinics that are associated, like the drop-in clinics or where their medications are held or need to be refrigerated. I think it was Minister Masland's constituency. (Interruption) It was yours too, okay. Basically, in consultation with the minister and the deputy minister, the intent is to have not-for-profit facilities with generators. That's kind of the basis as we're evolving through this. We will eventually get to everybody.

Those type of clinics weren't necessarily on our radar; they would certainly be eligible for funding because that's the intent of the program. The request for investments ranges anywhere from \$5,000 to the maximum at \$50,000 - and who knew that some generators to install were \$150,000? It's not like the little portable one that I have yet to buy for my house because I'm still waiting to figure out what kind of wattage I need for my house.

I have a son with special needs, and he doesn't understand when the power's out. If the internet's not working and his iPad isn't working, et cetera, it's not a happy place in my house during that time. We have neighbours who'd lend us a generator - the internet will work if you have power for it. So I certainly understand the whole spectrum of needs to losing your month's worth of groceries in your freezer.

I think it's a great program. I was really pleased when we communicated to the government what the demand was, that the government was able to provide us an additional \$4 million to meet that urgent demand. Particularly now with the power outages again, there's another round of immediacy of needs for generators.

JOHN WHITE: Earlier, you mentioned qualitative assessment. In relation to generators, I know the UNIA is a gathering place for the community. It's important to charge your phone or have a cup of tea or whatever. But when you talk about the Glace

Bay Volunteer Fire Department, you're talking about charging trunked mobile radios for the paramedics, for the police officers. You're talking about filling air bottles if there's a structure fire at the time.

It's such a broad perspective. You mentioned earlier, and my ears pricked up when you said it. It's so important. They're different needs. Absolutely awesome.

My next question is totally different. The 2023 IIHF World Junior Championship was obviously such a great success here. Absolutely amazing. You couldn't get into a restaurant unless you had booked well ahead. It was great. The economic engine on that was just amazing.

I'm curious about how communities can access support from CCTH to develop events in their own community. In particular, through the department you supported the Hawks Dream Field in Dominion, which is possibly going to be the only field in North America to have an RHF Accessibility Certified Gold by the Rick Hansen Foundation. The Special Olympics are on the horizon for that. That would be such a shot in the arm to that community.

I'm just wondering how communities can apply for funding on that.

BILL GREENLAW: I won't talk about World Junior Championship. We help produce the athletes who go to the World Junior Championship. We don't do the event side. I'll hand that to Chris. The success of our athletes, or our Canadian athletes, is through the sport system. We can all take credit for that. But Chris can take credit for the World Junior Championship and the greatness of the event here.

But more pointed to the Hawks Dream Field, that leveraged an investment. As the deputy minister said, we particularly like to see if the feds are on board, or a not-for-profit, and we come in and match those dollars, which we did in that aspect. A lot of the recreational infrastructure that is essentially world class now around the province is a good investment to attract those sorts of venues and those events to your communities.

Everybody wants a Rick Hansen accessible field now. That exists. It's that: Oh, how did John get that? I want to know how I get that in my constituency. Lots of demand. (Interruption) I didn't say it was political. It's not political. I'll hand it over to Chris.

CHRISTOPHER SHORE: I think it's interesting, the interplay between the infrastructure piece and the actual event piece. As Bill mentioned, whether it's tracks or whether it's the canoe club that has upgrades that allow an event like Canoe '22 to be highly successful in Dartmouth - those things go hand in hand.

The Events Nova Scotia team, which is part of my division, is really the team that's responsible using the Nova Scotia Event Strategy to support communities across the

province and develop their capacity to host events. Different-sized communities have different kinds of capabilities. The Events Nova Scotia team has webinars. They have information sessions. They talk to different communities about what kind of things they want to support.

We have a festival and events program that is for smaller events right across the province. When they're looking at trying to build capacity to running their event in their community, they can access funding there. When they have a slightly larger event, they come to our major hosted events program, which is an investment into larger events when those communities are ready to do so.

When we have opportunities for very big events like the World Junior Championship, of course we make special requests through the department and to Treasury Board because we've identified that this is a world-class event and has a great opportunity for everybody in Nova Scotia. The World Junior Championship is a perfect example of that. We were able to move quickly on that one because that was originally slated to happen in Russia. It was cancelled, but we were positioned well because the events team had a good relationship with Hockey Canada and we had worked with them for a long period of time.

Those big, big events - the North American Indigenous Games is coming up in July - absolutely first time. It's going to be spectacular. All those kinds of large events come through our team. We support the bid process. We support trying to get them and attract them. We provide support right down to a community festival that will happen. We have examples. I can't think of them off the top, but we have a lot of examples of great festivals that happen across the province.

JUSTIN HUSTON: If I could just add to that to echo, or to kind of build on something that Chris said. Every community is going to have its own desires and its own capacity to host different events. I think of the event that happened - was it last Summer or the Summer before with the sailing in Lunenburg or Mahone Bay? Chester-St. Margaret's. That's a great example. It's perfect for that community. It's the right-sized fit.

It's important to remember as well that sometimes because Halifax is the capital city, big events will tend to come to this area. I think of NAIG, which is coming - the North American Indigenous Games. It will be the biggest sporting event in Atlantic Canada ever held. The amount of people who are going to come to the province, or from the World Junior Championship, who come to Halifax - but because NAIG is happening in July, you know people are going to travel around and they're going to be here. Part of this event strategy isn't just the actual return on investment for the events.

We're working really closely, now that tourism is part of the department, to look at how we can build event strategy into tourism strategy as well, to look at shoulder-season events particularly. Something like the World Junior Championship was amazing because

it's happening in the time of year when typically tourism isn't up, but if we can look at tracking - whether it's a curling competition or it's something on the shoulder seasons in late Fall or early Spring - that's really where we're looking. We're competing across North America and across the country because everybody's looking at that coming out of COVID-19. How can we grow and expand tourism, not in the high season, but in those areas?

I really encourage those with communities that have aspirations of doing something that particularly suits your community, but maybe not in the peak of Summer, to definitely work with our department because we have some opportunities for sure.

JOHN WHITE: Just before I pass it on to MLA Barkhouse, the community has a Rock the Hill event scheduled for the grand opening of the field on July 2nd. When you talk about community in your quality assessment, you are giving opportunities for them to fend for themselves. Hats off to you, great job.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: You mentioned NAIG. I think it's absolutely fantastic: 16 sports, 47 venues, 756 Indigenous nations from all over Turtle Island, 5,250 - it's fantastic. I've got to ask: Can you tell us a bit of the Mi'kmaw Cultural Activities Program and how it aims to support the Mi'kmaw culture? It's a great lead-in to that question, I think.

JUSTIN HUSTON: Just to clarify, MLA Barkhouse, this is around the broader Mi'kmaw cultural program?

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: The Mi'kmaw Cultural Activities Program.

JUSTIN HUSTON: Let me flag two things there, and Chris can speak more specifically to the program. One of the other things we do that Bill touched upon earlier, as well, is that we have a Mi'kmaw Physical Activity Leadership Program. It's something that started with the Municipal Physical Activity Leadership Program. These are folks who are in - is it 11 of the 13 communities or all 13 communities now? Ten of the 13 communities have someone who is a paid staff member who is just responsible for working with their communities around physical activity. It's working with kids, adults. That's an example of something, but it is within the cultural context.

I can give you an example of Membertou. Membertou is a part of their development. You might be familiar. They've built a great walking trail with medicinal plants and signage. It's a part of their tour of the community. You can do a tourism aspect to it, but it's also this amazing network of trails that not only the community can use, but the greater Sydney community can use as well - and it ties into other existing trails. That

all came from leadership from the MPALs in the communities and the work that they're doing on the ground. That's an example. I kind of went on a little tangent there.

[11:15 a.m.]

Then we have a specific Mi'kmaw cultural funding program that Chris can speak to a little bit, which is just geared to working with Mi'kmaw communities' artist organizations. But I want to emphasize that the broader work that we're doing across the department around program improvement is that every single one of those programs is available for Mi'kmaw communities, individuals and artists or whatever the criteria are. Part of the work that we do is to make sure that they can access every program that we provide, not just those that are geared towards themselves. Chris, can you speak a little bit to that?

CHRISTOPHER SHORE: One of the other advantages that we have is our deputy minister happens to be the deputy minister of the Office of L'nu Affairs, so we happen to have built-in communication with both teams. We work really closely with staff at L'nu Affairs looking at all ways that we can support Mi'kmaw activities, specifically the Mi'kmaw Cultural Activities Program. These are project funds that come to us from the community and there are two deadlines a year. We fund all manner of projects that come through that are specifically in and around either forwarding specific initiatives or enhancing Mi'kmaw culture.

An example of a recent one that we funded is all about elder stories and about capturing those elder stories, which is a big component of Mi'kmaw culture. Going out and funding someone to go from community to community to actually talk to elders, to tape it, to digitize it, and to make it available forever for people to access. As we all know, many of those elders are going to be passing away and we want to make sure that the communities capture the knowledge that they have and that they want to pass along for the younger people.

That would be an example of a particular one that comes through the cultural activities program. There are a number of them.

BILL GREENLAW: I just want to highlight that the MCAP program, as we call the Mi'kmaw Cultural Activities Program, was developed in partnership with the Mi'kmaq. So to the Mi'kmaq we said we have a set amount of money - how do you think that we can best use it to leverage and what does the community want? This was a creation of the Mi'kmaq and we administer the program. They had their input and that's why it's designed in this way. I think that demonstrates how we try to work with community and meet the needs of communities. I just wanted to highlight that.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse, with three minutes.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: February is Black History Month. We know that Nova Scotia has many historic African Nova Scotian communities that have enriched our home with culture, history, achievements, but we also know that they have a long history of marginalization. What is the department doing to support underrepresented communities? Can you share a bit of the work being done to support the development of African Nova Scotians and their communities?

JUSTIN HUSTON: Sure. Again, I'll just emphasize at a high level that we work very hard to make all of our programs - grants programs, funding programs - accessible to all. A big part of our program recruitment process was identifying that both Mi'kmaw and African Nova Scotian communities and organizations were underrepresented in the amount of funding that they received. So we're looking across the board at ways that we can increase funding for existing organizations, as well as encouraging new organizations and entities to tap into what we have available. There are specific programs as well that are within specific sectors. I'm going to let Chris speak to some.

I can also talk about the work that we're doing across - speaking of the programs that we work with, a lot of partner organizations, say in the sport area, around anti-racism and fair play. So there are a number of initiatives that are looking at supporting community groups and organizations. I think of things like the Black Ice Hockey & Sports Hall of Fame Society and the learning to skate programs that are geared specifically toward the African Nova Scotian communities. But I'll let Chris talk a little bit about some other programs that are geared in the arts world.

CHRISTOPHER SHORE: I'm going to give you just a couple of examples. We also work very closely with the Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs, which has been housed in our department. We collaborate very closely with them on reaching into the community and community needs. Specifically, we've provided an investment this year to the Africville Heritage Trust of \$150,000 for them to develop a new strategic plan and operational plan. They're doing fantastic work.

Additionally, we provided funding to the African Nova Scotian Music Association - \$144,000 - similarly to support their strategic development plan. They put a plan in place and we're helping them to put that into action. It includes hiring a new executive director, new program staff, new programming. Similarly, another \$225,000 to the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia to achieve targets that they identified in their 2022-25 strategic plan.

Those are three specific examples of how we're providing support to those areas. There's a program through Arts Nova Scotia that's also specifically geared to recognizing Black artists.

THE CHAIR: Order. Perfect timing. We will move back into the second round of questioning. We have six minutes and 30 seconds per caucus. We'll begin with MLA Jessome and the Liberal caucus.

HON. BEN JESSOME: We discussed briefly the move away from the Building Vibrant Communities fund, which was designed to alleviate poverty. Given that this is the Community Services Committee, I felt it important to bring that back to the topic of conversation. Is it the deputy minister's impression - given that there are plans at the Department of Community Services to come up with some type of plan to replace that - will there be an accompanying mandate or how will CCTH support that work? Or is it the deputy minister's understanding that work will be driven specifically through the Department of Community Services?

JUSTIN HUSTON: In terms of the poverty reduction strategy and the work that they're doing at DCS - further to MLA Coombes's comment on breaking down silos, the approach that we take at CCTH is we're going to work with our partners across departments to serve communities the best way we can. We have the in-reach into communities. Some of the organizations we've worked with, whether it's around food security, whether it's around after-school programs - waiting to see what comes of that work, we will be right there working with those communities that we have supported over the last years and new ones that are emerging.

BEN JESSOME: In another line of questioning, we talked about some of the arm's-length organizations and the criteria that are established with respect to applications and grant approvals, but ultimately they come back to the office of the minister. We've seen measures taken to ensure that decision-making comes back to the office of the minister vis-à-vis the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Perennia, the Department of Economic Development. We've seen intentional measures taken by this government to bring decision-making back to the minister's office in several instances since they've taken office. My question is: When grants are being approved at that level, is there a record of why a grant may or may not have been approved at the ministerial level?

JUSTIN HUSTON: Yes. I can give you a sense of the process. I know because I have to sign off on every single one of them every day, and this time of year it just feels like it's non-stop. Thankfully, because of COVID-19, we are pushed to Teams, so it's no longer actual physical paper but essentially the associate deputy minister and I will approve - let's say it's a grant program. This is from a \$500 grant to a \$5 million grant. They follow varying levels but it's essentially the same processes. A staff recommendation will come forward based on the criteria of the program, which we'll then review to make sure that it makes sense to us. The ADM will review it and approve it. I'll review it and approve it. Then it goes to the minister's office.

It's all documented, so if for some reason there's a question that comes down that says, no, I have concerns about this, why didn't X, Y and Z happen, it will get sent back

down for further information and clarification, and then the decision will be made. So it's rare that it doesn't follow normal processes, and something comes out at the end of the sausage maker that's, like, wait, what's that? We usually know going into it.

I think what we try to do is work with groups so that there aren't any surprises. If you're making an application or a community group is making an application, we're working with you up front to say look, the information that you're providing just doesn't meet the criteria - here's how we can help you get across the line, or how to help you understand here's why you might not be successful.

I think one of the challenges is that we have to do grading criteria on some of these because we get so many applicants for some programs. It might be a great program, but in terms of where it's scored relative to others - we might have a million dollars, and there might be \$3 million that folks are looking to apply for. In that case, what we'll often do is keep that grid, and if slippage or money becomes available at the end of the year, we'll look to tackle some of those projects versus pushing it out to next year.

BEN JESSOME: Perhaps the deputy minister, for the benefit of the committee, could provide some of those scoring criteria for full review here, and if possible - understanding that it may not come tomorrow - a list of the programs that have come through the door, those that have been approved, and those that have been rejected. Given that the Province doesn't have a grants approval specific committee, similar to what my colleague referenced at the city level, I think that it would be important for a committee - I guess, that CCTH and grants falls on Community Services, and we're happy to scrutinize that if this is the appropriate committee to do so. Given that the government has presented this as a topic of consideration for today, we're happy to take a peek at that at a later date when the department, which I know is very busy, has the opportunity to present that.

JUSTIN HUSTON: Two things quickly. Chris just flagged to say that Arts Nova Scotia is a little bit different. It's peer reviewed, so the minister actually doesn't make decisions. The group makes the decisions on the funding. I think if we could get further clarification, because we have close to 80 programs - some of which are focused on, say, art or sport. If there are areas that it might help us prioritize - but we can absolutely get you that information. Something to think about maybe in your letter back to us to clarify.

THE CHAIR: Order. We will move on to the NDP caucus and MLA Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm just going to go into the vein of African Heritage Month. I was glad to hear that you're working closely with African Nova Scotian Affairs, as well as a number of other partners to help with programming funding, operation costs and such.

My question is about the African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent Coalition, DPAD, in particular. They had a three-year sustainable funding, and they hadn't heard back about whether or not they were going to be funded for a consistent

amount of time. We know the work that has been done by this particular organization. I'm curious to know, will CCTH, along with ANSA, continue on this process and create more of a sustainable organizational funding model so that organizations and groups like this can continue doing great work within our communities?

JUSTIN HUSTON: The short answer to that is yes. We are working to look at ongoing funding for that group and others. Some of the challenges with our operational funding - and it's not unique to just DPAD or other organizations - is that it's been essentially, as MLA Coombes noted, frozen for a number of years. New organizations that you would know and would be like, oh, that one doesn't have core funding, so we're looking at ways that we can create longer term funding opportunities. I know with DPAD, the conversations have been ongoing with ANSA around looking at what the next phase is. Those conversations are happening right now.

[11:30 a.m.]

SUZY HANSEN: I'm glad to hear that you're looking at other options because you did mention sometimes it doesn't always fit, but you figure out ways to continue with these particular programs. I think that's of value to our communities - being able to have our own voices around the table making those decisions. I'm really glad to hear that because I will be looking for the budget line for some of these funding programs that are specific to African Nova Scotian communities when we sit in our next sitting. So I just want to say thank you for that.

THE CHAIR: MLA Coombes with five minutes.

KENDRA COOMBES: I want to go in the vein - this concept that my colleague was talking about with regard to poverty and cycle breakers - and circuit breakers as well. Youth organizations in my community are struggling with operating costs. One executive director said - and I quote: I don't have the same time that I used to have with the kids because I'm always applying for pots of money. I'm always having meetings with other institutions and organizations looking for more money.

Because these organizations are cycle breakers, when you were looking at reviewing the grants process and doing that review, did you find that there was a need to switch from grant applications to a more core operational funding, considering that these are the organizations that are doing the heavy lifting? They're the ones that we are continuously relying on as government to provide programming.

Within that review, did you see a need to switch from a model of grants to a model of core operational funding?

JUSTIN HUSTON: Thanks for the question. To back up a step, I think there is a place for grant funding and there is a place for operational funding. They serve different

purposes and needs. I think it is something we've heard from all organizations. Obviously, any organization - I would like it and you would like it - having a base of operating funding that they don't need to sort of be project-based and applying for things is something that we have heard loud and clear. It's something that we're alive to and working on.

I think grant programs should and will always exist. I think it allows us collectively to be nimble and adaptive and say: You know what's really important right now? This. Whether it's climate change, whether it's EDI - this is kind of where we need the focus. It might be something - tomorrow is different as it emerges. Accessibility is a great example - let's put a program in place. I think it isn't necessarily a matter of switching, but I think to your point, it's around organizations that currently have operating or don't have operating are looking at ways to increase that. It can be a time drain for organizations that are chasing projects to essentially take their administrative fee off the top.

It is a real issue, but I would also say that organizations have been very creative in terms of whether it's shared administrative assistants who work across organizations. They're looking at pooling resources. But they've also had to look at things like reducing hours, reducing staff. That creates challenges for those organizations that we know are important to the fabric of Nova Scotia.

KENDRA COOMBES: On that path, as you said - reducing hours. The biggest problem they have in their core funding is to ensure that they are getting well-trained - those who deal with children - child workers as well as youth workers. There's a difference. Many youth workers often don't deal with younger children because it's a different mindset. It's a different - it's a talent, knowing with my children and older kids.

In that vein, we don't want to see reduced hours. That means we lose the best that we can get for our youth and our children. We don't want to see reduced pay. We want to see them better paid so that we can attract them.

Again, you mentioned EDI. I have Whitney Pier. That is one of the primary parts of my constituency. It is one of the most multicultural areas of the province. It also has an historic Black community. The ED there is often asked to explain how he does EDI, and his answer is always: Come here. We live it. Yet he has trouble finding program money for EDI when it is a lived experience. It is not something that they have to teach. It is something that they do.

I'm just wondering, how do you judge those types of - we have very white communities where, yes, they have to actually teach EDI, and communities that . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. The time for the NDP questioning has ended. We will move on to the Progressive Conservative caucus with MLA Tom Taggart - six minutes and 30 seconds.

TOM TAGGART: Earlier in our committee meeting here, Deputy Minister Huston indicated that the creative economy is a large driver in our economy and MLA Coombes indicated that it was actually bigger than the fisheries. Understanding that the previous government eliminated the film tax credit, I just wonder if you could - the \$25 million investment that we've made has made a tremendous difference in Nova Scotia's important film industry. Can you elaborate on how this investment has supported the film industry?

CHRISTOPHER SHORE: Additionally, last year and this year - the Nova Scotia Film & Television Production Incentive Fund is budgeted every year at about \$25 million. In the last couple of years, we've seen a sharp increase in demand on that fund. In actual fact, last year we made an investment of \$41 million into the film industry. This current year, we're projected at doing approximately the same number.

We've seen the attraction of some very large film projects because of the heightened profile of Nova Scotia. We've been able to increase that cap, as I mentioned earlier. We had a cap of projects that were - when a film project comes in for funding, we usually cap - there was a \$4 million cap. We raised that to \$10 million because of feedback that we had received, not only from the community but also from meetings that we'd had with studios, that they were looking at trying to invest more money in Nova Scotia and, in fact, that cap was holding them back a little bit because they wanted to have larger projects that were in place.

We've seen a steady increase in the number of projects that are coming through that particular fund. When originally we assumed responsibility oversight for the fund, which was two years ago, the fund came to us for administration, we had - I think the year before we took it over, we saw approximately 50 to 60 film projects at the time Nova Scotia Business Inc. was funding. Right now, this year, we're targeting 105 projects. So we're seeing a steady increase in what's happening there.

One of the advantages, of course, of that fund is that it's being used and we are investing in projects right across the province. These are things that are taking place not just in Halifax. They're shooting across the province. A great example would be last year, *Washington Black* was a very large Disney production that shot in Lunenburg, Louisbourg, Shelburne, here in Halifax - so a rather significant employer and an employer across the board. What you're seeing is investment in food services, hotels, workers. They use some of our museum sites as locations. So it's definitely a growth area. (Interruption) And Chester, yes.

THE CHAIR: We will move on to MLA Harrison.

LARRY HARRISON: I just want to get this one question (Laughter). Just yesterday, I had two communities asking for applications for creative grants, okay? You indicated that we might have a resource to call to get the proper application. Do you have

anything in place now or can you help? I know the constituency assistants are just constantly struggling trying to find that one grant that applies.

JUSTIN HUSTON: Depending on the program - like, Bill's team would have regional staff that would be located perhaps in your area. The short answer is when we finish here today, you can get Bill's number and his team will put you in touch with - if it's community-related grants. Because absolutely, the key for folks is, like you said, they know what they need - they just don't know if there's anything that they can access and tap into. That's what our team is very good about. We won't waste people's time. We will tell groups or businesses: Look, you're a pay business, you can't apply for this funding - here's who you should talk to. But if there's a way, we'll work to make it happen.

LARRY HARRISON: Both, I think, will fall in Bill's - your department. We can just have a little chat afterwards. That would be most helpful.

I'm not going to be able to ask another question because the time is here, but I want to thank you folks for all that you do. It's all-encompassing, really. Thank you for your time and thank you for the work that you do.

THE CHAIR: We will wrap up the round of questioning and ask the witnesses if they do have any closing remarks at this point they'd like to share, beginning with Deputy Minister Huston.

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'll just keep it brief. I know you have more to do on your agenda. I just want to thank you again for having the opportunity here to speak about what we do. I think someone said earlier we really like these opportunities, because it's an opportunity to highlight the work that we've done and answer important questions from members, but also to speak about the work that is planned and under way.

I think, again, I look around the table and I've been either contacted by you or your constituency assistants or your caucus offices. We have a lot of programs, and if there are ever any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me directly or to Chris or Bill. We want to connect your constituents and your citizens to the work and the programs that we have under way.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for being here today. It was a great conversation. You are now free to leave as we continue with our committee business. Perhaps we'll take a five-minute recess so everyone can get ready.

[11:42 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[11:45 a.m. The committee reconvened]

THE CHAIR: We're going to move into committee business. The first item on the agenda is the request for clarification and to let you know that it has been sent to the Office of Addictions and Mental Health. That has been sent. We're waiting on a response.

Item 2 on committee business is the NDP topic for access to midwifery and efforts towards reconciliation. Sally Loring, former senior director of the Women & Children's Health Program, pointed out that she has not been in that position in over two years. I just wanted to ask the members if they would like to find a replacement or if they would like to remove them from the list.

KENDRA COOMBES: We're happy if we can get the new senior director to - the position no longer exists. If the position no longer exists, then we're fine with those we have.

THE CHAIR: We will remove that witness.

Item 3 is a Liberal topic, the impact of the cost of living crisis on energy poverty. Energy Coordinator Brenna Walsh has asked that she have her colleague Energy Coordinator Jacob Thompson take her place. Looking to see if that's okay.

BEN JESSOME: Not a problem.

THE CHAIR: I understand there's new committee business. MLA Jessome has a motion he would like to read.

BEN JESSOME: Just a request for information to the Department of Community Services in light of some of the comments made by our witnesses here today with respect to the dissolution of the Building Vibrant Communities program. It had a mandate at the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage around the alleviation of poverty, and remarks were made today that the shift has been made to DCS, that they were charged with coming up with a new plan to deal with this move. I'm wondering if the minister will respond to share an update on the work that's being done to address the mandate of the former Building Vibrant Communities program.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion on MLA Jessome's comments from the committee?

JOHN WHITE: Can you let us know exactly what you're asking for? Are you asking for a written response? Can you elaborate a little bit, please?

BEN JESSOME: My motion is: I move that the committee, through the Chair, write to the Minister of the Department of Community Services to update us on the work being done at the Department of Community Services to replace the work that was being done at

CCTH. More specifically, how are they fulfilling the mandate of alleviating poverty through the Building Vibrant Communities program?

THE CHAIR: I saw MLA Taggart's hand go up, so I'll have him have a comment.

TOM TAGGART: I'm going to be consistent here in that I'm very unlikely to support any kind of a motion that comes up at the last minute sort of thing. I'm not going to support it. I also believe that the Department of Community Services is the Department of Community Services. We just had the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. I understand the question, but that was a program that has not been part, as I understand it, of this government's programs in the past two years. I don't have any knowledge of the program whatsoever, but I think that there's been something to take its place, but I'm not sure where it fits here. That might be a question that - maybe they want to have that for one of their topics. I don't know. I just don't see - I'm not going to support it, anyway.

BEN JESSOME: Just for the record, this was a government topic that was submitted for the review of this committee. Given the discussion we had today, this is not meant to be a surprise. This is in response to discussion we've had today at the committee where our witnesses remarked that the program around alleviating poverty - which is pretty close to the mandate of this committee, if I'm not mistaken - has been abandoned by that department and taken on by the Department of Community Services.

In the spirit of ensuring that the mandate of this program is being fulfilled - specifically, the alleviation of poverty - I think it's reasonable that this committee poses a simple request for information to the minister to respond to the question of how the Minister of Community Services is fulfilling the mandate of the Building Vibrant Communities program.

KENDRA COOMBES: Since this is a topic that came up during the line of questioning and considering that this is the Standing Committee on Community Services, we will be supporting the motion.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse, do you have a comment?

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Can I call for just a four-minute recess to talk with my colleagues?

THE CHAIR: We will have a four-minute recess.

[11:52 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[11:54 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. I call the Community Services Committee back to order. We will go to MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Yes, so if I understand correctly, we're asking for a letter - a written response - in regard to what exactly the department has in plans where this is no longer addressed. We are going to support this.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart has one more comment.

TOM TAGGART: We'll get a response to this letter. It will not be open to debate within this committee at that time. Am I correct in that?

THE CHAIR: I believe when we get correspondence back, there is an opportunity to have discussion on that correspondence once it's received. We are all in agreement. Do we need the motion?

LORELEI NICOLL: That's what I was going to ask - the motion. I wasn't here. Was the motion put on the floor? If I'm going to be voting on something, I want to hear what the motion is. At the end of the day, to simplify it, I asked the question of that particular program. Mr. Greenlaw mentioned in response that that was defunct and now there's a new plan. We, as a committee that's known as Community Services, we want to know what the Department of Community Services is going to be doing in response with their new plan. I'm in favour.

THE CHAIR: Everyone's comfortable to vote on the motion that was made by MLA Jessome? Could we hear it one more time, MLA Jessome?

BEN JESSOME: I move that the committee, through the Chair, write to the Minister of Community Services to request a written response on how the mandate of the Building Vibrant Communities program, charged with the alleviation of poverty, is being addressed by the Department of Community Services within their new plan.

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

I believe, if there's nothing else to be brought up for committee business, that brings us to the end of the meeting. I just wanted to note that the next committee date is March 7, 2023. The topic is the impact of the cost of living crisis on energy poverty. As discussed earlier in committee business, the witnesses are still to be determined, but should be cleared up in time for the March 7th meeting date. I would like to call the meeting adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:58 a.m.]