



2023 Impact Report



Executive Summary

The Living Cities Canada Fund is a program of Green Communities Canada (GCC). The Fund provides local partner organizations (LPOs) across the country with training, funding, and logistical support to engage their community, build public support, advance local policy, and implement equity-embedded urban green infrastructure projects where they are needed most. The Living Cities Canada Fund has different streams, each of which offer different levels of funding and structured processes to support LPOs to implement green infrastructure in their communities.

Over the last 12 months, Green Communities Canada has supported 'Demonstrate Stream' projects across the country and has launched our 'Mobilize' and 'Transform' Streams. In 2023, we also launched the National Mini Forest Pilot and supported 16 miyawaki forest plantings through a combination of Living Cities Canada Fund Demonstrate Stream and our partnership with the Network of Nature.

2023 Overall Planting Stats

In 2023, we supported



green infrastructure projects in **17** cities across Canada. These projects restored more than

4,000 m²

of urban land, improving climate resilience and ecological health.



Through these projects, we installed more than

13,500

plants, including

3,400

shrubs, and

4,300

wildflowers

These projects engaged over

1900

volunteers. Approximately

40%

were children or youth

&

30%

were from equity deserving groups.



In 2024, 11 large-scale projects will be implemented with funding through our Living Cities Canada Transform Stream!

National Mini Forests Pilot 2023 Impact

Green Communities Canada's National Mini Forest Pilot addresses the growing need for green spaces in urban environments, transforming sites in partnership with local organizations and municipalities using the Miyawaki forest technique. The method emphasizes the use of dense plantings, diverse locally-native species collections, soil preparation, and multilayered design to mimic the complexity of a native forest. This dense planting technique results in taller plants in a shorter time period.

Mini forests provide a variety of ecosystem services that offer both environmental and social benefits. From reducing air pollution to increasing biodiversity, these small plots can have a big impact on their local environments. They provide green spaces for people to enjoy, and improve air quality. Mini forests also help reduce runoff, prevent flooding and mitigate the urban heat island effect.

Through these projects, we planted more than

6,000

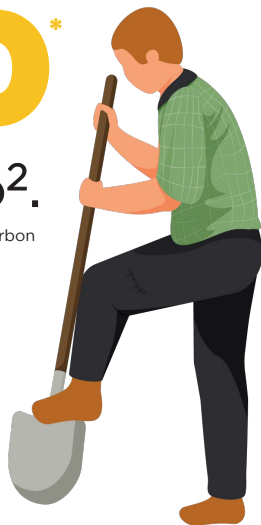
urban trees

Once mature, these forests will absorb over

1,000*

tons of CO².

*Calculated using Natural Resources Canada's Carbon Sequestration Calculator



16

mini forests were planted across Canada in

15

different cities across

5

provinces

1,400

volunteers engaged

40%

of volunteers were children or youth

30%

of volunteers were from equity deserving groups

Professionally produced **mini forest coordinator training videos** and **curriculum, planting guidance, project management tools**, and a **monitoring and maintenance program** were also developed during this pilot year.

Program Partners:

CANADIAN
Geographic

DOUGAN &
ASSOCIATES
ECOLOGICAL CONSULTING & DESIGN


WILDER
CLIMATE SOLUTIONS



Network
of Nature™

 **vineland**
RESEARCH & INNOVATION CENTRE

Living Cities Canada Fund Demonstrate Stream 2023 Impact

The Living Cities Canada Fund Demonstrate Stream supported 17 communities across Canada to implement new green infrastructure interventions in 2023. These projects took place at a variety of sites that prioritized social and environmental need, including: a decommissioned landfill, social housing communities, mosques, churches, an Indigenous community that recently experienced forest fires, an urban Indigenous heritage centre, and an arboretum. These projects have engaged hundreds of volunteers, and we are excited to watch the plants grow into the future!

In 2023, funding was directed to support the following partners & projects:



Mini Forests:

Calgary Climate Hub | Calgary, AB
Credit Valley Conservation | Georgetown, ON
Fundy Biosphere Reserve | Moncton, NB
Green Venture | Hamilton, ON
Kahnawà:ke Mohawk Council | Kahnawà:ke, QC
Langley Environmental Partners | Langley, BC
Little Forests Kingston | Kingston, ON
Oakville Green | Oakville, ON
Rainscape TO | Toronto, ON
ReForest London | London, ON
REVE Nourricier | Sherbrooke, QC



Rain Gardens:

Greening Sacred Spaces | Ottawa, ON
REEP Green | Kitchener, ON
Rhoda Foundation | Ottawa, ON
Scadding Court | Toronto, ON



Other:

Ashcroft Indian Band | Kamloops, BC (Tree Planting)
Sandy Hill Community Health Centre | Ottawa, ON (Orchard Planting)

These projects transformed

4,000 m²

of urban land, equal to the
size of

10 basketball
courts

50%

of the projects were led
or supported by equity-
deserving groups.

This
includes
projects

2

led by Indigenous
communities

Project Highlights 2023

Demonstrate Stream

Fruit Tree Project in Ottawa

Community Partner: Sandy Hill Community Health Centre

Project Location: Strathcona Heights Ottawa Community Housing and Lori Heath Park

Project Size: 46 sq.m.

Number of Plants: 20

Number of Volunteers: 44



Summary:

Sandy Hill Community Health Centre constructed combination planter-benches at Strathcona Heights Community Housing. These planters will be used to grow vegetables as part of a local community gardening initiative. They also held a planting and community cleanup event on October 28 in which pollinator plants and fruit-bearing trees were installed. This project will support community food security, and connections to nature for residents of Strathcona Heights Community Housing.

Mini Forest in Hamilton

Community Partner: Green Venture

Project Location: Mohawk College

Project Size: 100 sq.m.

Number of Trees Planted: 300

Number of Volunteers: 82



Summary:

Green Venture installed a 100m² mini forest at Mohawk College in Hamilton. Mohawk College Sustainability Green Team volunteers and Hillfield School staff prepared the site in August for planting in October. The planting event involved 70 Mohawk College students and dedicated volunteers from Millfield Strathallan College. This site was planted next to another mini forest, which will allow for observation and study of how the two mini forests perform.

Mobilize Stream

Community Partner: Environment Lethbridge

Summary:

On November 7, 2023, Environment Lethbridge conducted a forum to discuss their Pathways to Living Cities policy document among community stakeholders and advocates. The purpose of this meeting was to identify key priorities for 2024. This year, Environment Lethbridge will build on these learnings to develop a community planting initiative that will help to increase local adoption of green infrastructure.



Transform Stream

Community Partners:

- ACAP Saint John, Saint John, NB
- Centre d'écologie urbaine, Montréal, QC
- EcoSuperior, Thunder Bay, ON
- EnviroCentre, Ottawa, ON
- Green Action Centre, Winnipeg, MB
- GreenUP, Peterborough, ON
- Green Venture, Hamilton, ON
- London Environmental Network, London, ON
- Petitcodiac Watershed Alliance, Dieppe, NB
- REEP Green Solutions, Waterloo Region, ON
- Saskatchewan Environmental Society, Saskatoon, SK

Summary:

Through the Living Cities Canada Fund Transform Stream, 11 local delivery partners have been engaging equity-deserving groups in mapping their neighbourhoods, and developing initial ideas for green infrastructure projects that will be implemented in 2024. In 2023, GCC led these partners through a comprehensive equity training program co-led by equity consultants Cambium Indigenous Professional Services, Healthy Design.City, and Centre d'écologie urbaine. In 2024, each community will install 250 m² of new green infrastructure interventions, for a total of 2,750 m² of new green infrastructure area across the country. This will add green space in underserved neighbourhoods, improve urban heat and local air quality, enhance biodiversity, and support local climate resilience all while empowering residents to connect with plants and take action to protect the environment.



THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS AND FUNDERS IN 2022-2023

PARTNERS



FUNDERS



Possibility grows here.

About Green Communities Canada

GCC has been leading a community-based climate action movement for more than 25 years, working together with our members and partners from across the country to advance transformative, equitable, and lasting change. As a national organization, our goal is to support and sustain grassroots action. We do this by acting as a network, funder, backbone, and accelerator. We have a solid track record of leading community-engaged green infrastructure programming through our Depave Paradise Initiative, National Mini Forest Program, and Living Cities Canada Fund.

Key Contact: Emily Amon, GI Director, eamon@greencommunitiescanada.org



Strategic Overview



Living Cities Canada Fund Design

The Living Cities Canada Fund offers three different funding streams that allow organizations to grow their community's capacity for action in a way that is strategic, inclusive, and transformative. With multiple points of entry and funding pathways, local organizations have the opportunity to access the targeted supports they need to build strong and diverse alliances that move GI into the mainstream. The three-stream approach also enables GCC and our funding partners to strategically focus our granting approach and selection criteria to achieve broad representation and deep impact.

Up to \$30,000 | 8 - 12 months

Plan & Engage

Communities develop local Living Cities policy pathways using our evidence-based framework; build awareness and support by localizing tested campaign tools; and cultivate alliances with diverse partners.



MOBILIZE

Up to \$15,000 | 6-12 months

DEMONSTRATE

Small Capital



Communities complete small single-site GI projects* that increase local participation and engagement, build local capacity and confidence, and demonstrate impact. Proven models, such as depaving, and mini forests will inform design.

Up to \$60,000 | 18 - 24 months

TRANSFORM

Large / Multi-Site Capital



Communities implement innovative large, neighbourhood-scale, or other multi-site GI projects*. Projects will be guided by Living Cities (or similar) policy pathways and will advance community-identified priorities.

*GI projects supported through the Fund will be **nature-based solutions**. Small projects could include rain gardens, Depaves, mini forests, pollinator pathways, green alleys, pocket parks, or bioswales. Large projects could include significant single-site interventions or multi-site GI (e.g. rain gardens in a flood-vulnerable neighbourhood). Projects on buildings (green roofs/walls) could be included.

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CORE PRINCIPLES

Living Cities Canada Fund Vision

Our 10-year vision is that 'Living Cities' flourish from coast to coast to coast. We will reverse the decline in green urban space by establishing a robust, strategic, and scalable framework that supports communities to replace grey urban infrastructure with nature-based solutions and prioritize green infrastructure (GI) in new developments. The Living Cities Canada Fund measurably accelerates the growth of nature-rich cities, increasing community resilience, health, and vitality.

Living Cities Canada Fund Approach

The Living Cities Canada Fund provides communities with direct financial support and a structured process to build capacity, leadership, and momentum for GI. Our approach is evidence-based and cultivates diverse participation in the planning and ongoing implementation of community-led solutions.

Living Cities Canada Fund Tactics

Key tactics of the Living Cities Canada Fund:

Develop local policy foundations and pathways

To move GI projects beyond the 'pilot phase' and into mainstream planning processes.

Cultivate strong municipal-community working relationships

To emphasize community-engaged GI development, ensuring long-term investments are made where they are most needed.

Mobilize community participation and leadership

To empower and equip citizens to take meaningful action towards climate resilience and justice.

Support knowledge transfer within and between communities

To strengthen local capacity and provide accelerated learning opportunities within communities and across our network.

Abundant

GI becomes the default in land-use planning & transforms urban design

Thriving

GI is installed & maintained to provide the full range of long-term benefits

Equitable

GI is prioritized in the locations with the greatest environmental & social need

This 'tri-principle' approach is an essential part of our strategy to grow vibrant and resilient nature-rich cities that address the dual challenges of climate change and public health inequities.

Living Cities Canada Fund Approach

The three-stream approach is responsive to the needs of diverse communities and can be scaled, stacked, and framed to align with local policy drivers and project partner priorities. Participating organizations are supported by GCC's central coordination services, access to online training and tested implementation models; standardized liability, administrative, and health and safety protocols; centralized communications and community outreach strategies and resources; policy frameworks and pathway templates; and on-going peer-to-peer support via our national GI community of practice.



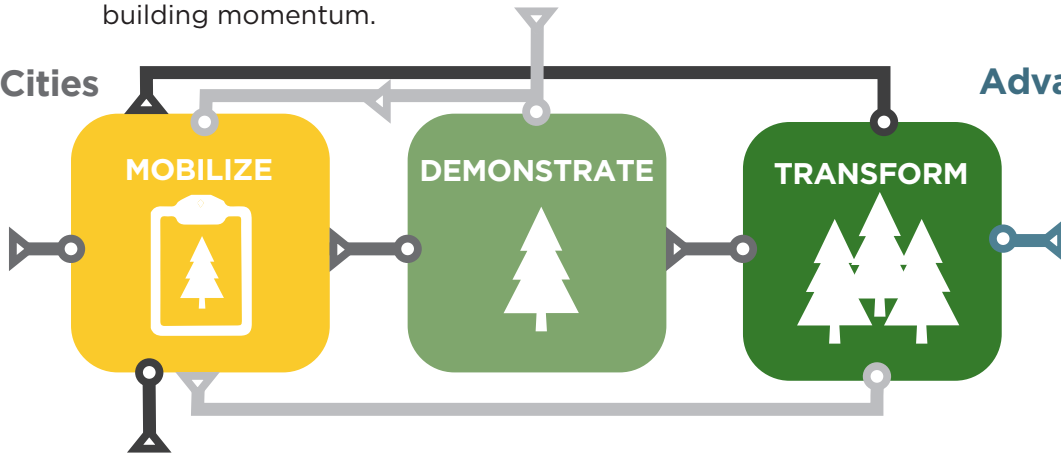
Granting Examples

New Cities

These communities have not undertaken any GI projects and are in the early stages of building partnerships to support implementation. They are interested in building momentum.

Emerging Cities

These communities demonstrate engagement from key partners who are committed to the strategic advancement of GI.



Advanced Cities

These communities have community-informed strategies in place and have the capacity and support to launch high impact initiatives.

Experienced Cities

These communities have completed successful demonstration projects, and have strong and diverse partnerships. Municipalities are invested in GI and there is readiness to accelerate implementation.



“

At Green Communities Canada, our work moves beyond the questions of 'why' and focuses on collaborative solutions to the challenge of 'how'

”

IMPACT MODEL

Living Cities Canada Fund Impact Model

Despite the strong evidence supporting GI, uptake remains slow and inconsistent in Canada. The next 10-year period is a critical time for action and investment in climate resiliency measures. For GI to become equitable, abundant, and thriving, we need to provide clear pathways for decision-makers and community practitioners to understand the benefits of GI and build strategies that enable GI to be implemented effectively. With a responsive three-stream approach and central supports available to all grant recipients, the Living Cities Canada Fund will accelerate GI in communities across the country.

Central Supports

Central supports available to participating organizations will ensure that all communities benefit from evidence-based delivery models, tested implementation supports, communications and campaign strategies, policy frameworks and pathway templates, and on-going peer-to-peer networking.

Fund outputs

output



1 Long-Term Community Strategies

Communities have developed Policy Pathways that identify key equity-informed priorities, create multi-stakeholder roadmaps, and build momentum for action. Practitioners and decision-makers are invested in the approach.

output



2 Strong and Diverse Local Alliances

Communities have deepened and expanded partnerships to support GI. Public awareness and engagement in GI is high. Diverse organizations and populations are directly involved in planning and implementation.

output



3 Demonstrated Potential for Impact

Communities have demonstrated the potential for transformation and have increased local knowledge, confidence, and capacity for GI implementation. Momentum is growing and the diverse assets within communities are being leveraged.

output



4 Acceleration and Growth of GI Projects

Communities have accelerated the implementation of GI. Landscapes are transformed as projects increase in scale and become mainstream. GI is championed by diverse partners and the benefits are celebrated by all.

long-term outcome

In communities across Canada, green infrastructure is equitable, abundant and thriving. Nature-rich cities are more resilient to the impacts of climate change, and environmental and health outcomes are improved for all.

Theory of Change

Key Idea

Green infrastructure works, and is an essential component of sustainable and resilient communities. To address the challenges of climate change, GI must be equitable, abundant, and thriving.

Equitable means that GI is prioritized in the locations with the greatest environmental and social need.

Abundant means that GI becomes the default in land-use planning, transforming the urban landscape.

Thriving means that GI is installed and maintained properly and provides the full range of long-term benefits.

The Need

Grey infrastructure continues to be the dominant approach to planning and development, shaping professional practice and our ideas about what is desirable and effective for our communities.

We need to make it easy for decision-makers, practitioners, and residents to understand the benefits of GI and to collectively and strategically implement it.

Our Solution

Living Cities Canada Fund builds community capacity and momentum for GI in four key ways:

1. Establishing a framework that summarizes best practices of jurisdictions that have designed and implemented exemplary GI.

2. Co-designing community-specific policy pathways that are informed by the framework and provide a roadmap to become a Living City.

3. Increasing public awareness to build a constituency of support for GI, and to sustain collective action.

4. Completing GI projects that create opportunities for training and skill development, and demonstrate the possibilities for transformation.

Project Impact Map

Output

1

Establish a Living Cities framework to advance GI that supports practitioners, decision-makers, and researchers. It identifies what works, how it works in practice in cities around the world, and how it can address multiple issues and provide multiple benefits.

key impacts:



Identifies Solutions



Provides tools for change



Builds knowledge & capacity

Output

2

Collaborate with local communities to co-design strategic Living Cities pathways that apply the framework to a local context. Partnering with a lead local organizations, we engage municipalities, community organizations, and equity-seeking groups in the development of a detailed road-map toward becoming a city where GI is equitable, abundant, and thriving.

key impacts:



Charts pathways forward



Advances local priorities



Deepens partnerships

Output

3

Grow public support and capacity for impact through the creation and roll-out of a scalable communications and engagement plan and accompanying resources. These resources are designed to increase public awareness, support, and engagement.

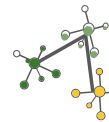
key impacts:



Increases public awareness & engagement



Develops capacity to implement



Establishes constituencies of support

Output

4

Provide training and resourcing to advance GI action projects that demonstrates the possibilities for community transformation and generates momentum toward future implementation. With an emphasis on knowledge and skill development for diverse stakeholders, we will leverage the skills and assets within each city.

key impacts:



Builds social capital and resiliency



Grows skills & confidence



Transforms the landscape

Supporting Structure

Expand the national GI community of practice that brings together leading local partner organizations to share best practices, advance collective projects, and support the evaluation and evolution of localized approaches to advancing GI that is equitable, abundant, and thriving.

key impacts:



Uplifts Practitioners



Supports Evaluation



Expands collective knowledge

Outcome

In communities across Canada, green infrastructure is equitable, abundant, and thriving. Cities are more resilient to the impacts of climate change, and environmental and health outcomes are improved for all.