

# More than Decision Making: How Local Elected Officials Navigate Support for Community-Based Initiatives

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This project is dedicated to my dad, Mark. You always believed in me. It was your dream that I become the first person in our family to complete a master's degree. Here I am, Dad. I did it.

## Executive Summary

### **Purpose, Scope and Research Questions**

This research project examines how local elected officials in British Columbia (BC) support community-based initiatives (CBIs). A CBI is a community-developed and community-run project that provides services or benefits to residents. Examples include public gardening projects, fundraising for community gathering spaces, and emergency food provision through a food bank. While CBIs primarily rely on the efforts of engaged citizens, local elected officials in BC are increasingly involved in supporting this work. This project aims to offer guidance and ideas that elected officials may consider to have options for providing support to CBIs.

Existing research has explored the broader representational and governance roles of local elected officials, yet the specific practices they use to assist CBIs remain underexamined. This study addresses that gap by identifying the approaches elected officials use, the opportunities and challenges they encounter, and the strategies they employ to navigate tensions that arise in this work. The purpose of the research is to develop a clearer understanding of how elected officials engage with CBIs and to offer a practical framework that can inform their support decisions.

### Research Goals

1. To explore the opportunities and challenges that British Columbian elected officials encounter in supporting community-based initiatives.
2. To identify and analyze the approaches that elected officials use to support community-based initiatives in British Columbia.

### Research Questions

1. What approaches do local elected officials in BC use to support community-based initiatives?
2. What are the key opportunities and challenges for elected officials in BC to support community-based initiatives?
3. What strategies do elected officials use to navigate tensions or conflicts that arise when supporting community-based initiatives?

### **Literature Review**

Local elected officials are widely recognized as community leaders who communicate community needs and represent their municipality at large. Existing research links government support to stronger community-based initiatives, yet the literature focuses primarily on the role of local governments as institutions rather than on the specific actions of individual elected officials. Existing literature notes that there is no single correct way to fulfill the local elected official role, and the community leadership dimension is often left to elected officials to interpret and perform on their own. Research on how elected officials support community-based initiatives is still at an early stage, highlighting the need for research that documents practices and provides insight into how elected officials navigate constraints, expectations and community needs. This study responds to that need by examining the actions and experiences of local elected officials in British Columbia.

## **Methodology, Methods and Data Analysis**

This research used an interpretive mixed methods approach to capture practices used by local elected officials. Because work in this area is still in its early stages, an interpretive design was chosen to allow participants to describe how they understand and carry out their support for community-based initiatives.

The study was conducted in two parts. First, a survey of local elected officials across British Columbia was conducted to identify the approaches they use to support community-based initiatives. A total of 44 local elected officials responded, representing a 10.7% response rate from an estimated population of 410 local elected officials across 58 randomly selected local governments that received the survey. From these respondents, individuals who expressed interest were invited to participate in focus groups. Two focus groups were held with a total of eight participants where they validated some of the survey data and explored tensions involved in supporting CBIs and discuss strategies for addressing them.

Although the number of participants was limited, the sample was broadly reflective of the demographic and geographic composition of local elected officials in British Columbia. This strengthens confidence that the findings offer meaningful early insights into this understudied aspect of the elected role.

## **Key Findings**

The first major finding is the identification of 57 distinct approaches that local elected officials use to support community-based initiatives. These approaches are grouped into categories that include public statements of support, resource provision, relationship building, direct services, providing guidance, championing initiatives and status work. Many of these approaches are present in the broader literature, but often in different contexts or applied to different actors. This study extends that work by consolidating examples specific to elected officials, as well as naming a few novel approaches.

The second major finding is that elected officials can reflect around significant outcomes when supporting community-based initiatives. These include strengthening community-based initiatives, providing support in a sustainable manner, maximizing community impact of community-based initiatives, optimizing the local elected official's personal contribution, and aligning their support approach with their abilities. Relationship building emerged as a particularly valuable and frequently used approach, reflecting the boundary spanning role that elected officials play in connecting community actors and institutions.

The third major finding concerns the challenges and tensions that shape local elected officials' involvement. Limited time, capacity constraints, expectations from residents, conflicting priorities within local governments and concerns about overstepping governance responsibilities were among the most identified challenges. Tensions arose in the prioritization of multiple goals, and to address these, several best practice recommendations were put forward.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are directed at local elected officials to guide their practice when supporting CBIs. The first two recommendations relate to applying the list of approaches

identified in section 6.2.8. Recommendations three through six respond to the tensions associated with supporting CBIs.

**Recommendation 1: Familiarize self with the full range of available approaches**

Understanding the 57 identified approaches allows elected officials to recognize strategies they already use and experiment with adjacent options. This encourages incremental skill development and reduces reliance on locally accepted norms.

**Recommendation 2: Clearly identify outcomes of involvement with CBIs**

Clarifying which of the five goals of CBI support an elected official wishes to achieve helps guide their decisions and avoids misalignment between their intentions and the needs of the initiative.

**Recommendation 3: Distinguish between community leadership and decision making**

Separating informal community leadership from formal governance responsibilities helps reduce conflict and manage expectations. Clear communication about boundaries strengthens trust and avoids confusion about what support is possible.

**Recommendation 4: Prioritize support approaches that align with personal interests and will lead to success**

Local elected officials face significant time constraints. Focusing on initiatives that reflect personal values and areas of strength increases satisfaction, supports local elected official wellbeing, and enhances the likelihood of meaningful contributions by the local elected official towards community impact.

**Recommendation 5: Build personal connections with CBI leaders to foster understanding and transparency**

Effective support relies on accurate and timely information about a community-based initiative. Developing relationships with CBI leaders strengthens transparency, reduces misunderstandings and enables constructive collaboration.

**Recommendation 6: Emphasize boundary spanning relationship making**

Many local elected officials excel at relationship building. By focusing on approaches that connect the CBI with other parties and resources, officials can respond in ways that leverage their strengths and demonstrate effectiveness within their role.

## **Conclusion**

This study deepens understanding of how local elected officials in British Columbia support community-based initiatives by identifying specific approaches, articulating key opportunities and challenges and outlining strategies for navigating tensions within the elected role. Although the participant sample was limited, the findings provide a strong foundation for future research, particularly studies that incorporate the perspectives of community leaders and initiative members.

The decision-making model and accompanying worksheet in Appendix D offer practical tools that elected officials can use to guide their engagement with community-based initiatives. As expectations for elected officials continue to evolve, this research offers timely insights to support more intentional, effective and sustainable collaboration between local governments and community-based initiatives.

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# 1 Introduction

This research project examines how local elected officials in British Columbia (BC) support community-based initiatives (CBIs). A CBI is a community-developed and community-run project that provides services or benefits to residents. Examples include public gardening projects, fundraising for community gathering spaces, and emergency food provision through a food bank. While CBIs primarily rely on the efforts of engaged citizens, local elected officials in BC are increasingly involved in supporting this work. This project aims to offer guidance and ideas that elected officials so they may consider options for providing support to CBIs.

## **Problem Statement and Significance of Contribution**

Graham (2018) outlines the three primary roles of Canadian mayors as political leaders, executive leaders, and community leaders. While Graham focuses on mayors, these functions are not unique to that role. Councillors and regional district directors are also regularly expected to provide community and political leadership. The executive role is less pronounced outside of the mayor role. Of most relevance to this study is the community leadership role, particularly the work of mobilizing members of the community around a cause. Community leadership involves leading the city or region as a place and representing it to residents and the public at large (Graham, 2018).

Government support is generally positively linked to the performance of CBIs (Igalla et al., 2020), and the involvement of well-connected individuals such as local elected officials strengthen these outcomes (Seixas & Berkes, 2009). In practice, this means that the community leadership role can directly influence the effectiveness of CBIs. Dale and Newman (2010), for example, provide a case of *United We Can*, an unhoused persons recycling project in Vancouver, BC. They observed that cross-cutting issues such as homelessness require well-connected individuals to facilitate cooperation across government levels, the private sector, and not-for-profit operators. Local elected officials are well connected and can have a large amount of influence in the community (Kjaer, 2013), and some local elected officials see this type of work of communicating with diverse networks as part of their responsibilities (Blidook et al., 2022; Plüss, 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic provides an interesting case to understand the role of facilitating connections between local elected officials and community groups. In the City of Toronto, the municipality created institutional task forces to address the pandemic with the exclusion of grassroots community groups. This action resulted in a lack of information flow from the community to the municipality, and the grassroots community responded to community needs as best they could without government support (Jackson et al., 2023). Meanwhile in Juneau, Alaska, the municipality utilized existing connections with the community to form more inclusive task forces to deal with the pandemic. Two way communication flows were established, and public input was considered at decision-making tables (J. Powell et al., 2023). In both of these cases, it is identified that existing connections needed to be leveraged to facilitate communication in times of crisis (Jackson et al., 2023; J. Powell et al., 2023). Local elected officials need to have built up these relationships through working with the community before they become critical.

Within the Canadian context, local elected officials tend to focus on their policy related responsibilities, sometimes exclusively. The aspect of the role that engages with the community is left to the elected official to learn and carry out on their own (Blidook et al., 2022). This often leads to mixed results as in Toronto where neighbourhoods with lower pre-existing network structures accessed less pandemic support from the city (Jackson et al., 2023). A trait of successful local elected officials is their ability to share their power (Kjaer, 2013; Potluka, 2021), and serve as a reliable partner to the community (Bénil-Gbaffou & Katsaura, 2014). Leaders who exhibit these types of traits can help a community grow and develop socially and economically (Sotarauta & Beer, 2017).

Further study is required on more specific approaches that local elected officials play in CBIs. Research out of Erasmus University Rotterdam has been leading the charge on municipal support to enhance CBI performance (Edelenbos et al., 2021; Igalla et al., 2020, 2021). Yet the roles in which local elected officials can play in relation to CBIs has been largely represented by government support as an institution and not at an individual level. Recent Canadian work on the roles of elected officials also generalizes this work as mobilizing and engaging diverse groups (Graham, 2018) or representational activities (Blidook et al., 2022). This existing research does not go into specifics on how to do these activities, or the challenges local elected officials may face when doing this type of work.

The research project will build on existing literature by focusing on this specific role of supporting CBIs by local elected officials. This narrow focus may enable depth to be added to the larger narrative on community leadership in cities and towns. With this research, elected officials may become aware of alternative and more effective methods of supporting CBIs than what they may have practiced in the past.

## 2 Purpose, Scope & Research Questions

The project is expected to provide insights into the opportunities and challenges that elected officials experience when engaging with community-based initiatives. The purpose of this research is to examine the ways in which local elected officials in BC support CBIs. The study aims to identify the approaches utilized by elected officials to support CBIs in BC and provide a framework for elected officials so they may consider options for providing community support.

The research will focus on understanding the unique perspective of elected officials in their role of mobilizing and engaging diverse groups, while also expanding on existing work regarding formal government support factors for CBIs. By investigating the actions taken by individual elected officials within and beyond the formal decision-making processes, this study aims to fill a gap in the literature.

### Research Goals

1. To explore the opportunities and challenges that British Columbian elected officials encounter in supporting community-based initiatives.
2. To identify and analyze the approaches that local elected officials use to support community-based initiatives in British Columbia.

### Limitations

This study does not address the process in which elected officials represent citizens, which is a topic that has had more research conducted (Blidook et al., 2022). A municipality in BC cannot be bound by a single elected official (Bish & Clemens, 2008, p. 32), and therefore any actions taken outside this decision-making role are done on an individual basis and not formally representational of the local government. This limitation allows the project to fill a niche within the roles of mobilizing and engaging diverse groups as identified by Graham (2018), while also expanding the work of Igalla et al. (2020) which focuses on formal government support factors for CBIs.

The scope of the research is limited to local elected officials in BC to maintain a standard of similar legislative frameworks and institutional traditions that would differ in other provinces and orders of government. The study is also limited to work with CBIs, as other community engagement methods have been better studied.

### Research Questions

1. What approaches do local elected officials in BC use to support community-based initiatives?
2. What are the key opportunities and challenges for elected officials in BC to support community-based initiatives?
3. What strategies do elected officials use to navigate tensions or conflicts that arise when supporting community-based initiatives?

### Definitions

To better understand these questions, a definition of community-based initiatives and local elected officials for the purposes of this research will be provided:

**Community-Based Initiative (CBI)** – A project developed and run by citizens that is self organized by the community to provide services for the community (Igalla et al., 2020). This

carries the important distinction that CBIs are not government led and are independent of government decision making. When discussing the similar concept of community initiatives (Bakker et al., 2012) highlights the active community state of initiatives – they bring together several people around doing something rather than advocating for a policy or action.

**Local Elected Official** – The scope of this term is limited to this study to councillors, mayors, and regional district board directors in BC. All are elected positions, with all councillors and mayors representing at-large districts and regional district board directors representing a specific area. All local elected officials must exercise any formal power through the council or board table, and the organization cannot be directed by any individual member (Bish & Clemens, 2008, p. 32).

### **Positionality Statement**

As a former elected councillor in Sechelt BC, my positionality in this research is shaped by this experience. Having served as an elected official, I have firsthand knowledge of the challenges faced by elected officials when supporting CBIs. As a not-for-profit leader, I value the importance of community-based initiatives in promoting social cohesion and building resilience. Between these two experiences, I have seen firsthand how elected officials can play a critical role in supporting these initiatives.

My positionality in this research may result in a blurred line between researcher and research participant. I must separate these roles and ensure that research participants know I am talking to them for research purposes and not as a colleague. My experiences are limited by one term in office, of which nearly three out of four years occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, my background in not-for-profit leadership may bias me towards a particular approach to CBIs, and I recognize the need to consider alternative perspectives in this research.

These experiences did influence the selection of a topic and the limitations on the work. While my background knowledge may be valuable in the big picture, the research was conducted with an open mind. My connections to potential research participants in BC could be beneficial, but an effort was made to select diverse participants through a randomized selection process.

### 3 Literature Review

A thematic literature review has been conducted to narrow the scope of the study in relation to previous work. Starting with the broadest work, the literature review explores the topics of local elected official role participation and then narrows to the community leadership role and support for CBIs, and finally it explores some of the factors that play into community support by local elected officials.

Search criteria used for this literature review include local government, urban development, community leadership, community initiative, government support, place leadership, role behaviour, representation, meta-governance, and governance networks. These were applied in various combinations within the University of Victoria Library Search system. Peer reviewed journal papers and academic books were selected based on titles and abstracts, and forward and backward citation searching was conducted on the most relevant items.

#### 3.1 Local Elected Official Role Perception and Behaviors

In BC, the Local Government Act and the Community Charter provide a set of regulations that outline the powers which councils and boards can exercise (Bish & Clemens, 2008, p. 23). As outlined by The Community Charter, the role of a council is to make major policy decisions including bylaws, financial and service planning, and governance of the local government body (Bish & Clemens, 2008, p. 23). A municipal council in BC cannot be bound by any individual member, and while the mayor may set an agenda, this restriction makes the legislative role of all elected officials approximately equivalent. This governance system is known as a weak mayor system, and is present everywhere in BC and common but not universal across Canada (Bish & Clemens, 2008, p. 32).

The Community Charter was introduced in BC in 2003 as a reform to increase the autonomy of local government (Bish & Clemens, 2008, p. 23), and is recognized as one of the less restrictive of legislations governing municipalities in Canada (Taylor & Dobson, 2020, p. 61), which could provide some latitude in the role for BC local elected officials. The Community Charter specifically mentions a municipality's council has the "authority to determine the public interest of their communities" (Community Charter, 2003). This responsibility of determining public interest can take an elected official beyond their traditional governance role.

Despite legislative requirements imposed on local governments around the world, Tan et al. (2016) utilize an Australian sample to suggest that governance traditions govern role behavior more than legislation. Blidook et al. (2022) also highlight that full time councillors in Canada tend to allocate more time to communication with residents, so already it is evident that there is more to the role than policy making. However it was also found that some Canadian local elected officials focus exclusively on policy work, but on average local elected officials focus on policy for 52% of their time (Blidook et al., 2022). This preference of focusing on policy making has been observed in other jurisdictions (Plüss, 2014), including in a cross jurisdictional study of European councillors (Klok & Denters, 2013, p. 83).

While there may be some diversity of opinions on the role, it is relevant to this study to explore the more broadly defined roles. In a study of mayoral governance in Bristol UK, it was identified that councillors should and can seek out opportunities to lead in similar ways to mayors (Hambleton et al., 2022). Graham (2018) breaks down roles of a Canadian Mayor into three categories: political leadership,

executive leadership, and community leadership. Research on the roles of Canadian local elected officials has been somewhat limited (Blidook et al., 2022), so the use of the mayor's roles can be an entry into this work as in BC, all councillors are elected at large, leaving regional district directors as the only regional representatives included in this study (Bish & Clemens, 2008, p. 53). This aspect of at-large representation is one factor which can differentiate the understanding of the role between mayors and councillors (Blidook et al., 2022).

Graham's (2018) work on the roles of Canadian urban mayors has been the pre-eminent study of Canadian local elected official roles to date. Graham (2018) takes a broader perspective on roles than the representational perspective taken by Blidook et al. (2022). Of interest to this study is Graham's (2018) work on community leadership role which is further broken down into 5 categories: "building civic pride, keeping the pulse of the community, mobilizing and engaging diverse groups, giving hope in times of crisis, and projecting a positive image of the city." The desire to work in these areas comes from expectations from both residents and local elected officials themselves (Graham, 2018; Plüss, 2014). This inability to collectively define a role for local elected officials is highlighted by Blidook et al (2022):

*There is no 'correct' way to be a representative; elected officials interpret their mandates differently and conceive of and act in their roles in diverse ways. In other words, elected officials develop their own representational styles which shape how they engage with and act for their various constituents.*

The local elected official role, and particularly the community leadership role, is highly variable and highly dependent on context and institutional traditions (Blidook et al. 2022). Some work has been done to define the role, but further work is needed in identifying specific community leadership role approaches.

### 3.2 Community Leadership Role

Graham (2018) describes the community leadership role of mayors as a role which leads the city as a place, rather than through administrative or legislative means. This role involves engaging directly with residents and helping to shape a shared vision for the community. Hambleton et al. (2022) focuses in on a mayor's ability to speak on behalf of the entire city, which is also a trait of at large councillors (Blidook et al., 2022). In a large study of European councillors, representing community issues was ranked as the second most important role, following the task of defining strategic goals (Klok & Denters, 2013, p. 67). This function of working with the community at large on shared concerns is also fundamental to political accountability, as elected officials must remain responsive to the electorate, the source of their democratic legitimacy (Beer & Irving, 2021, p. 292; Hambleton et al., 2022; Klok & Denters, 2013, p. 65). An interesting dynamic emerges in which elected officials depend on the community for their authority, yet this authority also enables them to empower others within the community (Hambleton et al., 2022; Potluka, 2021, p. 97). By publicly speaking about community issues, elected officials can offer symbolic and practical support to those actively working on these challenges (Potluka et al., 2022). This outward-facing leadership demonstrated through visibility, advocacy, and relationship building, is central to many of the community leadership approaches identified by Graham (2018).

Another way local elected officials can empower community networks is by connecting them with relevant government policies and processes, drawing on their experience in local government (van

Meerkerk et al., 2020, p. 260). Supporting CBIs also requires institutional power, as officials must be able to influence decisions to provide funding (Graham, 2018). The ability to influence decision making is therefore a key competency for officials supporting CBIs through government channels (Igalla et al., 2020). In addition, local elected officials are typically skilled in civic governance, a trait especially valuable for CBIs in their early stages (Bakker et al., 2012). In Canada, Doberstein (2013) observed a shift from community networks initiated by local governments toward those increasingly led by civil society. This transition is often better managed by elected officials than by civil servants, since officials are accountable to the public through elections (Sørensen & Torfing, 2005). Sotarauta (2009) highlights interpretive power and network power as two sources of place-based leadership. Viewed as competencies, these correspond to experience and connection-making skills. Combined with influence over decisions, these abilities - experience, connection-making, and influence - are central for local elected officials to lead and strengthen community networks and initiatives.

The way these networks of largely unstructured and self-regulating community actors is governed is referred to as metagovernance (Torfing, 2016, p. 567). Metagovernance presents an opportunity for elected officials to exert political authority by representing the needs of a community as a whole to a group (Sørensen & Torfing, 2005). Torfing (2016, p. 573) proposes several metagovernance tools including institutional design of rules, goal and framework setting, process management, and direct participation. However, Torfing (2016, p. 577) also notes that further empirical studies are needed to explore the strategies that metagovernors use in differing situations. More recent work by Hambleton et al. (2022) suggests that additional work is needed on understanding collaborative governance within communities, while Doberstein (2013) notes that there is need within the Canadian context for further accountability for community networks. The exploration of how local elected officials can lead and influence a CBI requires more research as it is in an early state of study.

### 3.3 Support For Community Based Initiatives

The shift towards metagovernance in communities is also driven by citizens' desire for more input and empowerment (van Meerkerk et al., 2020, p. 252). The increased prevalence of CBIs (Edelenbos et al., 2020, p. 1) could be a result of this need. These CBIs often respond to a perceived lack of government services and emerge as citizens become community leaders (Graham, 2018, van Meerkerk et al., 2020, p. 251). Despite the rise of network governance and CBIs, it is possible that this trend is not able to fill the gap in finding solutions to community issues without the support of local elected officials (Potluka et al., 2022). Support of local government is a critical factor in the success of CBIs (Edelenbos et al., 2021; Igalla et al., 2020, 2021; Quinn, 2017). Government support can take many forms including funding, access to information, generating awareness, and active collaboration (Igalla et al., 2021; Sotarauta, 2009). The ability for a singular local elected official to utilize formal government resources is variable, and dependent on the political capital that a local elected official able to spend to push an initiative forward (Kjaer, 2013).

There is also a key role that well connected individuals such as local elected officials can have in this process to facilitate connections to other partners (Seixas & Berkes, 2009, van Meerkerk et al., 2020, p. 262). This boundary spanner can advocate for a CBI to facilitate access to additional resources (Edelenbos et al., 2021). This process of connecting a CBI to others also can legitimize a CBI, and it is a tacit acknowledgement of the CBI purpose being aligned with community needs (Bénil-Gbaffou & Katsaura, 2014; Torfing, 2016, p. 573). Local elected officials are key for relationship building because

they know many more people than the typical actor (Graham, 2018). These types of connections are likely most valuable at the starting stage of a CBI where connections are fewer and more critical (Bakker et al., 2012)

Much of the work on the performance of CBIs comes out of Erasmus University Rotterdam using cases out of the Netherlands, which Igalla et al. (2020) suggests needs more international perspectives. Igalla et al. (2021) expand the scope to six Western European countries when exploring organizational support factors but still note the need for further country comparisons. However, this work still focuses on the role of government, not on the role of specific local elected officials. The process of government support for CBIs appears to be a field in need of further study in the Canadian context. Furthermore, when collaborative governance is studied, it often does not take into account the power of the place, including the role of local elected officials in differing contexts (Hambleton et al., 2022). There is a recognition that local elected officials can play a role in leadership of a community (Graham, 2018), but specifics could use further development, particularly when it comes to working with CBIs.

### 3.4 Literature Review Conclusion

The existing literature on local elected officials support for CBIs in at a preliminary stage. Much of the research focuses on the role that local governments can play. As the scope of the research is narrowed to the individual role of an elected official, we find there is a lack of clear understanding of the role of a local elected official within the British Columbian and Canadian context. This role has been studied more in international contexts, but without the specific lens of focusing on support for CBIs.

## 4 Conceptual Model

Following from the research questions, the various factors that local elected officials can consider when deciding how to support a CBI can be used to develop a conceptual model. One way to begin characterizing these factors is by considering both positive and negative factors. These can also be phrased as opportunities and challenges. To add further detail, factors can also be classified as either internal or external – that is personal factors which affect the local elected official, or those from the environment that affect them.

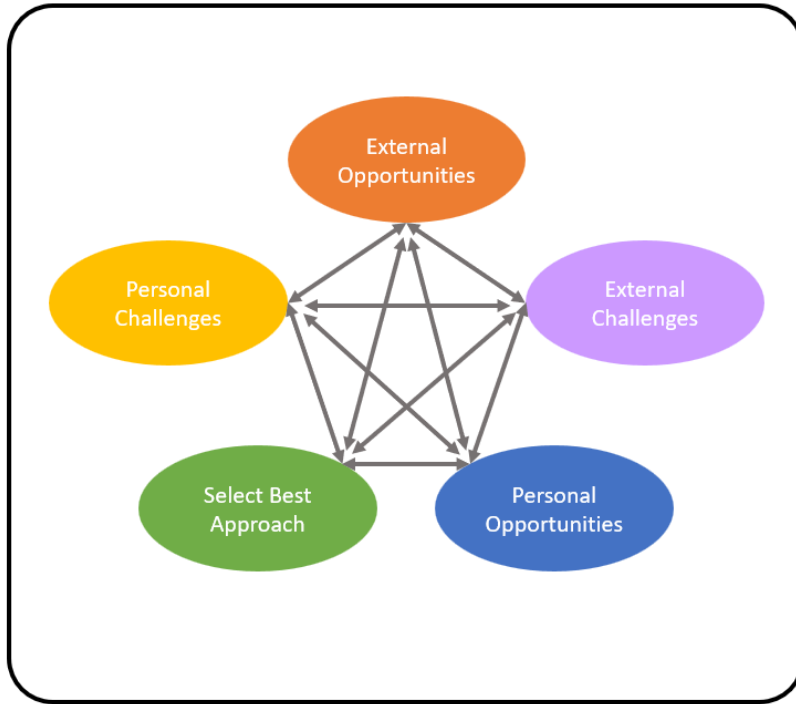
With this dual set of segmentations of factors that local elected officials consider when deciding how to support a CBI, we are left with four segments of factors:

- Personal Opportunities – Factors that offer potential benefits to the local elected official, such as increased personal satisfaction or improvements to their public profile or electability.
- Personal Challenges – Factors that limit or constrain the local elected official, including burnout or heightened expectations from residents.
- External Opportunities – External factors in the community or governance environment that encourage or enable support for CBIs, such as conditions that foster successful community projects.
- External Challenges – Environmental conditions that restrict or complicate a local elected official’s ability to support CBIs, including governance barriers or limited resources.

This breakdown of factors directly addresses the primary research question: *What are the key opportunities and challenges for elected officials in BC to support community-based initiatives?* However, to fully reflect all the research questions, the framework requires one addition.

When a local elected official deliberates on how best to support a CBI, they engage in an internal decision-making process that involves considering these four factors. They may also weigh which approaches they are most familiar with and capable of implementing. Including this consideration addresses the second research question: *What approaches do local elected officials use to support community-based initiatives?*

Local elected officials must evaluate these factors and select an approach that balances competing considerations. The intersections between considerations, represented as arrows in the model, illustrate potential tensions or conflicts in the process. This aspect of the model aligns with the third research question: *What strategies do elected officials use to navigate tensions or conflicts when supporting community-based initiatives?* The completed model is presented as Figure 1. This conceptual model will be refined as the project progresses but currently provides a useful framework for considering the five factors and the tensions involved in addressing them.



*Figure 1: Conceptual model for how a local elected official may choose to support a CBI. Factors for support are in ovals while tensions between these factors are indicated by arrows.*

## 5 Methodology, Methods & Data Analysis

### 5.1 Methodology

The research was conducted in two parts: first a survey of local elected officials was conducted to identify the approaches that elected officials use to support CBIs, then using interested respondents from the original survey, two focus groups were held to discuss tensions with supporting CBIs and how they might be addressed.

The research was conducted with an interpretive mixed methods research approach. Work in this area is still in its infancy, so an interpretive approach was selected to enable participants to reflect on the varied approaches taken to support CBIs. An interpretive design also enables the researcher to pull together the observed approaches of local elected officials and make sense of the opportunities and challenges presented by these approaches (McGregor, 2018, p. 231).

The phased approach of the research also enables the focus groups to build upon insights gleaned from the survey, with questions adjusted to align with, and expand on survey results. This builds upon a strength of an interpretive methodology where knowledge is held by people's interpretation of the context (McGregor, 2018, p. 23). The intent of using this approach is to understand the beliefs of local elected officials in regard to supporting CBIs.

### 5.2 Methods

#### **Phase 1: Survey**

The online survey was sent out to 58 randomly selected municipalities and regional districts in British Columbia with a request to forward on to local elected officials. Contact information for each local government is publicly available at [civicinfo.bc.ca](http://civicinfo.bc.ca). Using information provided by Civic Info, local governments were categorized based on population, and a proportionate number of local governments were selected from each category.

A target sample size of 90 respondents produces a 95% confidence interval with 10% margin of error for the estimated 1,300 local elected officials in BC. Municipalities in BC typically have councils with seven members (with variation from 5 to 11) (Bish & Clemens, 2008, p. 32). Using a sample population of all local elected officials in Canada, the Canadian Municipal Barometer achieved a 22% response rate from Canadian elected officials (Blidook et al., 2022). Using these values from this analogous population, 410 local elected officials would need to be sent the survey to reach the targeted number of responses. These local elected officials could be represented by sending out the survey to 58 local governments.

Of these 58 local governments, 15 were randomly selected from the under 2,000 population cohort, 7 from the 2,000-4,000 cohort, 9 from the 4,000-10,000 cohort, 9 from the 10,000-25,000 cohort, 9 from the over 25,000 cohort, and 9 regional districts. These rates reflect the proportion of all municipalities sorted by population cohorts. 44 survey responses were received, representing an estimated 10.7% response rate. While this was below the targeted response rate of 22%, it still represents a diverse population with responses from all population cohorts and all regions.

Full survey questions along with the consent form are available in Appendix A. The survey was broken up into the following sections:

1. Experience with CBIs
2. Approach Preferences
3. Support Factors
4. Reflection
5. Demographic Information

The first section begins with a question on frequency of support for CBIs. This could allow for further analysis for those extremely involved or less involved in this type of work. It then explores the experience that an elected official has in several areas related to the study. Generally, the questions are categorized into competencies: experience with CBIs, influence over decision making, and experience making connections. Combined these can identify the strengths of a located official. These competencies were identified in the literature review and when considered together, may inform how a local elected official selects an approach for support. Because the conceptual model outlines five general factors for CBI support, this section also assesses how an elected official's competencies relate to their selection. If there is a strong connection, an additional factor could be added, or abilities could be incorporated into one of the five factors.

This section also asks for a brief example of how they have supported a CBI, why they believe this was the best approach, and what is a creative way they have seen someone else support a CBI. The difference between how they would act, and a creative way to act responds to the observed difference between role behaviour and role perception in local elected officials (Plüss, 2014). A content analysis of these responses categorizes and identifies can further develop the list of approaches.

The second section of the survey follows Sotarauta's (2009) work on economic influence and power of development officers in Finland. While it is a different research context, many of the specific approaches surveyed by Sotarauta has been modified to fit into a local elected official context. Survey participants were also provided a list of actions and asked to rank their three most preferred approaches. Although they are not comprehensive, these results could be useful in Phase 2 of the study to begin a discussion on tensions faced when supporting CBIs for some of the less preferred options. The third section allows participants to reflect on their preferred approaches and explain why they are preferred.

The fourth section includes two reflective questions. The first question provides respondents an opportunity to share how they have changed their approaches over time. These responses will be used to further identify challenges and potential solutions to those challenges. A shift in priorities could also reflect change in priorities or goals for CBI involvement, which could inform development of the five factors from the conceptual model. There is also a question on removing the constraint of time, which from the literature review is a significant personal challenge. It is expected that time limitations are a major barrier to this work, so by removing this criterion, it may also open more suggested approaches.

The fifth section of the survey provides some control variables to identify any biases within the responses. Building off the work of Plüss (2014) control variables of city size, experience, age, education, and gender will be used. Additionally, a question on region will be included as that will be used to

segment participants for phase 2 of the study and ensure that responses represent a diversity of geographic locations across British Columbia.

## **Phase 2: Focus Groups**

The second phase of the study utilizes focus groups held on zoom. Participants were selected from interested survey respondents. 9 respondents showed interest, and 8 of which were split into two focus groups with 3 and 5 people. The division of groups and the one participant who didn't participate was based off schedule availability. A recording of the session with automatic transcripts enabled review an analysis after each session.

Focus groups provide an opportunity for more in-depth discussions with more examples as participants build off the responses of others (Nishishiba et al., 2014). Questions address the tensions that local elected officials face and the strategies they use to address these tensions. The discussions were moderated by the primary researcher to keep participants on track while providing enough space for participants to add detail as they see fit.

The focus group began with a question on opportunities of supporting CBIs. This is designed to encourage the participants to join the conversation with a more positive question and focus on the two categories of opportunities in the conceptual model – personal and external. Then participants briefly reviewed the results of the survey to provide feedback or clarification from their interpretation of the data. They then explored why support is sometimes conditional, a question focusing on the external and personal challenges. Due to time limitations, several pre-developed questions were not asked. This includes one question that responds to a tension around CBIs acting in opposition to government, one question that was a direct response to a contradictory survey response, and one on the difficulty of collaboration. Two questions were asked to only one focus group each, one on fairness which began to explore an identified personal challenge, and one on situational factors, which is related to external challenges. Full focus group questions, including the questions that were not asked are available in Appendix C. The consent form that each focus group participant signed is provided in Appendix B.

## **5.3 Data Analysis**

Survey data collected through Survey Monkey was reviewed in two phases. First, there was a preliminary review of the data collected in the approach preferences section of the survey with the frequency of actions performed question. This data is structured on a five point scale, so the most frequent was assigned a score of five, and the least frequent assigned a one. This summary was presented to the focus groups for validation and analysis. A basic summary of support approaches was also presented to the focus groups.

The second phase of survey analysis involved coding responses in the *experience with CBIs* section to group similar responses together. These coded responses complemented and expanded the list of actions identified in the second section of the survey. Scored responses from the approach-preference section can then be compared with the three competency categories, CBI experience, influence, and connection making, to determine which actions corresponded most closely to which competencies. Although the limited diversity of responses constrained the depth of this comparison, the analysis still supported the organization of approaches into seven general groups.

The recording and transcript functions of Zoom was used to record the focus groups. The transcripts were manually reviewed to produce a cleaner version. A thematic analysis of the transcript was reviewed by primary researcher using NVivo. The primary objective of the focus group data analysis is to answer research question 3: *What strategies do elected officials use to navigate tensions or conflicts that arise when supporting community-based initiatives?* When additional approaches for supporting CBIs were identified, they were incorporated into the results for research question 1. This qualitative analysis of the focus groups used an interpretive approach, so participants' various interpretations of the tensions were collated to make sense of the situation on a more generalized level.

#### 5.4 Ensuring Data Quality

The survey section was piloted with individuals not included in the sample population to produce more trustworthy data. This ensured that the questions are clear, and responses are relevant to the survey objectives. Revisions to the survey questions were made after feedback was received. Survey responses were assessed against demographic information to identify any biases in the sample population. During the focus group, moderation kept the conversation on track while also providing space for all participants to engage in the discussion.

Focus group participants validated the survey results to enhance credibility. By listing the approaches identified by the survey, the focus group participants could question any unclear approaches. There was also an opportunity to triangulate some of the data collected in the survey by providing space to add any approaches not identified in the survey.

While the sample population is only drawn from local elected officials in BC, the result of the study is presented with transferability in mind. Themes generated from the study are generalized sufficiently such that they should be able to be applied in other jurisdictions. For areas that are specific to the British Columbian context, these will be described with enough detail for readers to discern any differences within their context. Finally, since most of the work on support for CBIs is based in a Netherlands and European context, the results of this study will be compared to these works.

#### 5.5 Ethics Review

Ethics review was conducted by the UVic human research ethics board. No other parties were involved with the review of ethics for this project. The project has benefits for local elected officials, community groups and the general knowledge base, as this exact form of research has not been conducted. For participants, the primary risk of this project is reputational risk during the focus group. As local elected officials are participating with their peers, it may be difficult to share failures or other challenges. This was mitigated by a request for participants to consider any items discussed during the focus group as confidential, as well as anonymizing data in the results.

#### 5.6 Project Strengths and Limitations

This project's strength lies within its mixed methods, phased approach. There is opportunity to triangulate information between the survey and the focus groups, as well as comparing the differences between the focus groups. Multiple data sources combine to form more robust information for the project. The researcher's positionality as a former local elected official as well as a community leader also provides a good basis for the research. This experience has informed the design of the study to incorporate more conversations within the focus groups, hopefully leading to more fulsome results.

A limitation to this survey resides with its sample selection method. It is likely that only the most interested in the topic will complete the survey and be willing to go to the focus groups. Those members of the sample population who do not engage in supporting CBIs may be less likely to fill out the survey, and then their perspective will be missed when considering the challenges of supporting CBIs. An additional weakness lies within the interpretive approach which can be subject to the researcher's biases and preconceptions. Encouraging participants to interpret the data can help mitigate this.

# 6 Findings

Forty-Four survey responses were collected from local elected officials from across BC through February and March 2024. Of those 44 respondents, 9 were interested in focus groups, and 8 participated in one of two focus groups in June 2024. Focus groups were able to validate some of the approaches identified in the survey data and dig into the tensions mentioned.

## 6.1 Quantitative Survey Findings

Findings from the survey provided a valuable insight into some of the approaches of supporting CBIs used by Elected officials in BC. It also allows for a review on the conceptual model and begins to identify some of the tensions encountered by local elected officials in this work.

### 6.1.1 Demographics

Most survey respondents provided demographic information. Of 44 total responses, 34 had demographic information. As mentioned in the methodology, the surveys were stratified by population, meaning that the randomly selected local governments represented a proportionate share of local governments by population cohorts. As can be seen in Figure 2, the share of respondents corresponds closely with cohorts above 10,000. There is an overrepresentation of the 4,000-9,999 cohort, and an under representation of the two cohorts under 4,000. Some of this bias could be reflected in regional district representatives also being invited to participate as a separate cohort, which is difficult to classify in a similar population cohort system as there is only one representative per electoral area, whereas municipalities in BC have multiple elected officials per municipality.

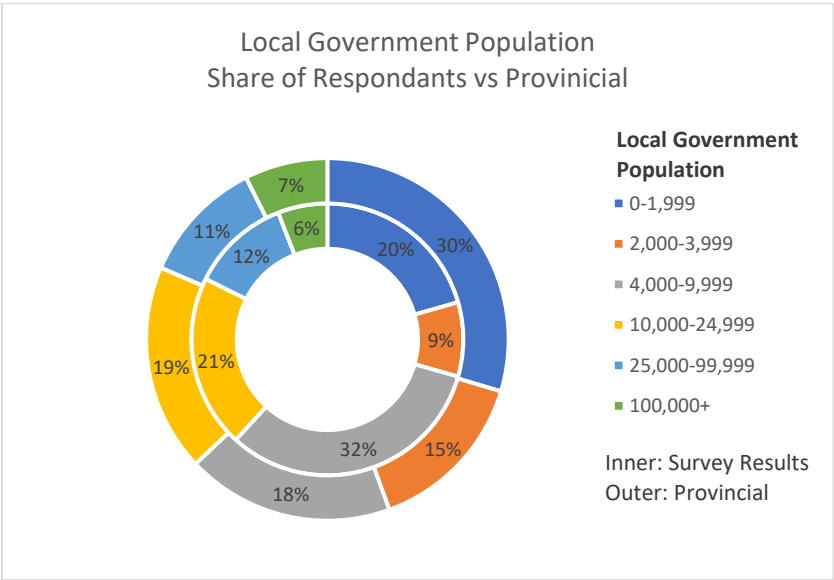


Figure 2: Local Government Population Survey Data and Provincial Data from Civic Info BC (n.d.)

While geographic spread was not controlled in the sample selection process, it was hoped that a broad geographic representation could be obtained in the survey sample. Figure 3 highlights a vast share of the respondents were from the Kootenay & Boundary region along with the Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities region. While results were obtained from every region, few came the

Southern Interior and Lower Mainland regions. The fewest results came from the North Central region, but that could be expected due to a smaller number of local governments in this region. Generally, the respondents to this survey largely represent two diverse regions of the province, which should bring differing perspectives to the results.

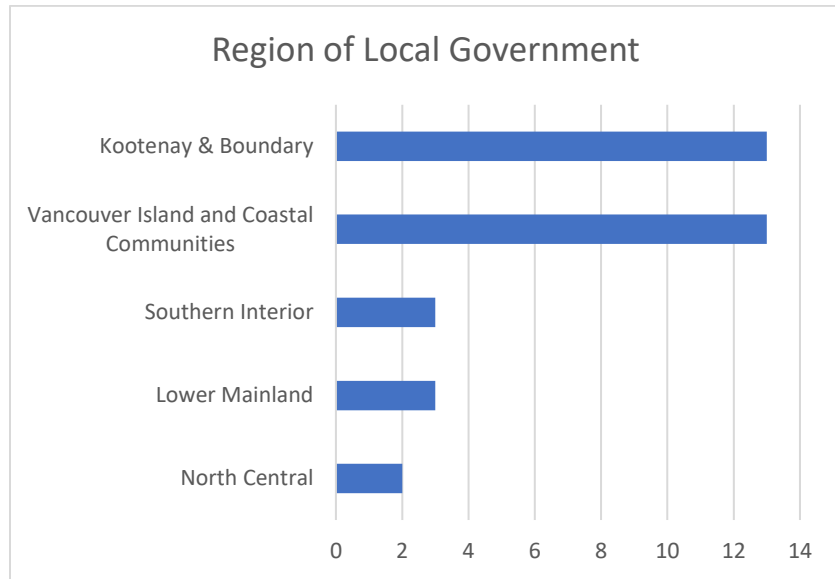


Figure 3: The geographic region in which respondents serve as local elected officials.

Figures 4 and 5 provide some personal characteristics of respondents. They both represent a diverse sample, with responses across the spectrum. The age of respondents skews older, with Figure 5 demonstrating that most respondents are between 55 and 74. This can be expected, since most local elected officials are within this age group (Deska, 2016). Education rates align with national studies of local elected officials, with approximately 30% having a bachelors degree in this study and in a national survey (Lucas, 2022). Additionally, participants were asked about their professional backgrounds. The most common professional backgrounds included those who are self employed and working in health services. Responses also included public safety, professional services, education, consumer services, government, construction, hospitality, finance, real estate, and forestry. No respondents identified a background in working in not-for profit organizations. Respondents are overrepresented from the health sector, with another Canadian report listing only 3% of local elected officials coming from the health sector (Ingham & Morden, 2021) where this survey had 16% of respondents with a health background.

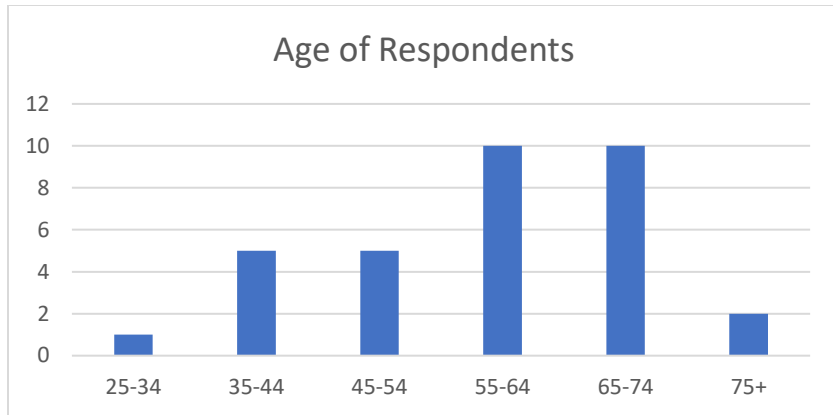


Figure 4: Age of respondents to the survey.

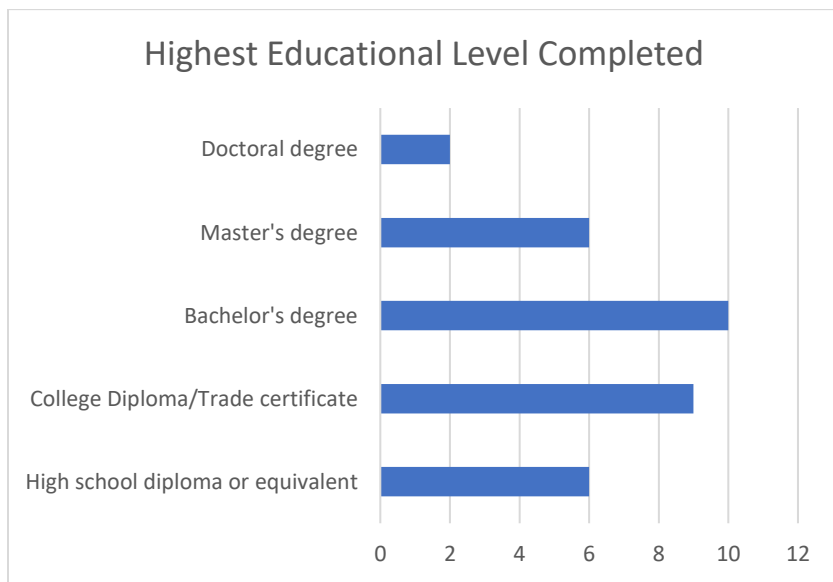


Figure 5: Highest educational level completed by respondents of the survey.

The final demographic question explored the length of service. Figure 6 shows that most respondents have served fewer than 4 years, but there are a variety of experiences also represented, including 11 with more than 12 years of experience. This represents many different levels of experience, which will be reflected in the results.

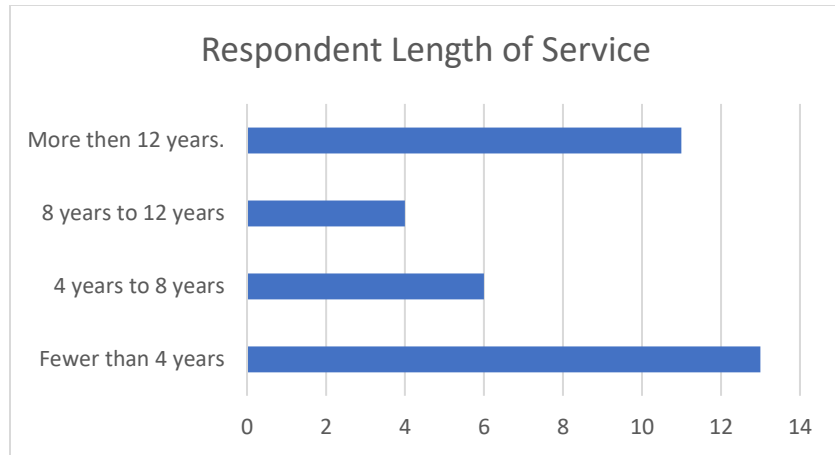


Figure 6: Length of service in local government by survey respondents.

In conclusion, while a small number of local elected officials responded to the survey, it is fairly representative of the entire local elected official population in BC, with some responses coming from every metric measured. Consideration should be given to the increased number of respondents with health sector experience and the impact of having few responses from the Southern Interior and the Lower Mainland regions of BC.

### 6.1.2 Frequency of Support

Within the past year, a vast majority of survey respondents had provided some level of support for CBIs, with only 5% of respondents rarely or never providing support. Figure 7 shows that 52% of respondents provided support on a weekly or more frequent basis. Of those who support daily, 63% are over the age of 65. As many local elected officials complete the role on a part time basis, those who are retired may have more time to provide daily support to CBIs. Those who have served fewer than 4 years had a decreased rate of daily support of 8%, whereas 33% of those with more than four years of experience provided support daily. Newer elected officials had an increased rate of weekly support, so it is possible that those who were more supportive shifted their support to towards daily support as they gained experience in local government.

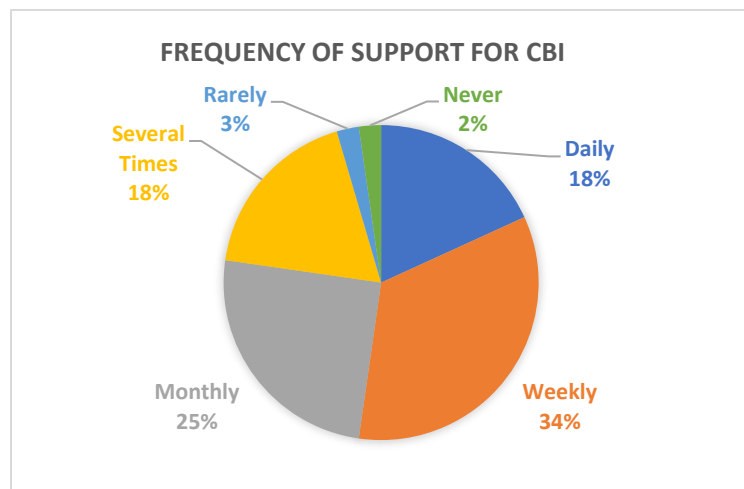


Figure 7: Frequency of support provided to CBIs by survey respondents.

### 6.1.3 Strengths Assessment

Survey respondents were asked to assess their experience across nine criteria, which can be grouped into three categories: CBI experience, influence, and connections. As shown in Figure 8, local elected officials generally rated themselves highest in connection skills and lower in influence skills. These self-assessments were intended to be compared with actions reported elsewhere in the survey and preferred approaches outlined in Figure 9. However, due to limited and non-diverse data, such comparisons are not possible.

Given that respondents are strongest in connection making, it is unsurprising that the most preferred approaches for supporting CBIs involve building functional relationships with influential individuals and promoting the initiatives, as shown in Figure 9. This alignment between strengths and preferred approaches is evident, even in the absence of extensive data. Conversely, some of the least preferred approaches in Figure 9 relate to conflict resolution, including arbitrating conflicts that complicate collaboration and organizing collective strategy-making processes.

Figure 8 highlights a strong emphasis on connection-making skills, with the other two competencies underrepresented in the sample. The limited number of respondents with strengths in influence or experience should be considered when interpreting these results, and the reasons for this pattern warrant further investigation.

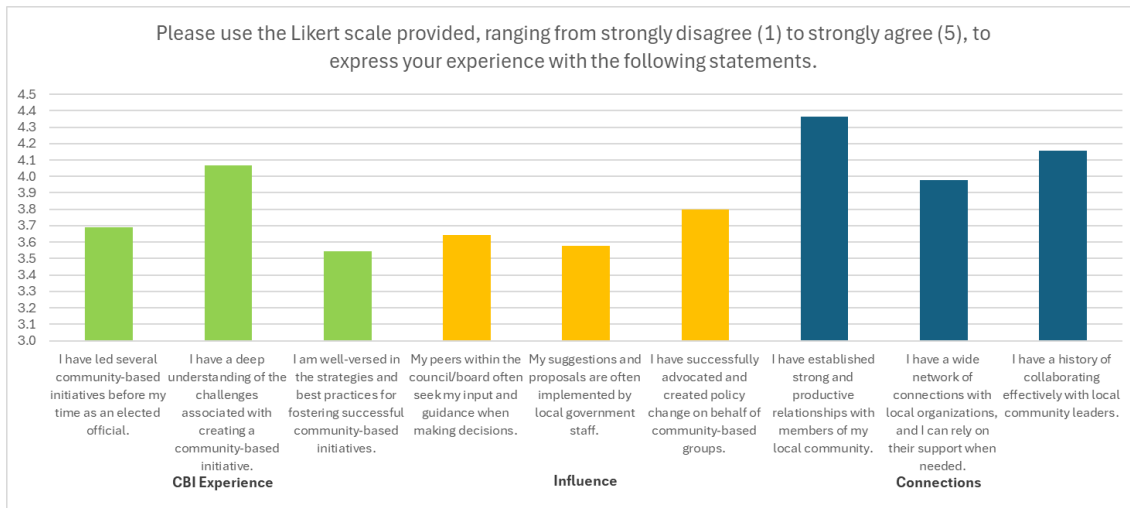
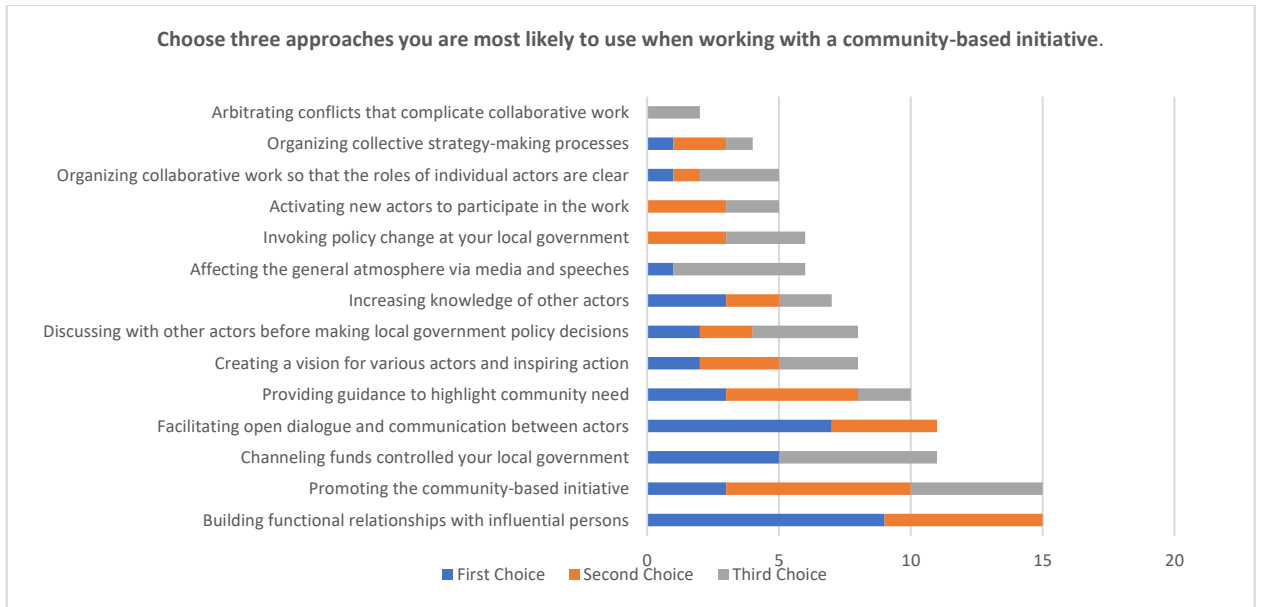


Figure 8: Average of experience ratings, sorted by CBI Experience, Influence, and Connection skills.



*Figure 9: Preferred approaches for CBI support by survey participants.*

As this project is exploratory and data are limited, all collected responses provide valuable insights into how elected officials support CBIs. In summary, while some diversity in skills exists, over half of respondents identified connection making as a strength. This trend may influence the results, including the list of preferred support approaches, favoring strategies that rely on strong connection making abilities.

## 6.2 Support Approaches Findings

Survey participants were asked to provide an example of how they have supported a CBI and to share a creative way they have seen another elected official offer support. Additionally, many approaches of supporting CBIs were mentioned elsewhere in the survey and focus groups. Both focus groups reviewed a preliminary list of support approaches to validate and expand on the list, and a few additional approaches were identified through this process. The final list of approaches is organized thematically, grouping approaches that require similar skill sets within each category.

### 6.2.1 Public Statements of Support

Some of the most frequently mentioned actions included speaking at council meetings (6 mentions), advocating to higher levels of government (4), posting on social media (4), and making other public statements of support. These activities leverage the status of local elected officials as community leaders.

As one survey respondent noted, “An elected official has access to media and a following, so when they speak in support of an initiative, people listen.” Their voice is often perceived as representing the broader community, giving their statements significant weight. This role of community leadership is something that some elected officials actively embrace. One focus group participant shared, “I refer to myself as a community leader, not just an elected official. I want to be known as a community leader.” By publicly supporting CBIs, local elected officials demonstrate leadership while using their influence and connections to amplify important community initiatives.

### **Example of Support**

“One of our Council members prepares a report for Council every week on the work of community groups. It gets the message into the public conversation and the media.”

### **Public Statements of Support Approaches**

- Shaping public discourse through letters to the editor.
- Raising local challenges with higher levels of government.
- Educating the public on key issues through seminars or podcasts.
- Recognizing community efforts at council meetings.
- Sharing posts from CBIs on social media.
- Highlighting how community contributions support local government successes.
- Wearing a button or pin to raise awareness of an issue.
- Speaking at fundraising events.
- Writing letters of support for grant funding.

### **Definition:**

Public statements of support involve endorsements by local elected officials through platforms like speeches, media, or social media, where they promote a CBI, align it with community priorities, and advocate for resources, aiming to raise awareness and legitimize the CBI's efforts.

#### **6.2.2 Resource Provision**

Other frequently mentioned responses included utilizing the role as a decision maker by providing grant-in-aid funding (4 mentions), changing local government policy (3) and providing other resources such as land, facilities, or other financial resources. These, and other responses touch on the ability for a local elected official to use their position and decision-making power to provide support. All these approaches align closely with the traditional role of a local elected official as outlined in the local government act. A survey respondent explains how this type of support can be beneficial for all:

*Working with nonprofit organizations they can leverage funding for a project that will benefit the municipality. The municipality on the other hand can focus on its day to day operations. Council can focus on the required policy changes that are required to make the nonprofit successful. If everyone stays in their own lane we create success.*

A local elected official sits on a decision-making body with the ability to provide resources. These resources can be directed to CBIs.

### **Example of Support**

“I met with the [Town] Housing Society, identified land which would be suitable for a housing project, through council created the required decisions to move the project forward and we now have a 30 unit housing project in our community.”

## **Resource Provision Support Approaches**

- Providing funding though including grant in aids.
- Creating aligned government services and programs.
- Changing policy to support work of CBI.
- Directing municipal capital projects as road or park improvements to support CBIs.
- Providing local government facilities for CBI activities.
- Creating new spaces for CBI activities.
- Leasing municipal land to CBI.

## **Definition**

Resource provision involves leveraging the formal decision-making power of local elected officials to allocate funding, infrastructure, and policy change to support to CBIs. Local elected officials can influence decisions to enhance the capacity of CBIs by sharing local government resources.

### **6.2.3 Relationship Building**

Survey respondents also identified relationship building approaches. They listed connected with community leaders (4 mentions), building organizational partnerships (4), and bringing in new people to a CBI (3) as some of the more frequent responses, along with other responses around connecting with others at various levels. These types of approaches focus on a local elected official's ability to connect and leverage the connections that they have. A survey respondent shared that "local politicians have a following and are connected to many businesses and leaders on the community and you can spread the word". Spreading awareness about the CBI can be very beneficial. For those local elected officials who are well connected to many people in their community, relationship building brings new people into a CBI.

## **Example of Support**

"Some CBIs need access to specific parties - potential suppliers, sponsors, etc. Elected officials can help develop these relationships"

## **Relationship Building Support Approaches**

- Bringing new people into the CBI.
- Connecting different organizations with a shared goal.
- Connecting with funding opportunities or other resources in the community.
- Hosting collective brainstorming sessions.
- Connecting the initiative to people with specific skills.
- Coordinating different parties to a shared goal.
- Connecting a CBI to local government staff.

- Introducing the group to decision makers.
- Putting people forward to serve on not for profit boards.
- Seeking donations for an initiative.

### **Definition**

Relationship building involves fostering connections between CBIs, community members, and decision makers to enhance collaboration and access to resources. Local elected officials play a key role by leveraging their networks to introduce CBIs to skilled individuals, government staff, and funding opportunities.

#### 6.2.4 Direct Services

Another theme from frequent responses involves sharing an elected officials services and knowledge with CBIs. Survey respondents frequently identified providing governance advice (3 mentions), meeting facilitation (3), explaining how local government works (3), and sharing information (3). Other approaches identified focused on specific skills. Local elected officials often enter the role with some sort of professional background, and those skills, along with knowledge obtained through the role, can provide benefit to CBIs.

### **Example of Support**

“We have the opportunity to provide the groups with knowledge of the processes and structures that they will be working through. We also have a knowledge base of potential funding sources for the groups to fulfill their expectations, but we also have the experience to provide some guidance as to what might be an easier path to accomplish their goals.”

### **Direct Services Approaches**

- Leadership experience.
- Directing to existing resources, information, and plans.
- Governance and meeting support.
- Explaining how local government works.
- Advice on how to present to council.
- Bridging information gaps with past work.
- Bring local government voice to community issues.
- Marketing and communications support.
- Sharing volunteer management strategies.
- Business and strategic planning facilitation.

## Definition

Providing direct services means applying expertise and experience to support CBIs in practical and tangible ways. Local elected officials can offer direct assistance that helps CBIs navigate systems, access resources, and operate effectively.

### 6.2.5 Providing Guidance

Other frequent responses collected were more diverse, with providing guidance (4 mentions) and directing a CBI towards community need (3) being somewhat aligned in influencing the activity of the CBI. At the intersection of experience and connections, this area uses the skills that an elected official possesses to guide those who they are well connected to.

## Support Example

“I attend community association meetings and not for profit organization AGMs to better understand the issues within my Electoral Area and offer solutions and connect people to sources of funding and expertise to help them find solutions and eliminate barriers.”

## Providing Guidance Approaches

- Encouraging interested parties to meet about an issue.
- Lifting marginalized voices in the work of a community-based initiative.
- Joining the board of not for profits or serving as a local government liaison.
- Highlighting challenges that some may face while working with the CBI.
- Providing data and other information to influence decisions.
- Steering a group in the direction of a community need.
- Sharing past experiences with similar initiatives.
- Sharing best practices from other communities.
- Setting a vision for the community and sharing how they would contribute to it.
- Encouraging new people to join the CBI.
- Coordinating different partners.

## Definition

Providing governance means guiding and supporting CBIs through advice, leadership, and strategic direction. Local elected officials contribute by sharing a vision shaped by their understanding of community needs.

### 6.2.6 Championing Initiatives

Other responses had a theme around taking leadership over a CBI. At the intersection of influence and experience, these actions have significant power to create change. They have the political backing to make a change and the know-how to make it happen.

### **Support Example**

“I chaired a group of 40 volunteers to do community spring cleanups, adopt public flower beds, participated in environmental concerns, organized educational garden sessions, worked with the wetlands association and supported the trails society, spearheading a trail cleanup and initiated a community garden.”

### **Championing Initiatives Approaches**

- Chairing a local government task force
- Chairing a not-for-profit board or other initiative.
- Organizing a group of volunteers.
- Creating a new program and sourcing funding for it.
- Creating a new not for profit or unincorporated organization.

### **Definition**

Championing an initiative involves local elected officials actively advocating for and supporting CBIs by taking on leadership roles and initiating new programs or organizations. By taking these actions, local elected officials help build momentum, coordinate efforts, and provide critical early stage support to strengthen CBIs.

#### **6.2.7 Status Work**

Beyond these, some responses had a theme of doing activities based on the status of being a local elected official such as fundraising or volunteering. Outside of the three competencies identified, local elected officials can provide support simply by using their status in the community.

### **Support Example**

“People are so happy that I have come in person, feels worthwhile”

### **Status Work Support Approaches**

- Attending community events.
- Attending community meetings.
- Seeking donations for an initiative.
- Volunteering.
- Public stunts such as a dunk tank.

### **Definition**

Status work involves local elected officials leveraging their position and reputation to enhance a CBI's credibility. Through their public image and authority, they help legitimize the CBI and raise its standing within the community and among other stakeholders.

### 6.2.8 List of Approaches

In total, 57 approaches for supporting CBIs have been identified. There are presented here for ease of reference.

#### **Public Statements of Support Approaches**

- Shaping public discourse through letters to the editor.
- Raising local challenges with higher levels of government.
- Educating the public on key issues through seminars or podcasts.
- Recognizing community efforts at council meetings.
- Sharing posts from CBIs on social media.
- Highlighting how community contributions support local government successes.
- Wearing a button or pin to raise awareness of an issue.
- Speaking at fundraising events.
- Writing letters of support for grant funding.

#### **Resource Provision Support Approaches**

- Providing funding though including grant in aids.
- Creating aligned government services and programs.
- Changing policy to support work of CBI.
- Directing municipal capital projects as road or park improvements to support CBIs.
- Providing local government facilities for CBI activities.
- Creating new spaces for CBI activities.
- Leasing municipal land to CBI.

#### **Relationship Building Support Approaches**

- Bringing new people into the CBI.
- Connecting different organizations with a shared goal.
- Connecting with funding opportunities or other resources in the community.
- Hosting collective brainstorming sessions.
- Connecting the initiative to people with specific skills.
- Coordinating different parties to a shared goal.
- Connecting a CBI to local government staff.
- Introducing the group to decision makers.
- Putting people forward to serve on not for profit boards.
- Seeking donations for an initiative.

#### **Direct Services Approaches**

- Leadership experience.
- Directing to existing resources, information, and plans.
- Governance and meeting support.
- Explaining how local government works.
- Advice on how to present to council.
- Bridging information gaps with past work.
- Bring local government voice to community issues.
- Marketing and communications support.
- Sharing volunteer management strategies.
- Business and strategic planning facilitation.

**Providing Guidance Approaches**

- Encouraging interested parties to meet about an issue.
- Lifting marginalized voices in the work of a community-based initiative.
- Joining the board of not for profits or serving as a local government liaison.
- Highlighting challenges that some may face while working with the CBI.
- Providing data and other information to influence decisions.
- Steering a group in the direction of a community need.
- Sharing past experiences with similar initiatives.
- Sharing best practices from other communities.
- Setting a vision for the community and sharing how they would contribute to it.
- Encouraging new people to join the CBI.
- Coordinating different partners.

**Championing Initiatives Approaches**

- Chairing a local government task force
- Chairing a not-for-profit board or other initiative.
- Organizing a group of volunteers.
- Creating a new program and sourcing funding for it.
- Creating a new not for profit or unincorporated organization.

**Status Work Support Approaches**

- Attending community events
- Attending community meetings
- Seeking donations for an initiative
- Volunteering
- Public stunts such as a dunk tank

Additionally, the definition of each category is summarized here for quick reference as well.

Table 1: Definitions of the 7 categories of approaches for supporting CBIs.

Approach Category	Definition
<b>Public Statements of Support</b>	Public statements of support involve endorsements by local elected officials through platforms like speeches, media, or social media, where they promote a CBI, align it with community priorities, and advocate for resources, aiming to raise awareness and legitimize the CBI's efforts.
<b>Resource Provision</b>	Resource provision involves leveraging the formal decision-making power of local elected officials to allocate funding, infrastructure, and policy change to support to CBIs. Local elected officials can influence decisions to enhance the capacity of CBIs by sharing local government resources.
<b>Relationship Building</b>	Relationship building involves fostering connections between CBIs, community members, and decision makers to enhance collaboration and access to resources. Local elected officials play a key role by leveraging their networks to introduce CBIs to skilled individuals, government staff, and funding opportunities.
<b>Direct Services</b>	Providing direct services means applying expertise and experience to support CBIs in practical and tangible ways. Local elected officials can offer direct assistance that helps CBIs navigate systems, access resources, and operate effectively.
<b>Providing Guidance</b>	Providing governance means guiding and supporting CBIs through advice, leadership, and strategic direction. Local elected officials contribute by sharing a vision shaped by their understanding of community needs.
<b>Championing an Initiative</b>	Championing an initiative involves local elected officials actively advocating for and supporting CBIs by taking on leadership roles and initiating new programs or organizations. By taking these actions, local elected officials help build momentum, coordinate efforts, and provide critical early stage support to strengthen CBIs.
<b>Status Work</b>	Status work involves local elected officials leveraging their position and reputation to enhance a CBI's credibility. Through their public image and authority, they help legitimize the CBI and raise its standing within the community and among other stakeholders.

### 6.3 Goals of Supporting CBIs

Some focus group participants were asked to reflect on how situational factors shape the methods local elected officials use to support community based initiatives. Their responses, alongside other discussion questions, help to surface the underlying goals that inform these decisions.

#### 6.3.1 External Opportunities

Many respondents emphasized the importance of strengthening CBIs by fostering collaboration and building meaningful connections. A focus group participant noted, "Ultimately, they're successful because they have relationships," underscoring the central role of networks in enabling CBIs to build momentum. By connecting emerging CBIs with experienced individuals or organizations, external supporters can help cultivate the conditions necessary for CBI success.

Local elected officials are frequently positioned by the community as key facilitators of such connections. One respondent reflected, “My reputation as a fair decision maker makes it acceptable for people to meet together to try to sort through problems that are hindering success.” This convening role, bringing together diverse stakeholders to collaborate and problem solve, was echoed by others who noted the power of relationship building and diplomacy in aligning groups around shared goals. As one focus group participant expressed, “I think anything is possible if we can make the connections and the partnerships in our communities.”

These examples highlight how elected officials, through their external relationships and reputational capital, can strengthen CBIs. When their involvement is responsive to community-identified needs, local elected officials can help unlock new possibilities for CBIs. This support is not about leading the initiatives themselves but rather about opening doors and building bridges. The potential for CBIs to meet their objectives is often already present. However, the right support at the right time, particularly in the form of strategic connections, can be a catalyst for the CBI.

### 6.3.2 External Challenges

A recurring challenge raised by participants is the limited capacity of local government staff to support CBIs. This capacity constraint directly affects what is realistically achievable. As one focus group participant explained, “As much as I want to support community groups, if it’s going to be a burden on staff or take away from other initiatives at the city, then it’s a challenge.” Another noted, “Most community-based initiatives require funding, especially start-up funding.” While many elected officials want to support these efforts, financial decisions must be balanced against other municipal priorities. Some respondents emphasized the importance of managing expectations openly in light of these limitations. One survey participant noted, “I have started to be as straightforward as possible about the capacity of local government to support community initiatives with resources or policy.” Transparent communication helps clarify what elected officials can and cannot do within the constraints of staffing and funding.

Political neutrality also emerged as a significant constraint. Elected officials must remain accountable to the entire electorate, which limits the degree to which they can affiliate with specific groups. One respondent remarked, “Being very careful not to support one political party over another. You can make enemies if you are strongly on one side.” Another participant emphasized the need for discretion, stating, “Even until you fully trust somebody, you do want to be careful what you say because it’s really easy for people to use you as an elected official for having heard you and agreed with something that maybe isn’t quite the way it was.” These concerns highlight the reputational risks elected officials face and the importance of building relationships rooted in trust. One focus group participant described a situation where they reached out directly to someone who was spreading misconceptions, reinforcing the need for one-on-one engagement to clarify misunderstandings and strengthen community trust. However, trust alone is not always sufficient. Some officials reported cases where individuals claimed to speak on behalf of CBIs without accurately representing the organization. These situations raise concerns about misrepresentation and potential political fallout. Focus group participants emphasized the need for careful investigation before offering public support to any initiative.

These examples highlight how external challenges are not just barriers to overcome, but structural realities that shape the decisions of local elected officials. Political risk, financial limitations,

public accountability, and governance structures all can limit the sustainability of local elected official support. Support can be provided once, but these external challenges tend to limit ongoing work without intentional interventions. For many elected officials, questions about fair decision making, proper use of resources, and maintaining public trust are top of mind when determining how to engage with CBIs in a long term, sustainable manner.

### 6.3.3 Personal Challenges

Time is the most valuable resource when supporting CBIs for local elected officials. Deciding how focus that time presents a recurring challenge raised in the focus groups. One participant from a small community shared that one of their greatest struggles was simply being interested in everything. Spreading themselves too thin, however, can quickly lead to burnout. As another participant noted, “You become overwhelmed and aren’t able to solve anything.” In practice, elected officials often rely on their personal interests to guide their involvement with CBIs. This was clearly expressed by a participant who drew a distinction between their formal role and personal time:

*There's a difference between when I'm at the council table and making decisions based on like, you know, evaluation criteria or staff recommendations, versus what I'm doing on my time outside of council meetings. Because outside of council meetings, I am totally not fair. I am focusing my attention on the community groups that are doing the work that I care about. And so, there are some groups that I like I will maybe respond to their emails, but I'm not going to sit down with them to brainstorm fundraising initiatives if it's something that is not an interest to me.*

This kind of personal alignment is not only understood but can be expected by the public. As one participant explained, “They elect people who reflect their biases in the right way.” However, on the inverse, personal interests can be affected by what the local elected official is hearing. Some focus group participants mentioned the effect of good advocacy and brought up concerns of bias that this brings: “the squeaky wheel gets the grease, we're not really focusing enough on sort of the equity diversity and inclusion”. There is a need to strike a balance between personal interests and personal biases due to abundance or lack of information. Another focus group participant mentioned that some groups are: “able to make their benefit statement and sell why their benefit to the community as a whole and that doesn't mean there's not other groups that perhaps are better positioned or better to do that, but if you never hear of them, you never know about them.”

With limited time, it’s imperative that their time is optimized, focusing on what is most important. We can see from the findings here, that one good factor in determining importance is self-alignment. This is held in tension with what the community and voters find important. The challenge of allocating time in an effective manner seems to be front of mind for many local elected officials.

### 6.3.4 Personal Opportunities

Local elected officials are uniquely positioned to assess and address community needs, blending their decision-making roles with active community leadership. As one survey respondent explained, “As an elected official, I notice things that need to be done, people that need help, and/or ways to enhance a community that doesn’t come from city hall.” This ability to identify community needs and choose where to act is central to how local elected officials function as community leaders. Many survey respondents emphasized this insight, while focus group discussions explored why certain CBIs receive

support over others. One participant highlighted the importance of effective advocacy: “To be able to make their benefit statement and sell why their benefit to the community as a whole... If you never hear of them, you never know about them.” The ability to recognize need is only one part of the equation. Officials must also assess which initiatives can realistically create change. As one focus group member noted, “You have to sort of balance that with what the community needs are and what’s possible.”

This balancing act reflects a key goal: determining whether support for a particular CBI will result in meaningful, measurable outcomes. Local elected officials often engage in this kind of informal assessment before aligning with an initiative. A focus group participant framed it as an ongoing negotiation: “You have to sort of balance with what the community needs are, what’s possible, and what the community is telling you.” Accountability plays a role in this process. As one respondent shared, “In my role as a councillor, it is important that I lead groups in the proper direction.” This sense of responsibility can make elected officials more likely to support established programs with a track record of success. As one participant admitted, “Of course that’s easy just to latch onto what already exists.” Supporting well known initiatives can reduce risk while enabling elected officials to associate themselves with success.

CBIs also function as tools for both community engagement and political alignment. One focus group participant described how, in their municipality, residents expect to have input in public decisions. They stressed the importance of visibility and trust: “It’s important that, as elected officials in the community, we make people understand their voices are important.” Another participant reiterated this point: “Community engagement is at the heart of everything we do.” In this context, CBIs provide a mechanism for elected officials to connect with community members and demonstrate responsiveness. A survey respondent observed, “What better way to get to know residents and their needs than to work alongside them?” Another added, “Ensuring always attending key events in the community and ensuring to keep updated with initiatives and helping when and where needed.” These observations highlight the reputational and political benefits of being perceived as involved and in tune with community priorities.

Sustained engagement often depends on this sense of personal fulfillment. As one official put it, “You better enjoy it, because you could potentially spend a lot of time doing it.” The value of this enjoyment and alignment cannot be underestimated when elected officials are asked to invest their limited time outside of formal council duties. The desire to be associated with effective community change was echoed throughout both the survey and focus group responses. For many, the rewards of supporting CBIs far outweigh the challenges. Participating in programs that deliver tangible benefits to the community is widely seen as one of the most fulfilling aspects of their role. A focus group participant described their involvement in a community grant program as one of the highlights of their year:

*We have kind of an interesting program through [Grant Program] that serves our area very well. We as elected officials come together once a year in the [Region] and select people that have applied for a program...I think it’s universally looked at as one of the most rewarding, positive days we have.*

This sense of fulfillment was echoed across other responses. One participant expressed their wish to spend more time supporting CBIs. Another shared, “If I had more time, I would help the local food bank more and help at our local shelter.” These statements reflect not only personal passion, but also a recognition that visible, positive involvement can strengthen both community trust and political standing.

While the path to supporting CBIs is shaped by many factors, one of the most influential is the potential for meaningful impact. Elected officials assess whether an initiative can deliver results that align with their political values and objectives and then adjust their approach to maximize this community impact. CBIs that demonstrate clear benefits offer not just community progress, but also a platform for elected officials to reinforce their leadership and commitment to public service, serving both an opportunity for the community and the local elected official to achieve change.

#### 6.3.5 Approaches and Skills

Alongside norms and traditions, a key goal for local elected officials when selecting an approach to support CBIs is to align that approach with the skills and abilities they possess. Several participants spoke to the common challenges that new initiatives face, particularly gaps in capacity, structure, and operational knowledge. One focus group member described this dynamic: “They have passion and excitement, and they want to contribute. They love the community. They love it here, but they don’t know how to run a meeting.” This is an example of where a local elected official could support the group with knowledge and experience on how to run a meeting – that is if they have those skills.

The skills in which local elected officials need to do their jobs is shifting. One participant reflected on how their responsibilities have evolved: “When I started as an elected official 20 years ago, we were elected to be decision makers, and there was collaboration in the community, but it wasn’t the most commonplace.” Another echoed this change, saying they now see themselves as “community leaders,” suggesting a broader, more relational interpretation of their role. This shift represents more than just a change in mindset; it has expanded the skills and knowledge expected of elected officials. The expectations for the formal aspect of the role are also commonly misunderstood by the public. One focus group participant noted that they were expected to change the world, but there is no way to do that as a councillor. Another shared “I feel that community groups are often trying to give me this power that I don’t feel I have and maybe I have more power than I think I have but I do feel like I’m not overly effective at times.” These types of outsized expectations require careful consideration of the approach selected, as a misalignment such as promising resources when a single elected official is unable to do so without council support, can negatively affect relationships with CBIs.

Participants noted that CBIs often thrive when they are equipped with the right tools, knowledge, and relationships to pursue their goals effectively. As one respondent observed, “Often new community groups may not know much about potential funders or their funding criteria. Helping them understand where they may receive long-term support is key to helping a group formulate their program for success.” This illustrates the value of providing targeted guidance that responds well to both needs and the elected official’s ability to contribute.

As the role moves beyond decision making and into the realm of community facilitation and partnership building, the ability to personally contribute becomes highly relevant. With limited time, elected officials must think strategically about how to support CBIs in ways that align with their personal strengths. Whether through connecting groups to other actors, offering strategic advice, or amplifying their work, the approach taken requires alignment with an elected official’s abilities.

### 6.4 Tensions Encountered with Potential Solutions

Several participants raised concerns about potential conflicts of interest, particularly in relation to funding. One focus group participant shared, “I don’t join community organizations. I worry that is a

conflict because the district often provides funding, so I am not a member.” This reflects a broader tension faced by many local elected officials: the challenge of supporting CBIs while avoiding perceived or actual conflicts of interest. Although this study does not evaluate the legal interpretation of conflict of interest, this study does highlight many elected officials are actively involved in community work without evident legal repercussions. This suggests with careful navigation; there is room for meaningful engagement with CBIs without incurring a conflict of interest.

Some local elected officials have developed strategies to manage this tension. One focus group participant explained their approach: “What I want them to know if I get involved in them is that it doesn’t mean I’m advocating to council, promising funding, or being swayed in any way with my decision making.” By drawing a clear line between participation and political endorsement, this official highlights how involvement can remain transparent to both the electorate and the community organization. A survey respondent echoed this distinction, noting their responsibility to the broader public, not just individual groups. These strategies reflect how elected officials are redefining their role by adjusting how they participate in ways that preserve trust and avoid compromising their decision making.

This approach reflects the broader challenge of navigating tensions between personal involvement and institutional responsibility. In smaller communities especially, CBIs can expand the reach of local government without overtaxing limited staff. As one focus group participant put it, “You really need to have your boots on the ground to be able to hear people and try and help them get to where they want to get.” When elected officials support CBIs through personal time, lived experience, and networks, rather than through direct financial or political intervention, they help enable grassroots change while managing institutional constraints. However, this informal involvement can bring emotional and logistical strain. Many participants described the exhaustion that results from being embedded in multiple initiatives. A recurring theme emerged around the need for boundaries and intentionality. As one experienced official reflected, “Building healthy relationships and setting goals and boundaries has adjusted my approach.” Strategic choices about where to engage and how to preserve personal capacity are key tools for managing this tension.

This informal influence also comes a responsibility to wield it with care. One survey respondent emphasized that “Community initiatives are best supported and long lasting when elected officials support said initiatives behind the scenes and not dominating the action(s) of the community.” This reflects a core tension of community development: how to be present without overpowering. Another participant similarly warned against elected officials inadvertently undermining grassroots leadership, even when acting with the best intentions. Navigating this tension requires humility, restraint, and a commitment to listening. As one focus group member described it, this process involves “investigative building and listening”, a gradual and responsive approach to support. The skills and disposition of the elected official are critical in ensuring their contributions strengthen, rather than displace, community leadership. At the heart of this tension is a paradox: elected officials depend on CBIs to generate visible community change, while simultaneously needing to limit their involvement to avoid undermining the autonomy or authenticity that gives these initiatives their legitimacy.

One strategy for navigating these competing pressures is to focus on low-risk, non-political forms of support, such as direct volunteering. As one respondent put it, “This type of on-the-ground volunteer is necessary, or nothing happens.” These efforts, though often modest, can be powerful

responses to CBIs' immediate needs. One participant used a metaphor to describe their problem-solving mindset: "Where's the dam, where is the bridge, and how can the water flow around it?" In situations where what CBIs need most is more people, elected officials can provide meaningful, visible value through volunteerism. When asked what they would do with more time, many elected officials pointed to simple acts of service - fundraising, event support, or contributing their own resources. One respondent shared, "I would help them to fundraise more, offer to hold a fundraiser, or give more money myself." These contributions may not involve policy shifts or systemic reform, but they are achievable, relatively apolitical, and align with the public's expectations of community-minded leadership. They offer a way to respond to environmental and institutional constraints while still generating impact.

The strategies that elected officials use to navigate these tensions highlight the complex balancing act at the heart of community leadership. Through careful boundary setting, clear communication, and selective engagement, local elected officials regularly manage the challenges while maximizing opportunities for meaningful community impact.

## 6.5 Conceptual Model Update

Given these findings, adjustments can be made to the conceptual model. The preliminary model was based on the factors that local elected officials must consider when deciding whether to support a CBI. These factors were broad, and the initial findings refine them in ways that make the model more practical, goal orientated, and useful for officials who may wish to apply the results of this study.

In the original model, the factor labeled External Opportunities was identified primarily as an opportunity to strengthen CBIs. Renaming this factor Strengthen Community Initiatives places the focus directly on CBIs and on the actions a local elected official can take to enhance their effectiveness. As one participant summarized, "As a politician, our job is to help our community any way that we can." This revised framing aligns more closely with the purpose of the study, which examines how local elected officials in BC support CBIs.

External Challenges were refined to focus on the sustainability of support. Survey and focus group participants noted that external challenges and constraints often limit what they can offer. One official explained, "I know the city is not going to want to take on another project." Such limitations reduce the sustainability of support and can interrupt efforts after they have begun. Reframing this factor as Provide Sustainable Support offers a constructive, goal-oriented perspective that emphasizes long-term, actionable support for CBIs.

The factor initially described as Personal Opportunities referred to potential personal benefits for elected officials. However, the findings revealed that officials often centered their reflections on the positive change they could create in the community. One participant stated that part of their role includes "building support in the community with groups for things that you think are helping your community." Renaming this factor Maximizing Community Impact better reflects its intent by directing attention toward meaningful outcomes rather than personal gain.

Similarly, the factor labeled Personal Challenges required refinement. The original term could carry negative connotations, as local elected officials are expected to prioritize community needs. One participant noted, "I want to be everywhere all the time, and I feel like I am spreading pretty thin." The

revised factor, Optimize Personal Contribution, offers a more constructive framing focused on time management, prioritization, and efficiency while still emphasizing meaningful contributions to CBIs.

Finally, the preliminary model included a factor labeled List of Approaches, which was overly simplistic. Focus group participants highlighted the importance of recognizing individual capacities, stating, “we also have our personal skill sets, interests, and priorities.” Renaming this factor Align Approaches with Abilities conveys the same sentiment with more precise language and emphasizes the skills and abilities of elected officials, a theme that emerged strongly from the findings.

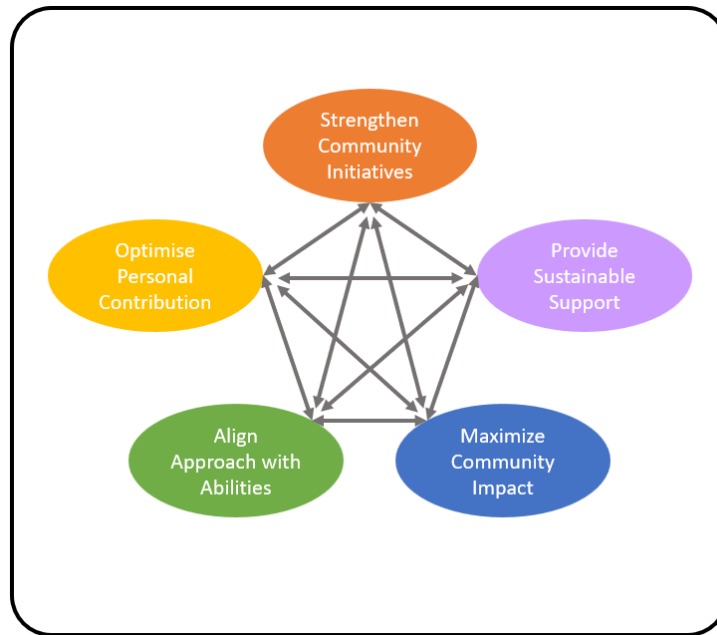


Figure 10: Revised conceptual model with improved definitions of factors for CBI support.

The revised conceptual model is presented in Figure 10. Each factor has been reframed to be goal-oriented, keeping readers focused on achievable objectives. This approach enhances the usability of the model for local elected officials, allowing them to relate it directly to the everyday decisions they face when supporting CBIs.

## 6.6 Summary of Findings

Local elected officials utilize diverse approaches to support CBIs, often providing guidance, building networks, and offering resources. They view their role as extending beyond decision making, though they face challenges such as capacity gaps, conflicts of interest, and resource limitations that can complicate these efforts. Despite these obstacles, many local elected officials find supporting CBIs a gratifying way to drive meaningful change within their communities. As expectations for their roles grow, managing time effectively has become essential. By collaborating with CBIs, local elected officials play a crucial role in fostering cooperation, addressing community needs, and advancing positive change – several goals outlined in the revised conceptual model.

## 7 Discussion & Analysis

While this research is being conducted in an exploratory manner, the literature review, and additional literature can be reviewed for alignment with findings. This will enable further exploration of the key findings that will result in clear outcomes for the research questions. This section will be structured on the three research questions and will conclude with a final revision of the conceptual model.

### 7.1 What approaches do local elected officials in BC use to support community-based initiatives?

The first research question was exploratory in nature, and 57 approaches for supporting CBIs were identified through the surveys and the focus groups. While previous research was not conducted on this specific subject, many of the approaches were identified by other studies either in different contexts, or by different populations doing similar work.

#### 7.1.1 Public Statements of Support

Sørensen et al. (2020) note that local elected officials can influence policy agendas by reporting on community initiatives at council meetings. This is one of several ways elected officials can publicly support CBIs and further their interests. Such statements not only provide visibility but also reinforce accountability, which strengthens a CBI's legitimacy (Hambleton et al., 2022; Sørensen & Torfing, 2005).

Survey and focus group participants also identified other means of shaping public discourse, such as writing letters to the editor, hosting seminars, or sharing social media posts. These actions help align CBIs with broader community conversations, enhancing their credibility - a key factor in their success (Bénil-Gbaffou & Katsaura, 2014; Quinn, 2017). Public discourse of work that an elected official engages in also plays a role in political success. In BC, where municipal officials are elected at large, building consensus on community needs increases an official's ability to implement policy (Graham, 2018). While Canadian mayors tend to be more effective in this work due to their media reach, councillors also engage in these efforts, reinforcing that community leadership is not limited to any one position.

Beyond shaping discourse, elected officials can advocate for CBIs by engaging with higher levels of government, whether through meetings or letters of support. The examples provided earlier of Juneau and Toronto illustrate how these connections are critical to CBI success (Jackson et al., 2023; J. Powell et al., 2023). Igalla et al. (2021) further highlight those relationships with key individuals, such as local elected officials, often precede government support. By serving as a direct link between CBIs and broader institutions, local elected officials can facilitate access to essential resources.

Finally, elected officials can demonstrate support by linking CBIs to municipal priorities, speaking at fundraising events, or even wearing a button as a visible sign of endorsement. These public gestures validate the alignment of CBI work with municipal goals, reinforcing their importance (Sørensen & Torfing, 2005).

### 7.1.2 Resource Provision

The provision of resources is one of the most preferred approaches identified in the survey, particularly through channeling funds controlled by local government. This aligns with research on local economic development officers, where financial support was also a key approach (Sotarauta, 2009). Studies on governance and power further highlight the influence that can come from the ability to allocate material resources (Beer & Irving, 2021, p. 283; Graham, 2018).

This form of support leverages the formal decision-making power of local elected officials to provide funding and other resources to CBIs. This area of support for CBIs is fairly well studied as a key contributor to CBI success (Edelenbos et al., 2021; Igalla et al., 2020, 2021; Quinn, 2017). Within the context of BC, providing funding is most often done through a grant-in-aid process, although other models of funding were identified in the survey. However, governmental support extends beyond financial contributions. As Igalla et al. (2021) note, research should consider the full range of government support mechanisms, including policy change. Other forms of support such as access to information, assistance in navigating government processes, raising awareness, facilitating networking, and aligning on shared goals are categorized elsewhere in this study.

The ability to change policy to support work of a CBI is another form of resource as it requires the expertise and time of local government staff. One example from the survey includes the prioritization of food security policy as a strategic priority for the municipality, which would support the work of a food security initiative in the community. This can be taken further, and the local government can also create services or programs that directly align with a CBI, such as a community economic development organization. Bussu & Tullia Galanti (2018) identify political sponsorship as a role for politicians, where they guide initiatives through the policy creation process, and if this supportive government attitude is aligned with a CBI, it can be very beneficial for the CBI (Edelenbos et al., 2021).

Most prior work on governmental support for CBIs does not go into much detail on the support that a local government can provide for CBIs. A benefit of this work is the generation of novel approaches from the experiences of local elected officials. This study has identified novel approaches including:

- Directing municipal capital projects as road or park improvements to support CBIs.
- Providing local government facilities for CBI activities.
- Creating new spaces for CBI activities.
- Leasing municipal land to CBI.

While these approaches are somewhat novel, they are all fairly aligned with the concept of providing government support. The definition of supportive government attitudes provided by Edelenbos et al. (2021) includes the range of services and support functions that a government could provide. All the approaches mentioned here fit within the typical range of services that a local government provides.

### 7.1.3 Relationship Building

Building connections emerged as a key strength among survey participants, aligning with Graham's (2018) observation that Canadian local elected officials typically have broader networks than the average person. Quinn (2017) highlights that policymakers play a crucial role in identifying

opportunities for emerging community leaders, while others emphasize that CBIs need external connections to succeed (Edelenbos et al., 2021; Igalla et al., 2020; van Meerkerk et al., 2020).

Bakker et. al (2012) stress the importance of key stakeholders leveraging social networks to engage new participants who bring both skills and access to power. This research identifies similar approaches, including bringing new people into the CBI, connecting the initiative to people with specific skills, and putting people forward to serve on not-for-profit boards. The later two specifically take advantage of the skills of new people, while the first builds the CBI by adding more capacity to it.

Case studies, such as Toronto's pandemic response (Jackson et al., 2023) and United We Can in Vancouver (Dale & Newman, 2010), demonstrate that pre-existing relationships with local government and decision makers were crucial to success. Both examples are aligned connecting a CBI to local government staff and introducing the group to decision makers, as identified in this research. More broadly, strong connections with civil servants is a known success factor for CBIs (Edelenbos et al., 2020; Hassink et al., 2016; Sotarauta & Beer, 2017), and this study confirms that local elected officials can also fulfill this role by connecting CBIs with civil servants.

Sørensen et al. (2020) describe hands-on political boundary spanning as promoting collaboration between relevant actors and participating in the decision-making process of collaborative tables. This study identifies related but more specific approaches of connecting different organizations with a shared goal, coordinating different parties to a shared goal, and hosting collective brainstorming sessions. There is also an opportunity to connect CBIs with funding opportunities or other resources in the community as identified in this study, which can benefit the CBI by accessing required knowledge, skills and resources that partner organizations may hold (Seixas & Berkes, 2009). While not all politicians possess the necessary collaboration skills (Potluka et al., 2022), this research suggests that many British Columbian local elected officials do.

#### 7.1.4 Direct Services

A great example of providing direct services is utilizing an elected official's leadership experience. Beer & Clower (2014) suggest that knowing the fundamentals of leadership by those in power opens the doors for others to lead in cities, while Edelenbos et al. (2021) highlight leadership skills as critical to a CBI's success. An elected official can directly support a CBI's leadership simply by creating space for others to lead.

Other ways local elected officials provide direct support to CBIs include sharing expertise in governance, marketing, volunteer management, and strategic planning. While research on how elected officials' skills influence their work is limited, one study links the managerial abilities of mayors and city managers in the United States to community growth rates (Carreri & Payson, 2024), while another study recognizes that managerial skills is something that politicians need to develop to foster collaborative projects (Schlappa, 2017). More broadly, civic skills such as governance and strategic planning are essential for launching a CBI (Bakker et al., 2012). This study builds on existing knowledge by identifying these four approaches, contributing to ongoing discussions by Potluka et al. (2022) on how leadership approaches transition from the nonprofit sector to local government when leaders themselves make that transition.

The political, social, and legislative networks in which CBIs operate can be complex, and support is often needed in navigating these complex systems (Sotarauta, 2009). This study identified several

ways local elected officials assist CBIs in navigating this complexity, including directing them to existing resources, explaining how local government functions, and advising on presenting to council. This work is categorized as direct services rather than guidance since it is based on factual knowledge rather than opinion sharing.

A focus group participant provided a strong example of direct services, stating, “I think one thing I would add is maybe just directing people to existing resources or existing information and plans.” This reflects an official’s role in connecting CBIs with past work and ongoing municipal priorities. The final two approaches identified under direct services, bridging information gaps with past work and bringing the local government’s voice to community issues further emphasize the role of elected officials as intermediaries. Past research has shown that this boundary-spanning role between local government and CBIs is mutually beneficial (Edelenbos et al., 2021; Igalla et al., 2020; van Meerkerk et al., 2020).

#### 7.1.5 Providing Guidance

A common survey response was the role of elected officials in providing guidance to CBIs. This aligns with research from Switzerland, where councillors identified their preference for steering community work by setting political objectives (Plüss, 2014). In community governance literature, this type of leadership is often referred to as metagovernance, which includes goal and framework steering, process management, direct participation, and institutional rule setting (Torfing, 2016, p. 573). Several approaches identified in this study align with metagovernance:

- Goals and framework steering: Setting a vision for the community, guiding a group toward addressing a community need and providing data and information to influence decisions.
- Process management: Amplifying marginalized voices, encouraging new members to join a CBI, and coordinating diverse partners, sharing best practices, and highlighting challenges.
- Direct participation: Serving on a board of directors or acting as a government liaison.

One aspect of metagovernance that was not reflected in the findings is institutional rule setting. This is due to the differing scope of this study, since CBIs operate independently of government, local elected officials do not have the authority to establish formal institutional rules for the community. Bakker et al. (2012) provide some guidance for local government where they are best able to structure collaborative networks, whereas individuals are best able to influence networks through changing the methods of how they collaborate. The survey identifies some evidence of local elected officials’ role in shaping collaboration. Two approaches identified in the survey that align with this are coordinating different parties and encouraging interested groups to meet about an issue. By facilitating discussions and influencing how groups collaborate, elected officials can help shape the processes that guide a CBI’s operations.

Graham (2018) identifies community leadership as a key role of Canadian mayors, highlighting their ability to mobilize and engage diverse groups. Mayors in the study spoke about empowering communities, instilling confidence, and earning public trust. This aligns with approaches identified in this research, such as steering groups toward community needs. While not all elected officials hold the same level of authority as mayors, they can still play an active role in providing guidance, demonstrating that Graham’s (2018) findings on mayoral leadership are applicable to this study.

### 7.1.6 Championing Initiatives

Championing initiatives within a co-production framework involves both advocacy and active support (Kjellström et al., 2024), distinguishing it from political sponsorship through a greater focus on managerial involvement (Bussu & Tullia Galanti, 2018).

A primary method of championing identified in this research is chairing a task force, nonprofit board, or initiative, which lends legitimacy to efforts (Doberstein, 2013) and creates opportunities for citizen participation (Bussu & Tullia Galanti, 2018; Kjellström et al., 2024). A less formal approach involves organizing volunteers, which can increase public trust and awareness of local government initiatives (Noda, 2017) and foster greater community leadership in future initiatives (Mulaphong, 2023). Graham (2018) also noted that this was an activity done by mayors in Canada.

Other identified approaches include creating new programs, sourcing initial funding, and establishing nonprofit or unincorporated organizations. Local elected officials play a critical role in providing early-stage resources and direction for new initiatives (Kjellström et al., 2024), as illustrated by one survey respondent: “We have a few funding sources that can provide a few hundred to several thousand dollars as seed money or even to help with facilities and snacks when bringing community members together to discuss their proposals.” This ability to support CBIs in their early stages is a key factor in their success (Bakker et al., 2012).

One respondent captured the essence of championing by stating, “Someone needs to build momentum, coordinate actions, and build support,” emphasizing the proactive role local elected officials can take in driving community initiatives forward.

### 7.1.7 Status Work

Status work was defined in the conceptual model as activities local elected officials can undertake without requiring significant strengths in the three identified competencies. A common example identified in the survey was volunteering. One focus group had an extended discussion on self-care and fulfillment in the local elected official role. Ball (2024) identified volunteering as a contributor to fulfillment within the councillor role. Additionally, a UK study found a positive correlation between politicians' emailed endorsement statements and increased college student volunteering, with an even stronger effect when politicians personally participated (John et al., 2019). This type of engagement requires no direct influence over council decisions, relationships, or specific expertise; it simply involves being present.

Local elected officials can also support CBIs by attending community events and meetings, where their presence lends legitimacy (Quinn, 2017), and this is an excellent way to form linkages with community groups as collaborative relationships often begin with an individual connection and regular interactions (Bénit-Gbaffou & Katsaura, 2014; Seixas & Berkes, 2009). In the Canadian context, Graham (2018) highlights that when a mayor attends an event, they build civic pride, stay connected to community sentiment, and project a positive image of the city.

Additional forms of status work identified in this study include seeking donations for an initiative and participating in public stunts such as a dunk tank. Unlike public statements of support, these actions do not require officials to align with local government priorities or articulate reasons for their participation. However, their involvement still implies tacit endorsement, reinforcing a CBI's credibility.

### 7.1.8 Approaches Conclusion

Through this work, 57 approaches for supporting community-based initiatives were identified. Many generalized approaches were identified in literature, albeit mostly in different contexts, allowing this study to build upon literature by providing examples of work in the specific context of elected officials. These identified approaches present numerous opportunities for local elected officials to support CBIs. How local elected officials choose an approach from this list will be explored in the following sections.

## 7.2 What are the key opportunities and challenges for elected officials in BC to support community-based initiatives?

The findings section identified several opportunities and challenges through the focus groups and surveys, here we will dig into the most important opportunities and challenges, as identified by existing literature.

### 7.2.1 Opportunity: Strengthening Community Based Initiatives

There are many opportunities to strengthen CBIs through local elected official involvement. Such opportunities include access to networks, provision of targeted knowledge, and fostering community receptivity.

From the outset of this project, a key opportunity identified in the literature is the positive impact of a well-connected individual serving as a boundary spanner - someone who links disparate networks and individuals to support a CBI (Igalla et al., 2021; Seixas & Berkes, 2009; van Meerkerk et al., 2020). This study adds depth to the existing work by specifically identifying the local elected official as a well-connected boundary spanner. In focus groups, participants noted that local elected officials can bring together diverse partners through their reputation or community position. They also often know more people than typical actors (Graham, 2018). Relationship building was one of the most mentioned approaches, highlighting a substantial opportunity for local elected officials to improve access to networks through this boundary spanning role.

An opportunity emphasized more in the focus groups and survey than in prior literature is the local elected official's ability to bring targeted, accurate, and timely information to CBIs. Building upon providing direct services and general guidance, this capability allows officials to meet the immediate needs of CBIs effectively. Timely access to relevant information is a demonstrated precursor to success for CBIs (N. Powell et al., 2024; Seixas & Berkes, 2009). van Meerkerk et al. (2020, p. 260) suggest that local elected officials can connect CBIs with government policies and processes. Schlappa (2017) however, identifies that local politicians in Europe need to further develop their ability to provide guidance on managerial and governance matters to collaborative initiatives. While this study does not identify bringing targeted information to a CBI as a top existing practice in BC, evidence from this research shows it is happening successfully, supported by literature demonstrating its benefits.

The final key opportunity to strengthen CBIs is the ability of local elected officials to foster community receptiveness to CBIs. This can be achieved through public statements of support and championing initiatives. Officials can align CBIs with ongoing community conversations (Bénil-Gbaffou & Katsaura, 2014; Quinn, 2017), creating opportunities for CBIs to gain wider backing. Graham (2018) also observed that Canadian mayors have a unique ability to involve individuals and organizations in

community initiatives. Our focus groups similarly highlighted officials' roles in organizing volunteers and engaging citizens in government initiatives, both of which can increase buy in. Such efforts foster greater legitimacy for projects (Doberstein, 2013) and can enhance community involvement in future initiatives (Mulaphong, 2023).

Together, these opportunities - boundary spanning, providing targeted information, and fostering receptivity - highlight the distinct ways in which local elected officials can strengthen CBIs. At the same time, these opportunities must be balanced against other considerations and challenges as officials decide how best to engage with and support community-based initiatives.

### 7.2.2 Opportunity: Maximizing Community Impact

The findings identified that local elected officials may benefit from being associated with positive community change generated through CBIs. These opportunities for community impact include enhancing community responsiveness, building political support, and achieving self fulfillment.

As noted in the previous section, local elected officials can align CBIs with ongoing community conversations (Bénit-Gbaffou & Katsaura, 2014; Quinn, 2017). This represents an opportunity to influence change beyond formal decision-making roles. Several focus group participants related this work to community leadership, a role often associated with mayors (Graham, 2018; Hambleton et al., 2022). This research shows that it is also undertaken by councillors and other local elected officials. By leading community-driven work, officials can strengthen the community's capacity to respond to identified needs. Both literature and focus group findings highlight how local elected officials can speak to broader community needs (Graham, 2018; Sørensen & Torfing, 2005), presenting opportunities for CBIs to shift community conditions in ways that governments alone may not be able to achieve (Sotarauta & Beer, 2017).

Although political support (i.e. getting re-elected) did not directly come up in the focus groups, likely due to the incumbency effect being so strong in Canadian municipal politics (Sayers & Lucas, 2017). However, participants did reference principles aligned with democratic accountability and engagement. These values are foundational to democratic practice (Sayers & Lucas, 2017; Sørensen & Torfing, 2005). McPherson et al. (2025) suggest that while most Canadians are unaware of the day-to-day actions of their local elected officials, for those who are paying attention, responses to pressing issues are highly significant. Supporting a successful CBI offers an opportunity for elected officials to visibly demonstrate their leadership and commitment. This can help distinguish them from the council majority and enhance their profile among engaged constituents.

The final opportunity of community impact is more personal. Supporting successful CBIs can offer a sense of self fulfillment. Many focus group and survey respondents noted that local elected officials are motivated by a desire to be part of meaningful community change. A UK study found that volunteering with CBIs can enhance fulfillment and reduce burnout risk among councillors (Ball, 2024). Similarly, research from Australia showed that councillors can shape their roles around personal interests and values (Tan et al., 2016). This finding was echoed in this study, where several participants reported choosing to focus on areas they found personally rewarding. The ability to align one's role with personal priorities, such as supporting CBIs, offers a way to navigate the often high demands of the position. By investing in work that feels meaningful, elected officials may find a more positive

perspective to their responsibilities and avoid the depletion that can come from managing a constant stream of issues.

The personal opportunities for impact through supporting CBIs underscore the deeper significance of this work. These results highlight the human dimension of local elected officials through their drive for meaningful contribution, fulfillment, and community connection. Recognizing that elected officials are motivated by the desire to make a positive change in their community helps explain why they choose to invest in CBIs. This orientation toward success and impact is central to sustaining their motivation in doing this work. By engaging with CBIs, elected officials can align their work with both community needs and personal values, reinforcing their leadership, strengthening community capacity, and fostering the conditions for change that governments alone cannot achieve.

### 7.2.3 Challenge: Providing Sustainable Support

Throughout the focus groups and the survey, participants raised challenges of working with CBIs. These challenges can also be understood as constraints on a local elected official's ability to offer support on an ongoing basis. Key challenges around providing sustainable support include limited government capacity, institutional constraints, and the need to manage political risk.

The first major challenge is the limited financial and staffing capacity of local governments, a concern highlighted strongly in survey responses. Without the added context from the focus groups, many survey participants appeared to conflate personal or individual support with formal government support for CBIs. Focus group discussions added nuance, revealing how difficult it can be to manage limited staff resources. As Edelenbos et al. (2020, p. 269) note, governments may adopt a defensive stance toward CBIs due to concerns that such initiatives can overwhelm administrative systems, a view echoed by some focus group participants. While government support goes beyond direct funding (Igalla et al., 2021), financial constraints remain a significant barrier. Project funding is often assumed to be the standard form of support (Bakker et al., 2012), and while all forms of assistance are valued (Edelenbos et al., 2021; Igalla et al., 2020, 2021; Quinn, 2017), participants often described how competing priorities within local government can limit the ability to offer meaningful support. Any government-backed support typically requires council consensus, creating an added procedural hurdle.

Another constraint arises from governance structure. In British Columbia, no single elected official can direct municipal operations (Bish & Clemens, 2008, p. 32). This dynamic often becomes evident in conversations about conflict of interest, which several focus group and survey participants raised. Underlying this concern is the fear of appearing to favour one group over others (Sørensen et al., 2020). Local government traditions and practice in BC emphasize impartial representation of all residents (Bish & Clemens, 2008, p. 32; Blidook et al., 2022), a value reflected in the comments of many participants. Elected officials are responsible not only for representing community needs, but also for working collaboratively with their colleagues to reach collective decisions, placing their actions under heightened scrutiny.

Participants also noted the reputational and political risks involved in supporting CBIs. Several described the pressure of ensuring clear and careful communication, especially in situations where their words or intentions were misunderstood. This lack of trust can jeopardize collaboration. Trust is a critical component of effective partnerships between CBIs and local governments (Graham, 2018; Jackson et al., 2023). Yet within a political context, these relationships are vulnerable to breakdown due

to polarization and the public spotlight on elected officials (Doberstein, 2013). This environment adds a layer of complexity to even well-intentioned support.

Each of these political or structural challenges limit the local elected official's ability to providing ongoing support. These constraints must be understood to be mitigated. Some approaches such as providing resources rely more heavily on these challenges, so there is opportunity to adjust approaches to circumnavigate these challenges. The better that a local elected official can do this, the more sustainable their support for a CBI can be.

#### 7.2.4 Challenge: Optimizing Personal Contributions

A key challenge identified from the outset of this study is the limited time that local elected officials can dedicate to supporting CBIs. Focus group participants described feeling overstretched and experiencing burnout, while survey respondents echoed these concerns with comments like, "the biggest challenge for me is not enough time to do it all, unfortunately, have to pick and choose." A Canadian study of municipal councillors found that those serving in full-time roles tend to dedicate more time to community engagement (Blidook et al., 2022). Many survey respondents expressed a desire to spend more time supporting CBIs but reported a lack of capacity to do so. These findings align with a Swiss study highlighting a disconnect between what councillors would like to do and what they are actually able to do in terms of community work (Plüss, 2014). While some officials do take on additional responsibilities based on personal interest, many still feel constrained and wish they could do more (Klok & Denters, 2013, pp. 81-82). This results in a need to prioritize and optimize their work when supporting CBIs.

The bias towards personal interests presents an ongoing challenge for some local elected officials, particularly when local elected officials are uncertain whether their primary responsibility is to represent the community as a whole or to respond to those they interact with most directly. This ambiguity is often shaped by local norms and traditions (Blidook et al., 2022; Tan et al., 2016). One focus group participant pointed to the informal accountability provided by citizens' constant observation, a strong motivator in Canadian local politics (McPherson et al., 2025). While local elected officials derive their power from citizens (Beer & Irving, 2021, p. 292; Hambleton et al., 2022; Klok & Denters, 2013, p. 65), their decisions are often shaped by who they speak to and their own backgrounds and beliefs (Verhelst et al., 2014). These influences blur the line between formal decision making and community leadership legislated and normative responsibilities. Focus group participants identified the difficulty of navigating situations where personal motivations, public expectations, and political accountabilities intersect. This internal struggle of which role expectations to follow seems to be common in local elected officials studied here.

Expectations from citizens further complicate these challenges. Many local elected officials in this study preferred relational approaches to support, but sustaining these relationships in the face of rising community demands is increasingly difficult. Citizens are more engaged (van Meerkerk et al., 2020, p. 252), and more CBIs are emerging in communities (Edelenbos et al., 2020, p. 1), often with the expectation that local elected officials will provide community leadership. This shift, observed in both Canada and Australia (Graham, 2018; Tan et al., 2016), places new demands on officials to develop leadership, managerial, and collaborative skills. This shift requires more leadership skills and other complementary skills which local elected officials may not have. The skills needed to lead a community are key in the community's success (Beer & Clower, 2014; Carreri & Payson, 2024; Sotarauta & Beer,

2017), and many local elected officials need to improve their managerial and collaboration skills to meet this evolving expectation (Carreri & Payson, 2024; Potluka et al., 2022).

The personal challenges facing local elected officials in supporting CBIs are rooted in limited staff time, competing role expectations, and rising community demands. These pressures highlight the importance of clarity in role definition and the development of leadership, managerial, and collaborative skills. Given that officials cannot do everything, their ability to prioritize, align support with their capacities, and build on their existing strengths will be critical. Addressing these challenges is not about eliminating constraints but about enabling local elected officials to navigate them more effectively, ensuring that their contributions to CBIs are both sustainable and impactful.

#### 7.2.5 Opportunities and Challenges Conclusion

The numerous opportunities and challenges for supporting CBIs highlight the complexity of engaging in this work for local elected officials. Not only do local elected officials have to consider which initiatives could be most impactful, they must also consider how they can best benefit the CBI, all while balancing their limited time and political/structural constraints brought on by the nature of the local elected official role. These tensions will be further explored in the following section.

### 7.3 What strategies do elected officials use to navigate tensions or conflicts that arise when supporting community-based initiatives?

Building on the opportunities and challenges outlined in Section 7.2, this section examines their points of intersection, presented here as tensions. These tensions represent the competing forces that local elected officials must navigate when supporting CBIs. Consideration of these tensions is informed by the solutions identified in the findings Section 6.4. The following discussion presents four priority strategies for addressing the most common tensions encountered by local elected officials when supporting CBIs.

#### 7.3.1 Manage Expectations

A recurring theme across both the surveys and focus groups was the challenge of managing expectations. Community groups often look to local elected officials to advance their priorities, sometimes assuming that officials can deliver policy decisions or direct resources. This creates tension: strengthening a CBI while also abiding by the constraints presented by the local elected official role. Participants emphasized that clarifying what officials can realistically offer is essential for navigating this tension. By setting expectations early, officials can help CBIs understand the types of support available, reducing the risk of disappointment when support is halted.

This issue of a lack of role clarity is recognized in the literature. For example, Blidook et al. (2022) highlight how community leadership varies across Canadian municipalities, while Klok and Denters (2013, pp. 81–82) found that although many European councillors valued representing community issues, fewer engaged in this work due to competing demands. Similarly, Plüss (2014) showed that Swiss councillors often deprioritized network management because it offered fewer visible or politically rewarding outcomes. These findings echo the experiences of officials in this study, who described the difficulty of reconciling personal motivations, community expectations, and governance responsibilities.

Resource constraints heighten these challenges. CBIs often hope for financial or material support but elected officials have limited capacity to deliver such resources, which typically depend on broader council approval (Igalla et al., 2020; Bish & Clemens, 2008, p. 32). At the same time, officials rely on CBIs to advance issues they cannot easily move forward within formal governance structures. This co-dependence creates a delicate balance in which both sides must adjust their expectations.

In practice, many local elected officials turn to less resource intensive forms of support. Relationship building, for example, was promoted as a meaningful and feasible approach. Focus group participants reported connecting CBIs with potential funders, aligning them with organizations pursuing similar goals, and facilitating introductions to decision makers. Such strategies are well supported in literature, which emphasizes that CBIs thrive when they have strong external networks (Edelenbos et al., 2021; van Meerkerk et al., 2020). Unlike direct resource provision, which risks politicization and perceptions of quid pro quo (Doberstein, 2013), these relational approaches allow elected officials to demonstrate leadership while maintaining trust and accountability.

Ultimately, managing expectations requires a shift in how support is framed. By distinguishing between governance responsibilities and community leadership, local elected officials can clarify the value they bring without overcommitting beyond external constraints. Establishing clear boundaries, prioritizing relationship based approaches, and focusing on knowledge sharing or network building can create more sustainable partnerships. In doing so, both CBIs and elected officials can benefit - CBIs gain access to new opportunities and legitimacy, while local elected officials demonstrate visible leadership and strengthen community capacity in ways that are not as risk of being shut down by the decision-making table.

### 7.3.2 Choose Where to Focus

Past research has shown that Canadian local elected officials have limited time to dedicate to community engagement and representation (Blidook et al., 2022). This scarcity underpins many of the challenges identified in this study, making an optimized and strategic approach essential. Whether engaging with the community, building trust with CBIs, or managing expectations of involvement, participants often linked these struggles to the few hours they could commit. Still, investing time in CBIs can be highly rewarding. It enables officials to demonstrate success in their role and highlight the tangible impact of CBIs in the community (McPherson et al., 2025; Sotarauta & Beer, 2017). Given both the significant influence officials can have on a CBI's success (Igalla et al., 2020) and the scarcity of their time, each moment of engagement must be meaningful. This challenge is held in tension with the requirements imposed by legislation on the councillor.

Decision making remains the primary responsibility of local elected officials (Bish & Clemens, 2008, p. 32), resulting in lower flexibility within the role. The opportunity for flexibility lies within the community engagement side of the role. One focus group participant pointed to the value of being close to the work of CBIs to better understand community needs. Others raised concerns about whether engagement should be broad or narrowly focused, which is similar to the apprehension of politicians getting too involved in one specific initiative (Sørensen et al., 2020). Clear expectations help address these tensions. When it is understood that engaging with a CBI does not necessarily indicate support at the decision-making table, the risk of misinterpretation is reduced. Engagement then becomes a way for elected officials to demonstrate leadership while fostering greater community receptiveness to the work of CBIs.

As expectations shift from local elected officials being primarily decision makers to also being community leaders, time management strategies must evolve. This trend is reflected in broader research. Doberstein (2013), for example, notes a move in Canada from institutions initiating community leadership networks to more civil society-led efforts. Similarly, Plüss (2014) observes that Swiss local officials are increasingly focused on governing community networks, while Graham (2018) emphasizes the mayor's role in shaping community identity and pride in Canada. Together, these trends highlight how the expanding scope of community leadership opens the door to new approaches to time management.

Focus group participants also emphasized the importance of being strategic with time, prioritizing the CBIs that matter most. The criteria for deciding which initiatives to engage with often reflect an official's personal values and interests, which are often the reasons they were elected in the first place. This approach enables an efficient use of the local elected official's time, focusing on specific initiatives selected in a strategic matter. Choosing to engage with successful CBIs is a way to work outside of the constrained decision-making environment and demonstrate the value of the CBI to the community.

### 7.3.3 Building Trust and Understanding

Local elected officials operate in a political environment where most actions can be viewed through a political lens, placing their work under significant scrutiny. In this context, building trust and developing a strong understanding of a CBI becomes essential. One of the most valuable contributions an elected official can make is sharing targeted, accurate, and timely information. This type of customized support is something elected officials are particularly well positioned to provide; however, it is only possible when the local elected official has taken the time to understand the CBI and its needs. This deeper understanding also acts as a form of risk management, reducing the likelihood of public backlash while helping build a trusting relationship with the CBI. This can address the tension between optimizing person contributions while also maximizing community impact.

Any involvement with CBIs carries the risk of being perceived as overly political. Previous research suggests that accountability measures can help mitigate this risk (Doberstein, 2013). Focus group participants echoed this, emphasizing the importance of transparency - both in how elected officials operate and in how CBIs communicate their needs. Some participants expressed concern that individuals may not always represent the needs of a CBI accurately, with misrepresentation identified as a significant risk. Building trust, therefore, becomes a key starting point. Trust is often rooted in existing relationships (Jackson et al., 2023) and getting to know the people behind a CBI allows elected officials to better assess risks and respond appropriately. When elected officials apply their relationship building skills, they can form coalitions of trust around CBIs (Sørensen & Torfing, 2005), strengthening confidence in the initiative and reducing political uncertainty.

This deeper understanding also improves outcomes in the community. This study identified several unique contributions that elected officials can bring to CBIs, such as tailored support and access to networks. However, the effectiveness of these contributions depends on how well an elected official understands the CBI's needs. This is particularly evident in their ability to provide targeted, accurate, and timely information, something identified as a key factor in achieving positive outcomes (N. Powell et al., 2024; Seixas & Berkes, 2009). The findings suggest that intentional relationship building grounded in trust and a clear understanding of the CBI leads to more effective and impactful support.

#### 7.3.4 Reflect Skill in Relationship Building

The final strategy for addressing tensions in supporting CBIs centres on maximizing community impact by drawing on the relationship building skills that many local elected officials already possess. Communities often pull elected officials in many directions, creating pressure to “be everywhere.” Focus group participants noted that this pressure can lead to burnout, especially when officials feel compelled to prioritize fairness in how they spend their time or place community needs above their own well-being. These challenges highlight the importance of aligning contributions with personal strengths rather than attempting to take on every request for support.

As elected officials decide where to focus their efforts, they must also navigate the political context in which they operate. Participants observed that officials sometimes respond to the “squeaky wheel,” despite wanting to prioritize equity or community need. The volume of CBIs seeking support can be overwhelming, and many officials expressed frustration about not being able to do more (Klok & Denters, 2013, pp. 81–82). Expectations for visible leadership beyond formal decision making continue to grow (Graham, 2018; Tan et al., 2016), compounding the structural and personal constraints they face. While some officials may not feel equipped with every skill typically associated with community leadership (Carreri & Payson, 2024; Potluka et al., 2022), the range of approaches identified in this study shows that they can still contribute meaningfully by selecting strategies that align with their strengths.

Findings from the survey reinforce this point. Respondents rated themselves highest in connection making competencies, and they most often selected approaches centred on building relationships with influential persons. Both results indicate a strong skill set in relationship building. Leaning into these relational strengths offers an opportunity for elected officials to make meaningful contributions, as highlighted by one focus group member: “I think anything is possible if we can make the connections and the partnerships in our communities.” Focus group participants noted that involvement in successful CBIs often brought a sense of fulfillment, helping sustain their motivation for serving in office. By prioritizing relational approaches that draw on their existing abilities, elected officials can provide effective support to CBIs while maintaining their own well-being, achieving a balance that benefits both impact of the CBI in the community and the officials themselves.

#### 7.3.5 Tensions Conclusion

Balancing community expectations with the norms of the role and personal expectations emerged as a key tension in this analysis. The wide range of approaches identified highlights the opportunity for local elected officials to tailor their support to the specific context in which they are working. When combined with attention to self-care and alignment with personal skills and interests, this offers a new strategy for engaging with CBIs. Applying the conceptual model to assess context can help elected officials identify where their support is most effective, while a relational approach to understanding CBIs and their participants can strengthen collaboration. Together, these strategies provide a pathway for local elected officials to navigate tensions more successfully and achieve meaningful community change.

## 7.4 Revised Conceptual Model

The current conceptual model frames tensions as multiple connection points between five decision-making factors. While any factor can be in tension with another, usability improves by focusing on the key tensions. Section 7.3 highlighted these tensions and proposed best practices for addressing them.

The first key tension is between strengthening community initiatives and providing sustainable support. As one focus group member shared, “You become overwhelmed and aren’t able to solve anything.” The ability to respond to all requests can conflict with the goal of building up CBIs. Managing expectations is a best practice for navigating this tension. By setting clear boundaries for involvement, officials can outline what they can and cannot do, avoiding governance conflicts while still offering meaningful support to CBIs.

The next key tension exists between providing sustainable support and optimizing personal contribution. Although officials may wish to dedicate time to all CBIs, they ultimately need to make choices. Recognizing that these decisions are personal rather than formal allows officials to avoid fairness concerns at the council table. Intentional selection also enables more efficient engagement, allowing officials to focus on the issues they consider most important based on their own experiences and values.

A third tension arises from balancing community impact with efficient use of time. CBIs provide a way for officials to make meaningful change, yet capacity constraints limit how much they can contribute. Understanding the specific needs of a CBI ensures that support is targeted, accurate, and responsive. By building relationships and engaging directly with those involved, officials can provide the right level of support while avoiding wasted effort. This approach maximizes community impact and ensures that time is used efficiently.

The final key tension lies between maximizing community impact and aligning approaches with individual abilities. Relationship building is critical in this context. One focus group participant noted, “Ultimately, they’re successful because they have relationships.” Playing to strengths in connection making enhances the effectiveness of CBI support and increases overall community impact.

By emphasizing these four best practices, the conceptual model can be presented in a more linear format, as shown in Figure 11. This streamlined structure enables local elected officials to work through one factor at a time, concentrating on the most immediate and manageable tensions rather than attempting to address all potential tensions at once.

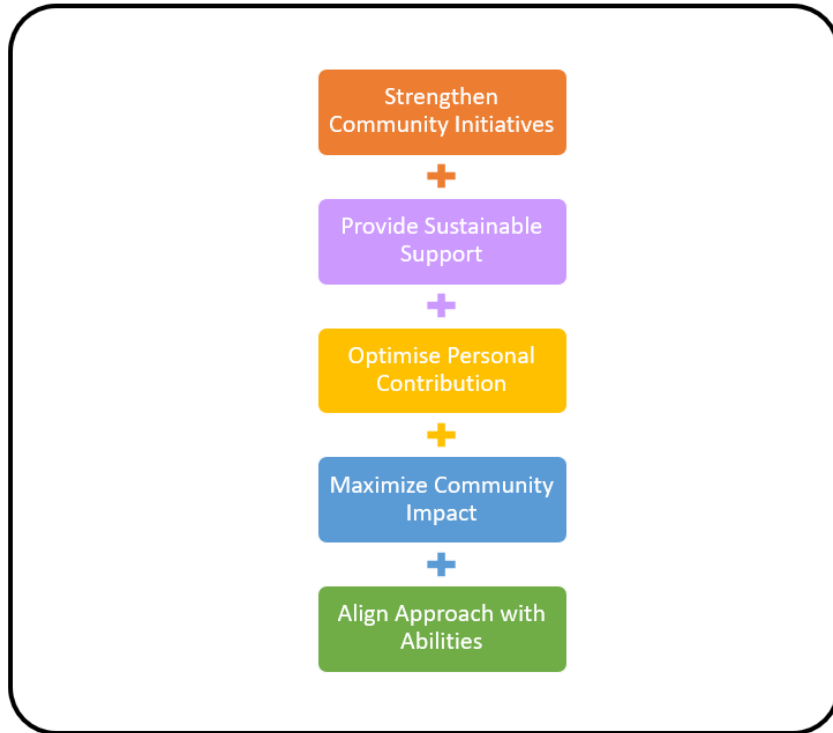


Figure 11: Final conceptual model, forming a linear decision-making process with five decision-making factors, and tensions between them, included by plus signs.

## 8 Recommendations

The most significant findings of this research were the identification of approaches for supporting CBIs, the analysis of the challenges and opportunities of supporting CBIs, and development of a decision-making model for supporting CBIs that accounts for the tensions present when supporting CBIs. These findings form the foundation of the following recommendations, which aim to guide local elected officials in making deliberate contributions to CBIs. The recommendations will follow the structure of the conceptual model, offering a practical framework for elected officials to apply this work in their daily practice.

### 8.1 Applying the List of Approaches

The first key finding was the identification of a comprehensive list of approaches for supporting CBIs, presented in Section 6.2.8 into the categories of Public Statements of Support, Resource Provision, Relationship Building, Direct Services, Providing Guidance, Championing an Initiative, and Status Work. This list of approaches opens the possibilities for local elected officials to engage meaningfully with CBIs and is grounded in both local experiences in BC and existing literature. The following recommendations are directed at local elected officials to apply to their practice as they consider supporting CBIs.

#### **Recommendation 1: Familiarize self with the full range of available approaches.**

This study identified 57 approaches for supporting CBIs. Reviewing the full range of approaches (Section 6.2.8 of this report) allows local elected officials to recognize strategies they already use and explore related options within the same category. This encourages experimentation and incremental skill development, without the limitation presented by aligning with local norms for CBI support. Using this list as a foundation enables officials to select approaches suited to each of the desired outcomes in the decision-making model.

#### **Recommendation 2: Clearly identify outcomes of involvement with CBIs.**

Local elected officials should consider the five goals outlined in the conceptual model: strengthening community initiatives, providing sustainable support, optimizing personal contribution, maximizing community impact, and aligning approaches with abilities. Clarifying expected outcomes and personal contributions helps local elected officials make decisions that are beneficial for the CBI, the community, and the local elected official, based on their personal assessment of each approach's ability to achieve that outcome

### 8.2 Strategies for Navigating Tensions

As approaches are developed and implemented, tensions naturally arise. Supporting CBIs is inherently complex, requiring elected officials to balance multiple roles, expectations, and capacities. Section 7.3 highlighted the tensions that emerge between opportunities and challenges of engagement. The following recommendations offer best practices for local elected officials to navigate these tensions as they go about supporting CBIs.

**Recommendation 3: Distinguish between community leadership and decision making.**

Tensions often arise when involvement in a CBI intersects with formal decision-making responsibilities. To navigate this, local elected officials should distinguish clearly between their role as community leaders and as decision makers. In practice, this may involve offering forms of support that do not require formal authority - such as public statements of support, providing guidance, or relationship building. For actions that do require council or board approval, local elected officials should communicate transparently about what is possible and set clear boundaries regarding their involvement.

**Recommendation 4: Prioritize support approaches that align with personal interests and will lead to success.**

Local elected officials often face significant time constraints and work within governance structures that can limit the sustainability of their support. Focusing on initiatives and approaches that align with personal interests and areas where officials can make substantive contributions helps foster professional fulfillment and increases the likelihood of successful outcomes. When engagement resonates personally, it often aligns with electoral mandates and enables officials to create meaningful community impact beyond formal decision-making processes.

**Recommendation 5: Build personal connections with CBI leaders to foster understanding and transparency.**

Building trust and developing a strong understanding of the CBI being supported is essential for effective practice. Taking time to build relationships with the leaders of CBIs promotes transparency, reduces political risk, addresses concerns about misrepresented needs, and establishes a strong foundation for collaboration. With intentional relationship building grounded in trust and clear communication, a local elected official can provide more effective CBI support through aligning with the true needs of a CBI.

**Recommendation 6: Emphasize boundary spanning relationship making.**

Local elected officials should select support approaches that align with their existing skills and capacities. Many officials possess strong relationship building abilities, which positions them well to provide effective support by connecting CBIs with other parties and resources. This report outlines several relationship building support approaches that draw directly on these strengths. Applying approaches that align with established competencies also supports personal wellbeing by reinforcing a sense of accomplishment and enabling officials to demonstrate effectiveness within their elected role.

### 8.3 Decision-Making Model in Practice

The decision-making model integrates these recommendations into a practical framework. Local elected officials can use it to determine how to support a CBI by considering the full list of approaches, setting clear objectives for involvement, and applying the best practices outlined in Recommendations 3-6. Together, these recommendations offer a structured way to evaluate and implement community support strategies.

The model highlights both the opportunities and challenges officials may face and identifies 57 specific approaches for supporting CBIs. For ease of use, and applicability, a worksheet summarizing all components of the model, including the recommendations and approaches, is provided as Appendix D.

## 8.4 Future Work

This area of study is still in its early stages, and this research should serve as an effective starting point for future exploration. There are several promising directions for continued work to deepen understanding of how local elected officials support CBIs.

While 57 approaches to supporting CBIs were identified, their effectiveness was not assessed. Existing literature suggests that certain approaches, such as providing funding or resources, are key determinants of success (Edelenbos et al., 2021; Igalla et al., 2020, 2021; Quinn, 2017). Further research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the remaining approaches, particularly the novel ones identified in this study. Within the decision-making model presented here, users are encouraged to determine which approaches are most effective in achieving one of the five identified outcomes. However, this process could be further refined by developing a clearer understanding of which approaches best lead to specific outcomes, which will result in simplifying decision making for elected officials.

One potential outcome not explored in this study is the role of CBI support as a tool for community engagement by local elected officials. Many focus group participants emphasized this value, for example one remarked, *“Community engagement is at the heart of everything we do.”* This outcome was excluded from the conceptual model because it benefits the broader legislative decision making process rather than directly supporting CBIs, placing it outside the scope of this study. Although there is existing research on local elected official community engagement (Blidook et al., 2022), examining its connection to CBI support offers a new perspective that deserves further investigation.

Finally, the skills and competencies of local elected officials should be studied more. As highlighted in *Recommendation 6: Align support with personal skills and strengths*, a clearer understanding of local elected officials’ abilities would be valuable. The decision-making model assumes that officials can assess their own strengths; however, a more systematic understanding could enhance recruitment, training, and ongoing development of local elected officials. This study made initial attempts to explore these competencies, but the low number of survey responses prevented a sufficiently diverse sample to analyze different skill sets. Many participants demonstrated strengths in relationship building and connection making, suggesting a possible link between these competencies and preferred approaches. While this relationship could not be confirmed here, it demonstrates an important area for future study.

## 9 Conclusion

This study successfully explored the opportunities and challenges involved in supporting CBIs in BC. The decision-making model and list of approaches developed through this research provide valuable guidance for local elected officials seeking to engage more effectively with CBIs. As research on this aspect of the local elected role remains in its early stages, this work establishes an important foundation for future study.

Although the study involved a limited number of participants, its findings offer meaningful insights that can be expanded and validated through subsequent research. In this way, the project serves as a starting point for continued exploration of how local elected officials can strengthen their support for community-based initiatives.

### 9.1 Gaps in Study

This study examines CBI support from the perspective of local elected officials. To gain a more complete understanding of support approaches, future research should include the perspectives of community leaders and CBI members. These additional viewpoints are particularly important for assessing the effectiveness of the identified approaches and strategies. Since this research focused on identifying possible approaches and strategies rather than evaluating them, its limited scope is appropriate for this stage of inquiry. However, the study included a relatively small number of participants and its focus on British Columbia. As such, the findings should be viewed as an initial contribution to this emerging area of research. Local norms and governance cultures often influence the role of elected officials. Therefore, different regions may identify distinct approaches that reflect their own contexts. Nevertheless, many approaches observed in this study align with those identified in other settings, suggesting some broader applicability.

### 9.2 Relevance

Most surveyed local elected officials demonstrated support for CBIs in one way or another. It is part of their everyday role, but there is no legislation to govern how it is done, the only thing they can go off is norms and how others have interpreted the role in their community before them. This research expands the understanding of how local elected officials can support CBIs and offers strategies for addressing key tensions that arise in the process. The toolkit presented in Appendix D can serve as a practical resource for officials, allowing them to adapt and apply its contents in their daily practice. Furthermore, CBIs and community leaders may be able to draft their strategic approach for requesting support from local elected officials using this information. With both sides clear on what can be offered, they can come to an agreement on the best way to support more effectively.

This study also establishes a foundation for future research in this critical area of community development. Local elected officials play an essential role in fostering the success of CBIs, and this emerging field of study merits continued exploration.

### 9.3 Summary

The purpose of this research was to examine how local elected officials in British Columbia support community-based initiatives. This is the first study to explore this specific aspect of their work.

While prior research has focused on governmental structures or the representative functions of elected officials, this project demonstrates that many officials actively engage in supporting CBIs. As one participant expressed, “What better way to get to know residents and their needs than to work alongside them?”

This project achieved both of its research goals. The first goal, *to explore the opportunities and challenges that elected officials encounter in supporting CBIs*, resulted in the development of a framework outlining five key outcomes of CBI support, along with some best practices for addressing key challenges. The second goal, *to identify and analyze the approaches used by local elected officials to support CBIs*, produced a comprehensive list of approaches, grouped into thematic categories.

All three research questions have been successfully addressed. The study identified a wide range of approaches, highlighted the main opportunities and challenges, and developed strategies for navigating tensions through a decision-making model. These findings are consolidated in the worksheet in Appendix D, which offers a practical tool for elected officials in British Columbia and beyond.

Ultimately, this research represents an important starting point. There is considerable potential to further validate and refine the model, explore competency alignment, and extend the analysis to other regions. This work provides local elected officials with a solid foundation for more intentional and effective engagement in supporting community-based initiatives.

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## 11 Appendices

### Appendix A: Survey and Letter of Consent

#### **Opportunities and Challenges for Local Elected Officials in British Columbia to Support Community-Based Initiatives**

##### **Participant Consent Form**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled Opportunities and Challenges for Local Elected Officials in BC to Support Community-Based Initiatives that is being conducted by Matt McLean.

Matt McLean is a graduate student in the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria and you may contact him if you have further questions by email at [mattmclean@uvic.ca](mailto:mattmclean@uvic.ca)

As a graduate student, Matt is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Masters of Community Development degree. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Lynne Siemens. You may contact Dr. Siemens at [siemensl@uvic.ca](mailto:siemensl@uvic.ca)

##### **Purpose and Objectives**

This research project will examine the ways in which local elected officials in British Columbia (BC) support community-based initiatives. The study is expected to provide insights into the opportunities and challenges that elected officials experience when engaging with community initiatives. The purpose of this research is to examine the ways in which local elected officials in BC support community-based initiatives. The study aims to identify the approaches utilized by elected officials to support community-based initiatives in BC and provide a framework for elected officials and community-based organizations so they may consider options for providing or garnering community support.

The research will focus on understanding the unique perspective of elected officials in their role of mobilizing and engaging diverse groups, while also expanding on existing work regarding formal government support factors for community -based initiatives.

##### **Importance of this Research**

This project aims to explore the specific role of local elected officials in supporting community-based initiatives, building upon existing literature which has explored community leadership on a more general basis. It seeks to provide insights into more effective ways of supporting community-based initiatives.

##### **Participants Selection**

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an elected official in BC. Municipalities and regional districts were chosen at random from population segments, and all elected officials from selected municipalities and regional districts are invited to respond.

## **What is Involved**

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include completing a survey which should take about 15 minutes to complete. Should you wish, you may also elect to submit your name for focus groups.

Focus groups will be held in early April 2024 on Zoom. Sessions will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and will be facilitated by primary researcher Matt McLean. They will be recorded for the purposes of producing a transcript. Written notes will also be prepared by the researcher. Participants will join 4-5 other local elected officials from their region, and all discussions will be considered confidential.

## **Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time required to complete the survey (15 minutes) and attend the focus group (60-90 minutes). Attempts will be made to schedule the focus group at the mutually agreeable time.

## **Risks**

There are some potential risks to you by participating in this research and which includes reputational risk when participating in the focus group. As local elected officials will be participating with their peers, it may be difficult to share failures or other challenges. To mitigate these risks the participants will be required to consider any items discussed during the focus group as confidential, and the data collected in the focus group will be anonymized.

## **Benefits**

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include gaining insights on how to better support community-based initiatives for elected officials, community groups and the general knowledge base.

## **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. Participants will not be able to withdraw from the survey once they have submitted it, as the survey is anonymous. In terms of protecting your anonymity, any identifiable information collected in the survey will be anonymized, and all responses will be considered confidential by the research team.

## **Anonymity**

In terms of protecting your anonymity any identifiable information collected in the survey will be anonymized, and individual responses will be anonymous. All information in the focus groups will also be anonymized.

## Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by keeping all data password protected and stored on the researcher's personal computer once downloaded from Survey Monkey and/or Zoom. Other members of focus groups will know focus group participants, so it is requested that participants hold all discussions held in focus groups confidential.

## Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include primary researcher Matt McLean at mattmclean@uvic.ca or supervisor Dr. Lynne Siemens at siemensl@uvic.ca

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

### 1. Consent

Your selection below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

- I consent to participating in this study
- I do not consent to participating in this study



Next

## Opportunities and Challenges for Local Elected Officials in British Columbia to Support Community-Based Initiatives

### Section 1: Your experience with community-based initiatives

To begin, let's provide a definition of Community-Based Initiatives.

**Community-Based Initiative** – A project developed and run by citizens that is self organized by the community to provide public goods or services for the community. This carries the important distinction that community-based initiatives are not government led and are independent of government decision making. They bring together several people around doing something rather than advocating for a policy or action.

A few examples could include volunteers creating a trail in the backwoods, a neighbourhood association hosting educational speakers, or a seniors planning table creating a volunteer driving service.

2. As part of your role as a local elected official in the past year, how frequently have you supported a community-based initiative?

- Daily: I have supported community-based initiatives almost every day.
- Weekly: I have supported community-based initiatives approximately once a week.
- Monthly: I have supported community-based initiatives around once a month.
- Several Times in the Past Year: I have supported community-based initiatives several times during the past year.
- Rarely: I have supported community-based initiatives, but it has been infrequent.
- Never: I have not supported any community-based initiatives in the past year.

3. Please use the scale provided, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, to express your experience with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have led several community-based initiatives before my time as an elected official.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a wide network of connections with local organizations, and I can rely on their support when needed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have successfully advocated and created policy change on behalf of community-based groups.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My suggestions and proposals are often implemented by local government staff.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have established strong and productive relationships with members of my local community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am well-versed in the strategies and best practices for fostering successful community-based initiatives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My peers within the council/board often seek my input and guidance when making decisions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a history of collaborating effectively with local community leaders.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a deep understanding of the challenges associated with creating a community-based initiative.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. If you have supported community-based initiatives, provide a brief example of how you have supported a community-based initiative. (500 character response limit)

5. Why do you believe that this was the best way to support this community-based initiative? (500 character response limit)

6. What is a creative way that you have seen an elected official provide support to a community-based initiative? (500 character response limit)



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## Opportunities and Challenges for Local Elected Officials in British Columbia to Support Community-Based Initiatives

### Section 2: Your approach preferences

Choose three approaches you are most likely to use when working with a community-based initiative.

\* 7. First Choice:

\* 8. Second Choice:

\* 9. Third Choice:



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## Opportunities and Challenges for Local Elected Officials in British Columbia to Support Community-Based Initiatives

### Section 3: Your Community-Based Initiatives Support Factors

10. In reflecting on your experiences, can you provide details about a specific past encounter (positive or negative) that played a role in shaping your preference for each specified approach? (500 character response limit)

Previous Response #1

Previous Response #2

Previous Response #3



## Opportunities and Challenges for Local Elected Officials in British Columbia to Support Community-Based Initiatives

### Section 4: Reflection

11. In response to challenges or tensions encountered in the past, what adjustments or changes have you made to your approach in supporting community-based initiatives? (500 character response limit)

12. If you had more time available in your role, what is a community-based initiative that you would want to support more and how might you support it? (500 character response limit)



## Opportunities and Challenges for Local Elected Officials in British Columbia to Support Community-Based Initiatives

### Section 5: Demographic Questions

13. What is the population of your municipality or regional district electoral area?

- 0-1,999
- 2,000-3,999
- 4,000-9,999
- 10,000-24,999
- 25,000-99,999
- 100,000+

14. In what region is your municipality or regional district?

- Kootenay & Boundary
- Lower Mainland
- North Central
- Southern Interior
- Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities

15. How long have you served as an elected official?

- Less than 4 years
- 4 years to 8 years
- 8 years to 12 years
- More than 12 years.

16. What is your age?

- 0-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-64
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75+

17. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Other (specify)

18. What is your highest level completed level of education?

- Less than high school
- High school diploma or equivalent
- College Diploma/Trade certificate
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree

19. What is/was your primary profession?



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# Opportunities and Challenges for Local Elected Officials in British Columbia to Support Community-Based Initiatives

## Section 6: Focus Group Recruitment

Thank you for completing the survey, if you wish, you may also join a focus group to review the some of the results of the survey and dig into the tensions of supporting community-based initiatives. Sessions will be held on zoom with 5-6 other local elected officials form your region in BC. Participants will be chosen at random from each region if interest exceeds participation limits.

Date and Time: Focus groups will be held in April 2024 at a time that is most convenient to the group.

Duration: Each focus group session will last approximately 60-90 minutes.

Location: Zoom.

Facilitation: The sessions will be facilitated by lead researcher Matt McLean

The sessions will be recorded, and transcripts will be produced for research purposes. All information will be anonymized in any publication of the data. Furthermore, participants will be asked to consider any conversations as confidential to protect other participants.

If you wish to submit your name for inclusion in the focus group, please email the primary researcher Matt McLean with your name, email, and municipality/regional district at [mattmclean@uvic.ca](mailto:mattmclean@uvic.ca)





## Opportunities and Challenges for Local Elected Officials in BC to Support Community-Based Initiatives

You are invited to participate in a study entitled Opportunities and Challenges for Local Elected Officials in BC to Support Community-Based Initiatives that is being conducted by Matt McLean.

Matt McLean is a graduate student in the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria and you may contact him if you have further questions by email at [mattmclean@uvic.ca](mailto:mattmclean@uvic.ca)

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Masters of Community Development degree. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Lynne Siemens at [siemensl@uvic.ca](mailto:siemensl@uvic.ca)

### Purpose and Objectives

This research project will examine the ways in which local elected officials in British Columbia (BC) support community-based initiatives. The study is expected to provide insights into the opportunities and challenges that elected officials experience when engaging with community initiatives. The purpose of this research is to examine the ways in which local elected officials in BC support community-based initiatives. The study aims to identify the approaches utilized by elected officials to support community-based initiatives in BC and provide a framework for elected officials and community-based organizations so they may consider options for providing or garnering community support.

The research will focus on understanding the unique perspective of elected officials in their role of mobilizing and engaging diverse groups, while also expanding on existing work regarding formal government support factors for community-based initiatives.

### Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because past studies have shown that government support positively impacts the performance of community-based initiatives, and the involvement of well-connected individuals, like local elected officials, is beneficial. This project aims to explore the specific role of local elected officials in supporting community-based initiatives, building upon existing literature which has explored community leadership on a more general basis. It seeks to provide insights into more effective ways of supporting community-based initiatives.

### Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an elected official in BC. Municipalities were chosen at random from population segments, and all elected officials from selected municipalities are invited to respond.

### What is involved

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include completing a survey which should take about 15 minutes to complete. Should you wish, you may also elect to submit your name for focus groups.

Focus groups will be held in late April 2024 on Zoom. Sessions will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and will be facilitated by primary researcher Matt McLean. They will be recorded for the purposes of



## Appendix C: Focus Group Questions

1. What is possible if more local elected officials have supportive attitudes towards community-based initiatives?
2. What stands out to you when you view this data?
3. What methods of support are missing from this list?
4. Why do some community-based initiatives get support while others do not?
5. How do situational factors contribute to the varying methods elected officials use to support community-based initiatives?

This question was only asked to focus group 1 due to time limitations.

6. Some community-based initiatives are created in response to a lack of services provided by local government, how and why does this change how you work with them?

This question was not asked to either group due to time limitations.

7. Do you agree or disagree with this survey comment. Why? “Local Elected officials have too much work on their plates to also have this work as well.”

This question was not asked to either group due to time limitations.

8. How do you ensure fairness between different initiatives when your time is limited?

## Appendix D: Worksheet: Providing Support for Community-Based Initiatives

This worksheet outlines a process for deciding how to support community-based initiatives for local elected officials. The model to the right outlines the key goals for support.

### Best Practices

- Distinguish between community leadership and decision making
- Prioritize support approaches that align with personal interests and will lead to success
- Build personal connections with CBI leaders to foster understanding and
- Emphasize boundary spanning relationship making

### Steps for using tool:

1. Familiarize self with list of approaches.
2. Which approaches could support strengthening the community-based initiative?
3. Which approaches could support providing sustainable support to the community-based initiative?
4. Which approaches could support optimizing your personal contribution?
5. Which approaches could support maximizing community impact?
6. Which approaches align with your abilities?
7. Consider best practices for navigating tensions between outcomes, remove approaches that don't align with best practices.
8. Determine common approaches within all (or most) outcomes.
9. Select approach for providing support.



Approach Category	Definition
<b>Public Statements of Support</b>	Public statements of support involve endorsements by local elected officials through platforms like speeches, media, or social media, where they promote a CBI, align it with community priorities, and advocate for resources, aiming to raise awareness and legitimize the CBI's efforts.
<b>Resource Provision</b>	Resource provision involves leveraging the formal decision-making power of local elected officials to allocate funding, infrastructure, and policy change to support to CBIs. Local elected officials can influence decisions to enhance the capacity of CBIs by sharing local government resources.
<b>Relationship Building</b>	Relationship building involves fostering connections between CBIs, community members, and decision makers to enhance collaboration and access to resources. Local elected officials play a key role by leveraging their networks to introduce CBIs to skilled individuals, government staff, and funding opportunities.
<b>Direct Services</b>	Providing direct services means applying expertise and experience to support CBIs in practical and tangible ways. Local elected officials can offer direct assistance that helps CBIs navigate systems, access resources, and operate effectively.
<b>Providing Guidance</b>	Providing governance means guiding and supporting CBIs through advice, leadership, and strategic direction. Local elected officials contribute by sharing a vision shaped by their understanding of community needs.
<b>Championing an Initiative</b>	Championing an initiative involves local elected officials actively advocating for and supporting CBIs by taking on leadership roles and initiating new programs or organizations. By taking these actions, local elected officials help build momentum, coordinate efforts, and provide critical early-stage support to strengthen CBIs.
<b>Status Work</b>	Status work involves local elected officials leveraging their position and reputation to enhance a CBI's credibility. Through their public image and authority, they help legitimize the CBI and raise its standing within the community and among other stakeholders.

## List of Approaches

### Public Statements of Support

- Shaping public discourse through letters to the editor.
- Raising local challenges with higher levels of government.
- Educating the public on key issues through seminars or podcasts.
- Recognizing community efforts at council meetings.
- Sharing posts from CBIs on social media.
- Highlighting how community contributions support local government successes.
- Wearing a button or pin to raise awareness of an issue.
- Speaking at fundraising events.
- Writing letters of support for grant funding.

### Resource Provision Support

- Providing funding though including grant in aids.
- Creating aligned government services and programs.
- Changing policy to support work of CBI.
- Directing municipal capital projects as road or park improvements to support CBIs.
- Providing local government facilities for CBI activities.
- Creating new spaces for CBI activities.
- Leasing municipal land to CBI.

### Relationship Building Support

- Bringing new people into the CBI.
- Connecting different organizations with a shared goal.
- Connecting with funding opportunities or other resources in the community.
- Hosting collective brainstorming sessions.
- Connecting the initiative to people with specific skills.
- Coordinating different parties to a shared goal.
- Connecting a CBI to local government staff.
- Introducing the group to decision makers.
- Putting people forward to serve on not for profit boards.
- Seeking donations for an initiative.

### Direct Services

- Leadership experience.
- Directing to existing resources, information, and plans.
- Governance and meeting support.
- Explaining how local government works.
- Advice on how to present to council.
- Bridging information gaps with past work.
- Bring local government voice to community issues.
- Marketing and communications support.
- Sharing volunteer management strategies.
- Business and strategic planning facilitation.

### Providing Guidance

- Encouraging interested parties to meet about an issue.
- Lifting marginalized voices in the work of a community-based initiative.
- Joining the board of not for profits or serving as a local government liaison.
- Highlighting challenges that some may face while working with the CBI.
- Providing data and other information to influence decisions.
- Steering a group in the direction of a community need.
- Sharing past experiences with similar initiatives.
- Sharing best practices from other communities.
- Setting a vision for the community and sharing how they would contribute to it.
- Encouraging new people to join the CBI.
- Coordinating different partners.

### Championing Initiatives

- Charing a local government task force
- Chairing a not-for-profit board or other initiative.
- Organizing a group of volunteers.
- Creating a new program and sourcing funding for it.
- Creating a new not for profit or unincorporated organization.

### Status Work Support

- Attending community events
- Attending community meetings
- Seeking donations for an initiative
- Volunteering
- Public stunts such as a dunk tank