

## Community Action Network Program Review

Presented To:	City Council
Meeting Date:	November 18, 2025
Type:	Managers' Reports
Prepared by:	Shelley Walushka Parks and Recreation Services
Recommended by:	General Manager of Community Services

### Report Summary

This report provides a recommendation regarding the key findings of the Community Action Network Program Review initiated in 2024. The report includes information on how existing City of Greater Sudbury programs support community organizations and best practices on how other jurisdictions support volunteerism. The report recommends a transition away from the Community Action Network program and a new approach to supporting community organizations which includes an affiliate/registry program and a micro-grant stream for grassroots activities.

### Resolution

THAT the City of Greater Sudbury directs staff to develop a new approach to supporting community groups and volunteerism as part of a transition away from the existing Community Action Network Program which includes:

- the suspension of the current standard operating procedures and terms of engagements for Community Action Networks
- the development of a Community Registry/Affiliate Program with details and recommendations to be reported back to City Council in Q1 2027
- the development of a micro-grant stream for grassroots community activities with details and recommendations for changes to the current HCI Policy to be presented back to the Finance & Administration Committee in Q2 2026

as outlined in the report entitled "Community Action Network Program Review" from the General Manager of Community Services presented at the City Council meeting on November 18, 2025.

### Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Climate Action Plans

This report refers to 5.7 Develop and Implement Policies, Practices and Enabling Technologies that Encourage Meaningful Engagement at the Neighbourhood and Community Level and Create a Healthier and More Vibrant Community as identified in the City of Greater Sudbury Strategic Plan 2019-2027. This report has no relationship to the Community Energy & Emissions Plan.

### Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report. Future staff reports will provide information and recommendations on the \$50,000 currently budgeted to provide Community Action Network operating grants.

## Background

The Community Action Network program was established in 2002 to provide a two-way line of communication between the community, City of Greater Sudbury (City) staff, and City Councillors to help with the planning and implementation of community initiatives. The role of Community Action Networks (CANs) has evolved since that time, growing to a current total of 20 recognized CANs. Terms of Engagement and Standard Operating Procedures have been developed and updated over time to guide the objectives, roles and responsibilities of CANs and to detail the supports provided by the City. 'Attachment 1 – History of CAN Program' provides a summary of the program evolution since inception.

The 2019-2027 City of Greater Sudbury Strategic Plan included the review of the Community Action Network Program as part of the strategic objective of "Creating a Healthier and More Vibrant Community" under the goal to "Develop and Implement Policies, Practices and Enabling Technologies that Encourage Meaningful Engagement at the Neighbourhood and Community Level".

### **Community Action Network Program Review – Stuckless Consulting Inc.**

In 2024, the City retained Stuckless Consulting Inc. to perform an assessment of the current CAN program, produce recommendations for improvements to the current program or recommendations for a new community development model.

The work Stuckless Consulting performed as part of this review included:

- A background review of the CAN program;
- Consultations with program partners and community members;
- A best practice review of programs in other communities;
- Analysis and interpretation of results;
- Development of final recommendations.

The review highlighted several strengths of the CAN program, including the involvement of dedicated community volunteers and the organization of over 100 local events annually. The report also identified significant weaknesses and threats, such as challenges between CAN volunteers and the City, burdensome governance, concerns about diversity and inclusivity, lack of program evaluation, overlap with other organizations and enhancements to City processes since the program's inception.

Based on the information collected as part of the review, the recommendation outlined in the report was for a gradual transition away from the current CAN model and for the City to focus on continuing to support community-led initiatives through the various City programs and platforms designed to encourage and guide community volunteerism and activities. The report also recommended redirecting CAN funding toward the creation of a new, simplified stream of funding through the Healthy Community Initiatives (HCI) fund to provide financial support for grassroots, community-led activities and initiatives, which would be made possible through a review and amendment of the existing HCI by-law.

The recommendation to transition away from the current CAN program model with a focus on supporting community-led initiatives through other established City programs was supported by the following rationale:

- **Outdated Role:** The CAN program hasn't kept pace with changes at City. New City programs offer alternative ways for residents to engage with CGS, making the role of CANs unclear. Many CANs lack resources for community engagement and propose projects outside their original mandate.
- **Lack of Representation:** The CAN program aims to increase community representation and inclusiveness, but it has struggled with these goals, particularly in including youth, young families, and cultural diversity.
- **Challenging Dynamics:** The CAN program's inconsistency and departmental transfers have led to frustration, mutual distrust, and collaboration challenges between volunteers and staff. The lack of clarity on CAN roles results in volunteers proposing projects outside the program's vision, causing tension when the City cannot support them.
- **Complex Governance:** CANs have a vague structure without proper elections, risking undue influence from special interests.

- **Limited Reporting and Funding:** CANs must submit annual reports to receive funding, but the process is seen as onerous and lacks standardized information for evaluating program impacts.
- **Overlap with Other Organizations:** The CAN program and Neighbourhood Association (NA) program have overlapping roles and responsibilities, both involving resident volunteers and formal governance. NAs focus on leisure activities but also serve as a voice for the neighborhood, creating two-way communication with CGS. Both programs face challenges with declining volunteerism, making it difficult to recruit and maintain active volunteers, which affects their effectiveness and sustainability.
- **Unclear Impact:** CANs have successfully implemented over 100 community projects in 2022, such as gardens, holiday celebrations, and park enhancements. However, the lack of program evaluation means CGS is not fully understanding the impact or effectiveness of these initiatives.
- **Existing Emphasis on Neighbourhood Projects:** CANs have been most successful and enthusiastic about implementing projects that improve local neighbourhoods. Volunteer enthusiasm is highest for these initiatives. Governance and administration are not essential for running these community projects.
- **Community Engagement:** The CANs' community engagement function has been ineffective due to lack of resources and training. There's risk involved with having untrained volunteers leading public meetings.
- **Focus on Project Support:** Best practices from other Ontario neighbourhood development programs emphasize supporting grassroots projects without involving governance and administration. With adequate staff support and community outreach, this approach allows diverse applicants to propose focused projects, which the City can review before providing support.

The full Community Action Network Program Review Recommendations Report authored by Stuckless Consulting Inc. is provided as Attachment 2.

### **Consultation with Community Action Networks**

After receiving the CAN Program Review Recommendations Report from Stuckless Consulting Inc., staff shared the consultant's report with CAN Executives during a working session in May 2025 and identified key areas where improvements of existing programs and development of new initiatives could benefit community organizations and volunteers. The following themes and suggestions emerged from CAN executives when reviewing the consultant's report and discussing how the City can support volunteerism in the community:

- **Governance** – Update/eliminate or reposition CAN terms of engagement and standard operating procedures; offer flexibility with requirements to host meetings given lack of participation and engagement
- **Overlap with Other Organizations** – Need for neighbouring jurisdictions and groups to work more closely together. Support required from City to recruit more volunteers to support with activities, events, initiatives and organizations. Volunteerism an issue for all groups in the community including CANs.
- **Inclusion and Diversity** – Identification of other organizations/groups and opportunities for them to connect is important and something the City could support further.
- **Administration, Finance, Funding and Grants** – Simplified applications for funding would benefit all community organizations; HCI applications are treated on a first-come-first-served basis and need to be reworked. The City providing Insurance for groups is important and very valued by groups such as CANs and Neighbourhood Associations. Having a City contact to liaise to help navigate processes, events, projects etc. is valuable for all community organizations.

Some existing CANs have expressed a desire for greater engagement from their local Councillors, including attending meetings or hosting community discussions to share updates on City projects and initiatives, and to hear directly from residents about their concerns.

## Establishment of the Community Initiatives and Partnerships Team

In January 2024, as a part of Council’s strategic priority on building community vibrancy, the Community Initiatives and Partnerships Section, part of the Parks and Recreation Services Division, was formed, taking on responsibilities for the CAN program in addition to volunteerism more broadly. As a one stop resource centre for community organizations and volunteers, the team was established to be the main point of contact for community groups and volunteers (beyond CANs). This team receives and manages requests, guides community groups through City policies and processes, provides information on funding and events, and supports project development from start to finish while building the City’s brand and reputation through strong customer service, continuous improvement initiatives, and special projects. Since inception the team has developed and implemented programs, initiatives, and best practices to support community organizations with initiatives such as:

- Improvements to the Special Events intake process and the creation of best practices and resources for common events and activities such as parades, holiday tree lightings, open water swim events in addition to new and enhanced insurance programs, French language resources, and post event surveys for continual feedback.
- Development and management of the community-led projects framework to guide and support community construction projects from start to finish, ensuring recognition and celebration once completed.
- Re-establishing City connection and resources with the Community Garden Network.
- Supporting the development and progress for new and emerging parks and recreation initiatives, sports, clubs and priorities such as cricket, disc golf and community gardens.
- Actively supporting City-wide projects and connecting with community groups and volunteers such as Communities in Bloom and the Ontario 55+ Summer Games.
- The Community Initiatives and Partnerships team continues to promote and leverage the My Community mailbox to connect with organizations in supporting and guiding community-led initiatives (events/projects) and supporting volunteerism in our community.

The feedback provided to the Community Initiatives and Partnerships team from CAN executives in May 2025 following the review of the Stuckless Consulting report reflects the broader needs expressed by other community organizations seeking support. These groups and their volunteers consistently emphasize the importance of having a dedicated point of contact at the City to address questions and provide guidance. They are also looking for simplified funding application processes for grassroots initiatives, assistance with basic insurance coverage, and improved access to resources such as meeting spaces, event equipment, and opportunities for learning, development, and connection with like-minded groups and volunteers across the community.

## Research and Analysis

### External Research

With the recommendation to transition away from the existing CAN program model, staff conducted research on how other jurisdictions supported community organizations and volunteerism. Many municipalities have established affiliate or registry programs and policies to support non-profit groups. Examples of programs from the City of Mississauga, City of Richmond Hill, Town of Oakville, and City of Vaughan are summarized in the chart below with additional details provided on Attachment 3 - Best Practices and Examples from Other Municipalities.

Municipality	Program Name	Facilities	Insurance	Grant/Funding	Support & Training	Promotion & Visibility
Mississauga	Community Group Registry Program (CGRP)	Discounted rental rates; 1 free monthly meeting	Access to City insurance program (general liability;	Annual Community Grants up to \$10,000; Multi-Year Grants (invite only)	Staff liaison; free workshops and webinars	Use of Civic Mark; discounted vendor license; permission

		room; 1 free AGM room; priority booking	optional D&O)			for mobile signage
<b>Richmond Hill</b>	Community Group Affiliation Policy	Discounted rental rates; priority booking; 1 free AGM room	No insurance coverage is provided as part of the program	No direct grants; cost savings through subsidies	Staff liaison; volunteer and board development support	Group listing in Recreation Guide and City website; discounted advertising
<b>Vaughan</b>	Community Service Organization (CSO) Policy	Discounted rental rates; priority booking; 1 free AGM room	No insurance coverage is provided as part of the program	No direct grants; cost savings through subsidies	Staff liaison	Group listing in Recreation Guide and City website
<b>Oakville</b>	CORE (Community Resources & Engagement) Membership	Discounted rental rates for youth and cultural groups priority booking;	No insurance coverage is provided as part of the program	No direct grants; cost savings through subsidies	Staff liaison and partnership support	Free group listing on City website; discounted advertising at City facilities

### Existing City of Greater Sudbury Programs and Initiatives Supporting Volunteer Organizations in the Community

The City has several programs and processes in place to support community groups and individuals wishing to plan and implement community initiatives although awareness of many programs and processes is low. Over the past several years many programs have been established and improved to make processes easier for citizens and to provide benefits for community organizations/groups such as:

#### Administration and Organizational Support:

- Meeting Space/Facility Rentals - booking of periodic meetings at no cost, one free facility rental per year (up to two days) for a non-meeting event such as a fundraiser, fair, dinner, or dance.
- Insurance – Currently the City provides insurance coverage to Community Action Networks and Neighbourhood Associations for a variety of community-based activities.
- Funding - Healthy Community Initiatives Fund; Arts and Culture Grants; Tourism Event Support Grants
- Laptops - Decommissioned City laptops have been repurposed and made available to CAN executive members and other organizations
- Mifi Hubs - The Parks and Recreation Services Division and Library services have a limited number of Wi-Fi hubs available for community groups that require internet access to host meetings or events for free.
- Other Library Services – printing, photocopying etc.

#### Special Events Support:

- Special Events Intake Process and assignment of liaison to support
- Feedback from Special Event through follow-up survey
- Equipment Rentals for Events (no cost)
- Compost and Recycling at Special Events (no cost)
- AED Loaner Program for Events (no cost with deposit)

- Funding - Healthy Community Initiatives Fund; Arts and Culture Grants; Tourism Event Support Grants
- Best Practices and Resources (parades, fireworks etc.)

#### Neighbourhood Projects Support:

- Community-led Projects – through the Community-led Projects framework formal and informal groups can bring ideas for projects forward to the City and are guided through the process and supported by staff.
- Memorial Gifts and Donations Program

#### Beautification and Community Gardens Support:

- Community Clean Up Programs/Adopt a Spot – The City currently offers a variety of Adoption Programs focusing on improving community pride, promoting the 3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle) and creating litter awareness within the city.
- Community Garden Network – Greater Sudbury has 40 community gardens, with many featuring a mix of individual and communal areas. The City supports gardens through the Community Garden Network and staff support meetings, resources and planning for garden volunteer groups. City staff also support recruitment of new volunteers and cover insurance for those gardens on City property.

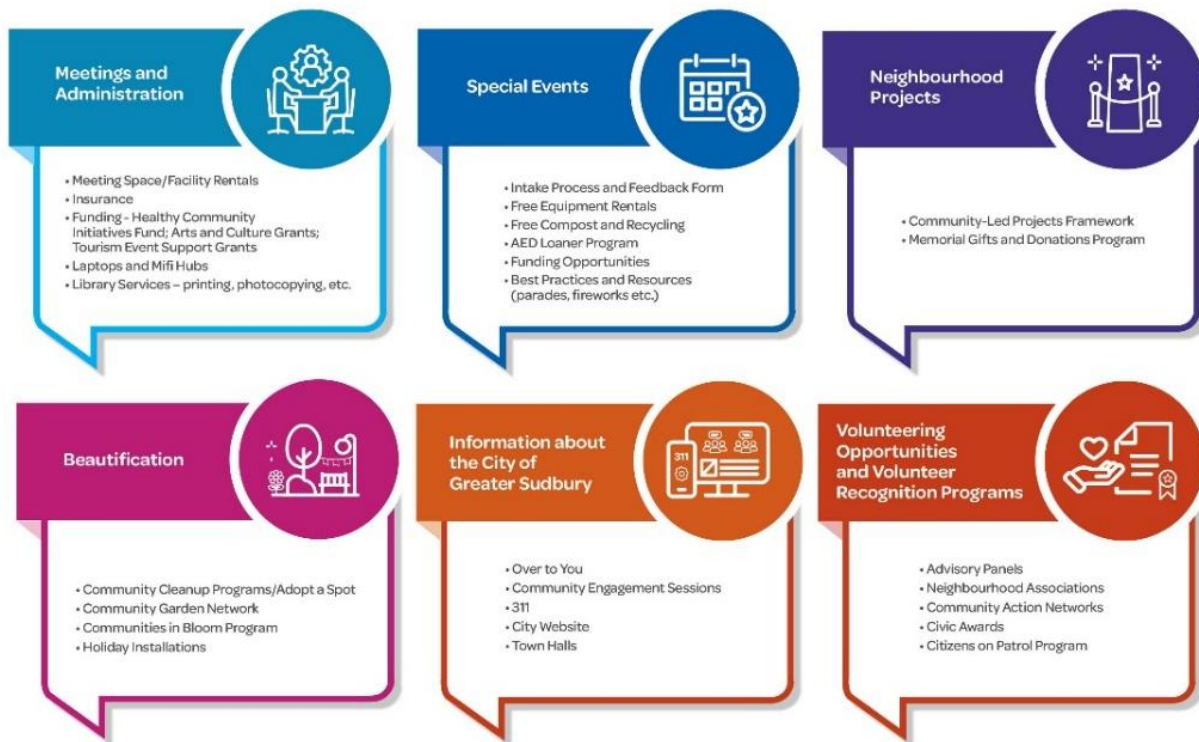
#### Community Involvement and Communications Processes:

- Over to You: The City's online engagement platform provides residents with a safe, convenient, and accessible way to share feedback on a variety of projects and initiatives.
- Community Engagement Sessions: Staff host in-person or virtual engagement sessions on projects throughout the year, for those who prefer to provide feedback in sessions, drop-in information sessions and pop-up engagement opportunities.
- 311: Community volunteers can continue to share questions, concerns, or feedback through 311 by phone, email or live web chat.

#### City Volunteering Opportunities and Volunteer Recognition Programs:

- Advisory Panels
- Neighbourhood Associations
- Community Action Networks
- Civic Awards
- Citizens on Patrol Program (COPs)

CANs have historically carried out a wide range of activities that align with existing City programs and initiatives available to community organizations. The infographic below highlights the how the City can continue to support these initiatives, without the need for formal governance or a dedicated CAN structure.



## Transition Away from the Community Action Network Program

As recommended by the Stuckless Consulting Inc. CAN Program Review Recommendations report and supported by a review of existing internal supports and best practices from other jurisdictions, a gradual transition away from the current CAN model is needed to allow the City to leverage existing programs and platforms to more widely encourage and guide community volunteerism and activities.

Staff are recommending a transition period which will ensure the activities and programs of CANs remain supported while new approaches to supporting community groups and volunteers are developed and finalized (information to follow later in the report). This transition period is expected to last from November 2025 into Q1 of 2027.

Based on the feedback outlined in the consultant's report and further discussions with CANs, the following key program elements are recommended to remain in place during the transition period:

- **Governance:** Staff are recommending the suspension of the CAN Terms of Engagement and Standard Operating Procedures at the start of the transition process. This will eliminate the requirement for CAN elections, meetings, visioning sessions, executive titles, etc. Interested/active CANs are still encouraged to come together to plan and deliver neighbourhood and community level events, initiatives and projects during the transition period. Should CANs dissolve during this time, assets of the CAN will be held in trust with Parks and Recreation Services, and in consultation with Finance, be earmarked towards appropriate ward-level based initiatives or the appropriate HCI ward fund. CAN projects previously approved through HCI will continue to be administered and completed by assigned staff.
- **Ongoing City Staff Support:** Continue providing existing CANs with support from City staff, including a dedicated primary contact to assist with planning special events, advancing community-led projects, and coordinating meetings where appropriate. Staff attendance at after-hours meetings will be discontinued unless the meeting is required to support a defined project or initiative.

- **Annual Grant for 2026:** Maintain the provision of an annual grant for the 2026 calendar year where eligible. CANs will remain responsible for submitting a year-end report and providing receipts for all expenditures. Active CANs with large balances in their bank accounts will be strongly encouraged to work collaboratively with City staff to organize events, initiatives and activities for the betterment of the community in 2026, and/or direct funds towards previously approved community-led projects in their respective Wards.
- **Liability Coverage:** Continue offering comprehensive liability coverage for general CAN activities and routine operations, such as CAN meetings, throughout 2026. Special events organized by CANs must receive approval from the City in accordance with current processes.

## **A New Approach to Supporting Community Groups and Volunteerism**

In addition to current programs, staff envision launching a new initiative to better engage and support community organizations with the transition away from the CAN program. This program would expand access and opportunities for all citizens to contribute positively to Greater Sudbury. It aims to enhance existing efforts by improving inclusivity, strengthening communication, and streamlining volunteer involvement through both program updates and new offerings. This new approach reflects best practices observed in other City-administered and comparable municipal programs across Ontario. It is designed to support non-profit, volunteer-based community groups by offering them access to municipal resources and benefits in a transparent and equitable way aligned with the City's strategic goals of strengthening community vibrancy and creating a healthier community.

### **Community Registry/Affiliate Program**

The Community Registry/Affiliate Program will be a formal initiative designed to support non-profit, volunteer-based community groups by offering them access to municipal resources and benefits. The program will help the City support groups that contribute to community well-being through recreation, sports, arts, culture, social services, and more.

Groups will register through an online portal and be assigned a staff liaison with whom they will connect with one to four times per year, depending on their needs. The staff liaison will act as the group's primary contact with the City when it seeks information and guidance.

Registered groups will be provided with regular communications, training and development opportunities, and access to benefits at the City such as access to meeting space, basic insurance, funding opportunities, and more.

The Community Registry/Affiliate program is an opportunity to connect with more diverse groups and organizations in our community while promoting and building awareness of the many programs and resources already available and articulated in this report. Assigning staff to specific groups to support and guide through various processes and initiatives in the City is important for community groups and existing CAN volunteers as the program transitions and therefore will be a key component of the new Community Registry/Affiliate program.

Organizations and groups joining the Community Registry/Affiliate program will agree to a code of conduct when working with the City and other organizations as part of learning and development opportunities. Affiliate program members will align with the City's strategic plan and vision for a more vibrant community.

Furthermore, through a City-led Community Registry/Affiliate program there is an opportunity to bring groups together in Wards and neighbourhoods to collaborate, share resources and build connections which was articulated as area of opportunity through the CAN review and by CAN Executive members. Connection opportunities like this currently exist such as the Greater Sudbury Healthy Aging Fair which is put on by the City's Parks and Recreation team and the Older Adult Advisory Panel. Gatherings of this nature could be further developed alongside the registry/affiliate program.

## **Volunteer Training and Capacity Building**

To support the benefits of the new Community Registry/Affiliate program, a year-round volunteer training initiative will be established. This program will offer skill-building opportunities for both individual volunteers and registered organizations, including role-specific training for City-supported activities (e.g., outdoor rinks, community gardens) and general learning such as first aid, organizational development, and promotional strategies.

Staff resources previously dedicated to CANs and related meetings will be redirected to support this training and development work, helping foster a more capable, connected, and empowered volunteer community across Greater Sudbury.

## **Micro-grant Stream for Grassroots Community Activities**

As identified in the CAN Program Review Recommendations Report completed by Stuckless Consulting Inc. there is a need for a new, simplified stream of funding to provide financial support for grassroots, community-led activities and initiatives. It is recommended that the CAN operating funding, which is currently part of the Annual Grant Program and has a total budget of \$50,000, be redirected toward a new, simplified stream of funding through the HCI fund to support grassroots, community-led activities and initiatives. This would be made possible through a review and amendment of the existing HCI by-law.

The HCI program offers more equitable eligibility criteria compared to the existing Annual Grant Program, meaning the \$50,000 allocation will be accessible to a broader range of community groups and organizations. To ensure better cohesion and further evolution to align with the changing landscape of community volunteerism staff recommend a review of the Healthy Community Initiative Fund program. This was emphasized through the CAN review and meetings with CAN executives and other community organizations in Greater Sudbury. Currently, the HCI program presents challenges for organizations due to burdensome administrative requirements, delayed funding, and limited access to additional financial support for even the smallest of initiatives.

## **Neighbourhood Association Program**

Feedback from both the Community Action Networks (CANs) and the Stuckless Consulting report highlights that the CAN Program and the Neighbourhood Association (NA) Program share overlapping roles and responsibilities. Both programs rely on resident volunteers and incorporate formal governance structures to support community engagement and local initiatives. NAs focus on leisure activities but also serve as a voice for the neighborhood, creating two-way communication with the City. Staff recommend putting more resources and attention toward improving the management of Neighbourhood Associations and of their operational volunteers, providing more support towards recruitment, screening, training and recognition. Neighbourhood Association volunteers play an important role in supporting City Parks and Recreation operations through providing outdoor rink maintenance, overseeing field house facility bookings and planning neighbourhood level special events, activities and initiatives for residents. City staff can re-direct more efforts to supporting this program as the transition away from Community Action Networks takes place by January of 2027. Existing CANs can merge and collaborate with Neighbourhood Associations to more fulsomely support neighbourhood level initiatives such as outdoor rink operations, special events and projects.

## **Summary and Next Steps**

For over 20 years, Community Action Networks have brought people together to build healthy communities. A review of the program identified several strengths, such as leveraging passionate community volunteers and facilitating over 100 local events and activities each year. The review also identified challenges with a problematic governance structure that has led to multiple community conflicts, concerns about representation and limited inclusivity, a lack of program evaluation, and overlap with other organizations and programs. City processes for communications and supporting community initiatives have also evolved significantly since the CAN program was established.

Based on the review, it is time to transition away from the CAN Program, to better align with the future of volunteerism in Greater Sudbury and trends seen in other municipalities. The following summarizes the

proposed next steps to transition away from the CAN program and enhance volunteerism within the City of Greater Sudbury:

Steps	Timeline
Suspend current CAN standard operating procedures and terms of engagement for the balance of 2025 and 2026	Immediate
Report back to Council with recommended revisions to HCI Policy/By-law 2018-129	Q2 2026
Report back to Council with detailed plan for Community Registry/Affiliate Program	Q1 2027
Community Registry/Affiliate Program Launch, dissolve existing CAN Program	Following Council approval of Community Registry/Affiliate Program
Volunteer Training and Capacity Building Initiatives	Initiate in 2027

## Resources Cited

Community Action Network Standard Operating Procedures

<https://www.greatersudbury.ca/city-hall/get-involved/volunteerism/community-action-networks/community-action-network-standard-operating-procedures/>

Community Action Network Terms of Engagement

<https://www.greatersudbury.ca/city-hall/get-involved/volunteerism/community-action-networks/community-action-network-terms-of-engagement/>

2019-2027 City of Greater Sudbury Strategic Plan

<https://www.greatersudbury.ca/city-hall/reports-studies-policies-and-plans/>

By-law 2018-129 A By-law of the City of Greater Sudbury to Adopt a Policy Regarding the Healthy Community Initiative Fund

<https://www.greatersudbury.ca/city-hall/grants-and-funding/hci-fund/application-process/hci-fund-policy/>