

our  
vibrant  
neighbourhoods  
strategy



United Way of Halifax Region's  
Neighbourhood Engagement &  
Revitalization Work  
2007-2010

Prepared for United Way of Halifax Region Staff & Board  
September 2006 Peter Mortimer & Paul Shakotko



# Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	1
Introduction .....	3
United Way's Role .....	4
Theory of Neighbourhood Change & Place Based Work .....	5
Why Focus on Residents to Lead Neighbourhood Change .....	6
Our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy & Vision .....	6
Criteria for Selecting & Working with Neighbourhoods .....	7
Why this Work Matters .....	8
Communications Plan .....	9
Partners & Staffing .....	9
How Do We Know We Are Successful .....	10
Final Thoughts .....	10
Work Plan .....	11
Financial Plan .....	12

# imagine

a neighbourhood where residents solve their own issues through local leadership  
a neighbourhood where people are excited to live, know their neighbours well & address issues  
an organization that is leading this type of work

## Executive Summary

We firmly believe that high crime rates, low-income levels and health issues can be proactively addressed at the neighbourhood level. We can do this by empowering residents and showing them the unique and positive strengths of their community. Residents, who are more engaged in their community, are more likely to work together and be more equipped to tackle systemic issues.

### Our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy will:

- Develop resident engagement initiatives.
- Leverage funding for neighbourhood work.
- Advocate and promote neighbourhood work.
- Create a provocative communication strategy that reflects our neighbourhood focus.
- Create long-term positive change.
- Build partnerships with three levels of government, local businesses and agencies to support resident engagement initiatives.
- Manage risks appropriately.

The Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy is also crafted in response to the growing concentration of serious economic and social issues in particular neighbourhoods in Halifax. Over the past 15 years Halifax has seen great change and is poised to become an economic and community powerhouse for Atlantic Canada. With this growth comes needed prosperity and a vision of hope for our future. However, over the past 15 years **some key indicators are suggesting that not all are benefiting from the recent successes in Halifax.**

Issues such as higher percentages of seniors living alone<sup>1</sup>, increases in the incidence of low income households<sup>2</sup>, increases in the number of parents raising children on their own<sup>3</sup>, and a widening gap between rich and poor<sup>4</sup> raise concerns for the fabric and strength of our neighbourhoods. Similar trends in urban centers across Canada have shown that if these issues are not adequately addressed, some neighbourhoods reach a “tipping point” when the cumulative effects of these issues making solving them increasingly more difficult.

**United Way of Halifax Region can and will help residents, businesses, governments and other groups address these issues.**

United Way's Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy was borne out of our deep commitment to build extraordinary community and from the November 2005 United Way of Halifax Board decision to support neighbourhood work on an annual basis. Over the next 5 years, we will be focusing our efforts at the neighbourhood level because **when neighbours know neighbours, neighbourhoods are safer, more active, vibrant and healthy – a benefit to all.**

United Way's role is to act as a convener and facilitator of positive neighbourhood change. Our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy focuses on a strong component of resident engagement, while at the same time building support for change with those who can best influence neighbourhood development. **Many of the issues facing neighbourhoods can be solved by the residents themselves.** We place this premise at the heart of our work. However, we also know that some systemic issues require the assistance from supporting organizations to work with residents. Our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy focuses on developing supporting networks.

<sup>1</sup> Provincial Community Counts 2006 for Halifax County.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.


<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Genuine Progress Index for Atlantic Canada. 2004. Linda Pannozzo and Ronald Colman.



# imagine

a neighbourhood where residents solve their own issues through local leadership  
a neighbourhood where people are excited to live, know their neighbours well & address issues  
an organization that is leading this type of work



Neighbourhood work is often difficult, usually uneven, and typically emotionally charged.

Neighbourhood work is also highly rewarding and necessary if we are to fulfill our organization mandate of “building extraordinary community” and to bring about long-term, sustainable change. Our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy manages the risks associated with these challenges through a combination of hiring local talent, promoting positive change, building on the strengths of the community, building political will for change, and defending our work when required.

Our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy is unique. It builds upon the tremendous learnings from community building organizations in Canada and the United States (such as the Annie E Casey Foundation and the Aspen Institute). Our strategy is also leading edge. An examination of 19 United Ways in Canada and USA<sup>1</sup> revealed that only 3 (Montreal QC, Toronto ON, and Louisville KY) had documented community-building strategies that focused on placed-based, citizen engagement.

Neighbourhood work requires funding. United Way's Board has made a commitment of \$150,000 per year for 5 years to kick start neighbourhood work. We also have the additional funding from Action for Neighbourhood Change for our work in Spryfield during 2006. Our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy takes our financial commitment and leverages it from donors who are committed to improving Halifax neighbourhoods.

---

<sup>5</sup> Canadian cities were Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Calgary, Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo and London - Middlesex. American cities were Louisville, Tucson, Atlanta, Rochester, Dannville, Boston, Manchester, Greater Seacoast, Portland, Chicago, Seattle and Philadelphia.

# imagine

a neighbourhood where residents solve their own issues through local leadership  
a neighbourhood where people are excited to live, know their neighbours well & address issues  
an organization that is leading this type of work

## Introduction

United Way of Halifax Region's mission is to "build an extraordinary community" and to be seen as leaders in community work. This mission was borne out of 80 years of charitable work, but more importantly from a shift in focus over the past 8 years from a traditional charity organization to a community building organization. This shift was consistent with the messaging we were hearing from residents, agencies, businesses and governments through consultation over the past few years. Overwhelmingly, we were told that United Way should be a leader in facilitating positive change in the community and in bringing people together to share information, inspire new leadership, and empower residents to do more.

We've walked the neighbourhood road for some time, and as each year passes we improve and expand on our learnings:

- 2001 - Success By 6
- 2002 - Together for Kids
- 2003 - Networking Grants Established
- 2004 - Local Block Parties
- 2004/2005 - Multi-service Roundtables
- 2005/2006 - Action for Neighbourhood Change in Spryfield
- 2007 - Action for Neighbourhood Change in (*next community*)

Our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy will help provide direction and focus to our neighbourhood work over the next 5 years. There are many paths and models from which to base community building from. For example, work in USA, UK and Australia all have variations on how best to create positive change in the community.

However, one underlying theme in all this work is the engagement of citizens in the process to finding solutions to neighbourhood issues. We also know from research that successful neighbourhood change is brought about by deliberate actions to include residents, businesses, and government in finding local solutions to local problems. We also know that solutions to some systemic issues require more than resident mobilization to solve them: they require a concerted effort by government and business to focus policy and resources.

In keeping with our Strategic Plan, adopted by our Board in June 2006, our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy will focus UWHR's work to selected neighbourhoods by using a range of techniques that include resident engagement, building on local strengths, learning and advocacy, research and policy development.

# imagine

a neighbourhood where residents solve their own issues through local leadership  
a neighbourhood where people are excited to live, know their neighbours well & address issues  
an organization that is leading this type of work

## United Way's Role

There is no doubt that some neighbourhoods in Halifax are trying to tackle tough, complex issues such as high crime, systemic poverty, low education, limited access to employment opportunities, and racism. In the average neighbourhood in Halifax, there are usually several organizations or groups working together on addressing these issues. Some actions are focused, some are over-arching. Many areas have agencies that are focused on specific issues while a few have resident groups that are more than ad-hoc teams.

On their own, or in teams, each of these groups has something to contribute in addressing issues. We believe that many groups, particularly those working in isolation, could make a bigger difference if they shared information, did joint research, collaboratively planned and collectively attacked their issues.

However, we know that these types of networks rarely come together - or stay together – on their own<sup>6</sup>. They are either too busy or not clear on how working with a group of other organizations can make a difference. At times, they may not even know there are other organizations that can help make a real difference. There are other times during a crisis or when issues are unresolved for too long, that networks cannot form on their own.

These are times when a neighbourhood needs United Way of Halifax Region to act as a convener organization.

### As United Way we can:

- Convene and facilitate discussions with residents, businesses and government.
- Bring funding and resource partners to the table.
- Fund and manage local field staff to engage residents.
- Source and interpret data to identify issues and strengths.
- Provide leadership training and capacity building to ensure sustainability in our work.

Each one of these skills alone adds some value to the neighborhood's existing efforts to address specific issues and should, by itself, result in at least a modest level of improvement. However, our real strength and value to neighbourhood work lies in being able to carry out many of these tasks effectively, which is far more likely to improve local efforts that will lead to successful and far reaching results.

Our strength also lies in being able to work effectively with various levels of staff and residents so as to provide a 'network' of access.

<sup>6</sup> Precised from the Convening Organization, amarack Institute for Community Engagement 2004.

imagine

a neighbourhood where residents solve their own issues through local leadership  
a neighbourhood where people are excited to live, know their neighbours well & address issues  
an organization that is leading this type of work

## Theory of Neighbourhood Change & Place Based Work

Neighbourhoods are reflections of the mosaic of residents and cultures, and the results of planning and economic growth (or lack there of).

Neighbourhoods are diverse. They are a home, a street, a team, a community, a feeling, and a sense of place. Ask a 100 people and you will probably get 100 different interpretations on what their neighbourhood is. We also know that neighbourhood work takes time – typically 2 to 5 years depending on the neighbourhood.

In spite of the complexity and variety of neighbourhoods the process by which United Way of Halifax Region can work in neighbourhoods can be fairly consistent and follow a logical procession.

A typical 2 to 4 year chronological process in each neighbourhood would be (with United Way's role detailed below each step):

### 1 Building Understanding & Awareness

This means we are the Initiator of change by working with politicians, collecting data and partnering with organizations and decision makers.

### 2 Building Conditions for Success & Commitment

We are the Facilitator of discussions and bringing convincing arguments to the table for great change with residents, organizations and decision makers.

### 3 Creating Action

United Way is the Manager in bringing the necessary people and resources to the table to plan and implement change.

### 4 Transitioning to Sustainability

United Way's work in the three steps above will put the neighbourhood on the path to great change. Our next role will be to demonstrate Leadership in building lasting relationships for the community - relationships that grow and prosper without the tending of United Way.

Where you start on this procession depends on the particular attributes and stages of resident engagement in a neighbourhood. For example, some neighbourhoods will be well organized and able to exert a high level of power and self-determination in their future. In this case, these neighbourhoods may need support from UWHR in the form of partnership building with government or sourcing matching funds.

Some neighbourhoods may not be well organized and neighbourhood leadership may be weak from years of struggling. This is mostly likely true in economically distressed areas of Halifax. In this case, UWHR may need to focus on facilitating resident engagement to source a vision, find new leaders, organize a local office, and be very 'hands on.'

As a result of this complexity, rarely does neighbourhood work unfold in a logical, systematic and seamless process. Any number of issues can make United Way's work disjointed or uneven.

To be successful at neighbourhood work, we must be ready to accept the different working speeds of neighbourhoods, the uncertainties, and the criticisms that may follow from such complex and difficult work.

# imagine

a neighbourhood where residents solve their own issues through local leadership  
a neighbourhood where people are excited to live, know their neighbours well & address issues  
an organization that is leading this type of work

## Why Focus on Residents to Lead Neighbourhood Change?

Years of research clearly tells us that residents know their challenges best. Residents have the incentive and can reap the direct results of neighbourhood work. Residents provide the wisdom, talent, and knowledge of the community. History has taught us that long-term positive change at the neighbourhood level must start with residents, include them throughout the process and end-up with empowering them to manage their futures.

- Work in collaboration with residents, local businesses, service providers and three levels of government.
- Engage the support of elected representatives.
- Be phased to allow for working in more than one neighbourhood.

### Our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy and Vision

Our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy will fulfill the vision of:

“When neighbours know neighbours, neighbourhoods are safer, more active, vibrant and healthy – a benefit to all.”

Hence, our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy will:

- Focus on residents to shape the vision and future of their neighbourhoods.
- Seek and empower local leadership.
- Focus at the neighbourhood level and target priority neighbourhoods.
- Source fact-based evidence to support and build a case for change.
- Create a culture of learning and advocacy.
- Leverage United Way’s \$150,000 commitment to raise additional funds for community development.
- Be a leading initiative that can influence and continue to build public and political understanding of the importance of strong neighbourhoods to the long-term vibrancy of Halifax.



imagine

a neighbourhood where residents solve their own issues through local leadership  
a neighbourhood where people are excited to live, know their neighbours well & address issues  
an organization that is leading this type of work

## Criteria for Selecting & Working with Neighbourhoods

Neighbourhoods will be chosen based on a number of criteria such as:

- Ability to uptake our work and level of readiness/interest in United Way.
- Current level of engagement and visioning.
- Significance of distress factors (i.e. fact based data on income, crime, educational achievement, isolated families, etc.).
- Level of political interest, desire to work with United Way and overall will to promote change.
- Potential for early wins and long term success.
- History of work in the neighbourhood.

# imagine

a neighbourhood where residents solve their own issues through local leadership  
a neighbourhood where people are excited to live, know their neighbours well & address issues  
an organization that is leading this type of work

## Why this Work Matters

Healthy neighbourhoods are the backbone of a healthy community. Healthy and vibrant neighbourhoods:

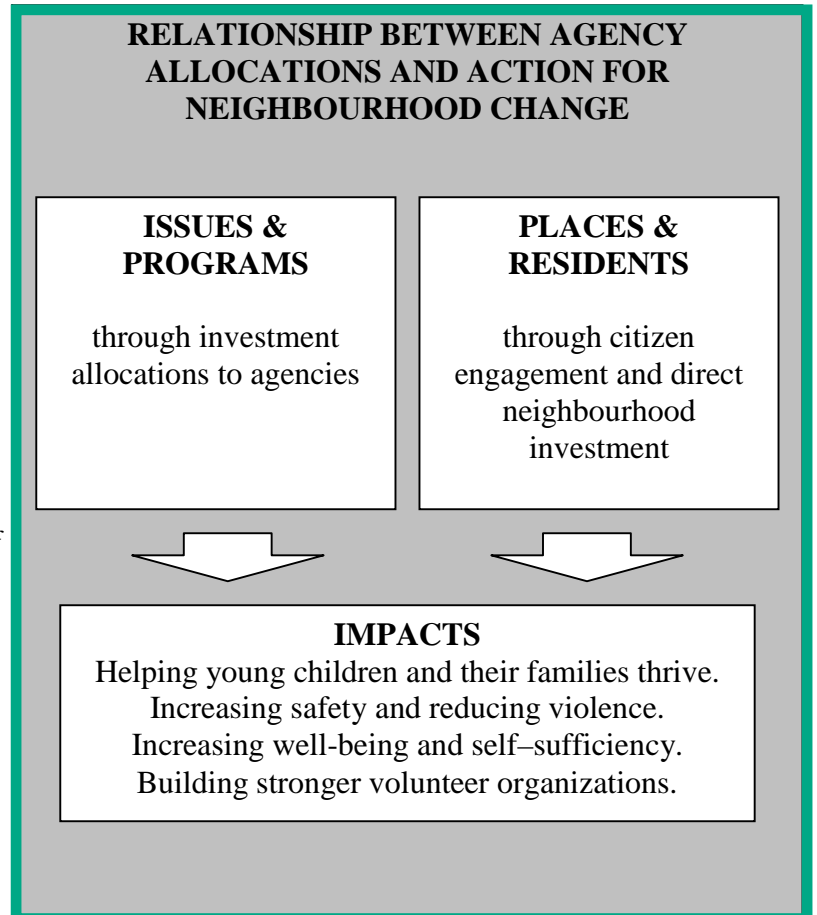
- Are places where people want to live.
- Have strong resident leadership and self promote.
- Have an identity and a vision for the future.
- Build on the community's strengths and assets.
- Attract balanced economic social investment.
- Are resilient and responsive to issues on poverty, crime and other challenges.

This work also compliments our agency investments in communities and fulfils many of our objectives in building an extraordinary community.

Currently, we allocate funds to agencies that address specific issues or programs (e.g. mental health). These issues are not necessarily tied to one particular neighbourhood. *(The left hand side of the diagram).*

Our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy builds on this investment success by allocating funds to resident groups, or place-based initiatives (i.e. neighbourhood park). This work focuses efforts to specific neighbourhoods. *(The right hand side of the diagram).*

Our approach of addressing issues and place-based work will make United Way of Halifax Region a leader in this field.



imagine

a neighbourhood where residents solve their own issues through local leadership  
a neighbourhood where people are excited to live, know their neighbours well & address issues  
an organization that is leading this type of work

## Communications Plan

Our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy needs a strong communications plan. Communication is the hinge-pin to our work; internally to the organization, locally to the community, and regionally to supporting networks. Early in our process, our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy will develop a logo and language that is consistent with our United Way principles and brand. Key aspects of a successful communications plan are:

- Proactive to manage anticipated challenges. Remember neighbourhood work involves many voices, some of which will be negative.
- Reactive to dispel misinformation. We must be quick and decisive to state our principles and defend our work immediately when confronted.
- Promotional to attract and inspire community work. Information sharing is an important part of building awareness with residents, broadcasting our message and building commitment from supporters.
- Informative and persuasive to source funding. Neighbourhood work needs funding. Our communications need to be energetic, targeted and convincing to lobby for funds from a variety of sources.
- Inspiring through celebrating our successes.
- Capitalizing on our brand exposure opportunities.

Our communications must demonstrate credibility of our work and still allow for the community to self-define and promote their own successes. Our communications must provide advocacy work to bridge and bond disparate groups. Lastly, we must publish our findings to build a case for giving and a case for neighbourhood work. In the end, our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy, coupled with a strong communication plan, can raise the United Way's profile as a community builder.

## Partners & Staffing

Our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy sees a strong role for partners; partners to provide funding, access to businesses and governments, and the collection of data. One of the first steps prior to working in a neighbourhood will be to form an 'alliance' of partners and decision makers who need to know about our work, can provide critical information, and can remove barriers to getting the work done.

Our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy will be led and managed by an experienced team of professionals. There will be a core team of internal United Way staff that supports and manages our work through local field teams. The number of field teams will depend on the number of neighbourhoods we are working in but will typically include a neighbourhood development coordinator and local field assistant. The Strategy will be directed by a cross-functional team such as the Community Resource Committee or an external advisory group depending on the size and extent of our work.

# imagine

a neighbourhood where residents solve their own issues through local leadership  
a neighbourhood where people are excited to live, know their neighbours well & address issues  
an organization that is leading this type of work

## How Do We Know We're Successful?

One of the greatest challenges with neighbourhood work is being able to clearly articulate where and when the positive change has occurred. Positive changes are also influenced by a number of issues, which make it difficult to attribute a success to one or two specific activities. This is further complicated by the fact that different neighbourhoods are at different stages on the road to vibrancy and the measures of success will be predicated on each stage.

In general, over the next 5 years, our Vibrant Neighbourhood Strategy will be considered a success if:

- We have created meaningful partnerships with organizations and residents that have removed barriers and fostered great change.
- New leaders are found and supported in the neighbourhood.
- Obvious physical and/or emotional positive changes are taking place at the neighbourhood level (i.e. a community park is developed, a resident association is formed).
- An obvious and deliberate commitment is being made by government and business to address issues.
- United Way is sought on several occasions for opinions on neighbourhood development.
- We are successfully fundraising for neighbourhood-specific initiatives.
- We have an open, working partnership with Halifax Regional Municipality, the Provincial Government and the Federal Government that is leading to drafting a tri-level government agreement.

### Final Thoughts

Find the best people. Adequately fund. Be patient and supportive. Promote and defend our work. Celebrate our success.

# imagine

a neighbourhood where residents solve their own issues through local leadership  
a neighbourhood where people are excited to live, know their neighbours well & address issues  
an organization that is leading this type of work

## Work Plan

The work plan can be divided into three primary areas: short term (one year), medium term (2 to 4 years), and the long term (5 plus years). Within in each area, our Neighbourhood Strategy attempts to define those items that need to be done at the community level and those that need to be completed internal to the United Way.

### Short Term (2006-2007):

#### In Spryfield:

We are currently working in Spryfield with consistent success. As of the summer of 2006 we will have invested over one year of effort in the community. Given that successful neighbourhood work requires two to three years of concerted effort, we propose the following for Spryfield's work:

- Continue creating Action stage in Spryfield in 2007 including formation of Resident and Resource Committees. Hold educational forums for local leaders, support local office and staff until end of 2007.
- Implement a fundraising strategy to leverage additional funds for investment in Spryfield initiatives. A target of \$50,000 is proposed.
- Transition to a sustainable model that relies less on United Way's direct involvement with field staff in spring 2007, and relies more on local leadership. This would include disbanding the office, reducing staff levels and shifting information and momentum of the project to the local organizations in Spryfield.

#### Internally to United Way

- Establish set of neighbourhood indicators with benchmarks.
- Build stronger relationships with the Halifax Regional Municipality by forming an alliance of community minded organizations that are interested in supporting neighbourhood work.
- Craft the Communications Plan to support the Neighbourhood Work.
- Launch a Neighbourhood Giving Initiative.

### Medium Term (2007-2010):

#### In Spryfield:

- Transition United Way's involvement in Spryfield to a supportive role.

#### Work to select other neighbourhood:

- Using our learnings from Action for Neighbourhood Change, commence preliminary work to select another neighbourhood.
- Include politicians from the outset. Engage businesses. Collect fact-based evidence.

#### Internally to United Way:

- Publish our findings and opinions on neighbourhood work.
- Build our credibility as a neighbourhood building organization.
- Promote our findings at conferences, with regional councils and media.

### Long Term (2010 +):

*Pending success of 2007*

imagine

a neighbourhood where residents solve their own issues through local leadership  
 a neighbourhood where people are excited to live, know their neighbours well & address issues  
 an organization that is leading this type of work

## Financial Plan

Neighbourhood work typically requires intensive support in the first two years in a neighbourhood, and sustaining support thereafter. That said, funding will be used to cover the costs of internal staff, local field staff, a local field office, community developers, data collection, and workshop costs. Typically, the majority of the funding goes towards salaries. Revenue sources for the years 2005 to 2010 are as follows:

REVENUE SOURCES FOR UWHR NEIGHBOURHOOD WORK 2005 to 2010						
Neighbourhood Allocations	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>Spryfield</b>						
United Way Operational Funding	\$ -	\$ 20,000	\$ 75,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Neighbourhood Giving Initiative	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000	\$ -	\$ -
Federal Funding	\$ 250,000	\$ 250,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Federal Grants	\$ -	\$ 80,000	\$ 80,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Sub total Spryfield	\$ 250,000	\$ 350,000	\$ 205,000	\$ 50,000	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Neighbourhood "2"</b>						
United Way Funding	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 75,000	\$ 150,000	\$ -	\$ -
Neighbourhood Giving Initiative	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000
Federal Funding	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Federal Grants	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Sub Total Neighbourhood "2"	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 75,000	\$ 150,000	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000
<b>Neighbourhood "3"</b>						
United Way Funding	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 150,000	\$ -
Neighbourhood Giving Initiative	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000
Federal Funding	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Federal Grants	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Sub Total Neighbourhood "3"	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 200,000	\$ 50,000
<b>Summary Totals for All Three Neighbourhoods</b>						
<b>Annual Budget Total's By Source For All Neighbourhoods</b>						
United Way Operational Funding	\$ -	\$ 20,000	\$ 150,000	\$ 150,000	\$ 150,000	\$ -
Neighbourhood Giving Initiative	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000
Federal Funding	\$ 250,000	\$ 250,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Federal Grants	\$ -	\$ 80,000	\$ 80,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Annual Budget Total For All Neighbourhoods Above</b>	<b>\$ 250,000</b>	<b>\$ 350,000</b>	<b>\$ 280,000</b>	<b>\$ 200,000</b>	<b>\$ 250,000</b>	<b>\$ 100,000</b>

For each neighbourhood we work in, we believe a minimum requirement is \$150,000 for the first year and then \$100,000 for the second and subsequent years. Sources of funding may vary depending on fund raising efforts (Neighbourhood Giving Initiative) and federal funding opportunities (such as Action for Neighbourhood Change). However at a minimum, United Way of Halifax Region has already committed \$150,000 for neighbourhood work each year for five years. The \$150,000 comprises 2.8% of our 2005 annual campaign. It is hoped that our neighbourhood work will see this operational contribution rise over time to at least 5 or 6% of the annual campaign by 2010.

Detailed budgets and work plans will be crafted for each neighbourhood.