

2024 GRANTS FOR COMMUNITY PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Report Author: Executive Officer Partnerships & Community Building
Responsible Officer: Director Communities
Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This item is to be considered at a Council meeting open to the public.

SUMMARY

Council is committed to partnering with the community through grant funding to encourage, support, and sustain an array of community-led initiatives. Grants support community led projects aligned to the delivery of Council's strategic objective of *"Connected and Healthy Communities."* These grants help communities to thrive, build social connections, enhance liveability, recover from natural disasters, and facilitate stronger, more resilient communities.

The three streams in the Grants for Community program focus on community development, arts and heritage, and festivals and events to bring community together. The grants encourage an asset-based community development (ABCD) approach, harnessing the strengths, experience, and ideas of communities across the municipality.

Two independent panels met for a day long deliberation where they developed a consensus on their recommendations to Council. This report presents the Panels' recommendations for projects to be funded through the 2024 Grants for Community Program. The projects recommended in each stream are contained in Attachment One. The recommendations are for funding totalling \$499,856.69 which is within the 2023-24 endorsed budget.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

1. ***Endorse the recommendations of the two assessment panels to award grants to projects that will be delivered in 2024 as part of the Grants for Community program***
 - (a) ***Arts and Heritage, 17 projects to the total value of \$160,133.***
 - (b) ***Community Development, 35 projects to the total value of \$241,920.***
 - (c) ***Festivals and Events, 14 projects to the total value of \$97,805.***
2. ***Acknowledge the panel members for their contribution of time and expertise in assessing the grant projects recommended for funding.***

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

At its meeting of 9 May 2023 Council endorsed the following recommendations.

That Council endorse

1. *The 2024 Grants for Community guidelines, selection criteria and assessment panel members.*
2. *The allocation of \$500,000 to the program in the 2023-2024 budget as follows:*
 - a. *\$125,000 Festivals and Events*
 - b. *\$125,000 Arts and Heritage*
 - c. *\$250,000 Community Development.*

Council endorsed its Grant Policy in May 2020. The policy which provides high level guidance to its grant making functions.

DISCUSSION

The Grants for Community program harnesses the skills, knowledge and inspiration of artists, community organisations, volunteers, and services to deliver outcomes in their communities.

Purpose and Background

The objective of this annual grant program is to foster mental and physical wellbeing, increase social connection, facilitate cultural and heritage development, and celebrate local communities. Projects recommended by the Panels for the 2024 Grants for Community Program will support local community groups and creatives to implement projects that strengthen their communities with outcomes that are:

- creative and innovative, support recovery, build resilience, strengthen social connection, support the development of skills, capacity building and community leadership, and encourage community networks.

The three streams of the 2024 Grants for Community are:

Arts and Heritage - opportunities for community expression, to tell stories, connect with one another, and contribute to a sense of creativity, identity, and wellbeing.

Festivals and Events - community delivered activities that enhance local culture, celebrate community spirit, and contribute to the liveability of Yarra Ranges.

Community Development - focuses on people and social connection, building community capacity, promoting respect, equality, and asset-based community development projects.

Options

A thorough assessment process was undertaken. This three-stage process involves: eligibility checks, panel members' individual assessments, and the Deliberation Day to develop final recommendations.

The independent panels' recommendations are to fund a range of projects that meet the eligibility and strategic criteria of the program. The panels noted the depth of community projects and were impressed by the amount of volunteer contribution and people involved in their communities again.

This report presents the panel recommendations for endorsement by Council.

Recommended option and justification

The recommendations from the two independent assessment panels contained in Attachment 2 are presented for Council endorsement.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

The approved budget allocation for the 2024 Grants for Community program is \$500,000. The recommendations are within the allocated budget.

The projects recommended by the independent assessment panels are summarised below:

Grant Stream	Applications Recommended	Funds Recommended
Community Development	35	\$241,920.00
Arts and Heritage	17	\$160,133.00
Festivals and Events	14	\$ 97,805.00
Total	66	\$499,858.00

The Community Development Panel re-allocated \$8,000 to the Arts and Heritage stream to enable them to fund all the projects the Panel recommended. In the Festival and Events stream the total allocation was under the budgeted amount and re-allocated to Arts and Heritage projects.

Generally, the Panels sought to fund projects adequately and in line with the amount requested. Any recommendations for less than the amount requested were the result of considered decisions based on project aims and budget set out in the applications.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

The Grants for Community program supports Council's strategic objective to create "*Connected and Healthy Communities*".

The following Council Plan actions are well supported by the Grants program.

- Strengthen relationships and networks to support local community groups and build their capacity to be active in achieving community outcomes (CP 5.10.1.1).
- Improve mental health outcomes for the community, strengthen social connections, and advocate for equitable and accessible mental health services across the municipality (1.5.2.3).

Following the pandemic, the 2021 storms and then floods that have affected our communities, it is important to note that these grants also continue to provide support for recovery and resilience building. The importance of community led recovery remains central to how Council approaches the ongoing process of recovery.

The program invites and supports outcomes aligned with Council goals and objectives in the following strategies, plans and policies:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and Wellbeing Strategy • Creative Communities Strategy • Equity Access and Inclusion Strategy • Child and Youth Strategy • Municipal Recovery Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy and Active Ageing Plan • Liveable Climate Plan • Environment Strategy • Draft Recreation and Open Space Strategy • Reconciliation Action Plan
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RELEVANT LAW

Grants for Community can contribute to addressing the requirements of the *Gender Equality Act 2020* through promoting and encouraging consideration of a gender and intersectionality perspective in the application process. The grants include consideration of 11 Child Safe Standards and meeting the requirement of these standards where there is direct and indirect contact with children and young people.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Section 9(2)(c) of the Local Government Act 2020 states: *“the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks, is to be promoted”*. The following sections of the report address this.

Economic Implications

Grants can have positive impacts on local economies, with events and festivals generating significant economic activity, income and raising the profile of local areas. There are 14 Festivals and Events recommended this year that will bring economic activity into their areas.

Grants can also leverage volunteer contributions and attract resources through other funders. Grant applicants are encouraged to “buy local first” when procuring goods and services, in line with Council’s Grants Policy.

Social Implications

All projects recommended in this year’s Grants for Community program have important social outcomes. Projects will build community connections, strengthen cultural expression, and support activities that nurture the overall health and wellbeing of local communities. Increased social inclusion will be delivered through diverse projects such as: support for young people leaving out of home care, an active seniors’ project, radio skills for young people, and music to reduce isolation.

Environmental Implications

The program includes criteria for projects that safeguard the environment, build environmental resilience, and engage people with the natural environment. In this year's round there are community gardens and environmental projects recommended. These projects have additional health and wellbeing benefits for participants through social connection for example getting involved in growing food with others.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Prior to the round, applicants and panel members from the 2023 grant round were consulted to capture their observations of the process, any lessons and general feedback.

To engage community members and organisations in the opportunity to seek a grant, Council hosted three online and in person grant information sessions. A skill building workshop helped with grant seeking, designing projects, project implementation and acquitting grant funding. These sessions also promote networking across groups and projects to strengthen connections.

The assessment panels provided feedback on further improvements to the application process so that applicants can be clearer about what their project wants to achieve, how they will do that, the budget needed and who will be involved. These valuable insights and tips for applicants will inform improvements in future rounds.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

No collaboration with other Councils, governments or statutory bodies was sought. Continuous improvement is a focus in each round. For this round the following were part of the grant initiation process:

- Changes informed by feedback from previous round.
- Reducing the number of questions and changes to make the questions clearer.
- Review and updating of the criteria.
- Seeking feedback from this year's panels to be included in future rounds.

Further feedback including from the Panels will lead to more improvements to the process in future rounds.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The Auditor General's report into local government grant making identified areas for improvement for the Council's that were audited. Officers reviewed these findings. An action regarding training for the organisation on the potential for grant related fraud will be progressed.

The table outlines the other risks inherent in the program and mitigating actions:

Risk	Mitigation
Conflicts of interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel members asked to declare COI and not assess that application. The member left the room during deliberations. • Assessment forms begin with asking if there is a conflict.
Confidentiality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel need to keep recommendations confidential until after the Council decision and sign a confidentiality agreement to this effect.
Panel members targeted by unhappy applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel member names are not made public.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

Panel members with a conflict with any applications declare the conflict and do not assess. There were conflicts for some panel members and the process outlined above was followed.

ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT

1. Panel Recommendations for Funding - 2024 Grants for Community Round.