

2023-2027 PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Report Author: Manager Creative & Connected Communities
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 that is open to the public.

SUMMARY

Council makes an important and targeted investment in its communities through a variety of grants programs. The multi-year Partnership Program offers key service providers, community and cultural groups the opportunity to secure recurring funding to support delivery of vital community services, facilitating positive social change, and celebrating the diversity and cultural uniqueness of the Yarra Ranges.

The current Partnership Program concludes on 30 June 2023.

This report presents proposed program guidelines and criteria for the 2023-2027 Partnership Program (Attachment 1: 2023-2027 Partnership Program Guidelines and Selection Criteria), budget implications and findings and recommendations from the 2018-2022 Partnership Program and proposed 2023-2027 Partnership Program assessment panel members.

Pending Council approval, the 2023-2027 Partnership Program is scheduled to open for applications on 1 October 2022.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

- 1. Endorse the 2023-2027 Partnership Program guidelines and selection criteria;***
- 2. Endorse the 2022-2023 allocation of \$498,575.00 to the program as follows:***
 - \$330,000.00 Connected & Healthy Communities stream; and***
 - \$168,575.00 Creative Communities stream;***

3. ***Endorse an annual adjustment for subsequent 2024-2027 payments in line with rate capping; and***
4. ***Note the 2018-2022 Partnership Program review findings and recommendations and the proposed 2023-2027 Partnership Program assessment panel members.***

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

Several past Council decisions relate to this report:

- Endorsed 2018-2022 Partnership Program budget, September 2017; and,
- Council endorsed the Grants Policy, May 2020, which provides high level guidance to its grant making.

DISCUSSION

Purpose and Background

Council invests through Partnership Program grants in communities across the region. Targeted funding, coupled with strong relationships, enables Council and funded Partners to build an empowered, vibrant and inclusive Yarra Ranges, together.

Partnership Program outcomes contribute to Council's strategic objectives, enabling delivery of vital community services to facilitate positive social change while celebrating the diversity and cultural uniqueness of the Yarra Ranges. The program also provides a platform to promote inclusion and sustainability objectives.

The program has two grant streams operating on a four-year funding cycle:

Connected and Healthy Communities: Supports organisations to deliver programs and services that align with Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Creative Communities: Supports community groups to deliver programs and events that enhance local culture, celebrate creativity and contribute to the liveability of Yarra Ranges.

The Partnership Program also seeks to build partner capacity. Formal and informal development opportunities are offered including access to Council's free Skills Building Program. Workshops, informed by partner feedback, have included topics such as outcome planning, grant writing and risk management.

The Partnership Program has undergone operational reviews with each program iteration. Recommendations from previous reviews such as improved equity and transparency through an open, competitive application process, increased partner capacity building and funding stability were embedded into the 2018-2022 Partnership Program.

To be eligible to apply, applicants must:

- Demonstrate a strong alignment with Council's adopted strategies;
- Fulfil the selection criteria (strategic connection, community benefit, organisational capacity, partnerships/collaboration and inclusion);
- Have prior experience delivering initiatives funded by Council; and
- Demonstrate a willingness to collaborate. Grant support is distributed as operational funding or for specific programs.

The Partnership Program is underpinned by a bi-annual monitoring process. Council staff are assigned Partners to provide support to additional in-kind resources and overseeing monitoring milestones.

In response to COVID-19 impacts, a 12 month extension of the program was granted with current Partnership Agreements due to expire 30 June 2023.

Historically, the Partnership Program has been competitive with strong applications and a finite funding pool with many 2018-2022 Partners receiving partial funding.

With growing awareness of the Partnership Program within the community it is anticipated there will be an increase in program demand from groups and organisations currently funded within the annual Grants for Community program.

Current Partners will be advised of the competitive nature of the program through targeted communication in the lead up to the round opening. The broader community will be informed as part of the program promotion strategy.

The application process is currently being reviewed in order to simplify the requirements of applicants. Any improvements in the process will be incorporated into the 2023-2027 Partnership Program application process.

Key Issues

2018-2022 Partnership Program Survey

A survey was conducted with current partners in April 2022. The aim was to gain grassroots partner insights, ascertain program effectiveness, identify barriers, support required and development opportunities for the program's next iteration. This approach aligns with a commitment to continuous improvement to ensure the program remains flexible and evolves to meet community need.

2023-2027 Partnership Program Reference Group

A 2023-2027 Partnership Program Reference Group (PRG) representing a diverse range of partners appointed by Council (through an EOI process) and Key Council Officers was established to inform program development including examination of key documentation, program guidelines, criteria, application and reporting processes.

An externally facilitated workshop conducted on 1 June 2022 with the PRG, resulted in recommendations for continuous improvement for the new program.

Key recommendations included to:

- Maintain current partnership program frameworks;
- Utilise program reporting data to celebrate partner/program achievements;
- Investigate opportunities for mentoring and resource sharing; and
- Explore adoption of a collective, outcome-based approach.

Review of the 2018-2022 Partnership Program

A high-level review of annual reporting within the 2018-2022 Partnership Program has been conducted to identify key learnings from the previous program and to assess the value of the program and effectiveness of the alignment to Councils strategic objectives.

A summary of combined recommendations is detailed in Attachment 2: 2023-2027 Partnership Program Recommendations and Proposed Assessment Panel Members).

The Assessment Panel Process

Community members are invited to sit on one of two panels - Creative Communities and Connected and Healthy Communities. A Council Officer, independent to the grants process, is included on each panel to provide subject matter expertise and objective input. Council's role as the final decision maker concludes the governance process for the program.

Two groups of proposed assessment panel members are presented in this report (refer Attachment 2: 2023-2027 Partnership Program Recommendations and Proposed Assessment Panel Members). Panel members will be confirmed prior to the grant round closing. Should panel members withdraw from the process, there is a pool of potential members to draw as replacement.

Options considered

Options that were considered and rejected include:

- Ceasing the Partnership Program. Partners rely on funding from the Partnership Program to undertake vital community services. Reputational risk to Council would likely ensue by terminating this long-standing funding opportunity; and
- Renewing the 2018-2022 Partnership Program without change. Introduction of an annual increase, in line with current rate cap is required to support rising costs, as are refinements to planning and reporting to ensure financial accountability, data analysis, celebrating success and transparency in the Partnership Program.

Recommended option and justification

- Proceed with a revised 2023-2027 Partnership Program, utilising existing frameworks and to include an annual payment increase, in line with the current rate cap for all Partners which considers recommendations from a 2018-2022 Partnership Program Partner Survey, Program Reference Group feedback and an internal review of the 2018-2022 Partnership Program.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

The 2018-2022 program currently funds 35 partners representing an annual investment of approximately \$490,000.

The 2022-2023 budget includes the following proposed annual allocations for each funding category:

- \$330,000.00 Connected and Healthy Communities; and
- \$168,575.00 Creative Communities.

Funding totalling \$2,083,090.92 (over 4 years) will be made available through the 2023-2027 Partnership Program. It is proposed that Grant payments include an annual adjustment in line with rate capping.

The projected budget for each year of the 2023-2027 Partnership Program is outlined below. Proposed figures are based on the current rate cap of 1.75%.

Year	Base Rate	Rate Cap @ 1.75%	Total
2023-2024	\$498,575.00	\$8,725.06	\$507,300.06
2024-2025	\$507,300.06	\$8,877.75	\$516,177.81
2025-2026	\$516,177.81	\$9,033.11	\$525,210.93
2026-2027	\$525,210.93	\$9,191.19	\$534,402.12
Total			\$ 2,083,090.92

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

This report contributes to the following strategic objective(s) in the Council Plan:

“Connected and Healthy Communities”

Communities are safe, resilient, healthy, inclusive and socially well connected. Quality services are accessible to everyone.

“Vibrant Economy, Agriculture and Tourism”

Our tourism, agriculture, health, manufacturing and other industries are leading and dynamic. Strong investment and attraction underpin sustainable economic growth and job creation.

In addition, the program requires that Partners achieve positive community outcomes aligned with Council goals and objectives in the following strategies, plans and policies:

- Health and Wellbeing Strategy;
- Creative Communities Strategy;
- Equity Access and Inclusion Strategy;
- Child and Youth Strategy;
- Healthy and Active Ageing Plan;
- Liveable Climate Plan; and
- Reconciliation Framework for Action and Reconciliation Policy.

RELEVANT LAW

The 2023-2027 Partnership Program application form and agreement will include a statement about commitment to Council’s Gender Equity vision and meeting requirements of the Gender Equality Act 2020.

Economic Implications

Grant funded programs can have positive impacts on local economies, with some large events and festivals generating significant income and raising the profile of local areas.

Grants often leverage volunteer contributions and resources through other funders.

Social Implications

The majority of services and programs supported by *Partnership Grants* have social impacts, building community connections and strengthening local communities. Increased social inclusion across two grant categories delivers diverse benefits, from community legal services through to festival development.

Funding opportunities also deliver vital resources to support community-led recovery through building community connection and facilitating strong, resilient communities.

Environmental Implications

The program includes criteria that address Council’s sustainability strategic plan for projects that safeguard the environment and engage people with the natural environment.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community information sessions across Yarra Ranges will be held to ensure that current and prospective Partner organisations are:

- Briefed about program aims, eligibility requirements, resources available;
- Aware of the open, competitive application process and funding available; and
- Supported during the application process.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Cross Council benchmarking was conducted to help gain an understanding of what other Councils offer in the multi-year funding space.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Risks associated with grant making require consideration of fair and proper processes, sound record keeping, transparent and ethical decision making and adherence to the *Local Government Act 2020*.

Risk	Mitigation
Impact on community of underperforming Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluation completed• Program Guidelines• Refinement with accountability to Council for the funding received through reporting process• Designated Council support contact responsible for support and monitoring
Misallocation of grant funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Robust application process• Two assessment panels with independent, community representation, to assess and make funding recommendations to Council (refer Attachment 2: 2023-2027 Partnership Program Recommendations and Proposed Assessment Panel Members)• Detailed funding agreements modelled off neighbourhood house partnership program.

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*.

ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT

1. 2023-2027 Partnership Program – Program Guidelines & Selection Criteria;
and
2. 2023-2027 Partnership Program Recommendations and Proposed Assessment
Panel Members