

GRANTS FOR COMMUNITY FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS 2023

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 is committed to partnering with the community through grants to encourage, support and sustain a range of cultural, social and community initiatives.

The 2023 Grants for Community round has sought to prioritise projects which build mental and physical health and wellbeing, support strong and sustainable community connections and nurture thriving local places.

This report presents projects recommended for funding for the 2023 calendar year. Council opened the grant round 1 June 2022 and closed 15 July 2022 receiving 91 applications for the round, across three program streams:

- 42 Community Development;
- 29 Arts and Heritage; and
- 20 Festivals and Events.

Two independent panels recommend 63 applications be funded, totalling \$480,138.12. These recommendations conclude a robust and transparent assessment process.

The grants celebration event, which acknowledges successful grant recipients and showcases 2022 Grants for Community projects, is scheduled for Thursday 8 December 2022.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

Endorse the 2023 Grants for Community Program funding recommendations totalling \$480,138.12 as follows:

- 1. \$199,207.40 for 28 projects in the Community Development stream;***
- 2. \$146,485.72 for 19 projects in the Arts & Heritage stream; and***
- 3. \$134,445.00 for 16 projects in the Festivals & Events stream.***

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

Several past Council decisions relate to this report:

- The 2020-21 budget endorsed in 2020 included an additional \$100,000 for Grants for Community. In 2020 these funds were re-directed to the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Program as a once-off;
- Council endorsed a Grants Policy in May 2020 which provides grant making high level guidance; and
- May 2022 Council endorsed the 2023 Grants for Community Program funding round and guidelines.

DISCUSSION

Purpose

This report presents Council with funding recommendations for the 2023 Grants for Community Program, from the two independent assessment panels.

Background

The Grants for Community round supports local community groups, and those outside the Yarra Ranges who deliver local community outcomes, to implement projects through Council funding. The program aims to foster mental and physical wellbeing, increase social connection and facilitate cultural and heritage development. This program enables grassroots communities to access valuable resources to respond to local issues. This is often achieved through creative and innovative endeavours which build resilience, collaboration, social engagement, capacity, leadership and independence.

The 2023 Grants for Community round has three streams:

- **Community Development** - focuses on collaboration, people and building communities around the principles of respect, equality and community led responses to local needs, issues and opportunities;
- **Arts and Heritage** - provides opportunities for the community to express, tell stories, connect and contribute to a sense of creativity, identity and wellbeing; and
- **Festivals and Events** - supports community groups to deliver activities that enhance local culture, celebrate community spirit and contribute to the liveability of Yarra Ranges.

Building Capacity in Communities

Complementary to grant funding is Council's annual skills building program. This program is designed to develop the capacity of community groups through free workshops. Curriculum is informed by feedback from workshop participants, consultation with community groups, volunteers and through advice from Council Officers. Topics covered in the curriculum include an online workshop on "Successful Grant Writing" as a practical prelude to the grant round opening. A Child Safe Standards workshop was also offered to equip current and future grant recipients with practical tools and support.

Program Initiation

Council endorsed the grants budget, selection criteria and panel process for the 2023 *Grants for Community* program at its meeting on 10 May 2022. Following endorsement, the grant round opened on 1 June 2022 and closed 15 July 2022. Council Officers worked alongside grant seekers to coach, encourage and build their grant making capacity.

The Assessment Panel Process

Community members are invited to sit on one of two panels: Creative Communities (Arts & Heritage, Festivals & Events); and Community Development. 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.

The assessment process is intensive and time consuming. As such, an honorarium and small gift of appreciation is offered to external, volunteer panellists in recognition of their contribution.

Assessment panel members are presented in Attachment 1 - 2023 Grants for Community Assessment Panel Member Details.

Panel members assessed applications independently through SmartyGrants, Council's grant database, before attending an all-day session to reach consensus

with funding recommendations. Conflicts of Interest were actively monitored throughout the process with panel members removed from discussion and decision-making where appropriate.

Grants for Community Program 2023

The 2023 grant applications included a diverse range of projects designed to build mental and physical health and wellbeing, support strong and sustainable community connections and nurture thriving local places.

Options considered

All submissions were considered by an external assessment panel and recommendations made based on the quality of submissions against endorsed selection criteria. Where necessary, clarification or further information was sought from applicants.

Recommended option and justification

The panel recommendations are outlined in Attachment 2 – 2023 Grants for Community Funding Recommendations

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

The approved budget allocation for the 2023 *Grants for Community* round was \$500,000 distributed across three funding streams:

- \$125,000 - Arts and Heritage;
- \$125,000 – Festivals & Events; and
- \$250,000 – Community Development.

Panel members assessed each application independently before meeting on 25 August 2022 to consider all projects and develop recommendations to Council.

The round was competitive. Within the funding limitations, a high proportion of projects are recommended for funding. A number of these projects are recommended to receive partial funding, with the panel determining that project outcomes could still be achieved.

Following the assessment process for the Community Development stream there was \$50,792.60 surplus funds remaining. To further support suitable applications across other grant streams, the assessment panel recommended an allocation of \$21,485.72 into the Art and Heritage stream and an allocation of \$9,445.00 into the Festival and Events stream.

Recommendations are for one-off funding to support projects occurring in the 2023 calendar year.

A summary of applications recommended for funding by the independent assessment panels is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Recommended Applications

Grant Stream	Applications Recommended	Funds Recommended
Community Development	28	\$199,207.40
Arts and Heritage	19	\$146,485.72
Festivals and Events	16	\$134,445.00
Total	63	\$480,138.12

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

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

The *Grants for Community* program supports Council's strategic objective to create "Connected and Healthy Communities". The program achieves positive outcomes aligned with several Council goals and objectives in the following strategies:

- Health and Wellbeing Strategy;
- Creative Communities Strategy;
- Equity, Access and Inclusion Strategy;
- Child and Youth Strategy;
- Economic Development Strategy;
- Environment Strategy and Liveable Climate Plan; and
- Reconciliation Framework for Action and Reconciliation Policy.

RELEVANT LAW

The 2023 Grants for Community Program Application Form and Agreement include a statement about commitment to Council's gender equity vision and meeting requirements of the *Gender Equality Act 2020*

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

Grants have positive impacts on local economies, with long-standing events and festivals generating income and raising the profile of local areas. The re-emergence of such events (following cancellations in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19) supports local economies in contributing to the recovery process.

Grants leverage volunteer contributions and resources through other funders. Applicants are encouraged to "buy local first" when procuring goods and services in line with Council's Grants Policy.

Social Implications

Projects supported by the program across all grant categories have wide ranging positive social impacts that nurture the overall health and wellbeing of local communities. Projects build community connection, strengthen cultural expression, support activities that increase social inclusion and deliver vital resources that encourage community-led recovery, facilitating strong, resilient communities.

Environmental Implications

The program includes criteria for projects that protect the environment, build environmental resilience and sustainability, and engage people with the natural environment. Several projects recommended for funding will have a range of environmental outcomes.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Online public information sessions were hosted via Zoom by Council Officers to encourage participation from across the municipality. The sessions incorporated a Q & A panel of current grant recipients who shared hints and tips.

Council Officers dedicated many hours to supporting grant seekers through encouragement, coaching and individual project development. This engagement aims to develop skills and expertise in grant seeking, designing projects or activities, managing community organisations, budgeting and acquitting grant funding.

Panel members from the 2022 Grants for Community round provided feedback to inform the process for the 2023 round.

Council Officers provided feedback to help refresh the 2023 Grants for Community guidelines and criteria.

With a commitment to continuous improvement, this program is reviewed annually, gathering feedback and insights throughout the year to understand community experience of the program.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

No collaboration with other Councils, Governments or statutory bodies was sought.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Table 2. Risk Assessment

Risk	Mitigation
Funds not allocated appropriately	Budget endorsed by Council Robust assessment process to consider applications with selection criteria Detailed funding agreements and acquittal process outlined in application process Process for variation of agreements

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 Grants for Community Assessment Panel Member Details
2. 2023 Grants for Community Funding Recommendations.