

## **PARTNERSHIP GRANTS RECOMMENDATIONS 2023**

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Report Author:           Manager Creative & Connected Communities  
Responsible Officer:    Director Communities  
Ward(s) affected:        (All Wards);

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*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 will be considered for decision at a Council meeting that is open to the public on 28 March 2023.

### **SUMMARY**

Council invests in community wellbeing through its grant programs. The four-year Partnership Program offers service providers, community groups and cultural organisations the opportunity to secure funding to support delivery of vital community services and activities. This important support for community wellbeing is generally not within Council's role to directly deliver. The outcomes delivered through the program align with Council's strategic direction.

This report presents the recommendations for the 2023-2027 Partnership Program for Council endorsement. These are based on the independent panels' deliberations and assessment and the panels' endorsement of additional funding for the programs to better match their assessments.

Council received 52 eligible applications in two funding streams:

- Connected and Healthy Communities (27) and Creative Communities (25)

The recommendations for Year 1, total \$558,000.00. After Council endorsement an investment in communities of \$2,232,000.00 will be made during the four-years of the program. This includes an additional \$59,500 per year above the currently allocated budget of \$498,500 to better align with the Panels' assessments.

Following Council's decision, the successful applicants will be notified, and the 2023-2027 Partnership Program and payments will commence in July 2023.

## RECOMMENDATION

### *That Councillors:*

1. ***Endorse the funding recommendations of the Panels as follows;***
  - (a) ***22 Connected and Healthy Communities grants, for a total of \$367,000.00 in Year 1 and \$1,468,000.00 across the four-year program lifecycle plus the annual rate base increase.***
  - (b) ***18 Creative Communities grants, for a total of \$191,000.00 in Year 1 and \$764,000.00 across the four-year program lifecycle plus the annual rate base increase.***
2. ***Endorse the provision of a one-off \$20,000 additional payment to Dandenong Ranges Music Council from the 2022-2023 endorsed Grants for Community budget to assist with the transition to the funding recommended by the Panel.***
3. ***Acknowledge the significant contribution of the community members on the panel.***

## RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

Several past Council decisions relate to this report:

- 27 September 2022 initiation report for the 2023-27 Partnership Program;
- 2018-2022 Partnership Program budget endorsement in 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 in communities through its Partnership Grants to fund services and activities across the municipality. Targeted funding, coupled with strong partnering relationships, enables Council and funded Partners to build a more empowered, vibrant, and inclusive Yarra Ranges, together.

Outcomes of the Program contribute to Council's strategic objectives, enabling delivery of vital community services to; facilitate positive social change, increase social connection, and celebrate the diversity and cultural uniqueness of Yarra Ranges. The program also promotes Council's inclusion and sustainability objectives.

Council endorsed the budget, selection criteria and panel process for the 2023-27 Partnership Program on 27 September 2022. The grant round opened on 1 October

and closed on 15 November 2022. The panels met in December 2022 to consider the applications. Applications were received in two grant streams:

**Connected and Healthy Communities:** supports organisations to deliver programs and services that align with Council's Health and Wellbeing Plan.

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

Historically, the Partnership Program has strong competition for a finite pool of funding. Previous partners and the broader community were advised of the competitive nature of the program leading up to, and throughout the round.

### ***The Assessment Panel Process***

Community members were invited to participate on two panels - Creative Communities and Connected and Healthy Communities. A Council Officer panel member provided subject matter expertise. Council's role in considering endorsement of the panel recommendations, completes the governance structure of the program.

Consideration of a recent VAGO report into local government grant making indicates Council's assessment process are robust and appropriate.

### **Key issues**

#### **Overall funding available**

Following Councillor feedback a review of both panels' deliberations identified projects that the panels felt warranted more funding but were initially recommended less because of budget constraints. In consultation with the Panels, additional funding was allocated above the original available budget which better aligned with their original deliberations.

Additional funding of \$37,000 for the Connected and Healthy Communities stream and \$22,500 for the Creative Communities stream is included in the recommendations as a result.

#### **Impact of panel recommendations on some applicants**

The recommendations of the Creative Communities panel included reduced funding for a long-term partner, Dandenong Ranges Music Council (DRMC). This will likely have impacts for the organisation which delivers cultural programming in the Hills region.

Recognising the long-standing contribution made by DRMC to community music and performance in the region, a separate one-off payment of \$20,000 in year one of the agreement is recommended. This will support a transition to the new funding level as recommended. Officers will continue to work closely with DRMC through this transition.

## ***Options considered***

### Option - Connected and Healthy Stream

The annual amount of the recommendations includes an increase of \$37,000 over the budget which is an additional \$148,000 over the four years of the program, see Attachment 1. This will assist the partners to deliver important services, support and social connection in their communities. The total of grants recommended in this stream each year, is \$367,000 (plus an annual increase in line with the rate base).

### Option - Creative Communities Stream

The annual amount of the recommendations includes an increase of \$22,500 over the budget per year which totals an additional \$90,000 over the four years. The recommendations are outlined in Attachment 2. The total of grants recommended each year is \$191,000 (plus annual increase in line with the rate base).

### Option – Dandenong Ranges Music Council

As a separate initiative, it is proposed that DRMC receive a one-off transitional payment of \$20,000. Officers will work with DRMC to build their ability to generate income and attract other funding through a transition period.

## ***Recommended options and justification***

It is recommended to distribute funding as per the endorsed budget, along with additional funds to be identified through the budget process for the increases outlined in the revised panel recommendations. The total expenditure for the program is \$558,000 per annum, with details set out in the Finance section below.

The recommendations support Council's role in providing funding to the not-for-profit sector and recognises the central role these services and cultural activities play in the overall wellbeing of the community. Throughout the pandemic and storm disasters, Council tracked impacts with funded partners and observed their central role in times of shocks from disasters, the pandemic and other unanticipated events as then in community recovery.

Partner organisations are a priority and a valued resource in reconnecting, restoring, and building back resilience into communities. This is in line with Council's strategic focus on resilience and health and wellbeing and aligns with Council's strategic intent for Creative Communities.

## **FINANCIAL ANALYSIS**

### **Original Budget - Partnerships**

The approved budget for the 2023-27 Partnership Program was \$498,500.00 across two funding streams:

- Connected and Healthy Communities: \$330,000.00; and

- Creative Communities: \$168,500.00

**Budget for Recommended Partnerships**

The revised budget required to fund the recommendations for the two streams is:

- Connected and Healthy Communities: \$367,000.00 (additional \$37,000); and
- Creative Communities: \$191,000.00 (additional \$22,500)

The total budget to meet the recommendations per year is \$558,000.

The panels were guided by the strategic criteria for the program endorsed by Council in September 2022. Panel members assessed applications independently through SmartyGrants, before an in-person deliberation workshop to reach consensus. Conflicts of Interest were monitored, and Panel members excused themselves from decision making if they had a conflict and did not score applications.

**Recommendations**

The table below shows revised Panel recommendations as supported by the Panels.

Funding Stream	Applications Recommended	Recommended endorsed by Panels			
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Connected and Healthy Communities	22	\$367,000.00	\$367,000.00	\$367,000.00	\$367,000.00
Creative Communities	18	\$191,000.00	\$191,000.00	\$191,000.00	\$191,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>\$558,000.00</b>	<b>\$558,000.00*</b>	<b>\$558,000.00*</b>	<b>\$558,000.00*</b>

The four-year commitment for the Partnerships is \$2,232,000 (\*plus an increase in line with percentage of the Council rate base increase, in years 2, 3 and 4).

All applicants regardless of the recommendations in this program were referred to the Recovery Grants through the Regional Community Recovery Committees (RCRC).

**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:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Health and Wellbeing Strategy</li><li>• Creative Communities Strategy</li><li>• Equity Access and Inclusion Strategy</li><li>• Child and Youth Strategy</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Healthy and Active Ageing Plan</li><li>• Liveable Climate Plan</li><li>• Reconciliation Framework and Policy</li></ul>
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## **RELEVANT LAW**

The 2023-2027 Partnership Program application form and agreement will include a statement about commitment to Council's Gender Equity and that successful projects need to meet the requirements of the Gender Equality Act 2020. Child Safe Standards compliance requirements are also included in the grant processes.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

### ***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, bringing economic benefits locally.

### ***Social Implications***

Services and programs supported by Council's *Partnership Grants* have social impact, build community connection, and strengthen local communities. Partnerships support social inclusion and deliver many benefits e.g., access to community-based services, accessible emergency relief in local communities and programs that increase volunteering and foster mental wellbeing. Festivals and cultural development activities support social connection, a diversity of cultural projects and provides opportunities for local artists and performers. All contribute to community wellbeing. Partnership funding also delivers vital resources to help support community-led recovery, with many applicants identifying recovery as a key aspect and outcome of their work.

### ***Environmental Implications***

The program includes criteria that address Council's sustainability goals through projects that protect and engage people within their natural environments.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Online community information sessions were hosted for prospective Partner organisations. The sessions briefed applicants on the program, communicated the open, competitive application process; and outlined support for applicants during the process. In addition, Council Officers dedicated time to supporting prospective new partners through coaching and project development. This engagement further develops capacity in grant seeking, project design and budgeting, even when not successful.

### **COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

Cross Council benchmarking helped gain an understanding of what 16 other Councils offer in multi-year funding. While there are some differences Council's program is commensurate with the other local governments. . A reference group of current partners helped review the program and identify improvements.

### **RISK ASSESSMENT**

Risks associated with grant making require fair and proper processes, sound record keeping, transparent and ethical decision making and adherence to the *Local Government Act 2020*. A recent report by VAGO into Council Grant making indicates Council is well positioned in this respect. Some of the key risks related to grant making and mitigations are outlined in the following table.

## Risk

Poor allocation of grant funding: weak strategic fit, low capacity to deliver

Funding goes to ineligible applicants

Subjective assessments or conflicts of interest at play

Lack of transparency in decision making

Reputational damage to Council due to reductions in funding

## Mitigation

Clear Grant Policy

Robust review of past rounds, application, and assessment process.

Two assessment panels with independent, community representation, assess and make recommendations to Council.

Terms of Reference and Conflict of Interest process for panel members and officers.

Clear strategic criteria.

SmartyGrants platform provides clear records.

Detailed funding agreements in place, outlining intended outcomes of the grants.

Acquittals and annual check-ins on progress.

Clear documentation of decisions and any changes or variations approved.

Clear communication on governance and process followed.

Officers work closely with affected organisations to support and undertake capacity building in securing other grants and income sources as well as supporting organisational sustainability.

Proactive and responsive communications on the program and outcomes.

Review of VAGO report recommendations to ensure process is in line with findings.

## 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. Panel Recommendations Connected and Healthy 2023-2027 Partnerships
2. Panel Recommendations Creative Communities 2023-2027 Partnerships