

2024 GRANTS FOR COMMUNITY INITIATION

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 considered at a Council meeting that is 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 the delivery of Council's strategic objective of "*Connected and Healthy Communities*." These funding opportunities help communities to thrive, build social connections and facilitate stronger, more resilient communities.

The Grants for Community program has three streams that 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. They can also support ongoing community recovery from the pandemic, storms and other recent natural disasters.

This report outlines the 2024 Grants for Community Program, due to open on 1 June 2023 and includes the program guidelines, selection criteria and proposed assessment panel members. It also presents the budget allocation of \$500,000.

RECOMMENDATION

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.**

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

Several past Council decisions relate to this report:

- Council endorsed a Grant Policy in May 2020 which provides guidance to its grant making functions;
- The 2020-2021 endorsed budget included an additional \$100,000 for Grants for Community. In 2020 this was directed to COVID Relief and Recovery grants and quick release grants of up to \$5,000 which were delivered for projects in line with the COVID Recovery Framework. Grants were awarded to both cultural and community development projects and were an important way Council responded to community needs during Covid; and
- Council also allocated \$1m for recovery grants to be administered through Regional Community Recovery Committees. This grant program will conclude in June 2023.

DISCUSSION

Purpose

This report presents the 2024 Grants for Community program including budget, selection criteria and guidelines for each of three streams and assessment panel members. These are the foundations for the grant round opening on 1 June 2023. The budget is to be endorsed through the 2023-2024 budget process.

Background

The 2024 Grants for Community program will support local community groups and creatives to implement projects they design and deliver. The guidelines outline the intent of the grants to foster mental and physical wellbeing, increase social connection, facilitate cultural and heritage development, and celebrate local communities. Importantly the grants also support the ongoing recovery from the pandemic and 2021 storms through supporting social connection and re-building confidence to participate in community activities and volunteering.

This funding also enables grassroots communities to access valuable resources to respond to local opportunities and issues. Outcomes realised are often creative, innovative and build resilience, social engagement, capacity, leadership, and community networks.

The 2024 Grants for Community program has three streams:

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

Festivals and Events - supports community groups to deliver 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 around the principles of respect, equality and locally led responses to opportunities and needs.

All three streams support strength based and community-led activation around projects that realise community aspirations. The mental wellbeing benefits of these kinds of activity and social connection is important and more so in the aftermath of the lockdowns and natural disasters.

The Assessment Panels

Community members make up the Creative Communities and Community Development assessment panels. The aim is to have diversity of representation and skills on each panel. Panel members spend at least 3-4 days on the process, a significant contribution of their time. An honorarium of \$500 is made to community panel members. A Council Officer, with relevant expertise is also included on each panel. A senior officer chairs the deliberation day for each panel. Council's role as the final decision maker concludes the governance process for the program.

Panel members are selected based on their skill set, community knowledge and grant experience. They are required to sign a Terms of Reference and Conflict of Interest form and remove themselves from assessing and discussing applications where there is a perceived or actual conflict of interest. Panels are briefed on their role prior to completing independent assessments online. The Panels then meet to discuss applications collectively and reach consensus on recommendations for Council endorsement.

Proposed assessment panel members are presented below. On occasion, panel members need to withdraw, and a replacement found. Yarra Ranges is fortunate to have a strong pool within the community to draw on if this occurs.

Proposed Community Development Panel

Proposed Panel Member	Skills and Experience	Geographic Area
Mike O'Meara	Kilsyth Community Planning Group (Chair) Government grant-making experience Experienced panel member	Urban
Ethne Pfeiffer	President Healesville Community Garden Grant-making experience 2021 Grants for Community panel member	Valley
Kelsey Haigh	Environmental science at Deakin University. Volunteer, Leading for the Future and Youth Advisory Group member.	All
Carolina Aguilera de Snow	Hills RCRC community member	Hills
Ellie Ingwersen Yarra Ranges Council	Recreation Development & Liaison Officer brings extensive community development experience	All

Proposed Creative Communities Panel

Proposed Panel Member	Skills & Experience	Geographic Area
Suzanne Phoenix	Grant writing and appraisal Photographer Community Event Manager	All
Jordan Sibley	Practicing Artist Community Engagement Coordinator Festival organiser	All
Lotte Gale	Member of the Misfits Youth Theatre Group, Seville resident and young community member	Upper Yarra
Leigh Harry	Yarra Valley Tourism Committee member, Co-chair Valley Community Recovery Committee, Healesville & District Community Enterprise committee member. High profile CEO roles in tourism sector.	All
Ginger van Handley Yarra Ranges Council	Cultural Programming Officer brings experience across the Creative Communities Strategy areas, events and cultural development.	All

Options Considered

The Grants for Community criteria consider community trends, aspirations and needs and draw on conversations with community members and organisations about what is important to them. The focus this round is on strength-based projects that build resilience.

The grants have a long-standing approach of driving strategic outcomes that Council identifies as priorities in consultation with communities. The related Council strategies are noted below. Grants remain an effective way to connect strategy with community-led action.

Generally, the program receives positive feedback from community panel members and applicants. All feedback is considered and informs the criteria moving forward.

A review of the criteria led to changes to reflect the stage of the pandemic and storm and flood recovery we are now in. The criteria around alcohol reduction projects has been removed as no applications in this priority were received over many years. The challenges of reducing alcohol harms are such that it is more appropriate for service providers to lead this work (noting that it can be in partnership with communities). As of now, organisations that receive funding via a major partnership with Council are not eligible to apply for funding via Council's grant programs. This is reflected in the 2024 Guidelines (Attachment 1).

Recommended option and justification

The program presented for endorsement is designed to draw out great projects and ideas in communities in response to the strategic direction of Council and emerging opportunities identified by communities themselves. The criteria and guidelines encourage inclusion and diversity, gender equity and participation by all age groups.

The program Guidelines (Attachment 1) and the Selection Criteria for each stream are attached:

- Arts and Heritage (Attachment 2)
- Festivals and Events (Attachment 3)
- Community Development (Attachment 4)

The Grants for Community Program is a proven way to mobilise and support communities. It taps into community-led responses to local opportunities and issues in ways that Council cannot. It empowers local people and communities to come together and work for the benefit of their area. Arts and cultural projects bring economic benefit to a sector hard hit by the pandemic and celebrate our region through performance, festivals, and a variety of arts practice.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

The proposed budget allocation for the 2024 *Grants for Community* program is:

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

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 also 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); and
- Improve mental health outcomes for the community, strengthen social connections ... (1.5.2.3).

The program invites projects seeking 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Healthy and Active Ageing Plan• Liveable Climate Plan• Draft Recreation and Open Space Strategy• Reconciliation Action Plan
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Grants for Community also contributes to addressing the requirements of the *Gender Equality Act 2020* through promoting and encouraging a gendered lens and addressing intersectionality in funded projects.

RELEVANT LAW

The grant program has sought to increase gender equity and inclusion so that everyone can participate if they want to. The grants also require consideration of Child Safe Standards and action by funded groups to meet these standards. Training in Child Safe Standards for community groups is delivered this year through a partnership with Knox and Maroondah Councils.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Grant recipients are asked to consider and include how they will reduce waste and impacts on the environment of their project, as part their application.

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.

Grants leverage volunteer contributions and 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

A high percentage of projects supported by the Grants for Community program have important social impacts. Projects can build community connections, strengthen cultural expression, and support activities that nurture the overall health and wellbeing of local communities. Increased social inclusion delivers diverse benefits across grant categories, from arts and heritage projects, through to disability, reconciliation, and other projects.

Environmental Implications

The program includes criteria for projects that safeguard the environment, build environmental resilience, and engage people with the natural environment.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Applicants and Panel members from the 2023 grant round were consulted to capture their observations of the process, any key lessons and general feedback. This informed the 2024 round. Council officers from multiple departments helped refresh the Grants for Community guidelines and criteria. Taking account of the strategic focus on increasing the ability of communities to withstand future shocks and uncertainty, there is an emphasis on strengthening community resilience and continuing the community recovery process.

To engage as many community members and organisations as possible in the opportunity to seek a grant Council will host online and in person grant information sessions. This has increased participation by removing travel barriers. An in-person skill building workshop will develop skills and expertise in grant seeking, designing projects, project implementation and in acquitting grant funding. A project management workshop was held on 19 April 2023 to support applicants. These sessions also promote networking across groups and projects to strengthen connections.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Grants officers draw on the South-Eastern local government grant network and test approaches with colleagues from other Councils. The criteria are updated through collaboration across the Council and against the evolving strategic goals of Council and what communities are telling us through various engagement processes. In this round this translates to a continued emphasis on building resilience and recovery.

Innovations seek to incrementally improve the program. In relation to feedback on simplifying the application form, officers reviewed and have made some changes where possible. These changes are minor given governance considerations outlined in a recent VAGO report requiring that Councils collect more information than other grant makers. Work will continue to update the application form with a lens of making it easier for the community in the lead up to the opening of the round.

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 mitigation strategies are outlined in the following table.

Risk	Mitigation
Poor allocation of grant funding: weak strategic fit, low capacity to deliver.	Review of past rounds and assessment process. Two assessment panels with independent, community representation, assess and make recommendations to Council.
Funding goes to ineligible applicants.	Terms of Reference and Conflict of Interest process in place for panel members and officers. Clear strategic criteria.
Subjective assessments or conflicts of interest at play.	SmartyGrants platform provides clear records. Detailed funding agreements in place, outlining intended outcomes of the grants.
Lack of transparency in decision making.	Acquittals and annual check-ins on progress. Clear documentation of decisions and any changes or variations approved.
Reputational damage to Council due to reductions in funding	Clear communication on governance and process followed. Officers work closely with organisations to support capacity building. Council's communications team support proactive and responsive communications. Review of VAGO report recommendations 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. 2024 2024 Grants for Community Guidelines
2. 2024 Arts and Heritage Criteria
3. 2024 Festivals and Events Criteria
4. 2024 Community Development Criteria