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Responsible Officer:	Coordinator Strong Communities
Owner:	Community Partnerships
Responsible Director:	Health and Wellbeing
Relevant Legislation/Authority:	Local Government Act 2020
DOCSETID:	4851654

1. PURPOSE

This policy responds to Council's commitment, expressed as Council Plan goal 1.1, to:

Lead and Govern for All: Accountable, financially responsible, equitable, transparent decision making.

The policy's purpose is to promote consistency and public accountability for Community Grant processes and decision-making. It establishes:

- Principles;
- Eligibility;
- Application, assessment, recommendation and approval processes; and
- Important parameters between City, Community Assessment Panel and Council roles and responsibilities.

The policy is complemented by Specific Provisions, procedures and Community Assessment Panel Terms of Reference. These may be amended from time to time without affect to the policy.

2. BACKGROUND

Reviewing policies aligns with the Local Government Act 2020 Principles of:

- Community engagement;
- Strategic planning;
- Financial management;
- Public transparency; and

- Service performance.

Consultation undertaken as part of the policy review process indicates our community believes Community Grants are important.

Community Grants represents a significant financial and human resource investment for our organisation. In a typical financial year Community Grants totalling more than \$850,000 in value are allocated. Administering Community Grants involves many City staff from multiple City business units.

The policy review has been informed by:

- Community Vision;
- Community Values;
- Council Plan 2021-25 *Mir Wimbul*;
- An Equity Impact Assessment;
- VAGO's 'Fraud Control Over Local Government Grants May 2022' report;
- Benchmarking of other Community Grants policies; and
- Recurring themes arising from consultation processes with the community, City staff, Community Assessment Panel members and Council.

The City, Community Assessment Panel and Council roles and responsibilities within the policy are aligned with VAGO recommendations.

3. SCOPE

The policy applies to:

- City staff;
- Community Assessment Panel members;
- Councillors;
- Community Grant applicants and recipients; and
- Community Grant processes and decision-making.

Community Grants are not intended to replace or subsidise Council's annual budget process or City service delivery.

Grants received by Council or the City are excluded from policy scope.

4. DEFINITIONS

Acquittal means information provided by a recipient explaining and evidencing how funding was used.

Auspicing Body means a registered legal entity that agrees to apply for, receive and be accountable for funding on behalf of an informal entity or individual, through mutual agreement.

City means the City of Greater Bendigo and includes the Chief Executive Officer employed by the Council and all other staff employed by the Chief Executive Officer.

Community Assessment Panel means a group of community members recruited and convened to assess applications and make funding recommendations.

Community Grant means funding allocated to an eligible group for a specified activity.

Community Value means behaviour characteristics and expectations identified by our community as being important and which underpin the Council Plan.

Community Vision means the statement developed in 2021 through a deliberative engagement process that articulates our community's collective aspirations for the future. The Community Vision 2021-2031 is:

Greater Bendigo celebrates our diverse community.

We are welcoming, sustainable and prosperous.

Walking hand-in-hand with the Traditional Custodians of this land.

Building on our rich heritage for a bright and happy future.

Conflict of Interest means if an impartial, fair minded person would consider that a relevant person's private interests could result in that person acting in a manner that is contrary to their public duty. For the policy's purposes, a relevant person could include City staff, Community Assessment Panel members and Councillors.

Council means the Greater Bendigo City Council and includes the nine (9) Councillors.

Council Plan means the current Council Plan, which at time of policy adoption is the Greater Bendigo Council Plan 2021-2025 *Mir wimbul*.

Declaration means a statement verifying all information provided in an application is true and correct to the best of the applicant's knowledge.

Equity means recognising that individuals and communities can have different circumstances and allocating resources and providing opportunities in a manner that is reflective of those differences to reach an equal outcome.

Equity Impact Assessment means a process designed in accordance with Gender Equality Act 2020 requirements to critically consider how policies, programs and services could affect different genders and diverse groups in different ways and recommend changes that could help create a more fair and inclusive community.

Evaluation means information provided by a recipient measuring how successful the specified activity was in achieving its aims and objectives.

Funding Agreement means a legal document that outlines the terms, conditions and obligations of funding.

Gambling means casino games, electronic gaming machines, lotteries, race or sports betting or similar activities. For the policy's purposes, gambling does not include the likes of bingo and card games that are for social connection purposes, or the likes of raffles and sports tipping competitions that are for not-for-profit organisation fundraising purposes.

Greater Bendigo means the municipal area governed by the Greater Bendigo City Council.

Incorporated Association means a registered legal entity usually established for social, recreational or cultural purposes. It must have at least five (5) members and put all profits back into the entity's activities.

Inclusion means providing access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised.

Innovation means turning an idea into a solution that adds value and increases capability.

Principle means a proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behaviour or for a chain of reasoning.

Reciprocity means an exchange of something with another entity for mutual benefit.

Specific Provision means a particular circumstance or condition.

Sustainability means protecting and preserving resources - including natural resources - to ensure they are not lost to future generations.

Transparency means operating in a way that enables others to see how decisions are made and what actions are performed, and implies openness, communication and accountability.

VAGO means the Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

Vaping means a device designed to produce a vapour containing nicotine, with the intent for the vapour to be inhaled.

5. PRINCIPLES

- 5.1.1 All Community Grant processes and decision-making are to be guided by the six (6) Principles of:
- Equity;
 - Inclusion;
 - Innovation;
 - Reciprocity;
 - Sustainability; and
 - Transparency.
- 5.1.2 With the exception of Reciprocity, the Principles are the Community Values which underpin the Community Vision.
- 5.1.3 The Principle of Reciprocity reflects a recurring theme identified through consultation processes with the community, City staff, Community Assessment Panel members and Council.
- 5.1.4 Reciprocity expectations will be scaled relative to Community Grant value. (Refer Specific Provisions).

6. POLICY

6.1 Community Awareness and Capability Building

- 6.1.1 City staff will be proactive in building community awareness of Community Grant opportunities, including undertaking multi-modal public advertising.
- 6.1.2 City staff will be proactive in building community capability in activity planning, management and Evaluation, and in grant seeking and Acquittal. Emphasis will be placed on the Principles of Equity and Inclusion regarding investment of available resources to support this.
- 6.1.3 City staff will encourage and facilitate Community Grant pre-application discussions. Pre-application discussions will typically explore:
- Applicant and proposed activity eligibility;
 - Proposed activity 'readiness' and potential strengthening opportunities; and

- Any application assistance needs.

6.2 Eligibility

- 6.2.1 To be considered for a Community Grant, applicants must be a registered legal entity (which will most likely be in the form of an Incorporated Association).
- 6.2.2 Auspicing Bodies may submit applications on behalf of informal entities or individuals, through mutual agreement.
- 6.2.3 An applicant may be considered ineligible for a Community Grant if they:
- Offer or promote Gambling of any form;
 - Offer or promote tobacco or Vaping products of any form;
 - Have not made reasonable efforts to implement the City's Healthy Facilities Policy (if applicable);
 - Have an overdue Community Grant Acquittal or Evaluation;
 - Have breached a Community Grant Funding Agreement within the past three (3) years;
 - Are party to another Funding Agreement that precludes them from receiving further City grants;
 - Cannot demonstrate financial need for a Community Grant;
 - Have an outstanding debt with the City; or
 - Have breached lease, licence or management agreement conditions
- 6.2.4 A proposed activity may be considered ineligible for a Community Grant if:
- It does not consider sustainability;
 - Its primary beneficiary would be a community outside of Greater Bendigo or an individual;
 - It seeks to make a profit where the profit would not be re-invested for Greater Bendigo community benefit;
 - It involves fundraising for a third party;
 - It seeks to enable a business, charity, school or service provider to carry out their core business (for example, a school undertaking curriculum delivery versus extra curricula activities) or to improve their 'bottom line';
 - It proposes to predominantly source goods or services from outside of Greater Bendigo when comparable local options are available;
 - Land or asset owner approval has not been demonstrated;
 - It is for works to or insurance for privately-owned property; or
 - It is inconsistent with the Healthy Facilities Design checklist.
- 6.2.5 Community Grants will not be allocated for retrospective activities: that is, where an activity has a discernible start and end date and has already commenced. The exception to this is when a group receives a utility account 'shock' it wishes to seek financial assistance for.
- 6.2.6 Activities that have been supported by a Community Grant for three (3) consecutive years prior may be re-directed for consideration within Council's budget development process.

6.3 Applications

- 6.3.1 Applications may be submitted in oral, written or visual formats, supported by City officers as required. Irrespective of format preference, applicants must respond to a

documented set of questions as well as provide activity budget (expenditure and revenue) information for their application to be considered complete and assessable.

- 6.3.2 Consistent with Equity Impact Assessment requirements, applications will request data about Community Grant applicants and Community Grant intended beneficiaries. The purpose of the data collection is to provide capacity for Equity and Inclusion Principle Evaluation.
- 6.3.3 Application requirements will be scaled relative to Community Grant value. (Refer Specific Provisions).
- 6.3.4 Submitting an application will require a Declaration.
- 6.3.5 Submitting an application does not guarantee receipt of a Community Grant.

6.4 Assessment, Recommendation and Approval Processes

- 6.4.1 Applications must be assessed using a documented set of criteria.
- 6.4.2 Emphasis must be placed on the Principle of Equity when assessing applications: that is, proposed activity merit must be assigned greater importance than application quality.
- 6.4.3 Assessment processes will be scaled relative to Community Grant value. (Refer Specific Provisions).
- 6.4.4 In instances where a Community Grant's value can be \$10,000 or above, a Community Assessment Panel must be convened to assess applications and make funding recommendations. (Refer Specific Provisions).
- 6.4.5 In instances where a Community Grant's value can be \$20,000 or above, the Community Assessment Panel's funding recommendations must be presented to Council for consideration and Council must approve any grant allocations. (Refer Specific Provisions).
- 6.4.6 Any decision that contributes to an assessment, funding recommendation or grant allocation outcome will be documented with an associated rationale for the decision.

6.5 Funding Agreements

- 6.5.1 A Community Grant offer will require the successful applicant to enter into a Funding Agreement with the City.
- 6.5.2 Funding Agreement requirements will be scaled relative to Community Grant value. (Refer Specific Provisions).
- 6.5.3 A Community Grant offer may require the successful applicant to verify their bank account details for fraud prevention purposes.
- 6.5.4 A Community Grant payment will only be processed once a successful applicant has met the requirements of 6.5.1 and, where applicable, also 6.5.3.

- 6.5.5 Community Grant offers may be retracted by City staff if requirements are not met within a specified timeframe. (Refer Specific Provisions). This is important for City budget management and reporting purposes, particularly towards the end of a financial year.

6.6 Acquittal and Evaluation

- 6.6.1 All recipients will be required to submit an Acquittal and Evaluation.
- 6.6.2 Acquittal and Evaluation requirements will be scaled relative to Community Grant value. (Refer Specific Provisions).
- 6.6.3 Acquittals and Evaluations will be considered overdue if not submitted within a specified timeframe. (Refer Specific Provisions).

6.7 Training

- 6.7.1 City staff involved with Community Grants, Community Assessment Panel members and Councillors will be offered annual training in:
- Conflict of Interest;
 - Familiarisation of the Council Plan priorities and
 - Fraud risks specific to Community Grants.

6.8 Declarations of Conflict of Interest

- 6.8.1 Any Conflict of Interest must be declared and documented.
- 6.8.2 When a Conflict of Interest is declared, the relevant person must not have any involvement in (or seek to influence) respective assessment, recommendation or approval processes.

6.9 Communication

- 6.9.1 Community Grant guidelines will be made publicly available. The guidelines will include information about:
- Community Grant opportunities;
 - How to apply;
 - Assessment, recommendation and approval processes;
 - Acquittal and evaluation requirements; and
 - 'Tips' for preparing a strong application.
- 6.9.2 Procedures will be documented and made available to City staff, Community Assessment Panel members and Council. The procedures will support efficient and transparent Community Grants administration and business continuity.
- 6.9.3 For public accountability purposes, Councillors must document any queries relating to Community Grants and log them via Councillor Support. City staff will provide documented responses to Councillors via Councillor Support.
- 6.9.4 Applicants will be provided with written acknowledgment of their application being received.

- 6.9.5 Applicants will be advised of the outcome of their application. If their application has been unsuccessful, the applicant will be offered constructive feedback to promote capability building.
- 6.9.6 In alignment with VAGO recommendations, where any grant allocations vary from Community Assessment Panel funding recommendations, the Community Assessment Panel will be informed and provided with an explanation.
- 6.9.7 Information about Community Grant recipients and funded activities will be made publicly available through the City's website.
- 6.9.8 Community Grants aggregated data will be made publicly available through Council's annual report.
- 6.9.9 Where any person expresses dissatisfaction with Community Grant processes or decision-making, the matter will be managed in accordance with the Complaint Handling Policy.

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- 7.1.1 It is the role of Council to adopt the policy.
- 7.1.2 All City staff, Community Assessment Panel members and Councillors have a responsibility to ensure adherence to the policy.
- 7.1.3 In alignment with VAGO recommendations and the Principle of Transparency, it is the role of City staff to:
 - Develop Community Assessment Panel Terms of Reference;
 - Recruit Community Assessment Panel members using a documented set of criteria; and
 - Manage all communication with Community Assessment Panel members.
- 7.1.4 It is the responsibility of Councillors to not communicate with any Community Assessment Panel member regarding any Community Grant matter.
- 7.1.5 The Community Partnerships Unit is responsible for:
 - Ensuring all City staff and Community Assessment Panel members have access to the policy and strategic documents which guide decision making;
 - Developing and maintaining the procedures;
 - Coordinating annual training opportunities for City staff, Community Assessment Panel members and Councillors; and
 - Reviewing the policy as required.
- 7.1.6 Applicants are responsible for completing all application requirements and for ensuring information provided in an application is true and correct to the best of their knowledge.
- 7.1.7 Recipients are responsible for Funding Agreement adherence, including completing an Acquittal and Evaluation.

8. RELATED DOCUMENTS

Readers are encouraged to access relevant documents and/or resources which are available as per the below.

These include:

Local Government Act 2020
 Greater Bendigo Council Plan 2021-2025 *Mir wimbul*
 Healthy Greater Bendigo 2021-2025
 Social Justice Framework
 Community Engagement Policy
 Complaint Handling Policy
 Fraud and Corruption Policy
 Gender Equality Act 2020
 Healthy Facilities Policy and Healthy Facilities Design Checklist
 Lease and Licence Policy
 Partnership and Sponsorship Policy (Draft)
 Reducing Harm from Gambling Policy
 VAGO's 'Fraud Control Over Local Government Grants' report (May 2022)

Further information or advice on this policy should be directed to Community Partnerships.

9. HUMAN RIGHTS COMPATIBILITY

The implications of this policy have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

10. ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES

It is recognised that, from time to time, circumstances may change leading to the need for minor administrative changes to this document. Where an update does not materially alter this, such a change may be made administratively. Examples include a change to the name of a City unit, a change to the name of a Federal or State Government department, and a minor update to legislation which does not have a material impact. However, any change or update which materially alters this document must be made through consultation with the staff Consultative Committee and with the approval of EMT or where required, resolution of Council.

11. DOCUMENT HISTORY

Date Approved	Responsible Officer	Unit	Change Type	Version	Next Review Date
Dec, 2022	DS	Community Partnerships	Review – Policy (significant)	1.0	Dec, 2026
Mar, 2024	DS	Community Partnerships	Review – Clause 6.2.5 (administrative)	1.1	Dec, 2026