

▶ GRANTS FUNDING POLICY

POLICY NUMBER:	94 (C)
NAME OF POLICY:	GRANTS FUNDING POLICY
DATE OF NEXT REVIEW:	2028 – every four years.
DATE APPROVED:	16/04/2024
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Director Community and Corporate
REFERENCES:	<i>Local Government Act 2020</i> <i>Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006</i> <i>Equal Opportunity Act 2021</i> <i>Gender Equality Act 2020</i> <i>Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014</i> <i>Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008</i> <i>Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986</i> Internal References: Hepburn Shire Council Grant Review Report 2023 Hepburn Shire Council Plan 2021-2025 Hepburn Shire Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025

Service Performance Principles as defined in section 106 of the *Local Government Act 2020*

Service performance principles

(1) A Council must plan and deliver services to the municipal community in accordance with the service performance principles.

(2) The following are the service performance principles—

(a) services should be provided in an equitable manner and be responsive to the diverse needs of the municipal community;

(b) services should be accessible to the members of the municipal community for whom the services are intended;

(c) quality and costs standards for services set by the Council should provide good value to the municipal community;

(d) a Council should seek to continuously improve service delivery to the municipal community in response to performance monitoring;

(e) service delivery must include a fair and effective process for considering and responding to complaints about service provision.

INTRODUCTION

This policy reaffirms Council's commitment to maintain a transparent, equitable, and effective process when delivering grant programs to the community. The policy will guide all current and future grant making programs.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all of Council's current and future grant making programs and provides guidance to community groups applying for grants, as well as Council officers responsible for the design, delivery, and/or evaluation of grant programs.

A grant is defined as a payment by Council to an individual or organisation for a stated purpose, awarded through a competitive and transparent application process.

This policy does not apply to:

- Ongoing or one-time funding through a Memorandum of Understanding or other funding agreement (for example, Signature and Regional events).
- Non-financial support such as the provision of buildings, land or facilities, and in-kind support from Council staff.
- Payments for sponsorship by Council.
- Payments to organisations for delivery of services on behalf of Council.
- Grant writing undertaken by Council to obtain external funding for Council activities.

1. POLICY

1.1 Principles

Council acknowledges the contribution that community groups, clubs, and not-for-profit organisations deliver to our community and the limited resources available to such groups in achieving meaningful results. Council is committed to supporting community groups, clubs, and organisations through the implementation of grant programs to provide access to funding for the facilitation of projects, events, and activities within Hepburn Shire, and for the benefit of Hepburn Shire residents.

Three principles guide Council's grant making programs, including how officers work with, support, and respect the community and administer the programs:

▶ GRANTS FUNDING POLICY

Transparency

Transparency is defined as a lack of hidden agendas or conditions and the availability of all information required to collaborate, cooperate, and make decisions effectively.

Fairness and Equity

Fair and equitable grant making means being conscious of the barriers and disadvantages being faced by some groups or individuals due to the inequitable distribution of power and resources.

Effectiveness

Every grant dollar should produce the maximum benefit for Hepburn Shire communities. Each grant should be both efficient and effective throughout the whole lifecycle of the community grant process, from promotion to evaluation.

1.2 Framework

Council is committed to providing an annual financial allocation for grant programs. The allocation is determined during the annual budget process. Grant programs may open for applications once per year or multiple times throughout the year via established 'rounds' with key dates outlined clearly within the guidelines for each grant program.

The Hepburn Shire Grants Framework and Handbook document contains information about the purpose and projected outcomes for each grant program. The Framework and Handbook contains the guidelines for each grant program including eligibility criteria, key dates, and assessment criteria.

2. Key Components of Council Grants Programs

2.1 Guidelines

Each grant program will feature documented and accessible guidelines that outline items including:

- Eligibility criteria and ineligible applicants.
- Projects and activities that will and will not be considered for funding.
- Application, assessment, funding, and acquittal processes.

- Expected timeframe for results to be determined and applicants notified.
- Assessment criteria, including the weighting of each criterion.
- Reporting and acquittal requirements.
- A Council contact for applicants to approach with further enquiries.

Guidelines will be made available before and throughout the duration of the application period and will be reviewed at the conclusion of the grant program or on an annual basis. Guidelines are also contained within the Grants Framework and Handbook document.

2.2 Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility criteria will be clearly outlined in the guidelines documents. Eligibility criteria may vary between the different grant programs (as each grant program is targeted toward differing outcomes). The common eligibility criteria across all grant streams includes:

- Applicants must represent a legal entity with a registered Australian Business Number (ABN) or be auspiced by another organisation that meets this criteria.
- Applicants must represent a Not-For-Profit (NFP) entity.
- Applicants must be from within Hepburn Shire and/or be conducting a project within Hepburn Shire for the benefit of Hepburn Shire residents.
- Applicants must not have received funding or in-kind-support for the same project from other sources within Hepburn Shire Council, i.e., funding agreements or sponsorship arrangements (except for Local Community Events Support where in-kind support can be provided regardless of the outcome of a grant application.)
- Applicants must have valid Public Liability Insurance or can demonstrate the ability to obtain such insurance before the project commences.

2.3 Communications and Promotion

To ensure that the Hepburn Shire community is provided with an opportunity to apply for funding, extensive communication will be provided to promote grant opportunities. A communications plan for each grant program will be developed to ensure strong media exposure and wide reach in promoting Council's grant programs.

Officers responsible for grant programs will be able to provide support, advice, and assistance to applicants.

2.4 Application Requirements

Guided by the principles outlined in section 1.1, Council Officers will assess the eligibility of each application. Applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria will not be considered for assessment. Council Officers may contact applicants to seek further information regarding their application or eligibility. Ineligible applicants will be notified as soon as they are deemed ineligible.

2.5 Accountability and Transparency

Conflicts-of-interest must be declared by both applicants and assessors and managed according to the *Local Government Act 2020* and recorded within Council's Conflict-of-interest register.

To ensure an accountable and transparent assessment process, Officers with a declared conflict-of-interest will not participate in the assessment process. Assessors will have no contact with the individual applicants in relation to the grants assessment process.

All information provided by applicants in the grant application is to be treated as sensitive and confidential and assessors are to adhere to the conventions outlines in sections 3(1) and 125 of the *Local Government Act 2020*. Assessors should conduct the assessments in a private setting and are not to disclose information about applicants to others until the assessment panel convenes.

A Terms of Reference document outlining responsibilities and duties, will be provided to any Council Officer selected for Assessment duties.

2.6 Assessment

In line with the recommendations from the Grants Review 2023, decision-making processes for each grant program are the responsibility of Council officers only.

Assessment Panels are comprised of Council Officers responsible for other grant programs, other suitable Council Officers, with representation also coming from the Leadership or Executive Team and Governance. The Director Cooperate and Community makes appointments to the assessment panel based on merit, skills and expertise in relevant grants and subject matter.

Assessors will individually assess each application against the assessment criteria before reviewing within a panel discussion. Officers involved with assisting or supporting applicants during the application process, cannot be considered for assessment duties.

Council officers involved in the assessment process must complete a conflict-of-interest declaration and undergo training in conflict-of-interest, fraud, and risk.

Assessment panels must consist of a minimum of three Council officers and all assessors must abide by the Terms of Reference provided by the Officer administering the grants program.

2.7 Assessment Criteria

All Council Grant Programs are assessed against the following Assessment Criteria.

- Meets the eligibility criteria and projected outcomes of the grant program.
- Addresses an evidence-based community need or opportunity.
- Demonstrates alignment with the Hepburn Shire Council Plan focus areas and relevant Strategy.
- Demonstrates a clear benefit to Hepburn Shire Council residents.
- Demonstrates a clear ability to carry out and undertake the project/activity/event through to completion.
- Provides supporting documentation including quotations.
- Demonstrates no ethical or other conflict of interest.

2.8 Decision-Making Process

All assessment comments and scores will be recorded in Council's grant management system and the minutes from the assessment panel discussion will be recorded and documented. At the conclusion of the assessment panel discussion, applications will be recommended for funding based on their assessment scores. Funding is allocated to the highest scoring applicant first, and then to each subsequent applicant until all recommended applications have been funded or the funding pool for the grant round is exhausted.

In certain circumstances an application may be deemed successful for partial funding only, at the discretion of the Assessment Panel. This may be due to some element of the application being identified as unsuitable for funding or a desire to fund more applicants.

Applicants offered partial funding have the right to refuse, as acceptance may impact their eligibility for future grants.

All decisions made by Council regarding eligibility, assessment and decision-making are final.

All applicants will be notified of the results, and successful applicants will be required to sign a funding agreement. Unsuccessful applicants will be provided with feedback regarding the assessment panel's decision.

2.9 Funding Agreements

To support clarity and transparency, funding will be administered through funding agreements. Recipients of grants must abide by the terms of their funding agreement, including the completion of acquittal obligations. A grant is only deemed awarded and received by the applicant once the funding agreement is signed.

2.10 Acquittal and Reporting Obligations

Grant recipients must adhere to the requirements outlined within the funding agreement including timely acquittal and reporting obligations. Applicants must demonstrate through the acquittal process that Council funds were spent on the stated purpose and products. Any money unspent by the applicant at the time of acquittal must be repaid to Council. Applicants will be deemed ineligible for any future Council grant if they have an outstanding acquittal for a previous grant.

Council reserves the right to request audited financials from applicants at any time.

3. Grant Programs and funding streams

Council supports the delivery of \$198,000 in grants to the community through the following grant programs: Community Grants, Biodiversity Grants, Environment Groups Grants and Sustainable Hepburn Grants. Each program and its funding streams are listed below.

3.1 Community Grants

The Community Grants Program provides \$110,000 to fund programs and events that promote community wellbeing, increase social connection, and build capacity for leadership and independence. Successful projects must be conducted in Hepburn Shire to the benefit of its residents.

Community Grants consists of the following funding streams:

- Community Support Grants

Community Support Grants encourage community-based projects and initiatives that enhance the social, environmental, and economic life of Hepburn Shire.

Community groups may apply for funding for community led projects and activities that align with the focus areas of the Hepburn Shire Council Plan and Vision 2022-25 and/or the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan. Community Support Grants are delivered through three rounds of funding per year. Community Support Grants are delivered through three rounds of funding per year.

- Quick Response Grants

The Quick Response Grant stream has been designed to support community groups who may have experienced an unforeseen disruption, urgent issue or to facilitate smaller projects that are significantly less costly than the amount available in the Community Support Grants scheme. The Quick Response Grants has quicker assessment outcomes to facilitate adequate and timely responses to community issues.

- Local Community Event Support

The Local Community Events Support Grants Stream provides funding to support local events and days of celebration which aim to promote the artistic and cultural diversity of Hepburn Shire. Successful applicants will need to demonstrate how their project aligns to the definition of Local Community Events within the Hepburn Shire Events Strategy. Funding is available for projects that can demonstrate benefits to a local audience, the potential to generate intrastate visitation, and promote the arts and culture of Hepburn Shire.

- Charitable purposes

The Charitable Purposes stream provides funding for organisations that perform charitable activities within the shire. Projects in this stream can be ongoing projects or previously run initiatives that can demonstrate that they are providing programs, activities, or events for vulnerable or disadvantaged community members. There is one grant available per Council Ward. Applicants must be a registered charity organisation to apply for this stream.

- Support for New Residents Welcome Sessions

The Support for New Residents Welcome Sessions stream provides funding to community groups that are providing sessions to welcome new residents to the shire. There is one grant available per Council Ward.

The Community Grants program parameters, including program objectives, key-dates and assessment criteria are managed in accordance with the Community Grants Program guidelines.

3.2 Biodiversity Grants

The Biodiversity Grants Program provides \$28,000 to support community driven biodiversity initiatives. The Biodiversity Grants program offers grants for 12 or 24-month projects that align with the seven objectives of the *Natural Environment and Biodiversity theme* within the Sustainable Hepburn Strategy. These grants support community groups and the diverse work being done to protect and enhance our natural biodiversity and ecology. Funding is available for projects that can demonstrate benefits to biodiversity via on-ground works or increasing the public's interest and capacity to protect and enhance Hepburn's biodiversity.

Funding is offered once per year. The program parameters, including program objectives, key-dates and assessment criteria are managed in accordance with the Biodiversity Grants guidelines.

3.3 Environment Groups Grants

Hepburn Shire Council's Environment Groups Grant Program (formerly Landcare Grants) supports community groups whose primary function is to enhance and protect the environment of Hepburn Shire. Council has committed \$20,000 to support local community environment groups in 2024. Potential applicants are identified by Council Officers and will be invited to apply by the Biodiversity Officer. Applicants will need to demonstrate that their group conducts on-ground environmental works or promotes/advocates for the protection and enhancement of ecological health within Hepburn Shire.

Funding is offered once per year and suitable groups are invited to apply by Council Officers. The program parameters, including program objectives, key-dates and

assessment criteria, are managed in accordance with the Environment Groups Grants guidelines.

3.4 Sustainable Hepburn Grants

Council has committed \$40,000 to support community driven sustainability initiatives in 2024. Funding is available for projects that align with the strategic themes from the Sustainable Hepburn Strategy and can demonstrate a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, through reduced energy consumption, carbon drawdown or via the use of renewable energy in Community facilities across Hepburn Shire.

Funding is offered once per year. The inclusion of financial co-contributions is encouraged to deliver maximum benefit to the community. The program parameters, including program objectives, key-dates and assessment criteria, are managed in accordance with the Sustainable Hepburn Grants guidelines.

3.7 Other Grant Programs or Funding Streams

Any future Council Grants programs will adhere to the principles outlined in this policy and include the key components set out in Section 2. This could include one-off funding opportunities open to the public or short-term grant programs funded by other government bodies and administered by Council.

DEFINITIONS

The following terms are referred to in the policy.

Term	Definition
Acquittal	Reporting on how the grant was used and spent.
Council	Hepburn Shire Council
Council Officers	Includes permanent and temporary full-time and part-time Council employees, as well as contractors and consultants engaged by Council.

▶ GRANTS FUNDING POLICY

Term	Definition
Grant	A conditional sum of funds provided to a recipient through a competitive and transparent process, for an agreed specified purpose in a formal agreement between parties, with the understanding that there will be a defined outcome that directly or indirectly benefits the community.
Grant making	The process of creating a competitive and transparent program that allows dispersal of allocated sums of money to community groups, clubs, or organisations to enable them to carry out activities for the benefit of the local community.
Grant writing	The practice of completing an application process for a financial grant provided by an institution such as a government department, corporation, foundation, or trust.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Any enquiries about the Grants Funding Policy should be directed to the Director Corporate and Community.

Relevant Council Documents:

Hepburn Shire Council Plan 2021-2025

Hepburn Shire Council Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025

Community Grant Review report and recommendations 2023

Community Grants Program Guidelines

Biodiversity Grant Guidelines

Environment Groups Grant Guidelines

Sustainable Hepburn Grant Guidelines

▶ GRANTS FUNDING POLICY

IMPLEMENTATION

This policy will be available on the Intranet, corporate website. Training will be administered to relevant staff to support understanding and compliance.

REVIEW

The Grants Funding Policy will be reviewed every 4 years or sooner if required by legislation or organisational changes.

The officer responsible for the review of this policy is the Director Community and Corporate.

GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT

A Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) has been completed for this policy. The GIA will be reviewed when the policy is reviewed.