

2.1 MONASH COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM SERVICE IMPROVEMENT (KJ)

Responsible Director: Julie Salomon

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council endorsement of changes to the Monash Community Grants Program timeline to improve service delivery. This report also requires Council to note the proposed key stages of the 2020/2021 MCGP grants round.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The Monash Community Grants Program (MCGP) has been a major source of funding to the Monash Community since 1995. The program aims to:

- develop partnerships between Council and community groups to achieve Council's strategic directions;
- direct resources to both the emerging and specific needs of disadvantaged groups;
- develop a positive approach to the resolution of local social issues;
- support local groups, activities and community connectedness; and
- support community organisations to develop skills and increase community participation.

The MCGP primarily provides funding for small to medium sized projects, events and initiatives that respond to the social, cultural, recreational and economic needs of Monash residents.

The next round of the Monash Community Grants Program will fund activities occurring between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2021. It is proposed that this round will open for applications on Tuesday 28 January 2020, closing on Friday 28 February 2020. Applications will be assessed during March and April and presented to Council for consideration at the May 2020 meeting cycle. All applications will be administered online via SmartyGrants.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The 2020/2021 Monash Community Grant Program is anticipated to have a total budget allocation of \$2,596,520.49, subject to the adoption of the 2020/2021 Council operational budget in June 2020.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council endorses the service improvements to the Monash Community Grants Program and notes the key stages of the 2020/2021 round.

2.1 MONASH COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS (KJ)

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RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. *Endorses the proposed stages and key timelines for the 2020/21 notably:*

- *Monash Community Grant Program Applications Open 28 January 2020;*
- *Monash Community Grant Program Closes 28 February 2020;*
- *Monash Community Grant Program Allocations Report is tabled at Council May 2020;*
- *Successful and Unsuccessful Applications are advised May 2020 (in-principle funding, dependent on the adoption of the 2020/2021 Budget); and*

2. *Notes that a further report will follow in September with the MCGP Guidelines and Terms of Reference.*

INTRODUCTION

Each year Council provides funding to local organisations and community groups through the Monash Community Grants Program (MCGP). The purpose of this report is to seek Council endorsement of changes to the Monash Community Grants Program to provide clarity and improve service delivery. This report seeks to outline changes to the timelines and key stages of the 2020/2021 round of grants. Key stages include the launch of the new round, application open and closing dates, assessment and evaluation timelines, and the timing of notification of successful and unsuccessful applicants.

BACKGROUND

The Monash Community Grants Program (MCGP) has been a major source of funding to the Monash community since 1995 and aims to:

- a) develop partnerships between Council and community groups to achieve Council's strategic directions;
- b) support local groups, activities and foster community connectedness;
- c) support community organisations to develop skills and increase community participation;
- d) direct resources to address the needs of both emerging and disadvantaged groups; and
- e) develop a positive approach to the resolution of local social issues.

These community grants primarily provide funding for small to medium sized projects and initiatives that respond to the social, cultural, creative and recreational needs of Monash residents.

DISCUSSION

The Monash Community Grants Program (MCGP) has been operating annually since 1995. The MCGP has been delivered in its current format since 2014/2015, when Council transitioned the

grants program to a financial-year funding model. At the same time, Council implemented the SmartyGrants grant management system, enabling online applications and administration of funding.

Transitioning to a financial year funding model changed the timelines and key stages, resulting in the grant applications opening in October and closing in December. As a result applicants were informed of the success or not of their application in April the following year. This timeline has been in place for some years, however it has presented a number of challenges for Monash community groups and organisations.

Feedback provided by a number of groups and organisations has highlighted that the current timelines are challenging for the groups to understand, often leading to confusion when and what documents are due. Groups are acquitting grants, signing funding agreements and writing new grants 9 months in advance, all within a 3-4 month period and often for 3 separate funding years.

Currently the MCGP applications open in October and close in the second week of December, followed by the officer assessment process. The majority of our groups and organisations close over the December/January Christmas holiday period. As a result of these closures any application follow up that may be required is extremely difficult and does not occur until late January and early February.

Council officers have had discussions with a number of other municipalities to understand their grant program timelines and key stages. Many Councils have their Grants Program opening at the beginning of the year with groups being notified in June. Timelines for projects are adjusted to allow for this notification period and many groups who apply for multiple grants outside of Monash would be familiar with these timelines.

Proposed Program Timelines

The proposed timeline of key milestones of the 2020/2021 Grants Round is outlined below:

Milestone	Date
Letter sent to groups notifying of the timeline change	August 2019
Reminder letter sent to groups notifying them of the date that the grants program will open, the information session times and grant guidelines	November 2019
'Invitation to Apply' letters sent to all previous applicants	13 January 2020
Advertising Campaign	20 January 2020 – 21 February 2020
Applications Open For Submissions via SmartyGrants	28 January 2020
Grant Information and Application Support Workshops	3 February 2020 – 24 February 2020
Applications Close for submissions via SmartyGrants	28 February 2020
Pre-eligibility Checks of Applications	2 March 2020 – 6 March 2020

Monash Community Grants Team prepare officer assessments and recommendations to present to the Community Grants Evaluation Panel	10 March 2020 – 9 April 2020
Monash Community Grants Evaluation Panel meetings <i>Grant Allocations recommended</i>	16 April 2020 – 23 April 2020
Report to Council <i>Subject to the adoption of Council 2020/21 Budget</i>	26 May 2020
In principle successful and unsuccessful letters sent to groups <i>Noting that the decision is subject to the adoption of the 2020/21 Budget at Council's June meeting</i>	27 May 2020
Funding Agreements sent to all Successful 2020/21 Grant Recipients	1 July 2020

The above timelines result in the Community Grants team being able to spend time with the groups in February, during the application open period, to ensure they submit an eligible and well-prepared application. Then throughout March, during the officer assessment stage, the team will be able to follow up with groups to seek further information to clarify their projects and ensure that each grant is provided the best possible chance of success.

Communication to Grant Recipients & Implementation

Following Council endorsement of these proposed timelines, all grant recipients will be notified both via email and letter correspondence to ensure that all groups are informed of the new process. Officers will also ensure that there is an increase in communication in the first 12 months of the new timelines with all key stages of the grant program.

Council officers will continue to offer support sessions to assist with grant application preparation, as well as agreement and acquittal submission sessions at the relevant stages of the Monash Community Grants Program cycle. These sessions will be scheduled across the municipality and with the offering of translators upon request.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The social implications of the Monash Community Grants Program are significant. Grant funding enables the:

- strengthening a sense of community by facilitating cultural and artistic activities, stakeholder participation, recognition of diversity, cultural heritage and social cohesion;
- provision of resources to community groups and organisations to support the diverse needs of our Monash community (e.g. children and families, young people, elderly people and people with disabilities), and facilitate the accessibility of community services;
- Strengthening of community health and well-being through public safety initiatives and facilitate participation of community members in healthy lifestyles and community festivals; and
- Fostering of education and skills development to the community by supporting a number of life-long learning opportunities.

In response to the needs of local services, Council has maintained its priority of supporting agencies and groups that are locally focussed and responsive to municipal needs.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

The 2020/2021 Monash Community Grants Program is entirely consistent with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*. In particular, the program supports:

- freedom of expression;
- peaceful assembly and freedom of association;
- taking part in public life; and
- cultural rights.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The 2020/2021 Monash Community Grant Program is anticipated to have a total budget allocation of \$2,596,520.49, subject to the adoption of the 2020/21 Council operational budget in June 2020.

CONCLUSION

The Monash Community Grants Program is a major community development and capacity building program for the Monash community, which recognises and supports the voluntary and community sector in Monash.

The proposed new timelines will ensure that Council continues to improve the grants program service delivery and meet the needs and expectations of the community.