

2.2 MONASH COMMUNITY GRANTS EVALUATION PANEL (KJ)

Responsible Director: Russell Hopkins

RECOMMENDATION

That the Monash Community Grants Program Evaluation Panel be dissolved recommended by Council's Internal Auditors with the full Council to consider the recommendations of the evaluation process.

INTRODUCTION

Each year Monash Council provides funding to local organisations and community groups through the Monash Community Grants Program (MCGP). These applications are assessed by the MCGP Evaluation Panel which includes five Councillors.

To ensure that Council's grants program is transparent and equitable, it is reviewed every three years by Council's appointed internal auditor, Crowe. As with any audit, benchmarking and best practice policies are relied upon to ensure that Council's grant program is efficient and transparent.

Crowe has undertaken an independent review of the processes and practises related to the Community Grants program. Ten findings were identified and presented to the most recent Audit and Risk Committee Meeting, with the following risk identified as High:

- Councillors are directly involved in the decision making process of grant fund allocation through their involvement on the Evaluation Panel.

This report seeks to dissolve the MCGP Evaluation Panel and allow all of Council to consider the recommendation report at a Council meeting.

BACKGROUND

Council undertakes an annual Community Grants Program which provides support to a range of community-based organisations and groups to provide services and activities which benefit the local community. Each year Council endorses the guidelines for the Program for the coming year, and nominates Councillors to be part of the Evaluation Panel. For the 2020/21 Community Grants program, Councillors Klisaris, James, Paterson, McCluskey and Saloumi were appointed by Council at its Meeting on 10 December 2019 to form part of the Evaluation Panel.

As part of the annual calendar of internal audits, a review of the processes and practices of the management of Council's Community Grants Program was undertaken by Crowe, with the findings presented to the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting on 3 March 2020.

DISCUSSION

Crowe's review identified ten findings, with two risks being rated as High:

- Grant funding has been allocated to applications received after the closing date.
- Councillors are directly involved in the decision making process of grant fund allocation through their involvement on the Evaluation Panel.

The first of the High Risk findings has been addressed with a much more stringent process of considering the receipt of late applications for the current process, with further tightening of this to be included as part of future Grant rounds.

The second of the High Risk findings is the subject of this report as it clearly identified the risks involved with the direct involvement of Councillors in the evaluation process. While there is no suggestion that Councillors, as members of the Evaluation panel, have inappropriately influenced the allocation of the grants, it is important that a clear separation between the evaluation process and the awarding of the grants exists. As such, it is proposed that Councillors play no direct role in the evaluation of the grants effective immediately, with the recommendations of the evaluation process being considered by Council as a whole.

Councillors, whilst no longer having a direct role in the evaluation of applications to the Community Grants program, will have an important function that consists of:

- Adoption of the Community Grants Policy and guidelines to guide the program and the assessment of applications.
- Consideration of the recommendations at a Council Meeting.
- Ensuring that Council endorses any variations to the recommendations of the Officers Evaluation Panel, with the rationale for these changes clearly identified to ensure transparency.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Council's decision on this matter will inform the review of the Monash Community Grants Program Policy and the Monash Community Grants Program Applicant Guidelines.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

The 2020/21 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.

CONCLUSION

The Monash Community Grants Program is a major community development and capacity building program for the Monash Community. This program recognises and supports the voluntary and community sector in Monash. The changes to the evaluation process as proposed in this Report will ensure increased transparency while maintaining Council's role in setting the guidelines and policy and considering the recommendations of the assessment process.