

## 2.2 2021/22 MONASH COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM

Responsible Director: Russell Hopkins

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### ***PURPOSE***

The purpose of this report is to make recommendations to Council regarding financial and in-kind (facility use/hall hire and printing) allocations to community groups and organisations for the 2021/22 Monash Community Grants Program (MCGP).

#### ***KEY CONSIDERATIONS/ISSUES***

Monash Council has one of the largest community grant programs in Victoria and Council is proud of its commitment to supporting and valuing the dedicated community groups and organisations within our municipality.

The value and interest placed on Council's Community Grants Program is high, with the quantum of funding requests considered in the 2021/22 round approximately \$2.94 million resulting in 236 applications being considered for funding in this round. Of these 236 applications, 119 were already committed as part of 3-year agreements awarded in 2020/21, with an allocated budget of \$1,456,158. A panel of Council officers has assessed all applications against the endorsed guidelines and present its recommendations to Council.

The allocated program budget for the MCGP is \$2,572,837 and officers have recommended a total of \$2,439,636.07 for cash and in-kind allocations to community groups and organisations. This funding will support the delivery of projects and services across the Monash community.

Officers are seeking endorsement from Council for the continuation of an adapted Quick Response Grant (QRG) program as this initiative has proven to be highly successful to encourage community strengthening during 2020/21. Additionally, it is recommended that a one-off QRG stream of grants focusing on 'Community Resilience and Recovery Response' be established to enable Council to continue assisting the community to respond to the COVID-normal environment for 2021/22.

#### ***FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS***

The assessment panel's recommendations fall within the available 2020/21 Monash Community Grants Program budget.

#### ***CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION***

The Monash Community Grants Assessment Panel recommendations are presented to Council within the available budget. Each application was assessed in accordance with the Monash Community Grants Program Policy, utilising a category specific matrix to ensure a fair and equitable process. The Assessment Panel have recommended allocations totalling \$2,439,636.07 for the delivery of projects, events and services throughout 2021/2022.

## 2.2 2020/21 MONASH COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM

Responsible Director: Russell Hopkins

### **RECOMMENDATION**

*That Council approves the in-principle allocation of the 2021/22 Monash Community Grants Program budget (\$2,572,837), subject to the adoption of Council's 2021/22 budget, in the following way:*

- a) Allocates a total of \$2,439,636.07 in financial and in-kind grant allocations to local community groups and organisations in line with the Monash Community Grants Program Policy & Guidelines; and*
- b) Quarantines \$110,000 for the continuation of the successful Quick Response Grant program and the one-off funding for a Community Resilience and Recovery Response Grant program to enable Council to continue assisting the community to respond to the COVID-normal environment in 2021/22.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this report is to make recommendations to Council regarding financial and in-kind (facility use/hall hire and printing) allocations to community groups and organisations for the 2021/22 Monash Community Grants Program (MCGP).

### **BACKGROUND**

Monash Council has one of the largest community grant programs in Victoria and is proud of its commitment in supporting and valuing the dedicated community groups and organisations within our municipality. The Monash Community Grants Program provides significant financial and in-kind support to Monash community groups and community organisations with the aim of:

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

Implementation of the 2021/22 Monash Community Grants Program required all applicants to submit their applications online, via the SmartyGrants portal.

At its meeting on Tuesday 24 November 2020, Council formally adopted the policy and guidelines for the 2021/22 Monash Community Grants Program (Attachments 1 and 2). Council's policy reinforces its ongoing support and commitment to the community and community organisations.

## **DISCUSSION**

The 2021/22 MCGP opened at 9am on Thursday 28 January, 2021 and closed at 2pm on Thursday 4 March, 2021. This offered community groups and organisations a period of five weeks to submit their application.

The 2021/22 Monash Community Grants Program was promoted in a number of ways, including:

- Formally advertised in the following publications
  - *Monash Bulletin*
  - *Neos Kosmos (Greek)*
  - *Il Globo (Italian)*
  - *Australian Chinese News (Chinese)*
- Emails were sent to all current and past grants recipients
- Various Council department newsletters, including:
  - Art & About
  - Sustainability News
  - Active Monash
- Multiple social media posts from December to February
- JC Decaux advertising throughout the municipality
- Officer support to applicants included:
  - Multiple application and information Support Sessions held throughout February;
  - Over the phone support to answer questions and provide clarification on the application process; and
  - One-on-one meetings between officers and applicants to provide direct assistance.

Council organised two free Effective Grant Writing Workshops which were held in February as part of our commitment to continuous improvement in the grant program and building the capacity of groups by assisting prospective applicants to develop stronger applications. These sessions were hosted by the City of Monash on Zoom and facilitated by Debby Maziarz with a total of 29 participants.

It was noted by the assessment panel that those who attended the workshops produced better quality applications than they have in the past.

As outlined in the 2021/22 Monash Community Grants Program Policy and Guidelines (see Attachments 1 and 2), organisations were invited to seek funding under nine grants categories:

1. Community Strengthening;
2. Community Strengthening - Hall Only;
3. Specialist Services;
4. Neighbourhood Houses;
5. Positive Ageing;
6. Arts & Cultural Projects;
7. Community Events;
8. Major Festivals; and
9. Active Projects

This year a total of 236 applications were received and considered, totalling \$2,924,571.45, across all categories. Of these, 117 were new applications, with a total value of \$1,468,413.45, and 119 applications were already committed as part of a 3-year agreement awarded in 2020/21, with a total value of \$1,456,158.

The category with the highest number of new applications was Community Strengthening, with 33 applications. This, however, is less than what was received in this category in 2020/21 and may reflect the impact that COVID-19 has had on community groups and organisations. Officers also note that a short five-day lockdown occurred in the middle of the application phase which may have caused some groups to reflect on their decisions to apply for a grant given the uncertain times.

Regarding applications in the other categories, the number received for Arts & Cultural Projects remained consistent with 2020/21, Active Projects and Major Festivals increased slightly however Community Events were lower than in 20/21. This was to be expected given the difficulty in planning events in the current environment.

All current multi-year funding agreements for Community Strengthening – Hall Only, Specialist Services, Neighbourhood Houses and Positive Ageing that were approved in 20/21 are in place until 30 June 2023. Additional applications were received for all multi-year categories, with some requesting to supersede current agreements and others applying for the first time.

An assessment panel consisting of officers from the Community Services directorate assessed all applications against Council's endorsed policy and guidelines. An evaluation matrix was utilised for each category to ensure that the applications were considered and assessed in a fair, equitable and transparent manner. This ensured the assessment process had rigour and consistency. Additionally it enables valuable feedback to be provided to applicants on their application.

Each category of the MCGP attracts diverse and varied applicants, this variation encourages a range of projects, events and festivals to exist within Monash and add another layer of vibrancy to our thriving community.

### **ALLOCATIONS**

After the disruption caused by the pandemic since March 2020, local community groups, programs and events are more important than ever to reconnect and strengthen the communities in which we live. Officers are acutely aware that all projects, events and activities that receive funding will need to be able to proceed in the current COVID-normal environment, and should be adaptable for changing circumstances throughout 2021/22.

Despite the nervousness surrounding COVID 19, and a slight reduction in applications received, the allocations that have been recommended by the Grants Assessment Panel are consistent and in-line with those from 2020/21.

The MCGP allocates both financial and in-kind support across all categories, with the exceptions being Major Festivals and Active Projects offering financial only, Community Strengthening - Hall Only offering only hall hire and Positive Ageing being the only category offering in-kind printing.

Positive Ageing grants for seniors groups (excluding Probus) are based on a formula that takes into account how many regular Monash participants are in the group (a membership list was required containing suburbs in which each member lived), how many times the group meets and the number of meals provided. The printing component is also calculated on a formula. Probus groups are encouraged to apply in this category however are not eligible for the cash component, only in-kind hall or other venue hire and in-kind printing

Many of the groups that receive support from Council for their regular meetings through in-kind hall or other venue hire were able to adapt in 2020 by moving their activities online. In recognition that some group members may not feel comfortable meeting in-person or that groups may wish to provide a hybrid model, all current Positive Ageing and Community Strengthening – Hall Only recipients were offered an additional \$210 cash payment per year to cover the costs of a ZoomPro subscription for 2021/22 and 2022/23.

Of the 104 Positive Ageing and Hall Only groups that were offered the ZoomPro subscription, 39 accepted (26 Positive Ageing, 13 Hall Only). This option was also included in the application forms for the 2021/22 round for both categories to enable all new applicants to have the same opportunity. Seven (7) of the fifteen (15) new Hall Only applicants and three of the five new Positive Ageing applicants requested this option.

The table on the following page outlines the financial and in-kind support that is being recommended the 2021/22 MCGP round by the Grants Assessment Panel.

	Cash	Hall Hire (In-kind)	Other/Non Council Venue Hire	Facility Rental (In Kind)	Printing (In Kind)	Zoom	Total
<b>Community Strengthening</b>	\$174,931.00	\$71,206.09	-	-	-	-	<b>\$246,137.09</b>
<b>Community Strengthening - Hall Only</b>	-	\$101,813.44	\$1,951.50	-	-	\$3,570.00	<b>\$107,334.94</b>
<b>Specialist Services</b>	\$521,282.00	\$2,168.66	\$2,463.33	\$138,004.04	-	-	<b>\$663,918.03</b>
<b>Neighbourhood Houses</b>	\$69,365.00	-	-	\$411,260.90	-	-	<b>\$480,625.90</b>
<b>Positive Ageing</b>	\$146,566.20	\$579,702.96	\$17,362.90	-	\$4,273.98	\$6,090.00	<b>\$753,996.04</b>
<b>Arts &amp; Cultural Projects</b>	\$52,329.00	\$43,595.43	\$11,696.00	-	-	-	<b>\$107,620.43</b>
<b>Community Events</b>	\$33,900.00	\$1,343.64	-	-	-	-	<b>\$35,243.64</b>
<b>Major Festivals</b>	\$40,600.00	-	-	-	-	-	<b>\$40,600.00</b>
<b>Active Projects</b>	\$4,160.00	-	-	-	-	-	<b>\$4,160.00</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,053,133.20</b>	<b>\$799,830.22</b>	<b>\$33,473.73</b>	<b>\$549,264.94</b>	<b>\$4,273.98</b>	<b>\$9,660.00</b>	<b>\$2,439,636.07</b>

**LATE SUBMISSIONS**

Crowe, Council's appointed auditors, recommended through their most recent audit that late submissions were not accepted. Council endorsed this service improvement at its meeting on 24 November 2020. The closing time for the grant program was widely communicated and the community was made aware that no late submissions will be accepted.

Requests for late submissions were received from two groups after the 2pm deadline on Thursday 4 March, but consistent with the MCGP policy these requests were denied.

This is a vast improvement on other years, where multiple requests would be received. This demonstrates that the community is now aware of the guidelines and that they must adhere to them.

**SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS**

A number of service improvements were made to the grant program this year:

- Including catering for art exhibitions within the Arts & Cultural Projects category, excluding alcohol, to a maximum of \$500
- A \$10,000 cap for hall hire applied in the Arts & Cultural Projects category, where previously no cap was recorded
- No longer accepting late submissions

Officers will undertake a thorough review of the MCGP in July/August to identify if any further service improvements should be made to the program for 2022/23. The findings from this review will be included in the 2022/23 MCGP report to be endorsed by Council at the October 2021 meeting.

**QUICK RESPONSE GRANT PROGRAMS**

At its meeting in June 2020 Council endorsed the establishment of a Quick Response Grant program (QRG) with a budget of \$135,000. The basis for this grant program was to enable the Monash community and Council to remain adaptive and agile in response to COVID and ensure that groups could continue to meet and bring the community together. This program has proven to be extremely successful and Council will be provided with a further report at the conclusion of the program in June. The QRG Guidelines are attached (Attachment 5).

Officers seek consideration by Council that the Quick Response Grant Program remains as an open grant program for 2021/22 onwards. The current surplus in the grants program will ensure that this program is funded via the available budget with a recommended amount of \$60,000 available annually.

The future focus of the QRG program will not be on COVID, rather it will be an opportunity for groups or individual artists whose idea, program, or issue falls outside of the normal grant round and currently have no other alternative to apply for funding through Council. This ensures that Council is continuing to remain adaptive and agile to community needs and that any money distributed to community groups is still bound by guidelines, rigour and the necessary financial requirements to acquit a grant successfully.

Officers will continue to assess the grants as per the current structure and provide a report to Council after each assessment period has been completed.

Officers are also aware that the ramifications of COVID will be felt for some time throughout the community and want to be in a position to support with resilience and recovery. Officers are proposing that \$50,000 of the remaining surplus be quarantined to assist with programs and projects that directly respond to the communities' response to recovery and resilience from COVID. This will be administered by the QRG but will have a different application form and assessment criteria. This particular grant will only be available for 2021/22 and will not be a reoccurring grant.

The total budget that is requested for the QRG for 2021/22 is \$110,000, available within the existing budget.

### ***POLICY IMPLICATIONS***

The Monash Community Grants Program Policy has been implemented with the intention of supporting both the 'Council Plan' and the 'Healthy & Resilient Monash: Integrated Plan' and other relevant strategic documents. The Program encourages community connectivity and participation, as well as focusing Council's support on the groups most in need. The MCGP Policy will be reviewed regularly to ensure that it meets the changing needs of both Council and the community.

### ***SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS***

The Monash community sector has a rich history of innovation in promoting community participation and civic engagement. The contribution of community organisations in developing, coordinating and managing the many activities funded by the Monash Community Grants Program is well recognised and respected by Council.

The 2021/22 Monash Community Grants Program funding facilitates community groups operating in Monash to draw on this legacy and continue their social and cultural activities and community services.

### ***HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS***

The 2021/22 Monash Community Grants Program addresses the four key themes: freedom, respect, equality and dignity of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

### ***FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS***

The 2021/22 Monash Community Grants Program is delivered within the available budget, subject to the successful adoption of Council's budget at its June meeting.

<b>MCGP Budget</b>	<b>\$2,572,837.00</b>
<i>Less</i> 2021/22 MCGP Recommended Allocations	\$2,439,636.07
Proposed 2021/22 Quick Response Grant Program	\$60,000.00
Proposed 2021/22 COVID Resilience & Response Grant Program	\$50,000.00
<b>Total Allocated</b>	<b>\$2,549,636.07</b>
<i>Total Surplus</i>	<u><u>\$23,200.93</u></u>



**CONCLUSION**

The Monash Community Grants Assessment Panel recommendations are presented to Council within the available budget. Each application was assessed in accordance with the Monash Community Grants Program Policy, utilising a category specific matrix to ensure a fair and equitable process. The Monash Community Grants Assessment Panel has recommended allocations totalling \$2,439,636.07 for the delivery of projects, events and services throughout 2021/2022.

**ATTACHMENTS**

<b>Attachment 1</b>	2021/22 Monash Community Grants Program Policy
<b>Attachment 2</b>	2021/22 Monash Community Grants Program Guidelines
<b>Attachment 3</b>	2021/22 MCGP Summary of Allocations
<b>Attachment 4</b>	<b>Individual assessments for each application (Confidential)</b>
<b>Attachment 5</b>	Quick Response Grant Program Guidelines