

ITEM 7. AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL LINKAGE GRANT APPLICATION: PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME AND SOCIAL COHESION: MEASURING, MONITORING, AND REDUCING FEAR OF CRIME

FILE NO: X009392

SUMMARY

Globally competitive cities are liveable cities, and safety is fundamental to the liveability of a city. The real and perceived safety of our residents, business and visitors continues to be a strategic priority for the City. There are many factors that influence perceptions of safety from built environment to social engagement. Negative perceptions of crime pose an ongoing challenge to a diverse and cohesive society. Perceptions of safety in the City of Sydney are important to our economic and social success.

The City currently runs a diverse range of programs that aim to improve actual and perceived safety as well as strengthening communities and increasing social inclusion. Rigorous analysis of current community perceptions and attitudes to crime are important to the successful delivery of these programs and services. The City has previously undertaken research to understand perceptions of safety in the local government area. The findings of this research inform the City's service delivery to improve outcomes for residents, business and visitors.

The University of Sydney have approached the City to become a supporting partner of an Australian Research Council Linkage Research Grant proposal to undertake the research project: *Perceptions of Crime and Social Cohesion: Measuring, Monitoring and Reducing Fear of Crime*. This research aims to understand perceptions of safety among residents, business and visitors and identify how to effectively reduce worry about crime, increase social cohesion and standardise data collection and evaluation tools to measure program effectiveness. Participation in this research will ensure that the City has valuable baseline data and evaluation tools to guide future policies and programs. The scale of the project will also provide opportunity for more localised crime analysis to understand the effects of programs on perceptions of crime across the local government area.

The total estimated cost of the project is \$661,006 if funding is secured through the Australian Research Council Linkage Research Grant application and this report recommends the City provides \$40,000 per year for three years to the project if the application is successful.

Through participation in the project, the City has the potential to directly shape the research questions to meet our organisational objectives and to benefit from new evidence that will support the development of innovative and progressive approaches to increasing actual and perceived safety in Sydney Local Government Area.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve funding of \$120,000 (excluding GST), comprising \$40,000 per financial year over three years (2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20), commencing in early 2018 to the University of Sydney for the *Perceptions of Crime and Social Cohesion: Measuring, Monitoring and Reducing Fear of Crime*;

- (B) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to negotiate, execute and administer an agreement with the University of Sydney to undertake this research; and
- (C) Council note that the grant is subject to the research project being accepted by the Australian Research Council.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil.

BACKGROUND

1. The City of Sydney (the City) has a resident population of over 200,000 and more than 1 million visitors, including workers and business owners, tourists (domestic and international) and students, in our local government area on a daily basis. As with any large city, many factors influence people's perceptions of safety from built environment to social engagement.
2. In 2014/15 the City, in partnership with the University of Sydney, conducted a research pilot titled Perceptions of Crime and Safety: Survey Design and Implementation. As part of the project City staff and the University of Sydney developed a survey using a best practice research approach. This survey was then tested in a small scale study on 100 residents from disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in the local government area.
3. In 2016 the City, in partnership with the University of Sydney, conducted a larger scale perceptions of safety research project building on the findings from the previous survey in 2014. Over 400 residents, business and visitors were engaged in the research with interviews conducted with over 100 City residents, business and visitors to gather more fine grain data sets. This research is being finalised with a release expected in the second half of 2017.
4. In addition to the Perceptions of Safety Research, in 2016 the City commissioned research to better understand the Wellbeing of International Students. The research consisted of a literature review, focus groups, in-depth interviews and an online survey. The results of the survey confirmed that the focus and prioritisation of activities that the City currently undertakes for International Students reflects their needs.
5. The key elements of the International Student Wellbeing research, Perceptions of Safety research and elements of other research projects that include safety components (for example the Late Night Areas Management Research and Customer Intercept Survey research) will be consolidated into the Australian Research Council research project moving forward. This will provide budgetary savings and project management efficiencies.
6. The City plans to conduct research into perceptions of safety regularly to inform service delivery and ensure the needs of visitors, residents and vulnerable groups are being met. Funds of \$40,000 are allocated in the draft 2017/18 budget for this research.
7. The City of Sydney has been approached by the University of Sydney to become a supporting partner of an Australian Research Council Linkage Research Grant application to undertake the research project: *Perceptions of Crime and Social Cohesion: Measuring, Monitoring and Reducing Fear of Crime*.
8. The University of Sydney is seeking two key partners, the City being one, to contribute cash grants for three years. The second is the Department of Justice and Regulation, Victoria, who will contribute \$30,000 per year for three years.
9. The Australian Research Council Linkage Research Grants scheme encourages the development of long-term strategic research alliances between higher-education and partner organisations to apply advanced knowledge to problems and/or provide opportunities to obtain national economic, social or cultural benefits.

10. An Australian Research Council Linkage Research Grant involves universities partnering with industry-based organisations in relevant sectors and together shaping the research questions to be examined. Partner organisations pledge a cash contribution over the life of the project: three years in this case.
11. An Australian Research Council Linkage Research Grant offers partners the benefit of involvement in a large scale research to leverage their contributions, as partner contributions are then matched by the Australian Research Council Linkage Research Grant.
12. The application will be submitted by 31 July 2017, with the outcome of the application expected in early 2018. If the joint Australian Research Council Linkage Research Grant application is successful, the study will commence in the 2017/2018 financial year. The project will be undertaken across three years - 2018, 2019 and 2020 - and will make the following deliverables available to partners:
 - (a) conduct research to identify community perceptions of crime in Sydney and comparable Melbourne locations;
 - (b) develop two reports on perceptions of safety in Sydney to be delivered in 2018 and 2020;
 - (c) an analysis of perceptions of safety from face-to-face engagement with a larger sample than previous research projects. The sample will be randomised and face-to-face in nature and will also include key focus groups with residents, business, visitors, international students and vulnerable groups in Sydney Local Government Area;
 - (d) an infographic of the key findings will be developed upon completion of the 2020 and 2018 report;
 - (e) a tool kit of sampling guidelines, survey questions and evaluation tools to ensure compatible application for local government in future years, and
 - (f) proven methodology which can be applied to similar research exercises in other areas and can be used over time to assess perceptions of safety.
13. The research is important as the City currently runs a diverse range of programs that aim to impact on actual and perceived safety as well as strengthening communities and increasing social inclusion.
14. The cash contribution of \$40,000 per year for three years will allow for a detailed analysis of what concerns City visitors, residents and key stakeholder groups. Focus groups will include business representatives, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents, social housing tenants, culturally and linguistically diverse community members, international students, youth, older adults and LGBTIQ residents.
15. If the application is successful, the City will leverage its investment into a research project worth at least five times the invested amount. The research will be academically rigorous and the scale of the project will allow for more detailed localised crime statistical analysis to understand the effects on crime on the local community.

16. It is noted that the City is not the applicant for this research grant (the University of Sydney is the applicant). The City will be a supporting partner. It is also noted that the City's funds are contingent on the application being successful.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030 Vision

17. *Sustainable Sydney 2030* is a vision for the sustainable development of the City to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the City, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This grant is aligned with the following *Sustainable Sydney 2030* strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) Direction 1 - A globally competitive and innovative city - A globally competitive city is critical to Australia's economic prosperity and expands opportunities for residents, business, workers and the broader society. Safety is a factor in attracting visitors, business and international students all of which play an integral role to the success of the City's economy. Understanding the safety perceptions and identifying predictors of fear and crime can contribute to increasing the actual and perceived safety of the City and strengthen our economy.
 - (b) Direction 6 - Vibrant local communities and economies - Building the sense of community by increasing social cohesion can have multiple social and economic benefits. This aligns to the City's commitment to a City for all. The research findings can contribute to reducing crime and increasing safety through our role in managing public space, providing local services, developing policies that affect local businesses and community engagement.

Organisational Impact

18. Management of the research project will be achieved using existing staff resources.
19. The project has the potential to bring staff capacity-building benefits throughout the duration of the study, as a result of the networking, university collaboration and information sharing towards the analysis of effective policy responses, which is an integral part of the study aims and outcomes.

Social / Cultural / Community

20. Within many communities there is an increased perception of danger and lack of safety, though statistically that threat is not so significant. It is important to understand why this occurs to assist in guiding future City strategies and programs.

Economic

21. The research outcomes closely align with the City's aspirations for the sustainable economic development of cities identified in *Sustainable Sydney 2030* - improving social cohesion in the City. The research findings may inform the improved effectiveness of policy and programming responses by the City and other participating local government authorities that may directly and indirectly improve economic, urban development, strategic planning, social, cultural and other outcomes over the short and longer term.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

22. Funding for the research project *Perceptions of Crime and Social Cohesion: Measuring, Monitoring and Reducing Fear of Crime* of \$40,000 per year (excluding GST) for three years has been included in the draft 2017/18 Safe City operational budget and in forward estimates in future years.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

23. Section 356 of the *Local Government Act 1993*.

CRITICAL DATES / TIME FRAMES

24. The submission to the Australian Research Council will be made in 31 July 2017. If the bid is successful, the project will run for three years from mid-2018 to 2020.
25. Outcomes of Australian Research Council Linkage Grant Applications are announced in early 2018. If successful, agreements between Australian Research Council and the grant recipient (the University of Sydney) are to be executed through a formal contract process.

OPTIONS

26. If the Australian Research Council Research Linkage Grant application is not successful the City will conduct a Request for Quotation to conduct local scale perceptions of safety research to inform work programs.

ANN HOBAN

Director City Life

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