

Item 4.

Post Exhibition - Grants Policy and Guidelines

File No: X119718

Summary

The City of Sydney's (City) Grants Policy and Guidelines support initiatives and projects that build the social, cultural, environmental and economic life of the city. The current Policy was adopted by Council in August 2022 and the current Guidelines in June 2025.

The Grants Policy and Guidelines form the framework by which the City manages grant funding applications. We commit to reviewing the Policy every 4 years. Following the review, changes to the Policy are recommended to clarify processes and improve guidance for applicants. The recommended changes to the Guidelines will streamline processes, continue to support strong outcomes for our communities and ensure that programs continue to deliver against Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: Continuing the Vision.

In December 2025 Council approved the public exhibition of the draft Policy and Guidelines. This exhibition period ran from 16 December 2025 to 2 March 2026 (with feedback being received from 12 January to 2 March 2026).

A total of 43 people provided feedback during the exhibition of the draft Grants Policy and Guidelines. These have been summarised in the exhibition report at Attachment E.

Following the exhibition period, no further changes are proposed for the Grants Policy. Changes to the Grants Guidelines in response to submissions have been summarised in this report and identified in the copy of the draft Grant Guidelines. This report recommends Council adopt the draft Grants Policy at Attachment A and draft Grant Guidelines at Attachment B.

The revised Policy and Guidelines will be implemented in financial year 2026/27, with applications for annual programs opening in July 2026, and recommendations reported to Council at the end of the year 2026 once the Grants budget has been endorsed by Council for that period.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council note the submissions received from the community on the draft Grants Policy and Guidelines as shown at Attachment E to the subject report;
- (B) Council adopt the revised Grants Policy as shown at Attachment A to the subject report;
- (C) Council adopt the revised Grants Guidelines as shown at Attachment B to the subject report; and
- (D) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to make minor amendments to the Grants Policy and Guidelines in order to correct any minor drafting errors and finalise design, artwork and accessible formats for publication.

Attachments

- Attachment A.** Draft Grants Policy 2026
- Attachment B.** Draft Grants Guidelines 2026
- Attachment C.** Grants and Sponsorship Policy 2022
- Attachment D.** Grants and Sponsorship Program Guidelines 2025
- Attachment E.** Exhibition Report - Grants Policy and Guidelines 2026

Background

1. The Grants and Sponsorship Policy and Guidelines were last reviewed in full in 2022 and endorsed by Council in August 2022.
2. A review of the Grants Policy and Guidelines commenced in 2024 to be considered as part of the 4 year policy period up for review by 2026.
3. Draft changes to the Guidelines have been developed with input gained through workshops with the community, specifically grant applicants, as well as City staff and Councillors.
4. The Policy states that it will be reviewed every 4 years.
5. The review was brought to Council for approval for the revised Policy and Guidelines to go on public exhibition in December 2025.
6. In December 2025, Council approved that the Ethics Framework included in the Grants Policy be adopted as the Ethics Framework across the Council and be posted on the City of Sydney website.

Revised Grants Policy

7. In the public exhibition period, respondents were positive about the clear governance principles and process detailed in the Policy, plus the ongoing focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and leadership.
8. No further changes are proposed to the Policy post public exhibition.

Revised Grants Guidelines

9. On 23 June 2025, Council adopted the current Grants and Sponsorship Guidelines. Since then, feedback has consistently highlighted the need for a simpler, more streamlined and easier application process, and the difficulty of navigating eligibility and program requirements. In addition, there is increased pressure on the program, impacting the efficiency and effectiveness of the grants program.
10. The revised Grants Guidelines addresses feedback and program pressures with the following key changes:
 - (a) Streamlined program of grants aligned with the key strategic pillars of the City of Sydney - social, creative, economic and environmental
 - (b) Program designed around 1 major round a year
 - (c) Clearer assessment criteria
 - (d) Increased time to support applicants in applying.
11. Quick response grants and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collaboration fund continue to be offered all year around as does our Value in kind (VIK) support through Venue hire and Street banner programs.

12. Accommodation grants, Short-term empty properties and Creative live and work spaces will continue to be offered when the opportunities arise.
13. The Affordable and diverse housing fund will continue to be offered when applicants seek support. The funding caps for the Affordable and diverse housing fund have been adjusted, increasing maximum funding from \$3 million to \$4 million or no more than 30% of the total cost.
14. Changes to the Guidelines have been emphasised at Attachment B and responses to feedback detailed below.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

15. Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision renews the communities' vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2050. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This policy and guidelines are aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 2 - A leading environmental performer - Grants contribute to the City's endeavours in improving environmental performance of our residents and businesses by supporting new and innovative approaches to delivering sustainability outcomes and strengthening community resilience.
 - (b) Direction 3 - Public places for all - Grants contribute to the safe and responsible use of public spaces for community access and enjoyment of city residents, workers and visitors.
 - (c) Direction 6 - An equitable and inclusive city - Grants contribute to community development and support active participation in civic life. They empower the community to address issues that matter to them and drive projects to create a more inclusive and resilient city.
 - (d) Direction 7 - Resilient and diverse communities - Grants contribute to improved wellbeing, well located, inclusive and affordable services that improve social connections and embrace a safe city.
 - (e) Direction 8 - A thriving cultural life - Grants contribute to supporting artistic and creative endeavours in our city, helping foster initiative, experimentation and enterprise by creative workers and providing new opportunities for audiences to engage in the city's cultural life.
 - (f) Direction 9 - A transformed and innovative economy - Grants contribute to helping stimulate business and promote economic activity. They encourage partnerships with other organisations on business development and assist groups of businesses to work together for the collective benefit.
 - (g) Direction 10 - Housing for all - Grants align with the City's position on affordable housing, homelessness and social sustainability, as set out in A City For All, the social sustainability strategy, as well as Housing for All, the City's housing strategy.

Organisational Impact

16. The revised program will enable the Grants team to deliver community focused support and help applicants in their grant process which is one of the key objectives of the review.

Risks

17. This recommendation is within the City's risk appetite, which states:
 - (a) We make decisions that align with our corporate objectives, policies and strategies and are committed to conducting our activities in full compliance with applicable laws, regulations and relevant industry standards.
 - (b) We foster a culture of ethics, integrity and responsible behaviour across our organisation. By creating a strong ethical foundation, we aim to minimise the likelihood of reputation-damaging incidents and enhance our ability to respond effectively when challenges arise.
 - (c) The City has a responsibility to ensure that it has sufficient resources in the short, medium and long term to provide the levels of service that are both affordable and considered appropriate by the community.
18. The City has a responsibility to manage the distribution of public money to community through an open and transparent process. The Grants Policy and Guidelines documents provide this transparency and allows for public input.

Social / Cultural / Environmental/Economic

19. The grants program provides the City with a platform to support social, cultural, economic and environmental initiatives from individuals, communities, community organisations and businesses within the local area.

Financial Implications

20. There are no additional financial implications beyond the grant budgets which will be submitted to Council as part of the draft 2026/27 budget and future years' forward estimates. The grants budget is included in the long-term financial plan.

Relevant Legislation

21. Section 356 of the Local Government Act 1993 regulates how financial assistance can be given by local councils.
22. As part of the Local Government Act 1993 and Integrated Planning and Reporting requirements, the City is required to exhibit changes to its grants program.

23. The Grants Policy provides the governance framework for how the City of Sydney's grant programs are managed, and how decisions are made. The Guidelines provide details about each of the grant programs including funding priorities, key dates, funding available, eligibility criteria, application processes and assessment criteria. The Policy and Guidelines ensure that the City of Sydney meets the requirements of section 356 of the Local Government Act 1993 in relation to its grants program.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

24. The proposed changes to the Grants Policy and Guidelines will be implemented for the 2026/27 financial year subject to adoption by Council.

Public Consultation

25. The revised Grants Policy and Guidelines were on exhibition from 16 December 2025 to 2 March 2026, with feedback received from 12 January to 2 March 2026.
26. The Sydney Your Say website included a summary of the purpose of the consultation, a description of the changes, an overview of the grants available and other key information. The draft Policy and Guidelines were available to download.
27. An email was sent to 8,693 subscribed stakeholders to advise them of the exhibition period. In addition, the public exhibition was included in City of Sydney external newsletters.
28. A community information session was held on Thursday 12 February 2026 and was attended by 55 people.
29. The Sydney Your Say webpage was viewed by 857 people, and the draft documents were downloaded 195 times. In total, 43 people provided feedback through online surveys, written submissions and at the information session, including 8 written submissions.
30. Overall, feedback was positive. Many respondents supported a simpler grant structure, clearer assessment criteria and greater consistency across programs. There was strong support for increased assistance for those applying, and appreciation for efforts to standardise processes and make information easier to understand.
31. From final submissions received, 9 key themes were received and are summarised in the table below.

Feedback provided	Comment	Response
(a) Broader and more inclusive language to describe priority communities	<p>Three submissions sought greater focus on priority communities at risk.</p> <p>Respondents stated current wording may exclude many culturally and racially marginalised people.</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>Our current priority communities are as defined in our Social Sustainability Policy: A City for All. These priority communities are reflected in the Guidelines and includes people with English as a second language as well as new immigrants, non-citizens and refugees.</p> <p>This feedback will be taken on board during the review of the Social Sustainability Policy and Action Plan.</p>
(b) Concerns about moving to a single grant round	<p>Three concerns were raised about a single grant round potentially limiting access to funding and unintentionally disadvantaging small organisations.</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>There are still many programs that are offered year round.</p> <p>A key component of the Grants Administration principles, as detailed in the revised Grants Policy, is Proportionality. This requires that grant programs reduce unnecessary administrative burdens. Offering the primary grant programs once a year will enable small organisations to apply once a year and the City oversee the range and diversity of applicants supported in one year.</p> <p>In addition, longer lead times and application periods will be provided plus additional time, such as increased face to face opportunities, to support small organisations in applying.</p>

Feedback provided	Comment	Response
(c) Simpler categories and assessment criteria	Two submissions sought a simplification of categories and assessment criteria.	<p>Agree and addressed as part of the version on exhibition.</p> <p>A primary focus of the revised guidelines is to achieve simpler categories and assessment criteria. Some respondents noted this in their feedback.</p>
(d) Social Enterprises eligibility	One submission requested eligibility criteria to include organisations defined as social enterprises especially in the Social/community category.	<p>Noted and included further clarity.</p> <p>Social enterprises are not legal entities and there is no government search website that determines this definition. If a social enterprise is also registered as an eligible entity they are able to apply for that grant, including if they are a not for profit entity, they are eligible to apply to the Social/community category.</p>
(e) Flexibility for creative space costs	One request for funding to supplement increased costs in commercial rents.	<p>Noted.</p> <p>The City offers significant subsidies for creative space through the Accommodation Grants program. In addition, the new Artist Support initiative will allow artists to use the grant for rental costs.</p>
(f) Flexible Acquittal deadlines and support	One request for acquittal deadline to be flexible for all applicants and support be given to smaller organisations.	<p>Noted and already available.</p> <p>Acquittals are set for a month after the completion of a project. Applicants can negotiate with their relationship manager to change acquittal dates.</p> <p>Grants staff are available to support applicants with their acquittals.</p>

Feedback provided	Comment	Response
(g) Clearer definitions of eligibility limits including operational costs	One submission requested greater clarity on eligibility requirements and on what is defined as an operational cost.	Noted and addressed as part of the version on exhibition. Guidelines provide greater clarity on eligibility requirements. This will be expanded on in the application forms and in information sessions provided when the round opens.
(h) Auspicing	One submission asked for clarity on auspicing arrangements.	Noted. It is noted that understanding auspicing can be challenging for applicants. Support in this area is being developed to assist all applicants and made available by speaking with the Grants team.
(i) Longer windows for applying	One request suggested longer application open periods for multi-year or biennial programs.	Noted and addressed as part of the version on exhibition. It is anticipated that the longer application open period of 6 weeks for the single grants round will address this concern.

32. A detailed report on the feedback received is at Attachment E.
33. Promotion of the new Policy and Guidelines will be shared through information sessions, grant writing workshops, new web pages on the Council website and face-to-face sessions.

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