

Attachment E

<p>Exhibition Report – Grants Policy and Guidelines</p>
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Exhibition report - grants policy and guidelines 2026



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Executive summary

The City of Sydney is reviewing its grants policy and guidelines to make the program clearer, easier to use and fairer for applicants. This report summarises feedback received through community consultation held between 12 January and 2 March 2026. The consultation explored how clear the draft documents were, what support applicants need, and whether the proposed changes would improve accessibility and equity.

Overall, feedback was very positive. Many respondents supported a simpler grant structure, clearer assessment criteria and greater consistency across programs. There was strong support for increased assistance for individual artists and creative spaces, and appreciation for efforts to standardise processes and make information easier to understand.

A key focus of the consultation was introducing more practical, hands on support for applicants, and feedback strongly endorsed this approach. Respondents said the proposed resources, including examples of successful applications, templates, checklists, step by step guidance and access to grants officers, would be highly useful and would make the application process easier and more accessible, particularly for less experienced applicants.

Some respondents suggested using broader and more inclusive language to describe priority communities. They proposed terms such as “culturally and racially marginalised communities” to better reflect groups experiencing structural disadvantage who may not be captured by the current definitions.

Other issues raised included the need for more flexible acquittal deadlines for small organisations, clearer guidance on eligible operational costs, the financial pressure created by rising creative space rents, and the importance of providing feedback to unsuccessful applicants. A small number of submissions also noted concerns about reduced flexibility if funding opportunities become less frequent.

Overall, participants welcomed the intent to strengthen and simplify the grants program. They emphasised the importance of clear, inclusive language, flexibility and practical support to ensure the program is accessible and effective for a wide range of applicants.

Overview

Background

The City of Sydney is reviewing its grants policy and guidelines to make them easier to use and fairer for applicants. Proposed changes include longer application periods and consistent opening dates. The draft simplifies the structure and expands eligibility for more organisations and projects. The draft guidelines include clearer procedures and assessment criteria, and propose additional support for applicants before and after applying. The overall budget for grants remains the same. The draft policy includes updates to the ethics framework and the guiding principles for grant administration.

Engagement

From **12 January to 2 March 2026**, the City of Sydney invited the community to provide feedback on the updated grants policy and guidelines. Participants were asked to comment on how useful and clear the draft guidelines were, and what support they need when applying for City grants.

Consultation activities included an online survey and an online community information session. The consultation was promoted through email direct marketing and various e-newsletters.

This report outlines the community engagement activities that took place to support the consultation and summarises the key findings.

Purpose

The purpose of this public exhibition (consultation) was to consult with stakeholders and the community on proposed changes to the City of Sydney's grants and sponsorship guidelines, and to help ensure the revised program is accessible, equitable and effective.

Objectives

- Meet the requirements of a statutory public exhibition and the City of Sydney's community engagement strategy.
 - Explain the key aspects of the updated policy and guidelines in plain English.
 - Seek feedback on the draft policy and guidelines, including the proposed changes.
 - Notify previous grant applicants and key stakeholder groups.
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Engagement reach

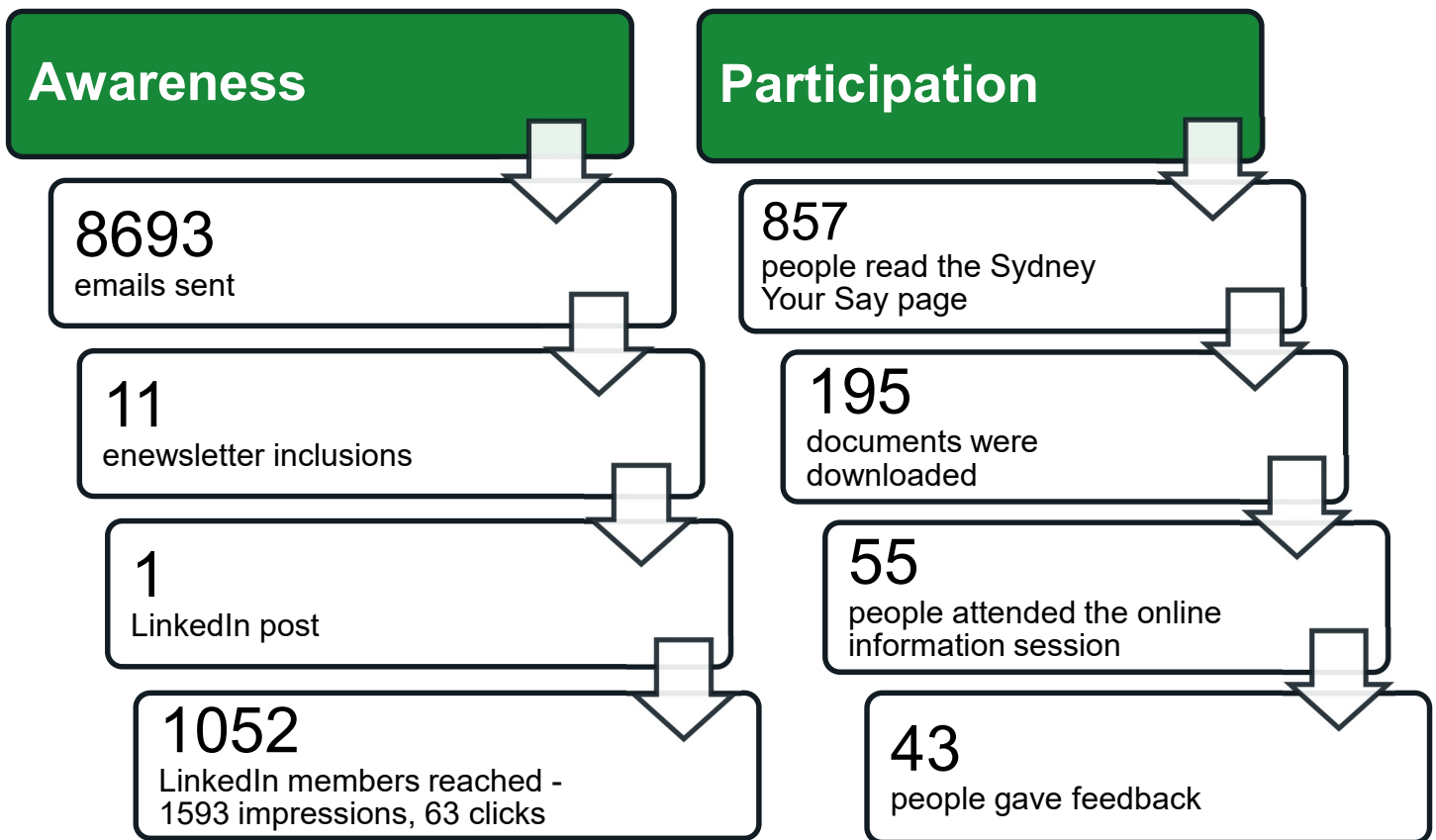
The Sydney Your Say webpage was viewed by 857 people, and the draft documents were downloaded 195 times. The community information session was attended by 55 people. In total, 43 people provided feedback through online surveys, written submissions and at the information session. Promotion and outreach ensured awareness and encouraged participation from residents, community organisations and local cultural groups.

Submissions from organisations

Submissions were received from 9 organisations representing economic, creative and cultural sectors.

- Brand X productions
- Diversity Arts Australia
- Forward Thinking Design
- Kil.n.it
- Performance Space
- Seymour Centre
- Sustainability Now
- Thai Town Business and the Thai Community Association
- Social Enterprise Council of NSW & ACT (SECNA)

Figure 1. Engagement activity and responses



Key findings

Across the survey, information session and email submissions, respondents agreed that the grants program should be accessible and supported with practical resources for applicants. Respondents generally found the draft guidelines to be clear and asked for more examples to support application writing and their understanding of eligibility. The strongest message across all engagement activities was enthusiasm for the proposed practical application support. People consistently selected examples of successful applications, templates, step-by-step guides and one-to-one help from a grants officer as the most useful forms of assistance.

Feedback also highlighted the importance of inclusive language in the definition of priority communities. Several respondents noted that the current phrasing may unintentionally exclude culturally and racially marginalised people who speak English as a first language. A small number of email submissions raised concerns about moving to one main grant round each year, noting the risk of lost momentum and reduced flexibility. Other topics raised included requests for simpler application forms and clearer definitions of operational costs and ineligible costs.

Figure 2 shows the most requested program resources according to the combined results of the information session survey and the online survey.

Figure 2. Responses to the question “What would help you when applying for a grant?”

Resource	No. of responses
Examples of past successful applications	26 responses
Templates or checklists	26 responses
One-to-one help from a grants officer	22 responses
Step-by-step application guides	22 responses
Workshops or webinars	17 responses
Short explainer videos	16 responses

Community information session

On **Tuesday 12 February** we held an online information session to explain the key changes in the updated grants policy and guidelines documents, to answer questions, and to ask participants what would help them when applying for a grant. In total, 137 people registered for the session, and **55 people attended**.

The people who attended represented a mix of creative, cultural, community and economic grant recipients.

Question topics included future plans for application support and feedback, the rationale for moving to one major funding round each year, and the eligibility of pilot projects. A written summary of questions and answers was sent to everyone who registered for the session. (Appendix D)

We asked participants on their experience with applying for grants and what support they would find helpful.

Twenty-five people took part in the session survey. Most attendees said they had previously applied for City of Sydney grants. Some had also applied for grants from other organisations. A small number said they had not applied for a grant before.

Of the support options suggested, one-to-one help from a grants officer was the most selected as helpful, followed by examples of past successful applications, step-by-step application guides, and templates or checklists.

The session survey responses are detailed in figure 3.

Figure 3. Responses to the community information session survey

Question: What would help you when applying for a grant? (Check box question – respondents could select more than one answer)	
One-to-one help from a grants officer	17 responses
Step-by-step application guides	16 responses
Examples of past successful applications	16 responses
Templates or checklists	16 responses
Workshops or webinars	11 responses
Short explainer videos	11 responses

Survey responses

Through an online survey, we asked people to tell us more about how clear the guidelines are, and what would help them when applying for a grant. In total, 11 people gave feedback through the survey.

Most respondents said they found the guidelines somewhat clear, and suggested that simpler criteria, clearer examples and more accessible formats would help. They strongly preferred practical support tools such as templates and example applications, as well as information about other funding sources. Comment themes included requests to expand eligibility criteria for priority communities, social enterprise organisations and apartment buildings.

Survey respondents

Of the people who gave feedback through the survey, 7 responded as individuals and 4 responded on behalf of an organisation. Most respondents (7 people) have experience applying for a grant through our program, and some (4 people) have no experience applying for grants.

Survey respondents represented community groups, not-for-profits, business and social enterprise. Most respondents run creative projects (5 people), and some run cultural projects (2 people) or economic projects (2 people).

The responses to survey questions are detailed in the tables in figure 4.

Figure 4. Survey responses

Q1. How clear are the guidelines in helping you identify which grant program best matches the nature of your project? (multiple choice question)	
Very clear	27% (3 responses)
Somewhat clear	64% (7 responses)
Not very clear	9% (1 response)
Not at all clear	0
I'm not sure	0

Q2. When reading the eligibility and assessment criteria, how easy is it to understand whether your project would qualify? (multiple choice question)	
Very easy	18% (2 responses)
Somewhat easy	64% (7 responses)
Not very easy	18% (2 response)
Not at all easy	0
I'm not sure	0

Q3. What would make it easier for you to find and apply for the right grant? (Open text question – this table summarises the topics raised)	
Clear criteria	5 responses
Provide examples and FAQs	2 responses
Transparent assessment and detailed feedback	1 response
Identify ineligible expenses	1 response
Increased eligibility for social enterprises	1 response
More specific categories for people working in arts adjacent roles	1 response
An option for partial funding	1 response

Q4. What would help you when applying for a grant?
(Check box question – respondents could select more than one answer)

Examples of past successful applications	10 responses
Templates or checklists	10 responses
Step-by-step application guides	6 responses
Workshops or webinars	6 responses
One-to-one help from a grants officer	5 responses
Short explainer videos	5 responses
Other (short qualifying EOI, example budget and project plan)	2 responses

Q5. Apart from funding, what other types of support would help your project?
(Check box question – respondents could select more than one answer)

Information about other funding sources	9 responses
Promotion or marketing opportunities	7 responses
Connecting with partners or collaborators	5 responses
Advice on project design or evaluation	5 responses
Networking events	3 responses
Mentoring or peer support	2 responses
Other (exempt certified social enterprises from the 1:1 matching funds requirement and provide procurement pathways)	1 response

Q5. Is there anything else that is important to make the grant program accessible or easier to use?
(open text question – this table summarises the topics raised)

Fewer questions	2 responses
Clear guidance and examples	1 response
Publish available budgets per grant program	1 response
More accessible application formats, such as language options and formats for people with disability	1 response
Include older, smaller apartments for climate-related project grants	1 response
A more inclusive definition of priority communities	1 response
More briefing and support days	1 response

Email responses

We received 8 written submissions via email. Six were from organisations, 1 was from an individual artist. One submission came from a person who also completed the online survey.

One topic raised by several email submissions was cultural inclusiveness. The draft guidelines identify priority communities as part of our commitment to a fairer, more inclusive city. Priority communities named in the guidelines include:

- new immigrants, non-citizens and refugees
- people with English as a second language

Several respondents said this wording may unintentionally exclude many culturally and racially marginalised people who speak English as their first language or who are second-generation migrants. They asked for a broader definition to recognise these groups.

Three submissions raised concerns about moving to one grant round per year. Two of these came from arts sector respondents who said the change would limit responsiveness to emerging opportunities. One submission raised concerns about timing pressures and loss of momentum for strata grants.

Other issues raised included commercial rent pressures for creative spaces, the need for more flexible acquittal deadlines, dedicated acquittal support for small organisations, clearer definitions of operational costs, and continued feedback for unsuccessful applications.

Respondents also noted positive elements, including clearer categories, simpler criteria, and support for creative spaces and individual artists.

Figure 5 summarises the topics raised in email submissions.

Figure 5. Email submission topics

Topic raised	Number of submissions
Request for broader definition of priority communities	3 submissions
Concerns about moving to one grant round per year (arts + strata)	3 submissions
Positive feedback on simpler categories and assessment criteria	2 submissions
Suggest flexibility for creative space costs, including commercial rent	1 submission
Suggest more flexible acquittal deadlines	1 submission
Request dedicated acquittal support for small organisations	1 submission
Request clearer definitions of operational costs and eligibility limits	1 submission
Note of timing challenges specific to strata buildings	1 submission
Agreement on auspicing arrangements for artists for substantial grants	1 submission
Suggest longer windows for multi-year or biennial programs	1 submission

Engagement activities

Sydney Your Say webpage

A Sydney Your Say webpage was created. The page included a summary of the review project, a description of the major changes, an overview of the grants available in the updated program and other key information about the consultation. The draft grants policy and guidelines documents were available to download from the page. There were 857 unique views of the Sydney Your Say page, and 195 document downloads.

The main source of web traffic was from organic searches and email marketing.

Stakeholder emails

An email was sent to 8,693 stakeholders known to have an interest in the grants program, including community groups, resident action groups, precinct management organisations, creative and cultural organisations, chambers of commerce, and people who had subscribed to the new grants email newsletter.

E-news inclusions

The consultation was included in the February edition of the Sydney Your Say e- newsletter (4013 subscribers) as well as the Sustainable Apartments newsletter (February), and the Creative Sector Update (February and March). It was promoted in the City of Sydney News (10 & 17 February) and in February newsletters for King George V, Pyrmont, Ultimo, Ron Williams, and Juanita Nielsen community centres.

Appendix

Appendix A: Sydney Your Say e-news article



Image: Chris Southwood / City of Sydney


Our updated grants policy and guidelines

We've simplified their structure, opened up eligibility for more organisations and projects, and clarified procedures and assessment criteria. More support is also planned for you before and after applying.

Read the updated guidelines and have your say by Monday 2 March.

[Read more](#)

Appendix B: Community newsletter inclusions



Your say on our updated grants policy and guidelines

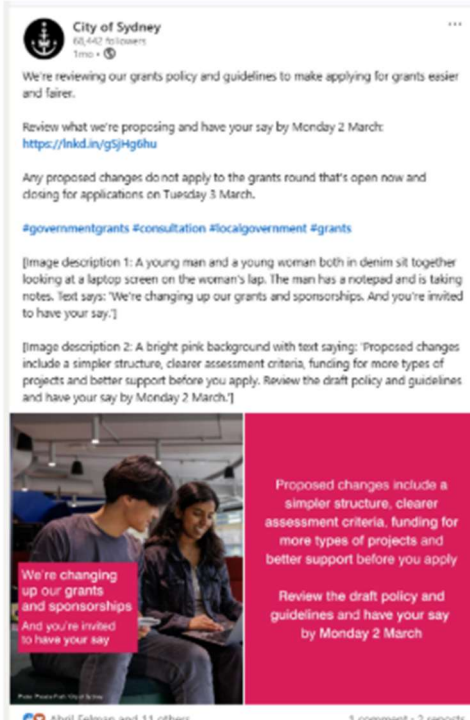
We're reviewing our grants policy and guidelines to make applying for grants easier and fairer.

Proposed changes include a simpler structure, clearer assessment criteria, funding for more types of projects and better support before you apply.

Review the draft policy and guidelines and have your say by Monday 2 March.

Any proposed changes will **not** apply to the grants round opening for applications on 3 February 2026.

Appendix C: LinkedIn post (8 February)



City of Sydney
16K followers
1mo · 🌐

We're reviewing our grants policy and guidelines to make applying for grants easier and fairer.

Review what we're proposing and have your say by Monday 2 March:
<https://lnkd.in/g/5JH66hu>

Any proposed changes do not apply to the grants round that's open now and closing for applications on Tuesday 3 March.

#governmentgrants #consultation #localgovernment #grants

[Image description 1: A young man and a young woman both in denim sit together looking at a laptop screen on the woman's lap. The man has a notepad and is taking notes. Text says: 'We're changing up our grants and sponsorships. And you're invited to have your say.']

[Image description 2: A bright pink background with text saying: 'Proposed changes include a simpler structure, clearer assessment criteria, funding for more types of projects and better support before you apply. Review the draft policy and guidelines and have your say by Monday 2 March.']

Abriel Felman and 11 others
1 comment · 2 reposts

Your questions answered

Thank you for your interest in our recent information session on the updated grants policy and guidelines. We appreciate the thoughtful questions that were raised during the session.

We've summarised the questions and answers in this email.

Our review of the grants policy and guidelines aims to make applying for grants easier and fairer. You can [view the draft documents and have your say by Monday 2 March](#).

About the review

What changes are being proposed?

Proposed changes include a simpler structure, clearer assessment criteria, funding for more types of projects and better support before you apply.

Do these changes apply to the grants round currently open?

No.

All applications for the grants round open now must follow the [current grants and sponsorship program guidelines](#). Applications for this round [close on Tuesday 3 March](#).

Resources and support

Are there guidelines to help write a strong application?

Yes. The [current guidelines](#) include application tips, definitions and examples.

We also provide briefing sessions, informative videos, budget guides and free grant writing workshops.

Will more support sessions be offered?

We're proposing more support before you apply as part of this update. This includes more resources such as information sessions, case studies and more staff availability.

You can tell us what support you need through the [consultation survey](#).

Feedback on applications

Will applicants receive feedback if their application is unsuccessful?

Yes. Unsuccessful applicants receive an email with a link to arrange a feedback session.

We're exploring ways to make this process easier and to provide more support before you apply.

Timing, frequency and funding cycles

Why one major funding round each year?

A single main round helps us assess all applications together and make sure funding is shared fairly across different projects, community outcomes and organisations.

It offers longer and more predictable timeframes for applicants. Smaller organisations and individual applicants have told us it's hard to prepare applications during busy periods. Consistent timing each year means applicants can set aside time earlier and know when to expect the outcome.

Quick response grants, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collaboration funding and value-in-kind programs remain open year-round.

Are multi-year grants still available?

Yes. Multi-year funding continues to be available in many programs under the draft guidelines.

When will we know which grants are opening in the July 2026 round?

More information will be shared closer to July 2026, once consultation feedback is reviewed and Council has considered the updated guidelines.

When will payments begin for the July round?

Under the draft guidelines, future grant rounds follow a consistent yearly schedule. We're expecting applications would open in late July, remain open for 6 weeks, then decisions would be announced in November for projects starting the following January. This would give applicants a clear sense of when applications open, when decisions are made and when payments are likely to begin.

Payment timings depend on contracting. A funding agreement, lease or licence must be signed before any funds are released.

For 2026, the exact timing will depend on when Council considers the updated guidelines. Once this happens, we'll confirm the dates for assessments, decisions and payment timeframes.

How can I stay informed?

Subscribe to the [mailing list](#).

Eligible location requirements

Do projects need to occur within the City of Sydney local area?

Activities should take place in [our local area](#) or demonstrate significant benefit to City of Sydney residents, workers or visitors.

Pilot projects

Are pilot projects eligible?

Yes. The draft guidelines support innovative or first-time projects.

Will an unsuccessful pilot affect future applications?

No. Unsuccessful pilot projects can still provide valuable insights. If the project wasn't successful, you can still apply for a second stage.

Your application should clearly explain what you've changed, why a second stage is worthwhile, and how it will benefit the community.

If a pilot project is successful, can it receive further funding?

If the pilot is successful, you're welcome to apply for a second stage through a new application. It will be assessed on merit like all other applications. It should clearly address the eligibility and assessment criteria for the relevant grant, explain why expanding the work is needed and show how the next stage will benefit the community.

Application process

Can application information be reused to avoid duplication?

Yes. The SmartyGrants platform includes features that allow you to [store key organisational information](#) and to pre-fill set sections of the application form.

Will the application process be more streamlined?

Yes. As part of the review, we're working to improve the experience at each step.

