



Yarra Ranges Council Grants Policy 2026

DRAFT

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Approved by:	<MONTH YEAR>
Review Date:	<MONTH YEAR>
Policy Owner:	Manager Community Support
Applicable to:	All Council Employees with roles in grant making

Acknowledgement of Country

Yarra Ranges Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri and other Kulin Nations as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of these lands and waterways. We pay our respects to all Elders, past, present, and emerging, who have been, and always will be, integral to the story of our region. We proudly share custodianship to care for Country together.

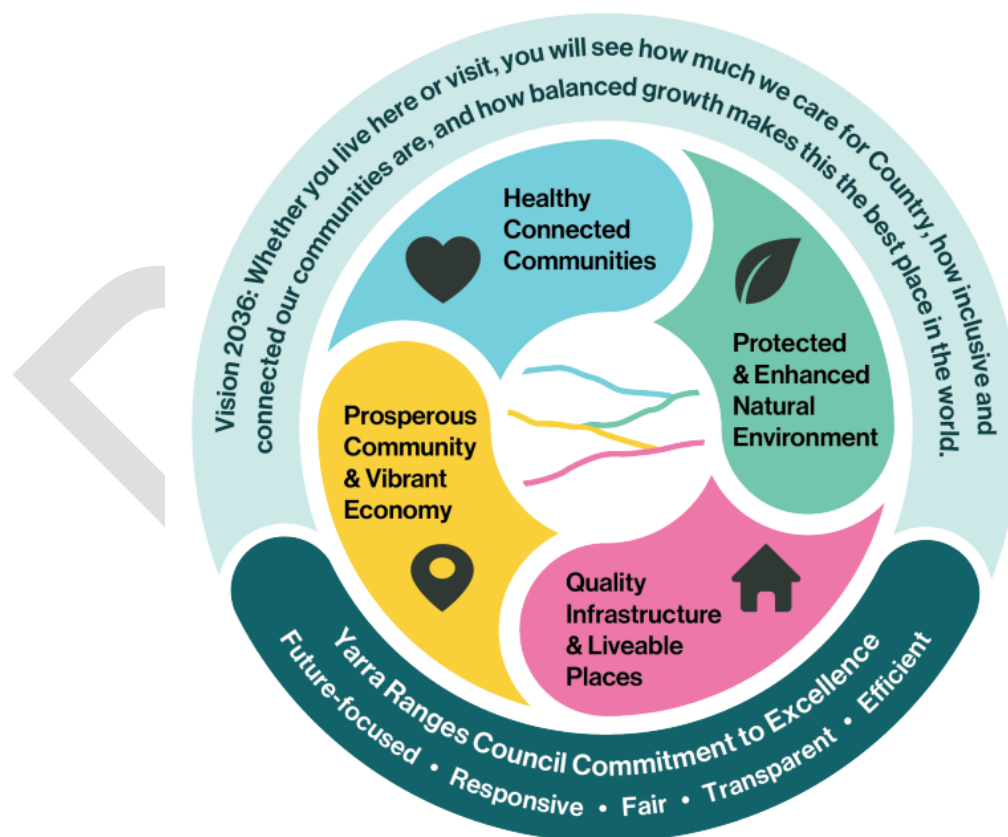
Yarra Ranges Community Vision 2036

The Yarra Ranges Community Vision 2036 has been developed to describe the communities and Council's aspirations for the future of the municipality. It's based on input from over 1,000 community members and reflects the local communities' aspirations for the municipality.

Whether you live here or visit, you will see how much we care for Country, how inclusive and connected our communities are, and how balanced growth makes this the best place in the world.

What We Want to Achieve

Council has four strategic objectives to describe what we are working towards and how we want Yarra Ranges to be in the future. These objectives have been developed in response to the priorities of our communities and the big issues facing Yarra Ranges. All policies and activities completed by the organisation contribute to one or more of these goals.



1. Introduction

Yarra Ranges Council (Council) is committed to partnering with local, not for profits, community groups, and creatives through its grant programs to encourage, support and sustain diverse cultural, social & community initiatives. The strategic investment made through grants helps create more connected, healthy, and creative communities.

Designed to equip communities with the resources they need to thrive, Council's grant programs also foster social inclusion, develop community capacity and support resilient communities.

Council offers several distinct grant programs that are the subject of this Grants Policy (Policy). In addition, Council may also offer innovative and ad hoc grant programs in response to community needs (see section 3. Scope, for details).

The Policy is underpinned by principles of asset (strengths) based community development, good governance and best practice in grant making.

This Policy supersedes the 2020 Grants Policy.

2. Purpose

The Policy outlines Council's commitment to delivering responsive, equitable, inclusive, transparent, efficient, and sustainable grant programs.

Guided by Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), the Policy supports initiatives that build on community strengths, foster partnerships, and empower local leadership and creativity.

The Policy provides a clear and consistent guide for allocating and managing Council funded programs.

Council Grants support the delivery of strategic objectives as outlined below:

Tier One	Tier Two	Tier Three
Council Plan	Health and Wellbeing Strategy	Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2024- 2026 Disability Action Plan 2025-2029 Creative Communities Strategy Key Life Stages Plan 2025-2029 Recreation and Open Space Strategy
	Economic Development Strategy	Economic Development Strategy - Shaping Yarra Ranges 2022-2032

	Environment Strategy	Nature Plan 2024-2034 Liveable Climate Plan 2030

The Policy aims to strengthen partnerships, empower community organisations, and advance equity through inclusive, community-led initiatives and is committed to:

- Building stronger partnerships between Council and communities by fostering collaboration, trust, and shared outcomes.
- Supporting community organisations to deliver projects, services and outcomes for Yarra Ranges communities that benefit their community.
- Promoting gender equality and embracing intersectionality by removing barriers and ensuring everyone can participate fully and fairly.
- Supporting the capacity of community organisations to deliver outcomes and services that benefit their community.

3. Scope

The Policy guides all Council grant decisions made by both Council and Council officers (Officers). It applies to Officers involved in developing Council's major strategies, setting grant criteria, administering, promoting, assessing, and managing grant programs.

This Policy applies to:

- Monthly Grants
- Annual Grants
- Multi-Year Grants
- Neighbourhood House Partnership Program
- Senior Citizens Grants
- U3A Grants
- Capital Development Grants
- Ad hoc grants in response to urgent community needs, such as natural disasters or public health emergencies.

Out of Scope

Requests outside the scope of this Policy, include advocacy campaigns, major sponsorships or donations, and financial support for individuals who do not meet the stated program criteria or eligibility.

4. Definitions

Table 1. Definitions

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)	• Asset-based community development (ABCD) is an approach to sustainable, community-driven development. This approach prioritises community strengths over deficits, identifying and activating individual and collective assets, skills, and passions. It is community-led,
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	grounded in the principle of “building communities from the inside out” (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), and driven by relationships.
Acquittal	All grants require an acquittal, including financial and program outcome reporting. If a recipient fails to meet agreed outcomes or misuses funds under the Funding Agreement, Council may reclaim the grant, in full or in part. Acquittals uphold transparency, accountability, and compliance.
Auspice	An auspice is an eligible organisation that manages grant funding on behalf of a group that is not incorporated.
Best Practice	A method or technique that is a widely accepted method for managing grants because it consistently delivers better results than other approaches or has become the standard for meeting legal, ethical, or operational requirements.
Community Benefit	The positive social, cultural, environmental, or economic impact an activity has on the Yarra Ranges community.
Community Development	A process where community members are supported by Council to identify and take collective action on issues which are important to them. Community development harnesses the skills and wisdom of communities and empowers residents to create stronger and more connected communities
Eligibility	Conditions required of the applicant to be eligible to receive a grant.
Funding Agreement	A funding agreement is a formal contract outlining the terms, conditions, and obligations between Council and the recipient regarding the use and reporting of grant funds.
Grant	A sum of money paid by Council to an eligible recipient, following an assessment process, to be used for an agreed and specific purpose outlined in the Funding Agreement.
Good Governance	Procedures, processes, templates, and governance structures that are fair and transparent and ensure accountability measures are in place.
Incorporated Association	A legal entity registered under the Associations Incorporation Reform Act (2012) Victoria.
Not for Profit	In Australia, not-for-profit (NFP) organisational structures refer to the legal frameworks under which organisations that do not operate for private profit are established and governed. These structures are

	designed to ensure that any surplus income is reinvested into the organisation's mission rather than distributed to members or owners. A not-for-profit organisation is one that: • Exists for a purpose other than making a profit for its members, owners, or shareholders. • Reinvests any surplus income into its activities or mission. • Cannot distribute profits or assets to individuals (except for reasonable wages or reimbursements). • May provide benefits to members if those benefits align with the organisation's purpose. sprintlaw.com.au, acnc.gov.au
Program Guidelines	• An overview of the implementation process, eligibility, objectives, selection criteria, and assessment and decision-making process.
Selection Criteria	• A set of criteria against which applications are assessed such as community benefit, partnership and collaboration, organisational capacity, budget, and inclusion.

5. Policy Statement

Council is committed to providing grant programs which are inspired by Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) principles with a focus on discovering community assets, strengths and passions, nurturing positive community relationships and partnerships and mobilising community led initiatives.

Process

All Council grant programs will have efficient and transparent processes and deliver:

- Accessibility and openness:
 - Information about the grant programs and how decisions are made is available and accessible to people of all backgrounds, identities, ages, abilities, and experiences.
- Clear program structure, eligibility criteria and objectives; expressed in Plain English.
- Clear and robust governance.
- Transparent and criteria-based decision-making, ensuring inclusivity and alignment with Council's Disability Action Plan and commitment to gender equity and intersectional access and inclusion.
- Risk identification and effective risk management.
- Monitoring and reporting of financial and grant outcomes.
- Clearly defined strategic outcomes that Council has identified through evidence, and engagement with communities and partners.

Each grant program has governance and reporting processes to ensure accountability, community benefit, and alignment with the Policy. Council uses SmartyGrants to manage applications. Officers support applicants and recipients to build capacity and deliver outcomes aligned with Council strategies.

Good Governance

Good Governance refers to procedures, processes, templates and governance structures that are fair and transparent and ensure accountability measures are in place.

Council's grant programs will be guided by:

- Good governance in grant making.
- Program Guidelines and Selection Criteria.
- Best practice in grant making processes identified by the Institute of Grant Managers (IGM)
- Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) local government grant making recommendations.

Decision making and governance processes for Council grant programs are outlined below:

Grant Program	Program Structure	Program Initiation & Guidelines	Assessment Process	Approval and Reporting
Monthly Grants	Open, competitive	Guidelines are reviewed and endorsed annually by Director, Communities Minor improvements can be approved by Executive Officer	Independently assessed by two Council Officers	Reviewed by Coordinator or Executive Officer Approved by Manager Executive Officer/Manager may veto if criteria are not met Successful applications circulated to Councillors Grant variation and acquittal processes in place

Annual Grants	Open, competitive	Guidelines and selection criteria are reviewed annually to ensure strategic alignment Council report for endorsement initiates new program	Assessed by independent panel (community members and may include Council Officers with subject matter expertise)	Panel recommendations presented at Council meeting for noting Grant variation and reporting and acquittal processes in place Caretaker Policy to be applied in election years with ELT endorsing the Panels' recommendations
Multi-Year Grants	Open, competitive 4-year funding cycle	Guidelines and selection criteria are reviewed prior to each funding round to ensure strategic alignment Council report for endorsement initiates new program	Assessed by independent panel (community members and may include Council Officers with subject matter expertise)	Panel recommendations presented at Council meeting for noting. Grant variation and annual acquittal/reporting processes in place
Neighbourhood House Partnership Program	Non-Competitive 4-year funding cycle (proposed 5-year cycle pending Council endorsement in April 2026).	Compliance reviewed before renewal	Six-monthly check-ins with Key Contact Officer	Annual acquittal reviewed and endorsed by Key Contact Officer Annual financial acquittal reviewed by Coordinator/Executive Officer before payment is made Attendance at Strategic Network meeting by House managers and committee representatives
Capital Development Grants	Open, competitive	Guidelines and selection criteria are reviewed prior to	Assessed by Officers with	Panel recommendations

	Annual	each funding round to ensure strategic alignment.	subject matter expertise	presented at Council meeting for noting.
U3A Grants	Non-competitive	Guidelines and selection criteria are reviewed prior to each funding round to ensure strategic alignment	Assessed by two Healthy Active Ageing Officers	Reviewed by Executive Officer Approved by Manager Executive Officer/Manager may veto if criteria not met Recommendations circulated to Councillors
Senior Citizen Grants	Non-competitive Annual	Guidelines are reviewed prior to funding to ensure strategic alignment	Assessed by two Healthy Active Ageing Officers	Reviewed by Executive Officer Approved by Manager Executive Officer/Manager may veto if criteria not met Recommendations circulated to Councillors

Other Grant Programs

Other grant programs delivered by Council are guided by the same governance standards and the Policy.

6. Principles

These principles form the foundation of Council's long-standing approach to grant making. These inter-related principles are:

- social inclusion, equity, intersectionality, diversity and capacity building.

Council's commitment to Asset Based Community Development guides the implementation and approach to grant making seeking to draw out what is strong in communities and leverage the skills, wisdom and energy of communities.

"...when funders make diversity, equity, and inclusion central to their missions, philanthropy has greater impact. That's because having varied perspectives helps generate better ideas to solve the complex problems of a changing and increasingly diverse world".
(Ford Foundation)

This Policy makes these principles explicit through the definitions below.

6.1 Definitions - grant making principles.

Social Inclusion

Social inclusion refers to the process of ensuring that all individuals - regardless of their ability, background, identity, or circumstances - have equal opportunities to participate fully in society. It involves removing barriers to access and engagement in community life.

Social inclusion promotes equity, respect, and belonging, aiming to build cohesive communities where everyone can contribute and thrive.

Equity

Equity refers to the intentional design and delivery of funding programs that ensure fair access and outcomes for all communities, particularly those historically marginalised or disadvantaged. It involves recognising systemic barriers and tailoring support - such as accessible application processes, eligibility criteria, outreach, and capacity-building- to meet diverse needs. This approach aims to reduce disparities, promote inclusion, and empower underrepresented groups.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, when applied to this Policy, acknowledges that individuals and communities experience overlapping forms of disadvantage and discrimination based on factors such as race, gender, disability, socioeconomic status, and cultural background. By applying an intersectional lens, grant programs can better identify and address systemic barriers, ensuring funding decisions promote equity, inclusion, and meaningful access for diverse groups.

This approach supports more responsive and effective allocation of resources, tailored to the complex realities of those most impacted.

Diversity

Council expresses its commitment to diversity in many ways. The grant programs actively recognise and include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, LGBTQIA+ community members, people with disability, neurodivergence, and those from all socio-economic, age, and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are valued stakeholders whose perspectives and experiences are respected and celebrated.

Capacity building

Council grants aim to enhance the skills, resources, leadership, and networks of community organisations to improve their ability to deliver effective, sustainable initiatives. It supports growth in governance, planning, and operations, while fostering collaboration and resilience. Through funding, mentoring, and training, grant programs enable organisations to leverage their strengths deliver meaningful community outcomes.

Council will also support capacity building through a skill-building program and leadership development opportunities that complement grant programs. These programs are designed to be inclusive and accessible, ensuring representation from women, neurodivergent individuals, and people from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and ability backgrounds across the whole community.

6.2 Supporting Local Businesses and Industries

Monthly and Multi-Year Grants support not-for-profit Business and Trader groups to strengthen their operations and governance, build capacity, and deliver initiatives that benefit the broader community. In addition to the principles of social inclusion, equity, diversity and capacity building, Council expresses its commitment to fostering local businesses and industries.

Grant seekers are encouraged to “Try Local First” when procuring services and goods which can deliver value-added and incidental benefits to local businesses and industries by stimulating local economic activity, encouraging partnerships, increasing visibility for local producers and creating flow on effects such as tourism.

These benefits, while not the primary purpose of grant funding, contribute to a thriving local economy and enhance the overall impact of funded initiatives.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

The Council’s Grant Programs involve Officers at many levels and from across the organisation. The Executive Leadership Team and Council also play important roles. At Yarra Ranges independent assessment panels are selected to assess applications and make recommendations that are reported to Council.

Table 2. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Council	Determines and endorses Grants Program funding levels through the annual budget process. Endorses the Grants Policy and associated program criteria. Whilst not formally required, Council may Note, but not Endorse, the Assessment Panels recommendations of grants to be funded. During the Local Government caretaker period, the Assessment Panel's recommendations cannot be presented to Council for Noting and will be referred to ELT.
Councillors	Councillors endorse grant programs at initiation and review key program information, including scope, strategic alignment, selection criteria, and guidelines. They note monthly grant funding recommendations and note annual and multi-year funding allocations based on the recommendations of independent assessment panels.
Executive Leadership Team (ELT)	During the Council election year ELT will be the decision maker in line with Council’s Caretaker Policy. ELT may endorse grant recommendations, with Council formally noting the approved grants.
Manager	Oversees grant programs and approves monthly funding recommendations.

Executive Officer (EO) and Coordinator	EO and/or Coordinator oversees grant programs, ensures good governance, prepares reports to Council, lead the Grants Officers and informs the Manager and Director. These Officers also lead cross organisational collaboration on grant programs.
Grants Officers	Officers deliver the Programs.
Other Officers	Officers including, but not limited to, Community Development, EO Creative Communities, Coordinator Cultural Development, Cultural Development, Disability Inclusion, Healthy Active Ageing and others involved in informing, assessing, and reviewing grant applications - as well as supporting recipients and managing acquittals - are integral to the programs' delivery.
Community Assessment Panels	Community Panel members assess applications for the Annual and Multi-Year programs. Grant assessment panel membership is designed to reflect community diversity - across gender, age, cultural background, intersectionality, and geographical location. Panel members are required to declare conflicts of interests. Some grants may use participatory decision-making, where communities collectively decide how funds are allocated. Decision making processes/structures are proposed to Council for endorsement through this Policy.

7.2 Role of Grant Programs during emergencies

Grants can play a vital role in supporting response and recovery efforts during emergencies like bushfires, storms, floods, and pandemics. When such events disrupt grant-funded projects, Council will:

- Support the delivery of community-led projects, including reimagined or revised versions of previously awarded grants, or extended delivery times when appropriate following an emergency.
- Not seek to re-coup funds expended in good faith on a grant project that cannot be completed.
- Ensure acquittal of public funding.

Council acknowledges the significant financial and wellbeing impacts emergencies can have on communities, and Council's role in supporting communities to recover well.

8. Related Documents

- Yarra Ranges Council Plan 2025-29
- Yarra Ranges Council Grants Policy (2020)
- Yarra Ranges Council Grant Program Guidelines and Selection Criteria
- Yarra Ranges Council Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-29
- Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2024-26
- Yarra Ranges Council Disability Action Plan 2025-29
- Key Life Stages Plan 2025-29

- Nature Plan 2024-34
- Liveable Climate Plan 2030
- Recreation and Open Space Strategy

- Local Government Act (2020)
 - Section 90 (1) related to the Council Plan 2025-29
 - Section 91 (1) related to Council's annually adopted financial plan
 - Section 88 (1) related to the Community Vision

- Gender Equality Act (2020)
 - Part 2, Section 7 (a) that requires Council to consider and promote gender equality in policies, programs and services.
 - Part 3, Section 9 (1) Requires Council to undertake a gender impact assessment when developing or reviewing any policy of, or program or service provided by, the entity that has a direct and significant impact on the public.

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act (2006)

9. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are overseen by the Manager and led by the relevant Executive Officer/Coordinator, focusing on grant accessibility, alignment with the Council Plan, Tier 1, 2 and 3 strategic priorities and assessment of program impact through participant feedback and annual acquittals.

Compliance is managed through eligibility checks, criteria-based assessments, and acquittal processes overseen by the Executive Officer/Coordinator.

Program development includes regular reviews to ensure alignment with Council objectives and legislative requirements. Financial reporting and project outcomes are assessed through annual acquittals in SmartyGrants, supporting continuous improvement and responsible use of public funds.

10. Policy Review

This Policy will be reviewed every four years. Minor administrative amendments that do not alter its intent may be approved by the Manager without requiring ELT or Council endorsement.

11. Revision History

Version	Date	Summary of revisions
2007	2007	Extensive updates were completed in 2020 to incorporate program redesigns, ongoing

		improvements, and the evolving community and strategic focus developed between 2012 and 2020.
2020	August 2020	The updated policy established the foundation for Council's current grant programs. Reviews and revisions made to reflect new initiatives, meet gender impact assessment requirements, and align with evolving strategic goals.
2026	2030	Updates to reflect changes since 2020 and improve processes. References to critical impacts such as Caretaker period are added. Generally the policy has been reviewed to ensure clear language and to reflect Council's commitment to gender equality and intersectionality under the relevant Act.