

# Cardinia Business Group Support Grant Program

## Program Guidelines 2026

The Cardinia Business Group Support Grant Program is a funding program open to recognised and incorporated business and trader organisations operating within Cardinia Shire to implement initiatives to support the business community, stimulate growth and foster economic prosperity.

February 2026

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## Program Overview

The Cardinia Shire Council Business Support Grant program is designed to empower trader associations and business groups to undertake projects that enhance the local economy and business environment. These grants are a key component of the council's strategic priorities as outlined in the Council Plan, which focuses on improving local learning and employment pathway opportunities through strategic partnerships and promoting our unique community identity.

## Objectives

The Program is designed to support incorporated business and trader associations to deliver initiatives that drive innovation, support businesses, and increase economic activity.

The key objectives of the program are to:

- Foster collaborative business environments and partnerships
- Support the growth and development of local businesses
- Enhance the visitor experience in our townships and increase business engagement with the community
- Increase economic activity and spend within the local economy
- Introduce new initiatives that diversify the local economy

## Links to Council Plan

The program aligns with [Cardinia Shire Council Plan 2025-29](#) Strategy Priority 4, Prosperous Economies. We support our productive land and employment land to grow local industries.

## Strategies

- 4.1. Investment attraction
- 4.2. Investment and partnerships
- 4.3. Community workforce development
- 4.4. Visitor economy
- 4.5. Business and Industry development

## Funding Categories

The total funding available for both grant categories combined is \$30,000.

### Category 1: Strategic Projects Grant

Up to \$10,000 per project

This stream is designed to support strategic initiatives that have the potential to make a significant impact on the local business community.

Examples include:

- Professional services for strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, research and data
- Precinct marketing strategies
- Training and development for local businesses
- Workforce development initiatives
- Fairs / Expos for local businesses
- Business development activities such as training workshops and networking events
- Entrepreneurship support

## Category 2: Small Projects Grant

Up to \$5,000 per project

This stream is designed to support smaller-scale initiatives that provide immediate and practical benefits to business groups.

Examples include:

- Development of promotional material for projects or events
- Purchase of small items of equipment to support project delivery
- Networking events including: speakers and workshops
- Consultants for strategic planning and engagement (i.e. financial long-term sustainability)
- Projects to support group sustainability and governance

Applicants can seek up to 100% of their total project cost, up to the maximum per grant category, GST free.

Please note that Council Shire Council generally receives more applications for financial assistance than funds available, and therefore not all applications can be supported. Priority will be given to applications that score highest in the assessment criteria.

Funding decisions are at the discretion of Cardinia Shire Council. Fulfilling the assessment criteria does not guarantee funding.

## Key dates

Details	Date
Application outcomes and Letter of Offer sent to applicant	By 5pm Tuesday 24 April 2026
Letter of Offer returned to Council	By 5pm Monday 4 May 2026
Payments made	By Monday 15 June 2026
Interim Check in with Council	November 2026
Acquittal due	Friday 26 February 2027

## How to apply

Applications will be available via SmartyGrants.

Download the guidelines and follow the instructions carefully.

Applications can only be made online.

Use clear, concise language and avoid industry jargon. Spell out acronyms and abbreviations.

Provide all information requested in the application form.

## Eligibility

An applicant must:

- Be a trader/business group operating within the Cardinia Shire
- project must be based in Cardinia Shire
- be registered as an incorporated association or auspiced by an incorporated association
- have an active Australian Business Number (ABN)
- \$20 million Public Liability Insurance to cover all aspects of the project
- have acquitted any previous Council grants and have no outstanding debts to Cardinia Shire Council

## What Cannot be funded?

Examples of projects and items that will not be funded include, but not limited to:

- Projects/programs based outside of Cardinia Shire
- Activations, programs or projects that are member only focused
- Items or activities that are part of an organisation's core business or their normal day-to-day operating expenses e.g. wages, insurances, utilities, office rental, insurance, storage etc
- Office consumables and software, subscriptions, materials, or advertising that is necessary to the running of the association, or activities such as bookkeeping
- Retrospective funding for Projects or events that already exist or have been held
- Initiatives from an individual business rather than a group or organisations
- Festivals and events that seek to promote, launch an organisation or business
- Projects that are currently receiving, or have received, any other Cardinia Shire Council support or funding
- Projects and/or programs that are considered for the purpose to advance an organisation's religious or political position
- Projects that are the funding responsibility of other levels of government or duplicate other local service responses
- Fundraising activities
- Catering exceeding \$1,000 and alcohol
- Prize money or competitions
- Activities that do not deliver on the program objectives
- Capital works projects (as defined in [Council's Community Capital Works Grants Policy](#))
- Proposals that do not hold the relevant permits required for the activity
- Festivals and events that benefit members only or a specific audience to the exclusion of the broader community.
- Contingency funding / plans

## Multiple Applications

Multiple projects may be considered for funding under the two separate categories.

## Budgets

Your budget should reflect the scope of your activity and include all income and expenditure that relates specifically to your proposed activity or program. Please also include any financial contributions from your group/organisation and partnerships responsible for the delivery of the initiative. When you have completed your budget, the Total Income and Total Expenditure must be equal. In-kind support will be noted in a separate section to the budget table.

## Income

You must provide all income contributions related to your activity. For example:

- Your organisation’s financial contribution
- Sponsorship contributions
- The grant amount you are seeking from Cardinia Shire Council
- Grants you are seeking from other funding bodies sponsorship, donations or other funding

Please indicate whether funding is confirmed or unconfirmed.

**Expenditure and quotes**

Quotes are required for all expenditure items that are essential to the delivery of the project and must be uploaded with your application. Failure to do so may result in your application being deemed ineligible or unsuccessful. Expenditure amounts should include GST in the total.

**Sample budget**

Income	Amount	Expenditure	Amount
Cardinia Shire Grant	\$10,000	Consultant fees	\$7,500
Your organisation	\$2,000	Venue Hire	\$1,500
Sponsorship	\$300	Merchandise	\$1,500
		Design and printing	\$1,800
<b>Total Income:</b>	<b>\$12,300</b>	<b>Total Expenditure:</b>	<b>\$12,300</b>

**In-kind support**

In-kind support includes any non-monetary contributions that support the project. Examples of in-kind support include prize donations, equipment, or volunteer time or services.

Volunteer labour time can be calculated using The Centre for Volunteering Calculator link below. It is recommended to use the ‘All ages’ category.

[Cost of Volunteering Calculator - The Centre for Volunteering](#)

**Sample In-kind Support**

Income	Amount
Project Timeline 10 x Volunteer Hours	\$469.60
Equipment lending	\$500
Prize donation	\$100
<b>Total Income:</b>	<b>\$1069.60</b>

**Supporting Documentation for Applications**

The following information can be provided to support your application:

- Project plan including project management, scope, and timeline.
- Quotes that show the supplier, items, and amount for each item.
- Evidence of partnerships (if applicable).
- A current Certificate of Public Liability Insurance (minimum \$20 million)
- Letter from auspicing association (if applicable)
- Other supporting documents to your application.

## **Reporting and Accountability**

### **Conflict of Interest Declaration**

All conflicts of interest must be declared in acceptance with your Letter of Offer. A conflict of interest occurs when a person's personal interests clash with their duties or responsibilities. This can lead to situations where the actions or decisions may lead to personal gain. For example, if a company board member votes on a policy that benefits a business they own, it could be seen as a conflict of interest.

There are two main types of Conflict of Interest, material or general.

#### ***Material***

A material conflict of interest involves specific relationships or situations that could result in a benefit or loss.

A relevant person has a material conflict of interest when “an affected person would gain a benefit or suffer a loss depending on the outcome of the matter.”

There are two elements to a material conflict of interest:

- Who is an “affected person”?
- What is a “benefit” or “loss”?

#### ***General***

A general conflict of interest is less specific and direct than a material conflict of interest.

A relevant person will have a general conflict of interest in a matter if “an impartial, fair minded person would consider that the person’s private interests could result in that person acting in a manner that is contrary to their public duty.”

There are three parts of a general conflict of interest which should all be considered:

- the private interest,
- the public duty, and
- what an impartial, fair-minded person would consider.

### **Change of Scope**

Should an applicant want to change aspects of their grant, a Change of Scope must be submitted via SmartGrants. The change of scope must still meet the project outcomes and meet the assessment criteria. Officers will review the Change of Scope and if successful, provide the written support for the changes.

### **Final Report/Acquittal**

Upon completion of the project, a final report or acquittal must be submitted, including a financial acquittal, invoices, expenditure, an evaluation of the project’s impact on the local business community and any other relevant data collected in the process.

Failure to acquit grant applications will result in the applicant being ineligible for future grant funding from Cardinia Shire Council.

## Assessment Criteria

Applications will be reviewed against the assessment criteria outlined below.

Assessment Criteria	Description	Weighting
Meets objectives of grant program	Clearly outlines how the application achieves the program objectives.	50%
Ability to deliver project	Application clearly demonstrates strategic plan on how project will be delivered including timelines, budget management, and measurable outcomes.	20%
Sustainability of project outcomes.	Application clearly demonstrates how the outcomes of the project will be sustained after the funding ends.	20%
Alignment to the Council Plan 2025-29 priority 4 – Prosperous economies	Project demonstrate alignment with Council Plan Strategies - 4.1. Investment attraction 4.2. Investment and partnerships 4.3. Community workforce development 4.4. Visitor economy 4.5. Business and Industry development	10%

## Scoring

Applicant responses will be scored an average across each criteria rated 0 to 5 as follows:

Submitted applications are assessed by an internal panel of Council officers. Grant funding recommendations from the panel are provided to the Manager Arts Advocacy & Economy for approval.

Council reserves the right to approve partial funding or refuse funding on applications. Additional conditions may also be implemented as part of the funding conditions.

## Outcome Notification

Applicants will be notified of their application outcome by email by 5pm, Friday 24 April 2026.

### Successful Applicants

Letters of offer will be sent to successful applicants outlining the funding conditions. Successful applicants will be required to enter into a funding agreement with the details outlined in the letter of offer.

## Interim Check In

Grant recipients will be requested to meet with Council in November of that calendar year to provide an update on the progression of the project. This meeting will benefit both parties to see how any further assistance or guidance could be provided but also share any learnings.

## Payment

Letters of offer must be signed and returned to Council by 5pm Monday 4 May 2026. Payment will be made to the applicant by Monday 15 June 2026.

## Disputing a Grant Decision

If an applicant wishes to query a grant assessment, written requests for clarification may be sent by post or email:

### **Post**

Att: Economic Development Cardinia Shire Council  
PO Box 7  
Pakenham VIC 3810

### **Email**

[business@cardinia.vic.gov.au](mailto:business@cardinia.vic.gov.au)

All requests will receive due consideration, and a written response will be provided.

If required, the dispute will follow [Council's Complaints Policy](#) and be escalate as required.

## Technical Assistance

Refer to the SmartyGrants help guide for technical assistance related to submitting your application. The SmartyGrants support desk is open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday on 03 9320 6888 or by email at [service@smartygrants.com.au](mailto:service@smartygrants.com.au).

## More Information or Help

For more information or for help with the grant application process, please contact our Economic Development Team.

Call: 1300 787 624

Email: [business@cardinia.vic.gov.au](mailto:business@cardinia.vic.gov.au)

## Additional Category Definitions

- Business Group & Trader Association: Incorporated association who promote and support the development of local businesses to increase economic activity. Groups must have a member base with a majority percentage of business owners based in Cardinia Shire.
- Contingency funds. This is generally only for funds that are given post project delivery like capital works, not upfront funding.
- Auspice: an organisation who manages grant funding on another organisation's behalf