

6.2.4 COVID-19 Community Connection Grant Program

File Reference: Nil.
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Recommendation(s)

That Council note the report.

Attachments

Nil

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 Community Connection Grants program formed part of Council's Community and Business Support Package which includes initiatives to help community members to cope with the impacts of Coronavirus (COVID-19).

This grant program opened for applications on 13 May 2020 and closed 30 June 2020. Grants were available to community groups, services and not-for-profit organisations that deliver projects, programs or services to the Cardinia Shire community which aim to increase social connection and reduce social isolation, promote healthy relationships or improve social, physical and mental health during COVID-19 restrictions.

Fifty-four applications were received. Two applications were withdrawn at the request of the applicant; therefore 52 applications were assessed. These projects totalled \$170,815.47 and applicants requested \$94,642.14 in funding.

Due to the time critical nature of the grant program, an expedited grant assessment process was implemented, with twice weekly grant assessment panels and grant payments processed weekly. A turnaround time of 2 weeks from each application submission to grant outcome was achieved.

Following an extensive assessment process involving a multidisciplinary panel of staff and senior leadership, a total of 20 grants to the value of \$35,682.83 were approved.

Background

From 27 March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Council established a Relief and Recovery Committee to oversee the emergency relief needs for community during the Pandemic. Evidence from this group, as well as Council staff, indicated that the social and economic health of the community was negatively impacted, issues were increasing and continuing to rise because of the Pandemic. These included, but were not limited to food shortages, financial hardship, loss of employment, family violence, homelessness, schooling from home impacts, increased poor mental health presentations, substance abuse, social isolation, and reduced community connection.

To support the community through this difficult time, Council developed the COVID-19 Community Relief and Recovery Funding Program, part of Council's Community and Business Support Package. The funding package demonstrated to Cardinia residents a partnership approach in supporting our community during this critical time.

Part of this package was the Community Connection Grants. The total budget allocation for these grants was \$30,000. Grants of up to \$2,000 were available for community groups and organisations to deliver projects that work to connect the community during this time of social distancing and assist in the prevention of feelings of isolation, emerging family violence, mental and physical health issues.

Applications were assessed by a multidisciplinary panel of Council staff and senior leadership. Below are the outcomes following this process:

Application status	COVID-19 Community Connection Grants
Fully supported	18
Partially supported	2
Not supported	32
AMOUNT ALLOCATED	\$35,682.83

Below is a breakdown of applications received via Ward:

	Central Ward	Port Ward	Ranges Ward
COVID-19 Community Connection Grants	19	19	14

Total applications and amounts approved via Ward:

	Central Ward	Port Ward	Ranges Ward
COVID-19 Community Connection Grants	7	5	8
Total Allocated	\$11,984.00	\$9,438.19	\$14,260.64

Successful grant recipients:

- Bestchance Child Family Care
- Bunyip and District Community House
- Cardinia Men's Recovery Learning Community
- Cockatoo Community House (supported by Taskforce Community Agency)
- Cockatoo Township Committee
- Emerald Community House Inc
- Emerald Village Association Inc
- Garfield Netball Club
- Kaduna Park Residents Group
- Konnext RightNow Inc
- Kooweerup Regional Health Service
- Living and Learning Pakenham Inc
- Mount Burnett Observatory
- Reclink Australia

- Region of Pakenham Gamers Inc
- Tribes Basketball Club
- U3A Emerald Inc
- Upper Beaconsfield Men's Shed
- Western Port Catchment Landcare Network
- Woman's Friendship Cafe Pakenham

Total applications and amounts declined due to ineligibility and/or not meeting grant criteria:

	Ward	Number of applications	Total amount
COVID-19 Community Connection Grants	Central	12	\$21,315.93
	Port	14	\$25,226.38
	Ranges	6	\$10,417.00

Policy Implications

This grant program aligns to Council priorities and objectives and with Council's Liveability Plan 2017 - 2029.

Relevance to Council Plan

Our Community:

We will foster a strong sense of connection between Cardinia Shire's diverse communities.

1. Our diverse community requirements met
2. Engaged communities
3. Increased levels of community participation
4. Improved health and wellbeing of our residents

Our People:

We support a variety of needs and lifestyles through programs and activities that promote and develop the wellbeing of Cardinia Shire's people.

1. Access to a variety of services for all
2. Access to support services and programs for young people
3. Learning opportunities for all ages and abilities
4. Improved health and wellbeing for all
5. Variety of recreation and leisure opportunities
6. Increased awareness of safety
7. Minimised impact of emergencies

Climate Emergency Consideration

Nil.

Consultation/Communication

A comprehensive communications plan was developed which saw the grants widely promoted through various internal departments, Council's Relief and Recovery Committee, newsletter

distribution through various Council and community newsletters, community leaders, local media, Councils web and Facebook pages.

The grant round opened on-line via Smarty Grants on 13 May 2020 and closed on 30 June 2020.

The staff assessment panel consisted of staff from the following areas: Risk, Community Development and the Pandemic Response and Emergency Management Team. The assessment

panel recommendations were then provided to the Manger Pandemic Response and Emergency Management Team and the General Manager – Customer, People and Performance for final assessment and approval.

Successful grants are currently being promoted on Council's web and social media pages and through local media.

Financial and Resource Implications

The budget for the Community Connections Grant program was \$30,000.

This grant program has provided support to 20 applicants, totalling \$35,682.83.

The additional \$5,682.83 was offset by the COVID-19 Community Relief Provider Support Grant program, which has a budget of \$50,000 and currently has supported grants totalling \$43,145.50.

The COVID-19 community grants program has a combined budget of \$80,000. That leaves a current amount of \$1,171.67 available.

The Victorian Government recently released a grant program called Let's Stay Connected Fund. The fund provides grants between \$5,000 and \$200,000 to support community-led initiatives. The program will support innovative, community-led and community-based initiatives that build connection, reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation and can be implemented quickly – providing much-needed support across the state. It will also support existing initiatives that can be rapidly scaled up to a local, regional or state level – delivering innovative and practical solutions that will benefit communities as soon as possible.

This means that community groups within Cardinia Shire can now apply for this Victorian Government funding.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 Community Connection Grants program formed part of Councils Community and Business Support Package which includes initiatives to help community members to cope with the impacts of Coronavirus (COVID-19), and connect during the social distancing period.

The grant program aligns to and adds value to Cardinia Shire's Liveability Plan. This grant program has proved popular with a high number of applications received.

The program has supported 20 grants to the value of \$35,682.83. It is recommended Council note the approved applications and budget expenditure.