

Community Grants Program review

ENGAGEMENT SNAPSHOT

Community Grants Program review

WHEN: Monday, January 30 to Monday, March 6

ENGAGEMENT METHODS: To encourage residents to get involved, we promoted the opportunity for people to have their say through our communication channels, including public notices, emails, social media and a have your say page on makewodongayours.com.au. There were also five Have Your Say Pop-Up s as part of the Draft Budget 2023-2024 consultation during February 2023 at various locations.

FACE-TO-FACE ENGAGEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

5
Have your say pop-up

68
residents who engaged with us in person

RESPONSES

19
submissions through Make Wodonga Yours

2
email submissions

2
submissions at pop-ups

COMMUNICATIONS

7053
emails

51.26%
average open rate

27
click-throughs

9
Facebook posts

21585
reach

85
likes and reactions

6
Instagram posts

1527
reach

35
likes and reactions

246
website visits

204
unique pageviews

3
public notices

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FEEDBACK

SUMMARY

There were 23 submissions. 19 submissions were in support of the Community Grants Program, three submissions against the program and one submission indifferent.

Feedback considered things such as cost to council, benefits to council and community and the application and evaluation process of the program.

Submissions not in support of the program see the program funding as a gift or donation to not-for-profit groups. They believe that the Community Grants Program only benefits small pockets of the community and that the funding could be better utilised by council.

Submissions in support of the Community Grants Program advocate for its continuance. They speak to the significant return on investment the program offers. They believe that the relatively small investment by council *"is multiplied through the long hours of volunteer planning, project management, construction, and networking of voluntary organisations"* and *"provides significant social benefits through supporting volunteerism, networking ,community belonging and community pride. These grant programs allow community to prioritise projects according to micro-level needs, building a sense of community and adding to the amenity of this beautiful city."*

Submission in support indicated that they felt the Community Grants Program achieves its stated aims to *"empower organisations and to drive social environmental, cultural and economic outcomes"* and also assists in meeting councils strategic objectives.

When considering the process in applying for a grant, one person felt that the application process is *"excessive for a small return."* Two people supported the rigorous application process, which includes the need for a letter of support from a council officer, to ensure quality projects that are genuinely in the best interests of the community are supported.

It was suggested that the program could be improved through evaluation of project outcomes following completion and better sharing of this information with community.

It was also suggested that in addition to promoting council's Community Grants Program, that council should share information on other funding opportunities from state and federal bodies.

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SUBMISSIONS FROM ORGANISATIONS

GARDENS FOR WILDLIFE ALBURY WODONGA

Gardens 4 Wildlife Albury-Wodonga (G4W) is a Wodonga Urban Landcare Network (WULN) program that has been a past (and current) recipient of Wodonga Council Community Impact grants.

We would like to highlight the following benefits/features of the grants:

COMMUNITY IMPACT GRANTS ASSIST COUNCIL TO MEET ITS OBJECTIVES

Wodonga Council's Regional Natural Environment Strategy (a joint strategy with Albury Council) emphasises the importance of habitat gardening. It lists these three actions:

1. Continue awareness campaigns ... around topics such as ... habitat gardening.
2. Support the delivery and promotion of local environmental education initiatives such as ... Gardens 4 Wildlife.
3. Continue to support and/or deliver community education events that encourage connection to nature and improve community understanding of the local environment, including initiatives such as habitat gardening.

Wodonga Council staff have very few resources to educate, engage and inspire residents in the wildlife gardening space. If it were not for the G4W program, the above objectives would be difficult to meet.

The grants help groups share the load with the Council. The volunteers add significant numbers of hours of work that would not be possible by Wodonga Council.

The ground works completed with the grants improve the amenities in public parks and reserves, enhance Council's assets and promote increased use of public spaces by the community. It increases citizen satisfaction with amenities.

COMMUNITY IMPACT GRANTS BENEFIT GARDENS 4 WILDLIFE ALBURY-WODONGA

The grants provide Gardens 4 Wildlife with necessary funding to conduct education and engagement events, including community plantings, habitat gardening presentations, open gardens and responsible cat ownership activities. The 'Safe Cat, Happy Wildlife' program alone was an outstanding success, resulting in the establishment of a local cat enclosure business, creation of a popular cat enclosures video and strong interest by interstate councils and DELWP in the resources created.

A significant number of Wodonga residents have benefitted from our program directly and indirectly – hundreds have attended our Wodonga events and viewed our videos and online resources and

thousands have been inspired by our social media posts. We have more than 2000 Facebook followers with some (unboosted) Facebook posts reaching 40,000+.

We depend on grant support from Council to host many of our Wodonga-based events.

COMMUNITY IMPACT GRANTS BENEFIT OTHER GROUPS

The grants support diverse local projects and organisations. Many groups are unlikely to receive grants from other sources – there's a real and ongoing need for small local grants supporting small local groups, projects and ideas.

The grants incentivise these groups, providing them with resources needed to carry out their on-ground works and conduct education and engagement



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events. Without them, some of the groups might disband because they would find it too difficult to continue to volunteer using only their own personal resources. By helping them to continue to volunteer, the grants also boost the wellbeing of those who volunteer.

The grants help to leverage other funds from the State and Commonwealth governments and from philanthropic trusts. The work carried out through the grants can demonstrate to other funding bodies that local groups have the capability.

COMMUNITY IMPACT GRANTS ARE COST EFFECTIVE

The grants are cost effective. Volunteer labour enables the work to get done at a cheaper rate - therefore the Council gets much more for its money.

The grants are a relatively small part of the Wodonga Council budget. Between 2018-2022 Wodonga Council spent $390,298 on grants. This equates to $97,574 per annum. Assuming a population of 42,700, this suggests a per capita spend of $2.28. Perhaps this figure excludes other grant monies, but this figure is considerably lower than the spending by Hume, Knox, Loddon, Southern Grampians, Warrnambool and West Wimmera councils, which average $22.14 (range $6.10 to $75.11)

Finally, it needs to be stressed that Wodonga Council's rigorous application process ensures substandard projects are unlikely to receive funding. The requirement of a letter of support by a council officer is an assurance that applications are genuinely in the best interests of the community.

The stated aims of the community grants are to empower organisations and to drive social, environmental, cultural and economic outcomes. We believe the grants achieve this.

We sincerely hope that your review of the Wodonga Community Impacts Grants results in the continuation of these relatively inexpensive but invaluable lifelines for our community.

OUR NATIVE GARDEN NURSERY

We operate a not for profit volunteer run nursery that grows only local occurring native plants. Our objective is to provide low cost plants for landcare groups, landholders and residents of the Wodonga Region and further afield.

Through the sale of plants we are able to self fund the cost of materials we use in order to grow plants. However there are capital items that we require from time to time that draw larger sums of money from our savings and we actively seek out grant programs to assist with these purchases.

Using the grant program to build infrastructure capacity has enabled us to have a productive operation supplying over 20000 plants per annum and provide a facility for community members to share in what we do as well accommodate an active intellectual need support program.

Thank you on behalf of the volunteers of Our Native Garden Nursery.



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WODONGA URBAN LANDCARE NETWORK

Wodonga Urban Landcare Network (WULN) has been very fortunate to have benefited from the Wodonga Council Community grants program over a number of years and we appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the program.

WULN is an umbrella organisation that employs a part time network and member support facilitator through grant funding from the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program. These positions support 16 groups which have different environment and sustainability focuses but who collectively aim to enhance the environment of the Wodonga Council area and have a membership of approximately 490 volunteers.

OUR VISION is of a biodiverse, connected and sustainable landscape supported by an integrated community approach.

WULN has been successful in obtaining funds through the community grants program to undertake a wide range of environmental works within Wodonga Council area.

We collaborate closely with Wodonga Council and NECMA our two key partners to ensure that any works delivered are of benefit to Council and the community it serves and the environment. In preparing grant applications WULN consults with Council and aligns its project work with the Wodonga Regional Waterway Action Plan, Council Plan and the Regional Natural Environment Strategy (a joint initiative with Albury City Council). In this way the work which WULN is doing through these grant programs directly supports the objectives of Wodonga Council and its vision:

Albury Wodonga has a thriving natural environment and connected community that underpins the liveability and prosperity that makes us nationally significant

We believe that the continuation of the grants program is critical to achieve this vision and below are some of the direct benefits of the program to WULN and Council.

- These grants incentivise our small volunteer groups. The grants provide them with resources needed to carry out their on-ground works and conduct education and engagement events. Without them, some of the groups might disband because they would find it too difficult to continue to volunteer using only their own personal resources. Through the on-ground works, groups add significant environmental and aesthetic value to the community - and by helping them to continue to volunteer, the grants help to add to the wellbeing of those who volunteer.
- The work that groups do with the grants improves the amenities in public parks and reserves through planting, weeding, signage and infrastructure- this improves Council's assets and promotes increased use of public spaces by the community. It increases citizen satisfaction with the amenities.
- The grants help groups share the load with the Council. The volunteers add significant numbers of hours of work that would not be possible by the Council.



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- The grants are cost effective. For a small financial investment the return in volunteer labour, enabling a myriad of work to be completed at very little cost to Council- truly a great return on investment.
- The grants allow our groups to purchase services from private businesses in the municipality, adding to the economic growth of those businesses
- The grants help to leverage other funds from the State and Commonwealth governments and from philanthropic trusts. The work carried out through the grants can demonstrate to other funding bodies that our groups have the capability to complete projects.

We rely on a variety of funding sources to complete our work and the community grant program grants have specifically supported WULN In recent years to;

- Expand the Gardens for Wildlife program to include responsible cat ownership and education around the habitat gardening message to service clubs and community groups.
- The establishment of stewardship groups on the hills as part of a partnership effort between WULN and Council to implement the Hills Strategy. Without the grant, WULN could not have established those groups
- New tracks on Susan Campbell & Kent McKoy reserves, new shelter in David Winterbottom Park, enhancement of the entrance to tunnel at Lou Lieberman Park, expanded native vegetation and riparian health across Wodonga.

In addition we acknowledge the many other community groups who have driven local projects for community benefit. Without these small grant opportunities many community organisations would be unable to deliver community services.

The council community grants program aims to provide opportunities to empower organisations and groups to drive social, environmental, cultural, and economic outcomes in the Wodonga municipality. We feel that this program delivers on these aims and wish to see the program continue into the future with the same robust requirements for all community groups.

- Clears aims, objectives and deliverables linked to Council strategies
- Engagement with relevant Council officers in the development of grants with letters of support.
- Defined budgets
- A fair and impartial assessment process for all grant applications.

Our Annual for 2021-22 highlighting our direction and successes for the year and what we can achieve with grant funding and volunteers is available here https://wodongalandcare.org.au/what-we-do/publications/

We hope that your review of the Wodonga Community Grants Program results the continuation of this program into the future.

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SUBMISSIONS FROM INDIVIDUALS

- I already donate time and money to various charities. My issue is I have no say where my contribution via rate donation goes. Whilst I agree there are many worthy charities, we cannot support them all. It comes down to this, if the council is going to use part of my rates for charities then I will no longer contribute to the charities I already support. It seems to me that my council wants to contribute more of my money to their selection of charities, not mine. Not very democratic.
- Would be good to see a regular list of available grants on the council website that goes beyond council grants and includes state, federal grants etc
- Community grants are good - Id suggest in some of the park related ones not funding paths etc that will wash away in floods (Winterbottom Park) or a lot of repair after.
- I work in community services and am on the committee for a local neighbourhood house, my husband is on a committee for a sporting club. We both see great value in community grants. The support they provide the community are so important and impact a wide range of people, I fully support the grants remaining.
- I am involved with a number of volunteer groups who have all accessed the Council grants for one off projects It is never the core funding of these group but helps deliver on community group priorities in a timely manner. Since Covid19 our regular and successful fundraising events and activities have been curtailed and don't raise the funds they used to. At a time of rising cost of living impacting on how much locals can donate, this is the time that Council needs to step up and support community and wellbeing, not step away at a time of such high need. Please show leadership and compassion. I have witnessed the benefits of these valued grants.
- Council gains a lot from our local clubs and organisations. Places like Trudewind Road Neighbourhood house, are fantastic, and provide so many services for the local community, and they do get some funding from other grants, but without the local councils support they wouldn't be able too.
  Supporting local organisations also give council a HUMAN face that can help them be seen favourably in other areas.
- Community organisations provide many services, mostly using volunteer labour, that if those organisations were not providing, the need would not go away and it would fall back to Council to take up that slack and provide those services itself. It is common sense that once a paid labour force and dare I say, a bureaucracy becomes involved, the cost of provision of those services will be far greater than when performed by willing volunteers.
  Volunteering in the community is what makes people feel valued and gives them a sense of belonging. As an active member myself of a service club (Lions International) I know how hard it is to attract volunteers as new members. Any loss of financial support will only make finding and keeping volunteers serving our community all the more difficult.
  It would be extremely short-sighted of Council to reduce support for those who help build a stronger Wodonga.
- Community Grants programs are vital to supporting the endeavors of volunteer, not for profit and other community focused groups. Perhaps in moving forward, additional assessment could be included as a part of the grants process to evaluate the impact and success of these grants, and resulting outcomes for the community. I strongly support the continued delivery of these grants.
- There are more important infrastructure projects that can be funded throughout Wodonga. Community groups have other avenues to fund their goals and not all residents receive any benefit from their programs. Killara doesn't even have a community centre to run such programs.
- Community Grants should be kept. Community should have access to it.



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- Wodonga Council's Community Grants program is absolutely critical to the community it serves.
  Many organisations across the community rely on opportunities like this to build their reach, try something new, engage community members, offer participation opportunities for community to get involved, learn, connect and feel a sense of belonging in the place where they live, work, learn and or play.
  As the Coordinator of the Albury Wodonga Local Food Network, since its inception in 2018, Wodonga Council has been an active partner and supporter of the Wodonga Local Food Strategy and its implementation.
  The Network received $28,000 under the Community Partnerships Grant category of the Program. This provided much needed seed funding to really assist in establishing the Network, its structure, marketing and communications and also develop and deliver a number of key actions, that in turn supported a number of community organisations, businesses and community members across the board.
  This funding gave Wodonga an opportunity to lead important work, advocacy, coordination of key projects across the broader North East and Border Region and place our local government area on the map. The impact has continue to have groundswell and includes being formally recognised as a key case study in State Government Strategies and Policies that support local food systems and community health and wellbeing. Without the funding it is fair to say, much of what has been achieved here in the food systems space wouldn't have occurred.
  The Network also received $1,500 in 2021 to partner with Felltimber Community Centre, Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau and Supergoat Media, to run a series of community 'Grow Your Own' workshops for community members to participate in.
  These workshops formed part of the Albury Wodonga Sustainable Living Festival's program of events, in which Wodonga Council was hosting that year. This essentially added a key element to the Program in linking food and community capacity building.
  I strongly support the continuation of the Program as I see the benefits for both community organisations and groups working hard to create and deliver important activities, events and engagement opportunities for all community to enjoy and engage with. After all this is the essence of what creates a resilient, diverse, connected and vibrant community.
- I am the Vice-President of Wodonga Hearts FC and we have been fortunate enough to be a recipient of the community grants in the past.
  As a voluntary and non-for-profit community sporting club we would not be able to function to our current ability without support. With the funds we received we have been able to expand our programs and support groups we would generally not have resources for. This has resulted in Wodonga Hearts being able to offer more teams this year including two all girl teams in the u12 and u14 age groups. Many of the u14 girls come from refugee backgrounds and this opportunity not only offers them the chance to build community relationships but also their parents and siblings.
  My professional role outside soccer is youth social work. From a professional point of view with the continued complexities that our youth face any opportunity for youth to engage in community events is of great benefit. The opportunity to make connections, assimilate, understand culture and community expectations are all additional bonuses and intangibles that these grants offer.
  I strongly advocate that these grants remain and that council take the opportunity to get down to local sporting events and fields to see the impact they have. I am not sure if council has had the opportunity to come down to Willow Park to see Wodonga Hearts in action but the invitation is always open and it would be fantastic to show how these grants are crucial to community development and inclusion.



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- I am the President of the Filipino Australian Community of Albury Wodonga Incorporated (FACAW Inc), for the last 15 years. There were previous occasions over 10 years ago in which FACAW Inc received small funding support from Wodonga Council to hold the annual Fiesta Filipina celebrations which showcased Filipino food and culture through dance performances, music and language interaction during the Fiesta events.
  The cultural grants are therefore significant for the Filipino Australian community, with a large number settling in the Wodonga and surrounding districts of Northeast Victoria. They are mostly skilled migrants employed by local businesses and industries.
  We could not find any willing or suitable venue in Wodonga that is accessible to our community members and to the general public or other CALD Communities that is culturally sensitive to our needs. We could not afford the price of the CUBE as the funding from Wodonga council was minimal, we are a non profit organisation relying on donations and kindness of volunteers to assist with the coordination and facilitation of the Fiesta Filipina event. When the event is held, both Mayors of Albury and Wodonga Councils are invited and the local MPS NSW and Victoria. I remember Councillor Mark Byatt attending our events and becoming so popular with our community members that it was recommended that if the current sitting Mayor was not available, that we specifically request for Councillor Byatt.
  When the venue was changed to Albury Commercial Club, City of Wodonga Council was not interested with our funding submissions under the cultural grants program, and no Mayor or other Councillors attended to find out at least the issued of the Filipino Community living and working in Wodonga and the Northeast region..
  In summary:
  - the cultural grants program should continue as it helps groups like my community to support multiculturalism, diversity, reduce racism and discrimination, connect with other CALD communities and general public, and it helps Council to report that their Multicultural Strategic Plan has at least been achieved with the Fiesta Filipina celebration. It has social and economic benefits to Wodonga as it encourages people from outside of Wodonga and Northeast to attend our Fiesta and visit Wodonga and spend money in local businesses.
  - City of Wodonga should review the amount being granted to successful groups who are non profit organisations such as FACAW, the amount barely covers our costs despite our efforts to fund raise more monies for our events and activities we wanted to start to benefit our communities who are sometimes in isolation, no families, social or community networks, and as we have an aging community as well, the activities we organise supports their mental health. welfare and wellbeing.
- The application process is excessive for a small return.
  The time taken and the cost to process, assess and councillor discussion & confirmation could be better utilised.
  Over recent years controversy has risen over these awards at Council meetings.
  I don't believe ratepayers money should be gifted to groups in this manner.
  Perhaps Council could support other opportunities for fundraising for these groups. Seminars on how to fundraise or run a Club or charity.
  More recognition of volunteers or young achievers either a group or individual could encourage or recognise profiles of volunteering.
- As a member of Friends of Willow Park I have seen the benefit of the community grants again and again. They have allowed us to partner with a wide range of organisations including Wodonga Senior Secondary College. and they have enable us to move forwards with development of the park and to build a strong group at Willow Park.
  The grants have help to build a positive relationship with the council.
  I think from the council's point of view there has been a lot of benefit as with a small input of capital and expertise from the council, an ongoing group has formed to continue to work in the park and to provide ongoing maintenance and improvements.
  I hope the council continue this excellent program



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- Over the years the Wodonga Council community grants have supported the implementation of valuable community based projects. Without the small amount of funding provided by the grants program many of these projects would not have happened.
  The financial impact of the grants program is multiplied through the long hours of volunteer planning, project management, construction, and networking of voluntary organisations such as sporting clubs and service organisations. These groups are constantly fundraising and dipping into the pockets of members to provide the amenities and activities that makes them sustainable and contributing to strong, resilient and vibrant community. Often grant supported projects are also supported by local businesses through donations and discounts, further adding to the financial return on investment made by Council.
  The relatively small investment by council provides significant social benefits through supporting volunteerism, networking ,community belonging and community pride. These grant programs allow community to prioritise projects according to micro-level needs, building a sense of community and adding to the amenity of this beautiful city.
  Without the community grant program, many place-based and interest-based community projects would not be developed and implemented. At this time of chaos and rapid change, it is even more vital to continue to provide opportunities for the community to come together to create community cohesion and develop neighbourhood identity.
  I commend Wodonga Council for its long history of valuing community activity and supporting community identified and led projects . I sincerely hope that Council will consider expanding the community grants program to broaden accessibility for our more vulnerable community cohorts, especially young people and people from diverse cultural backgrounds and to continue to support those hard working volunteer community groups and associations.
- The community grants program is a fantastic mechanism for council; staff, executive and councilors to know, understand and engage with dynamic and inspired groups within their community.
  Along with this knowledge, Council, representing residents and ratepayers, are able to support these groups with the necessary resources to continue their great work.
  Lets face it, the program is not a lot of money, but the flow on effects through volunteer labour, purchasing local business services, improved amenities and citizen satisfaction and appreciation is huge.
  I hope this program continues and expands,
- My involvement has only been through environmental activities and I strongly support the community grants for these actions.
  Working as part of a volunteer Landcare group, the community grants have enabled us to achieve great outcomes with modest funding because of our ability to leverage our volunteer labour. I believe the outcomes should exceed the grant value either through other private funding or through 'in kind' donations and labour.
  I think in a very general sense there does need to be strong accountability and scrutiny to ensure there are genuine, sustained benefits from community grants and I'm confident we have been able to achieve this through the Landcare activities.
- A number of my friends and family volunteer in groups that have received funding through the Community Grants Program. Even though the amount of the grant may have been small, they all said it was a huge boost to their group both in terms of finances as well as morale. It allowed them to expand their services and/or reach into the community.
  When I look at how much the program costs Council each year - a little over $100k - and see the analysis of what that money actually delivers in benefits - over $500k per year plus immense community benefits that are often difficult to quantify - I believe that this is an essential component of the Council's budget. Given how much value the CGP gives to Wodonga, I would hope that the program can be expanded in the coming budget. It would make responsible fiscal sense to do so.

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- In working with a variety of local Community groups I have at various times used council's community grants funds to support community projects which would otherwise have either not been undertaken or else have fallen short of the mark in achieving its intended outcomes.
  As a community member I see a lot of work in our community done by volunteers who are often under-resourced with volunteer man-power and reliant on their own tools, trailers and vehicles to do their work in and for the community to make Wodonga a better place.
  They [the volunteers] are more often members of the retired segment of our community, a group who have skills and experience to offer, a group that keep themselves healthy, engaged and productive and a group that needs to belong and engaged with like-minded people.
  The community grants program has not only supported this community of active and community-minded retirees, but it has become one of the jigsaw pieces that has over time establish a positive relationship and vibrant partnership of good will and appreciation between the council and the volunteers.
  I personally have put the council's Community Grants Program to good use on a variety of projects related to my local Landcare and Rail Trail groups and would strongly encourage continued support of this kind from council in the future.