

ITEM 4 CONNECTING NEIGHBOURS GRANTS (PILOT)

The Connecting Neighbours Grants program, proposed for pilot in early 2018, will provide small grants between \$250 - \$1,000 to community members and groups who want to make a positive impact in their local area. The grants program is about strengthening and celebrating neighbourhoods at the grass roots level, creating connections and encouraging collective action to build strong communities, as well as enhance relationships between Council and the community. The Connecting Neighbours Grants pilot provides an opportunity for Council to expand the existing programs offered through the Financial Assistance Policy and create greater flexibility in how support is provided for small locally based activities.

A budget of \$10,000 has been allocated in the 2017-18 financial year to undertake the pilot. If successful the Financial Assistance Policy will be amended to include the Connecting Neighbours Grants and ongoing financial resources allocated to the grant program as appropriate.

This report provides Council with details of the pilot and proposed approach.

RECOMMENDATION

Council support the commencement of the Connecting Neighbours Grants pilot in February 2018.

REPORT AUTHORISATIONS

Report of: Kerry Hunt, Manager Community Cultural and Economic Development
Authorised by: Renae Elrington, Director Community Services - Creative and Innovative City

ATTACHMENTS

- 1 Internal Background Document
- 2 FAQ Sheet

BACKGROUND

It is proposed to pilot a Connecting Neighbours Grants program in early 2018. The program will provide grants to community members and groups who want to make a positive impact in their local area and have a good idea how to do it. The grants program is about strengthening and celebrating neighbourhoods at the grass roots level, creating connections and encouraging collective action to build strong communities. The program also provides an opportunity to build local capacity and strengthen Council's relationship with the community.

The pilot program has been informed by initial research and consultation undertaken in 2013 which included a review of existing grant programs at the state, national and international level and literature on the effectiveness of small grant programs. Consultation was also undertaken with community organisations and Council staff. Examples of similar successful projects elsewhere include: Quick Response Grants - Adelaide City Council, Make Your Place - City of Newcastle and Community Capacity Grants - Parramatta City Council.

Since this initial research was undertaken Council has tested a range of placemaking initiatives in the LGA. The projects undertaken in the City Centre, Corrimal Town Centre and the Allan Street 7 Day Makeover have helped develop greater understanding of both our internal capacity to support the grants program and how the community engages with placemaking.

Through the Business Proposal process a \$10,000 budget has been allocated in the 2017/18 financial year to provide grants to small groups of community members and smaller community groups and organisations across all suburbs of Wollongong. If successful it is envisaged the pilot will be integrated into Council's Financial Assistance Policy, creating greater flexibility in how support is provided for small locally-based activities and reducing red tape to assist community members to activate our neighbourhoods.

The grants have two categories:

- 1 Up to \$250 for an individual who, along with at least two other community members, share an idea and want to make it happen.
- 2 Up to \$1000 for projects where the community members have partnered with an incorporated organisation to auspice the funds and support the project.

The grants are to support community led projects in a neighbourhood. This could include a street, a few houses, a group, or a place people socialise. The grants are not designed for larger community organisations that already receive government funding. However larger organisations may want to partner or auspice a community-led project.

Council staff from the Community and Cultural Development Unit will act as coaches and assist community members to develop their ideas, complete the application and if required, assist to locate an organisation to manage the funds. The research undertaken as part of the programs development identified the coaching element as a crucial success factor in grant programs such as the Connecting Neighbours Grants.

Examples of projects that may be funded include planting gardens, working bees, art projects, a bush dance, a training course, a social outing for a group of isolated older neighbours or a guest speaker for training community groups.

Ideas may:

- Help neighbours to get to know each other.
- Connect with people who are not yet involved in neighbourhood activities or who may be socially isolated.
- Increase feelings of community safety.
- Improve how the area looks.
- Build local skills and/or job opportunities.
- Any application that meets the seven criteria listed below will be considered.

Applicants:

- Must be based in the Wollongong LGA.
- Need to be community members with a shared idea; part of a community group, or representing a small community organisation (not a government agency or a large non-government or community organisation).
- Will 'match' the funding via in-kind and voluntary contributions.

The idea:

- Is a new initiative and involves local residents.
- Connects people and/or strengthens the neighbourhood.

Funding:

- Of more than \$250 will be managed by an incorporated organization.
- Will need to be spent within six months.

A review panel consisting of two Council officers and an independent will consider the applications and make recommendations to Council. Priority will be given to projects that are not already provided in the local government area by community organisations, individuals or businesses.

It is proposed that applications will open in late February and close mid April 2018. The recommended grant recipients will be reported to Council at the May 2018 meeting for approval. Subject to approval by Council, funds will be distributed in June 2018 with projects commencing from July 2018 and completed within six months.

An evaluation process will be undertaken to determine the success of the pilot including both the grant process and the successful projects outcomes. Subject to the outcome of the evaluation, ongoing resources will be allocated and the Financial Assistance Policy amended to include the Connecting Neighbours Grants.

PROPOSAL

The Connecting Neighbours Grants be piloted in early 2018 and successful applicants reported to Council for approval at the May 2018 meeting. If the pilot is deemed a success then:

- The program will be modified to reflect any learnings.
- The Financial Assistance Policy will be amended to include the Connecting Neighbours Grants.
- Financial resources will be allocated to the grant program as appropriate.

CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Extensive consultation was undertaken in 2013 with local community organisations and Council staff.

In refining the program for the pilot, consultation was undertaken with Council’s Governance Officer and General Counsel (Acting) to ensure the pilot met Council’s obligations in terms of probity, governance and the Local Government Act.

The following aspects of the grant program will assist Council meet their obligations:

- The pilot will be delivered (as far as is practicable) in line with the Financial Assistance Policy.
- The pilot will be widely advertised and promoted to enable fair and equitable access.
- The ‘coaching’ element provides an opportunity for Council to provide information that will assist community members to deliver successful projects and mitigate risks.
- The coaches will not be part of the approval process to minimise any perceived conflict.
- The grant limit of \$250 for individual community members with a shared idea is low.

The recommended grant recipients will be reported to Council for approval prior to the release of any funds.

PLANNING AND POLICY IMPACT

This report contributes to the delivery of Wollongong 2022 ‘Goal 3 – *Wollongong is a creative, vibrant city*’, ‘Goal 4 - *We are a connected and engaged community*’ and ‘Goal 5 - *We are a healthy community in a liveable city.*’ It specifically delivers on the following:

Community Strategic Plan	Delivery Program 2012-2017
Strategy	5 Year Action
3.4.3 Communities have access to quality local spaces and places to meet, share and celebrate	3.4.3.1 Deliver a program of activities in local communities

Should the pilot be a success, the Financial Assistance Policy will be amended to include the Connecting Neighbours Grants.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The program has been refined after consultation with the General Counsel (Acting) to ensure that risks are mitigated. Whilst the program is not identified within the Financial Assistance Policy it will be delivered within the policy framework, the addition of coaches provides another avenue to manage risk. The approval process for applications will take into account a risk assessment. The funding categories have been designed to increase the level of accountability and management in line with increased amounts and associated risk.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

\$10,000 has been allocated to fund the pilot in the 2017-18 financial year via a business proposal.

Should the pilot be deemed a success then a review of like operational budgets will be undertaken to ascertain capacity for funding future iterations of the program.

CONCLUSION

The Connecting Neighbours Grants pilot provides an opportunity for Council to expand the existing programs offered through the Financial Assistance Policy and create greater flexibility in how support is provided for small locally-based activities. This grants program would further demonstrate Council's commitment to working with community members to build on local neighbourhood strengths and add an additional element to our placemaking initiatives.



CONNECTING NEIGHBOURS GRANTS - A PILOT

INTERNAL BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

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Introduction

Wollongong City Council aims to foster a community that is prepared to contribute energy and initiative to improve the wellbeing of its people. Council is committed to encouraging local creativity and building on neighbourhood strengths, skills and participation. As part of this commitment Council's Community, Cultural and Economic Division will pilot a micro grants program, the Connecting Neighbours Grants (CNG). The grants provided will support projects that build opportunities and/or strengthen the community in Wollongong LGA.

The aim of this program will be to support small, community-driven initiatives by providing financial and mentor assistance at the 'grass roots' level. By taking a community development approach, the grants program will foster strong relationships by linking local residents, groups and organisations while promoting and raising Council's community profile. The CNG differs from current Council grant programs by focusing on developing community partnerships and capacity to build strong and resilient communities.

Links to Wollongong 2022: Community Strategic Plan

Wollongong 2022 is a long term Community Strategic Plan for the City. The Plan plays a vital role in the future of Wollongong and provides direction for the delivery of key projects and services which will help meet the needs of the community.

During 2011 and 2012 Council undertook extensive community engagement to develop a long term vision for Wollongong. This vision and the six community goals to reach this vision are:

From the mountains to the sea, we value and protect our natural environment and we will be leaders in building an educated, creative and connected community.

1. *We value and protect our environment*
2. *We have an innovative and sustainable economy*
3. *Wollongong is a creative, vibrant city*
4. *We are a connected and engaged community*
5. *We are a healthy community in a liveable city*
6. *We have sustainable, affordable and accessible transport*

All applications for the CNG are required to show how their project aligns with at least one of the Community Goals of the Wollongong 2022 Community Strategic Plan.

Background

The pilot program has been informed by a body of research and consultation undertaken in 2013. This included a review of existing NSW Council Programs and Grant Program Reports and website resources of national, international and local programs. A brief scan of published literature focussing on effectiveness of small grant programs was also undertaken. Consultation was also undertaken with community organisations and Council staff.

Since this initial research, Council has also tested a range of placemaking initiatives in the LGA. The projects undertaken in the City Centre, Corrimal Town Centre and the Allan St 7 Day Makeover have helped develop greater understanding of both our internal capacity to support the grant program and how the community engages with place making.

Program Snapshot

- Applications are required to align with at least one of the Community Goals of the CSP.
- Grants amounts of
 - up to \$250 for community members (minimum 3) with a shared project idea.
 - up to \$1000 for projects where there is an incorporated auspice.
- The grants are targeted at residents and small, local community groups.
- A bi annual intake cycle – February and September (proposed, subject to pilot).
- Existing community development workers provide mentoring and act as 'support coaches' throughout the period of the grant.
- Aims to develop the capacity of residents to build on neighbourhood and/or community strengths, skills and participation.
- Driven by social equity and 'grass roots' principles – requires a more personal approach in promotion and marketing.
- Works from Asset-Based Community Development and Strengths-based perspectives.
- Encourages informal groups to develop a partnership with an auspicing organisation.
- Offers a plain English, easy application and accountability process.
- Includes a community 'matching' component.
- Rigorous evaluation process using a Results Based Accountability methodology.

Why Connecting Neighbours Grants is different

Council through the Financial Assistance Policy has a number of programs that sit within the Financial Assistance Policy and provide financial assistance to groups and individuals in the Wollongong community. These include:

1. Wollongong Heritage Fund
2. Small Cultural Grants
3. Small Grants NAIDOC Week Event
4. Sponsorship of Community Events
5. Contribution to Public Bands and Choirs
6. Minor Donations
7. Activities with Economic Benefit

Following Connecting Neighbours Grants pilot and further funding allocation, it is envisioned that the Financial Assistance Policy would be amended to include the CNG.

The CNG provides an opportunity for local government to invest in building community assets and processes such as community problem solving and community planning. Some of the aspects that differentiate this small grants program from other Council Grants and Sponsorships include:

1. Community-led, community development approach

In particular, the CNG aims to stimulate community action by providing residents with an incentive to identify an issue, priority or activity in their neighbourhood and take steps to change or address this. The CNG supports a 'bottom-up' approach to community strengthening whereby local residents are proactive and creative about issues that are important to them. The CNG provides an opportunity for Council to invest in capacity building activities that develop and strengthen the local community.

2. Establishes community partnerships and networks

The CNG endeavours to link residents and neighbourhood/interest groups with existing community organisations and networks. If the group is not incorporated and wishes to apply for more than \$250, partnerships are required with non-government organisations to administer the delivery of grant funds to the community. Grant recipients will be encouraged to negotiate this arrangement themselves, developing these relationships. Links between Council, residents, groups and community agencies will also be strengthened through the CNG coach component. The CNG provides opportunities for community engagement and increases the capacity of communities through:

- Developing community members as positive role models.
- Cultivating skill sharing.
- Harnessing resources for the community.
- Facilitating greater access to services.

3. Sustainability

The CNG aims to develop small, localised projects with the expectation that they increase the capacity of community groups and residents. This can be achieved by:

- Ensuring grantees have a variety of sources of support.
- Encouraging community ownership - transfer decision making to residents and organisations.
- Securing local sponsorship: increase private sector support of programs and sense of ownership.
- Investigating scope for expansion of activities.
- Seeking to secure long term resources for community based initiatives.

4. *Unique coaching model*

The program has a unique model of 'mentors' or 'coaches' who assist applicants and community organisations from application for a grant to completion of a project. It is a key component and strength of the program. Existing Council resources will be utilised with staff from related services providing the support to grant applicants e.g. Youth Worker for a project submitted by young people. This raises the profile of the Council at the local level. Council's coaches will be available to work with applicants to increase their skills and knowledge about other funding opportunities available from other organisations and governments.

5. *A more hands-on, on-the-ground approach*

As demonstrated by comparable strength based grant programs, the most effective way to market and promote the grant program is through a personal approach, word of mouth and existing relationships.

Auspicing Arrangements

Partnerships are required with non-government and not for profit organisations to administer the delivery of grant funds that exceed \$250 to the community in a seamless and responsive manner. Funding will be managed by an incorporated organisation. Financial assistance guidelines will be met by Letter of Agreement. Grant recipients will be encouraged to negotiate this arrangement themselves with assistance and support from the CNG Coach.

Who can apply?

The grants are targeted at residents and small, local community groups. Underpinned by social justice, access and equity principles, the grants will be disbursed to individuals and community groups living in the Wollongong LGA who wish to strengthen their community connections. Community members experiencing social exclusion, marginalisation and isolation will be encouraged to apply. Residents and/or groups who may consider applying may include, but are not limited to:

- Indigenous families and young people.
- Communities in social housing.
- Young families.
- Families experiencing housing stress.
- Young people (particularly unemployed young people).
- Older people.
- People with disabilities.
- Culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
- Refugee groups.

The challenge with the CNG is to be able to connect with the above groups to let them know about the opportunity and to support them to consider developing an idea for an application. This is where the importance of utilising Council staff resources to get out and tap into formal and informal community networks is key.

Who can't apply?

The CNG is not designed for community agencies, large non-government organisations and government agencies that already receive funding from government and other sources. However, partnerships with NGO's, large community organisations or government agencies would be accepted where these organisations are the *minor* partner. Regardless, it is hoped that these organisations will communicate information about the CNG to their networks and offer to manage their grant funds and support the development of their communities' ideas. Projects will not be funded that directly benefit an individual.

What kinds of projects can be funded?

Any project that shows that it can build opportunities for residents and/or strengthen the community will be considered. Projects might include:

- Increase opportunities for participation in community life.
- Engage community members not yet involved in neighbourhood activities.
- Build community connections.
- Improve feelings of community safety.
- Improve local amenity (how the area looks).
- Build local skills and/or job opportunities.
- Provide opportunities for young people.
- Provide opportunities for vulnerable groups and those experiencing social exclusion.
- Address local community care and wellbeing needs.

Project examples

Examples of projects that may receive a grant may include:

- scrapbooking the memories of elderly dementia patients from a local nursing home.
- a Christmas barbeque to gather information on the needs of residents in a social housing complex.
- a bus trip for socially isolated residents.
- an evening program for teenage girls.
- hip-hop dance lessons for young people that culminates in a performance.
- painting a banner with a group of Aboriginal elders.
- a landscape gardening project that involved a playgroup, youth group, or a group that has been formed within the neighbourhood just for this purpose.

Funding Criteria

1. Applicants must be based in Wollongong.
2. Applicants can be a small group of community members who have a shared idea, an existing community group or small community organisations.
3. Applications will "match" the funding via in-kind or voluntary contributions.
4. The idea is a new initiative and involves local residents.
5. The idea connects people and/or strengthen neighbourhood in a beneficial way.
6. Grants of up to \$250 will be provided to an individual who has a shared idea with at least 2 other community members.
7. Grants above \$250 will be managed by an incorporated organisation
8. The funding is spent within 6 months of being received.

Timeframe

It is proposed (post pilot) that application rounds will open twice a year. Upon notification of successful application, grant applicants will have 6 months to complete the project and acquit the funds.

Round 1 February to March

Round 2 August to September

Evaluation

The CNG will have a key focus on evaluation and will employ a Results-Based Accountability framework for process, intermediate and outcome indicators. The evaluation will take in two processes:

1. Internal project management.
2. Program delivery and outcomes.

Elements of the program delivery evaluation will incorporate:

- Coaches diary/notes.
- Grant recipient interview/survey at end of project.
- Reflection by applicant on the project, its outcomes, process and the results.
- Discussion about the sustainability of the project activities, results and what can be done to enhance them.
- Feedback on improvements to grant processes.
- NGO's interviews/survey/feedback sessions.
- Grant program team (including coaches) debrief.

Impacts to be evaluated may include:

- Amount of resources secured by grant funding.
- Actions resulting from the involvement of community members.
- Extent of community involvement in joint projects.
- Effect of participation in the project on participants.
- Extent of involvement of volunteers in joint projects/strategies.
- Effect of participation on the volunteers.
- Changes reported in neighbourhood connections (Measurement Tool).
- Outcomes of the grant projects and their sustainability (ie change in the capacity of local organisation - Measurement Tool).
- Change in capacity of local community groups (Measurement Tool).
- Impact on CCED resources, administration hours and coach hours.

**These impacts might not become evident for some time after the project is completed. This means that methods to capture these longer terms aspects need to be incorporated, say in 12 months and 24 months after the project.



WOLLONGONG CITY COUNCIL

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CONNECTING NEIGHBOURS GRANTS

Have you got a great idea for your neighbourhood?

Here are some frequently asked questions to help

Have you got a great idea for your Neighbourhood?

Maybe you want to run an art class to get people together, plant a community garden, or organise a bus trip to get some older neighbours out and about. We want to help you make your neighbourhood an even better place to live.

To do this we're offering small grants to help fund your great idea as well as providing you with information and support to help you plan your event or activity.

It's called the Connecting Neighbours Grants.

What are the Connecting Neighbours Grants?

It's a program where individuals and community groups can apply for money to fund a great idea to make your neighbourhood a better place. We're looking for ideas which will bring people together and help neighbours get to know each other.

What is a Neighbourhood?

A neighbourhood could include a street, a few houses, a group, or a place you socialise.

Who can apply?

Anyone can apply so long as you live in Wollongong and you have at least two friends who share your idea. If you've got a slightly bigger idea – then you'll need to get a local community group to work with you.

The program isn't for larger community organisations that already receive government funding. However, larger organisations might want to partner or auspice a community led project.

Larger organisations might want to apply for one of Council's other grants. For information on these grants please refer to www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/services/funding.

How much can I apply for?

Up to \$250 for community members with a shared project idea.

Up to \$1000 for projects where there is an incorporated supporting organisation.

How will the funding be provided to me?

For projects funded up to \$250 you will receive a letter of offer and be asked to sign an agreement and provide an invoice/tax invoice to Council. The person nominated on the application form will be provided with the funds via an electronic funds transfer (EFT) or cheque.

For projects up to \$1000 an incorporated support organisation is required to act as the auspice. The support organisation and the applicant will receive a letter of offer and be asked to sign an agreement and provide an invoice/tax invoice. The funds will be provided to the support organisation via an EFT or cheque.

How will I find a support organisation?

If your community group is not incorporated you will need to partner with an incorporated organisation. We may be able to help find an organisation who will manage the funding so please contact the community development team on (02) 4227 7238. Council staff can offer suggestions for suitable local organisations to manage the funds on your behalf. Examples could include your local neighbourhood or community centre, a sports group, club or a larger community organisation. The arrangement you come to must be agreed upon by both parties and be as easy to manage as possible.

What does being a support organisation mean?

Under Council's grant guidelines, applications for more than \$250 require a support organisation that is incorporated. The support organisation will receive the funds on the group's behalf and manage and acquit the funds.

The organisation would need to be supportive of the project and group and provide guidance as needed. The grant applicant would need to secure the support of the organisation and agree on how the funds will be managed prior to submitting their application.

It is hoped that the Connecting Neighbours Grants will help develop stronger connections between residents and wider community networks.

I think I have a good idea but would like to talk to someone about it. What help is available?

Council has staff who act as coaches and are available to assist you with developing your ideas, completing your application and, if required, assisting to locate an organisation to manage your funds. The 'coaches' are there to provide you with the support to make the process as easy and as beneficial to you as possible.

What is the selection process?

A review panel made up of Council Officers and an independent representative look at the applications and makes a recommendation reported to Council for approval. Priority is given to projects that are not already provided in the local government area (LGA) by community organisations, individuals or businesses.

The applications will be reviewed against the following seven (7) criteria:

Applicants

1. Must be based in the Wollongong LGA.
2. Need to be community members with a shared idea, part of a community group, or representing a small community organisation (not a government agency or a large non-government or community organisation).
3. Will 'match' the funding via in-kind and voluntary contributions.

The idea

4. Is a new initiative and involves local residents.
5. Connects people and/or strengthens neighbourhood.

Funding

6. Of more than \$250 will be managed by an incorporated organisation.
7. Will need to be spent within 6 months.

What do you mean by "matching" the grant?

We will provide up to \$1000 for each project, however you may need less than this for your idea. The money comes with the understanding that you will also contribute or "match" the amount via voluntary or in-kind contributions. This could be time, materials, goods, funds and/or volunteer hours. For example, if your group wants to paint a community mural in your neighbourhood - you donate 10 hours labour and a local business donates some paints. The grant could provide additional paint materials and a neighbourhood celebration at the end!

Can you give me some examples of project ideas that could be funded?

Any application that meets the seven (7) selection criteria will be considered. Examples could include planting gardens, working bees, art projects, a bush dance, a training course, a social outing for a group of isolated older neighbours or a guest speaker for training community groups. Ideas that we are looking for can be simple and they may:

- Help neighbours get to know each other.
- Connect people who are not yet involved in neighbourhood activities, or who may be socially isolated.
- Increase feelings of community safety.
- Improve how the area looks.
- Build local skills and/or job opportunities.

If your project does not fit any of these areas but meets the selection criteria, please contact a Council Officer to discuss.

Where do I find out more information?

All this information is available on Council's website: www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/services/funding.

Should you have further questions, please contact the Community Development Team on (02) 4227 7238 or via email on C&CSAdmin@wollongong.nsw.gov.au.

Where do I send my application form?

Posted applications need to be post marked no later than 30 March 2018 and sent to:

Connecting Neighbours Grants
Community, Cultural & Economic Development
Wollongong City Council
Locked Bag 8821
WOLLONGONG DC NSW 2500

Alternatively, you can submit your application by:

- Email: C&CSAdmin@wollongong.nsw.gov.au.
- Fax: (02) 4227 2641.

In person to Wollongong City Council, 41 Burelli Street, Wollongong. Hand delivered applications will be received up until 5pm on 30 March 2018. Please mark your application 'Connecting Neighbours Grants'.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS

Dates to Remember

- February 2018**
 - Applications open
 - Application forms and guidelines available
 - Council staff available to assist with applications
- 30 March 2018**
 - Applications close
- May 2018**
 - Recommendations are reported to Council for approval
- June 2018**
 - Successful applicants notified
 - Funds distributed
- December 2018**
 - Reminder sent out for projects not yet acquitted
- January 2019**
 - Projects to be acquitted