

# Hepburn Shire Council

## Community Grants Program Guidelines 2025-26



*Hepburn*

SHIRE COUNCIL

## Program Objectives

Hepburn Shire Council's Community Grants Program supports community-based projects and initiatives that enhance the social, environmental, and economic life of Hepburn Shire. Community Grants can help community groups to implement projects that promote community wellbeing, increase social connection, and build capacity for leadership and independence. Funded programs can strengthen the community by creating opportunities for participation, celebration, development, inclusion, and sustainability.

The Community Grants Program will provide up to \$57,000 in 2025/2026 to fund proposals from the community for programs and activities that are conducted in Hepburn Shire to the benefit of its residents. Applicants can apply for a grant up to \$5,000 at any time during the application period and can only receive one grant per year.

Funding is available for projects that can demonstrate commitment from the community, and that align with one or more of the key focus areas in the [Council Plan 2025-2029](#) or benefit priority groups outlined in the Council Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

## Program Principles

Three principles guide all of Hepburn Shire Council's grants programs, including how Council Officers work with, support, and respect the community and administer the program:

### 1. Transparency

Transparency is defined as the lack of hidden agendas or conditions and the availability of all information needed in order to collaborate, cooperate and make decisions effectively.

### 2. Equity

Equitable grant making is being conscious of the barriers and disadvantage being faced by some groups or individuals because of the inequitable distribution of power and resources.

### 3. Efficiency and Effectiveness

Every grant dollar should produce the maximum benefit for Hepburn Shire communities. Every grant should be both efficient and effective throughout the whole lifecycle of the Community Grant process, from promotion to evaluation.

## Strategic Alignment

The Community Grants Program aligns with the Domains and key focus areas detailed in the [Council Plan 2025-2029](#) and Council Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Applicants will need to identify how their project aligns with one or more of these focus areas:

**Council Plan Domains:**

**Hepburn Life**

- Connected communities that are resilient and adaptable, able to respond, and supported to recover from climate-related impacts, emergencies and other community challenges.
- A healthy and inclusive community, where all people regardless of background or life stage have the opportunity to participate and thrive.
- An informed and engaged community.

**Future Hepburn**

- Preserve the unique character of our towns and communities, plan for future growth and protect our productive rural landscape.
- Responsible management of infrastructure and environment to support wellbeing now and for future generations.
- A dynamic, vibrant and resilient economic environment.

**Hepburn Working Together**

- Future-focused services that are easy to use and inclusive.
- Maintain corporate governance to enable good Council decision making and to ensure long-term financial viability.
- An engaged, safe and skillful workforce.

**Municipal Public Health and wellbeing Plan focus areas:**

- Increased active living
- Increased mental wellbeing

**Key priority groups:**

Projects should ideally target one or more of the key priority groups identified in the Council Plan 2025-2029:

- First Nations peoples
- Older people
- Children, youth and families
- Women

- People from low socio-economic backgrounds
- Culturally and linguistically diverse population
- People living with a disability
- LGBTIQ+ people

### Who Can Apply?

- Local not-for-profits, sporting clubs and community groups in the Hepburn Shire, which are incorporated with an Australian Business Number (ABN).
- Local groups without an ABN may apply, only if they are auspiced by another organisation that is a legal entity with an ABN and meets the eligibility criteria.
- Only charities that are registered with ACNC (Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission) are eligible to apply for the Charitable Purposes stream.

### Who Can't Apply?

- Unincorporated groups, unregistered charities or a group without an auspice arrangement.
- Private organisations, profit-making entities or political parties.
- Applicants with an outstanding acquittal for a Hepburn Shire Council Grant.
- Applicants already receiving funding from Hepburn Shire Council for the same project.
- Applicants that have already commenced their project, or have completed the project and are requesting funds be applied retrospectively.

Applicants are only eligible to receive **one** grant per 12 months.

### Application Process

1. It is strongly encouraged that all applicants contact Council's Community Grants Officer to discuss your initial idea for your project, application requirements and the online application process.
2. Visit: [www.hepburn.vic.gov.au/residents/support/grants](http://www.hepburn.vic.gov.au/residents/support/grants) for more information.
3. Go to the [Hepburn Shire Council Grants Portal](#) and submit your application online with Smartygrants.

**Applications not meeting the eligibility guidelines will not be considered for assessment.**

### Before you apply.

Council encourages community groups interested in submitting applications for their project to discuss their project with a Council Officer. Technical support will be provided to guide and refine the scope of potential projects, before and during the application stage. All

applicants are advised to contact Council's Community Grants Officer at [grants@hepburn.vic.gov.au](mailto:grants@hepburn.vic.gov.au) or (03) 5348 2306 to ensure that the project meets the funding aims.

Council will hold an online information session for applicants seeking further information on this grant program and how to apply. For further details, please visit [www.hepburn.vic.gov.au/residents/support/grants](http://www.hepburn.vic.gov.au/residents/support/grants).

### Key Dates

Due to Council's recent restructure, the program dates for Community Grants are still being finalised. Please check this page for updates. It is envisaged that one round of Community Grants will take place in the second half of the 2025/26 financial year for a total funding pool of \$47,000. The program will revert to two rounds in the 2026/27 financial year.

### Community Grants 2025/2026

ROUND 1	KEY DATES
Application period opens:	16 March 2026
Application period closes:	15 May 2026
Assessment panel convenes:	TBA
Outcomes announced:	30 June 2026

**Acquittal and Evaluation Form:** Due 12 months after funds are granted.

### Assessment Process

- At the conclusion of the Application stage, applications are reviewed to ensure they meet the eligibility criteria. Those not meeting the criteria will be notified and will not progress to assessment.
- Eligible applications will be assessed by a panel consisting of Council Officers against the Assessment criteria.
- Applications are ranked by overall average score, with funding allocated to the highest scoring applications until the funding pool or pool of suitable applicants is exhausted.

### Assessment Criteria

All Council Grant Programs are assessed against the following Assessment Criteria:

- Criterion 1: Evidence of a community need or opportunity, and evidence of support from the community (25%)
- Criterion 2: Alignment with the Council Plan 2025-2029 (25%)
- Criterion 3: Benefit to Hepburn Shire residents (20%)
- Criterion 4: Ability to deliver the project effectively and within budget (15%)
- Criterion 5: Managing risk (15%)

### Funding

Applicants will be notified of the assessment panel outcomes by Council Officers. Once notified, successful applicants are required to sign a funding agreement and submit a tax invoice to Council using the Smartygrants platform.

### Acquittal Process

An online acquittal must be completed through the SmartyGrants portal at the conclusion of the funded project/activity/event. Successful applicants are required to keep records of all items used and purchased in facilitating the grant project/activity/event and upload these records to our grant's portal as part of the acquittal process.

### Eligible Projects

To be eligible for assessment, projects must:

- Be a new or one-off activity or program, or, be a new initiative for an existing project or program.
- Be completed within twelve months of signing the agreement and release of funds.
- Take place within Hepburn Shire to the benefit of its residents.
- Be an organisation that is a legal entity with an ABN (e.g., an incorporated association), or be auspiced by a suitable group.<sup>1</sup>
- Have all permits, permissions, and approvals for the project.<sup>2</sup>
- Be a not-for-profit group (NFP).<sup>3</sup> NFPs that employ paid staff, such as Coaches, Players, Administrators or Chairpersons, must clearly show a strong financial need for funding and explain the potential growth of their organisation due to the project.
- Demonstrate community involvement in its planning and proposed implementation.
- Be willing to participate in public relations for the project, including a potential media release and photo with members of the applicants' organisation and funding representatives
- Be an organisation that has valid public liability insurance or can demonstrate the ability to obtain such insurance before the project commences.

If the project is expected to generate a minor financial gain, the applicant must clearly highlight how the profits will contribute to the group's sustainability or community benefit.

<sup>1</sup> An Auspicing Agent is another organisation that is a legal entity with an ABN. A letter signed by two committee members from the auspicing agent must be submitted with the grant application, confirming they will auspice the application and that they will not charge a fee for this service.

<sup>2</sup> If the project is to undertake works on; Council owned/managed land or property, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action property, or Parks Victoria land, you must provide written approval from the relevant land manager.

<sup>3</sup> Your organisation may meet the requirements of being a not-for-profit by having specific dissolution clauses in its governing rules. Category C Children's Programs will consider applications from organisations such as schools.

### Ineligible Projects

- Individual applicants, profit-making organisations and political parties
- An activity that is the funding responsibility of the state or federal government, or can be funded by fees, sponsorship or service agreements
- Applicants that have already received a Community Grant within previous twelve months (judged from the date the funding agreement was signed until the date the application period closes)
- Applicants that have an outstanding Council grant acquittal or unpaid invoice from Council
- Recurrent or ongoing projects can only apply if they demonstrate the introduction of a significant new initiative.
- An activity that meets the definition of an 'Event' as defined in the Hepburn Shire Council Events Strategy 2020-2026. (Projects meeting this definition should contact the Events Officer to discuss the project and apply through the Events grants programs).
- An activity that already receives or has received funding or in-kind-support from other sources within Hepburn Shire Council, i.e., funding agreements or sponsorship arrangements
- Projects that have already commenced or have been completed
- Applications submitted outside the Application Stage closing date
- Organisations based outside the Shire, unless the project is of benefit to Hepburn Shire residents.

**Applications completed by a third party on behalf of an applicant will not be considered.**

## Funding Conditions and Requirements

- All planning and building permits and other applicable authorisations remain the responsibility of the applicant. Evidence of permits / permissions must be provided where relevant
- Public Liability Insurance is the responsibility of the applicant and must be obtained prior to commencing any works that has been funded.
- An offer of a grant does not mean an ongoing funding commitment or obligation by Council.
- Hepburn Shire must be acknowledged on any promotional material related to the Project / Event. This must be approved by Council's Communications Officer prior to distribution.
- Successful applicants are required to extend a written invitation, with a minimum of two weeks' notice, to the Hepburn Shire Council Mayor, Councillors, and CEO to attend openings and events when available.
- Successful applicants, or their Auspicing Agent, are required to enter into a formal funding agreement with Council. If the Project does not adhere to the conditions of the agreement, Council may require grant funds to be returned.
- All funded Projects must complete an Evaluation and Acquittal including evidence of expenditure, e.g., receipts.
- Ongoing maintenance and repair costs for equipment purchased with grant funds are the responsibility of the applicant.
- In the event of a Project/Event only being part-funded, Council will provide an explanation for this decision. Applicants have the right to accept partial funding or withdraw their application.

Applicants who are seeking funding from external grant sources are required to advise Council as soon as possible on the status of this external grant funding.

If your application includes grants funds from Council and an external source of funding, and the external funding becomes unavailable, you must submit an alternative proposal and budget within 30 days of receiving the external funding decision.

## Ready to Apply?

All grant applications must be lodged through the [Hepburn Shire Council Grants Portal by Smartygrants](#). Click the link to begin your application during the application period.

Applications can only be submitted online only using the Smartygrants portal. Council officers can assist with this process where required, e.g., if you have an impairment that prevents you from lodging your application online.

### **Funding Alternatives**

The Hepburn Grants Finder provides local community groups with a comprehensive and up-to-date list of grant and funding opportunities available from a range of funding providers including State and Federal government and philanthropic organisations. The Hepburn Grant Finder also includes an alert service meaning you will never miss a grant opportunity again.

Access the [Hepburn Grant Finder](#) on our grants website to explore what other funding opportunities may be available to support the implementation of your project.

### **Council Contact**

Community Grants Officer

Email: [grants@hepburn.vic.gov.au](mailto:grants@hepburn.vic.gov.au)

Phone: (03) 5348 2306

Please get in touch if you would like additional information, or if you require assistance to complete your application.