


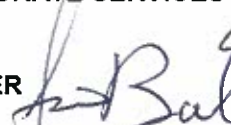

TO: GENERAL COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAM

PREPARED BY AND KEY CONTACT: C. MILLAR, CGA, DEPUTY CITY TREASURER, ext. 4436 

SUBMITTED BY: D. McKINNON, CGA, DIRECTOR OF FINANCE 

COMMISSIONER APPROVAL: E. ARCHER, CMA, GENERAL MANAGER OF CORPORATE SERVICES 

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER APPROVAL: JON M. BABULIC, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER 

RECOMMENDED MOTION

1. That the Community Grant Program described in FIN004-11 be approved for implementation in 2011.

PURPOSE & BACKGROUND

2. The purpose of this report is to recommend a Community Grant Program for the City of Barrie that provides a fair, equitable and open mechanism for allocation of funds to community groups and organizations that are requesting financial assistance from the City.
3. In past years, Council was receiving requests from various community groups and organizations for financial assistance throughout the year but there was no mechanism in place to evaluate the extent to which the financial assistance requested would benefit the community as a whole. As such, grants were being approved on a first come first serve basis which created the risk that a request that could provide substantial benefits to the Community, requested later in the year, might not be approved due to financial constraints.
4. As part of the 2010 Business Plan, a Program Change was approved to introduce a Community Grant Program with a budget allocation of \$100,000. These funds were allocated from the Council Strategic Priority account which was the account that was typically used for providing grants to community groups. The proposed 2011 Business Plan also includes an allocation of \$100,000 for Community Grants.
5. The proposed Community Grant program demonstrates Council's commitment to working with groups who provide beneficial programs, services or projects to the community, while at the same time recognizes the financial constraints impacting the City's ability to provide funding to these groups. The proposed Program utilizes eligibility and assessment criteria, an application based approach and a requirement to report back to Council to indicate how the funds were actually used.

ANALYSIS

6. The key elements of the program are described below:

a) Scope:

The scope of this program is intended to cover programs and services relating to the services delivered by the City but it excludes arts and culture grants currently addressed under the City's well established Cultural Grant Program.

b) Program Administration:

The deadline for applying for Community Grants be established as January 31 of each year with the objective of receiving Council approval by no later than the end of April.

There was significant variance in application deadlines in the surveyed municipalities but generally speaking they were either done in advance of the upcoming annual budget deliberations so that applications could be considered during deliberations or after the budget was approved based on a pre-establish Community Grant Program budget. Given the City's financial condition and existing pressures on the tax rate, it has been recommended that the budget allocation be established prior to receiving applications. When the recommendation is made to Council regarding the grant recipients, a summary of all grant applications will be provided. This will provide the opportunity for Council to "swap" out successful recipients or fund additional projects from the Council Strategic Priority Account.

c) Type of Grants:

For the purpose of this program a Community Grant is defined as one-time assistance either as seed funding for the start up of an organization/project, funds for a short-term undertaking with a start up and completion date or funds to support a special event or community event. This program is not intended to provide operating funding to assist with the general operation expenses of the group or organization or to commit grants in future years for ongoing programs or events.

Based on the survey, Community Grants Programs are being provided for one-time Projects or operating Grants or both but the majority were for one time projects. The advantage of allocating funds to projects is that it is easier for applicants to provide measurable outcomes that describe the benefit to the community and it prevents the an organization from becoming dependent upon the City's grant funding for its continued operation.

d) Amount of grant:

There will be no limit to the amount of the grant allocated to an organization but that the total grants be limited to the funds allocated for Community Grants in the annual business plans. Grant applications would be evaluated based on the eligibility and assessment criteria so the highest ranked projects would receive funding until the funds were fully allocated. This means that some projects that meet the City's criteria may not be funded in any given year, however, Council will have the option to provide partial grants (less than what was applied for) in order to be more inclusive.

The survey indicated that some municipalities set maximum grant amounts which ranged from \$500 to \$5000. In order to provide some additional flexibility, the proposed program does not recommend this restriction.

e) Goals and Objectives:

The Community Grant Program is intended to support projects, events and programs that provide a direct benefit to the community in areas the City is responsible for such as recreation, economic, public relations, heritage, environmental service and arts and culture (if not within the scope of the City's cultural grant program). The projects, events and programs must not duplicate those provided by the City or another level of government. This is consistent with other Community Grant Programs.

f) Eligibility:

Applicants must be local community groups and organizations, not for profit or registered Charitable organizations with a community service mandate who provide services within the boundaries of the City. Groups or organizations must have volunteer boards that hold regular meetings and the majority of the membership must reside within the City. Grants would not be provided to individuals, for profit organizations or for organizations supporting political or religious activities. This is generally consistent with other Community Grant Programs.

g) Assessment Criteria:

Grant applications of eligible proponents will be evaluated based on the following weighted criteria:

- Extent to which unique, direct benefits in areas for which the City is responsible are described (30%)
- Quality of business case (25%)
- Financial responsibility (15%)
- Program sustainability (10%)
- Accessibility and accountability (10%)
- Measurable outcomes that are attainable and demonstrable (10%)

While the proposed assessment criteria is consistent with other Community Grant Programs, none of those surveyed disclosed weighted criteria, however, it is recommended that this process be conducted in a manner similar to a procurement process. The establishment of weighted criteria will support the objective of being a fair, equitable and open process.

h) Evaluation:

Grant applications will be evaluated against eligibility and assessment criteria by a five member staff committee and a recommendation for grant funding allocations will be made to Council. The staff committee will be comprised of individuals who are in a management position, at least five years experience in public service, demonstrated financial expertise and experience in evaluating proposals against established criteria. A formal appeal process is not recommended for this program.

Of the programs surveyed, evaluation committees were either staff committees or committees comprising both staff and council members.

i) Terms of Grant:

Grants will be for one year only to align with the City's business planning. Applicants will be required to apply for grants each year, automatic renewals will not be approved. Grants in excess of \$30,000 will be paid in installment based on project milestones being met. Each grant may have its own terms and conditions which will be captured in the Letters of Understanding.

This is generally consistent with surveyed municipalities, however, only one municipality mentioned criteria associated with grants greater than \$30,000. This element is recommended for inclusion in the City's program due to the accountability it incorporates.

j) Reporting Requirements:

All grant recipients will be required to sign a Letter of Understanding with the City which will outline the terms and conditions of the grant. The grant will be disbursed upon the signing of a Letter of Understanding with a 10% holdback. The hold back will be released upon receipt of a final report 60 days following the completion of the project indicating that the terms and conditions of the grant were adhered to and demonstrates that the stated outcomes of the project were met. Failure to submit a satisfactory final report will result in the forfeit of the 10% hold back and may disqualify the applicant from applying for future grants under the program.

Most of the municipalities surveyed had post program reporting requirements for grant recipients, however, the 10% holdback was only mentioned in one program. Again, this element has been recommended for the City's program because of the accountability it incorporates.

7. If the program is approved by Council, a Communication Plan will be developed to promote the program to the Community and solicit grant applications for the 2011 Calendar year. While the recommended program indicates an application deadline of January 31 of each year, if Council approves the program, for 2011 the deadline for applications is proposed to be the end of April with recommendations for grant recipients being made to Council in June.

ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

8. There are no environmental matters related to the recommendation.

ALTERNATIVES

9. There are three alternatives available for consideration by General Committee

Alternative #1 General Committee could decide not to support the proposed Community Grant Program and direct staff to make revisions and report back at a later date.

This alternative is not recommended as the policy has been developed based on best practices in other municipalities and delays in finalizing the policy could impact the City's ability to complete the implementation of a Community Grant Program for 2011 given other competing workplan demands.

Alternative #2

General Committee could decide establish an external evaluation committee to review and recommend Community Grants.

This alternative is not recommended as is it substantially increases the amount of time required to administer this program. The skill sets to evaluate applications for grant funding, based on the established eligibility and assessment criteria, exists within the City. This program is distinct from the Cultural Grant Program because of the specialized expertise required to evaluate the skills of individual artists. Jurors are selected for their years of experience and proven expertise in the area of arts and culture. This is experience that generally doesn't exist within the City.

If Council chooses this alternative then the timeline for recommending grant recipients to Council would need to be extended into the Fall of 2011 to allow for the time required to assemble and train a Community based evaluation committee.

Alternative #3

General Committee could decide to extend the goals and objectives of the Community Grant Program to include services that support Council's Strategic Goals. This could, for example, open the program to applications from health care or social services providers.

This alternative is not recommended as direct funding responsibilities for these programs exist at other levels of government. Also, it is felt that based on the level of funding available in this program, investments in City related services would have more of a direct community impact than if they were applied to the much larger programs provided by other levels of government.

FINANCIAL

10. There are no direct financial implications resulting from the recommended motion.
11. Each year as part of the City's Annual Business Plan, Council will establish the level of funding to be made available for Community Grants. Grant applications will be evaluated against the established criteria for the program. Given the financial constraints of the program, only the highest ranked applications will be funded.

LINKAGE TO COUNCIL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

12. The recommendation is operational in nature and does not directly support any of Council's Strategic Priorities.