



## MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** Mayor Lawlor and Members of Council

**FROM:** Erin Burger, Community Development Supervisor – Special Events & Neighbourhood Engagement  
Heather Kaufmann, Community Development Supervisor – Community Partnerships & Sport Development

**DATE:** February 10, 2025

**MEMO NO.:** CSE-2025-001

**SUBJECT:** Community Grant Program Update

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### **PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM:**

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide Members of Council with an update on the Community Grant Program for 2025, focused on the feedback received through stakeholder consultation. Future staff reports will outline recommended program and policy changes to the Community Grant Program for Council's consideration.

### **BACKGROUND:**

In May of 2021, Council approved report [RP-2021-0013 Community Partnership Program](#) (formerly known as Municipal Assistance Program). At that time, it was identified that additional support was required to enable local groups to respond to growing community needs. To align previous Council direction with current Council priorities, Town staff created a program with key criteria, eligibility requirements, an application process, scoring practices and a funding agreement.

In mid-2023, Town staff presented Council with report [RP-2023-008 Community Partnership Program Review and Guideline Update](#) which suggested updates to the program, including the elimination of support for special events that had a fundraising component. Council referred the report back to staff to complete additional work in the area of fundraising and to review the program, as a whole.

In July 2024, a Council Workshop was held to further discuss the Community Grant Program.

## **COMMENTS:**

After the July 2024 Council Workshop, staff undertook community consultation to gather input that will help ensure the program's long-term success. This included discussion related to grant needs, special events and events with a fundraising component. Based on stakeholder input, staff have identified next steps and potential updates to the Community Grant Program.

### **1.0 Stakeholder Feedback**

In September 2024, Town staff launched two surveys via the Let's Talk Halton Hills platform, seeking feedback on the program. One survey for past applicants and one for those who have never previously applied to the program. The surveys were shared with 160 local community groups.

Highlights of the survey results include:

- Several of the respondents noted that the amount of funding available through the grant program is inadequate for their organization's needs.
- Many grant recipients noted that their event or project would not have taken place, would have been in jeopardy, or would not have been able to give as much (financially) back to local charities, had they not received support from the Town.
- For the most part, recent program enhancements (e.g. updated application process, creation of an online presentation, simplified guidelines, etc.) have improved the overall applicant experience.
- Communications around program eligibility and application deadlines are clear and reasonable.
- Additional support such as clarity around evaluation criteria would be helpful.

Later in September, to seek further consultation with community groups, Town staff hosted a workshop to discuss survey findings and potential additional program updates. Individual conversations with community organizations held throughout the fall offered valuable suggestions to guide the development of the updated program. Feedback from Halton Hills community organizations included:

- Reoccurring waiver of Town fees is not perceived as a grant.
- The program streams do not provide enough financial support for groups; therefore, it is not worth their time to apply to the program.
- Rising costs such as insurance, paid duty police, are not currently eligible for funding under the current program.
- Administrative changes that have been made to the program have been helpful in shortening the application process and to creating clarity to the program.

The consistent feedback from the recent consultations as well as from ongoing engagement with community groups is that while the Town's financial grant is critical for the community groups, the existing level of funding is not adequate.

## **2.0 Preliminary Observations**

Based on stakeholder feedback and additional staff review, key observations and potential program changes were identified related to special events and events with a fundraising component.

### **2.1 Special Events**

It was identified that a large portion of the current Community Grant Program Budget is used to support community special events. To ensure the program's long-term success, it will be necessary to consider updating the program to include a clearly defined Special Event stream. The latter would include event classification, with a maximum level of support available to each event to ensure that events of similar size and impact will receive consistent levels of support from the Town. It has also been identified that consideration should be given to providing grants to special events in addition to waiver of fees.

Further details of a potential Special Event stream and associated policy updates will be outlined in a future staff report.

### **2.2 Events with Fundraising Component**

Additional staff research of other municipal grant programs indicates that there is no consistent practice around support for events that have a fundraising component. The decision as to whether to support fundraising events, whether they support local or non-local charities/causes, will be outlined in a future staff report and associated recommended policy updates.

## **3.0 2025 Program**

Given pending future reports that need to be presented to Council in light of the stakeholder feedback, the Community Grant Program will remain unchanged for 2025. Town staff will extend the existing 3-year special event agreements, for an additional year. This approach will enable applicants to apply for 2025 without further delay; and give Town staff time to identify potential 2026 budget implications, refine special event needs, and update the program's policy and guidelines for Council's consideration.

Pending any additional feedback from Council, program application details are planned to be shared directly with community groups and through the Town's website later

during the week of February 10. Application intake is scheduled to start on February 18.

#### **4.0 Program Funding**

The 2025 budget for the Community Grant Program is \$84,700. The budget increase of \$5,000 (over previous years) is dedicated to support BIA events through the recently adopted BIA MOUs. The remaining \$79,700 will support community group activities, initiatives and events in 2025.

The program's budget has only increased by approximately 10% since its inception in 2008. Since a major challenge identified by stakeholders has been sufficient funding, Town staff will report further on potential solutions in the subsequent staff reports in Q2 and Q3. Any approved changes would be intended to launch in 2026.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Town staff have continued to advance the update of the Community Grant Program as expeditiously as possible, given other priorities and available resources. The results of the stakeholder consultation and additional staff review will be used to inform the final recommended updates to the program for approval by Council at a later date, with implementation anticipated for 2026.

Reviewed and approved by,

Kevin Okimi, Director of Parks, Community Development & Environment

Damian Szybalski, Commissioner of Community Services

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer