



TOWN OF
HALTON HILLS
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REPORT

TO: Mayor Lawlor and Members of Council

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

DATE: May 5, 2025

REPORT NO.: CSE-2025-025

SUBJECT: Community Grant Program Policy

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. CSE-2025-025, dated May 5, 2025, regarding the Community Grant Program Policy, be received;

AND FURTHER THAT Council approve the updated Community Grant Program Policy and associated funding stream Guidelines, as outlined in Report No. CSE-2025-025 and its Appendices, for implementation starting on January 1, 2026;

AND FURTHER THAT, if necessary, Town staff be authorized to make refinements to the Guidelines, provided that there is no significant material change to the objectives, scope or funding outlined in this report;

AND FURTHER THAT Council endorse the integration of the Climate Change Investment Fund (CCIF) program, now recommended to be the “Environmental Stewardship” funding stream into the Community Grant Program, and close the CCIF project (7300-22-1501) at the end of 2025;

AND FURTHER THAT the increase in annual operating costs of \$66,000 for the Community Grant Program be included for consideration in the 2026 operating budget;

AND FURTHER THAT Subject to Budget approval, Council direct staff to proceed with the implementation of the revised policy, including a comprehensive communication and

outreach strategy, training for community applicants, and support for volunteer-led groups;

AND FURTHER THAT staff continue to monitor the effectiveness of the policy, and report annually to Council on program performance, funding allocations, and community impact;

AND FURTHER THAT this report and Council's approval form the basis for continued community engagement and the ongoing evolution of the Community Grant Program to ensure it remains accessible, transparent, and aligned with the needs and priorities of Halton Hills residents.

KEY POINTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- The updated Community Grant Program (CGP) Policy introduces a modernized, transparent and equitable framework for funding community-led initiatives in Halton Hills, effective January 1, 2026.
- The policy establishes four distinct funding streams:
 - Community Investment Projects (formerly Community Projects stream)
 - Neighbourhood Projects
 - Special Events (with classification system)
 - Environmental Stewardship Projects (formerly Climate Change Investment Fund)
- A new Special Event Classification System was approved by Council to categorize events as Small, Community, or Signature - ensuring each category's funding level provides consistent support.
- The Georgetown Highland Games, Georgetown Fall Fair, Acton Fall Fair, and Head for the Hills Craft Beverage Festival were approved as Signature Events, eligible for support beyond the amounts outlined in the Event Classification system.
- Council approved a historical exemption for the Georgetown and Acton Terry Fox Runs, allowing continued CGP support despite fundraising for a national organization.
- The revised policy includes simplified application and reporting processes, new supports for volunteer applicants, increased funding for event costs and multi-year funding agreements for recurring events.

- Extensive community engagement was conducted through two online surveys, a stakeholder workshop, and direct outreach, with feedback informing all major updates.
- The existing CGP is not able to keep pace with growing community needs. The CGP funding has not been adjusted historically for annual inflation pressures. The program's budget has increased by only 8.7% since its inception in 2008. As an example of community needs, as reported in the recent [Council Memo on 2025 CGP funding allocations](#), it was noted that 14 applications, totaling \$27,144 or 32% over the available budget, were unable to be supported due to limited funds.
- As part of the 2026 budget process, an increase in the operating budget of \$66,000 will be required, raising it from \$84,700 to \$150,700. This additional funding is essential to support the growth and sustainability of the program. This budget increase includes:
 - \$11,000 to support Special Events Classification system
 - \$10,000 to support new and emerging Special Events
 - \$30,000 to maintain Community Investment and Neighbourhood Projects
 - \$15,000 to support Environmental Stewardship
 - Integration of the Climate Change Investment Fund (CCIF) program into the Community Grant Program operating budget as the "Environmental Stewardship" stream.
- Inflationary increases may be required annually to reflect annual municipal fee increases and rising costs. These increases will be determined annually and be reflected as a base budget adjustment, as needed.
- Without the budget increase, the CGP will be unable to accommodate new applicants or sustain current support levels across all streams, risking the viability of key events and initiatives. Event organizers continue to struggle with increasing costs such as insurance, police and emergency management.
- Staff would implement the revised policy in 2026, supported by a communication plan, training for applicants and annual reporting to Council - subject to final approval of the 2026 Budget, including the items identified above.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

The Town of Halton Hills has a long-standing commitment to supporting community-led initiatives that foster social, cultural, recreational and environmental well-being. This commitment began in 2008 with the creation of the Municipal Assistance Program, a funding mechanism designed to provide financial support for local organizations offering community projects and events.

Over time, as the needs of the community evolved and expectations around equity, transparency, and alignment with municipal priorities grew, Town staff recognized the need to revisit and modernize the program. Between 2016 and 2018, a series of Council workshops were held to assess the effectiveness of the Municipal Assistance Program and explore opportunities for improvement. Key themes emerged during these sessions, including the importance of transparent funding criteria, clearer accountability, improved accessibility for emerging groups, and better alignment with the Town's strategic priorities.

Building on this foundational work, a significant milestone was reached in 2021 when Council approved the creation of a new funding model - the Community Partnership Program (CPP).

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 and name change to the Community Grant Program (CGP). Council referred the report back to staff to complete additional work in the area of fundraising and to review the program as a whole.

On July 2, 2024, a Council Workshop was held to discuss the Community Grant Program.

In Fall 2024, the Community Services department launched a comprehensive engagement and consultation process in an effort to refresh the CGP for 2026 and beyond. This process involved reviewing application processes, refining eligibility criteria, simplifying reporting obligations, and developing new program streams tailored to specific community needs.

In April 2025, through confidential report no. CSE-2025-004, Council approved a new Special Event Classification System to categorize events as Small, Community, or Signature, ensuring each category's funding level provides consistent support.

Based on the work to date, this report provides Council with the revised Policy and updated CGP Guidelines (found in the Appendix), reflecting the collective input from residents, community partners, Council and Town staff. The guidelines may be updated as the program evolves, while maintaining alignment with the objectives, scope or funding outlined in this report.

This report seeks Council approval of updated Community Grant Program Policy and Guidelines, marking the culmination of community input and Town staff research through collaboration, innovation, and responsiveness to community needs.

Subject to Council approval, the new policy and guidelines will be fully implemented in 2026, including through a modern, transparent and impactful funding model that continues to support a thriving, engaged and inclusive Halton Hills. Budget approval decisions will determine the amount of support and allocated funds available to community organizations.

1.0 Policy Updates

The revised Community Grant Program (CGP) Policy reflects a significant modernization of the Town's approach to community funding, rooted in equity, transparency and strategic alignment. This update introduces several foundational changes designed to improve accessibility, program delivery and community impact.

1.1 Refined Program Objectives

A core enhancement to the CGP Policy is the formalization of a clear set of objectives that guide funding decisions, program design and evaluation. These objectives position the CGP as a tool to invest in initiatives that build a connected, inclusive and sustainable Halton Hills.

The Community Grant Program aims to:

- **Support Community Initiatives:** Fund local activities, events, and projects that benefit residents and enhance quality of life.
- **Align with Town Priorities:** Ensure funded initiatives support Council's strategic plan and community development goals.
- **Enhance Quality of Life:** Promote meaningful social, cultural, recreational, and environmental experiences.
- **Encourage Community Participation:** Foster resident involvement, leadership, and collaboration.
- **Create Community Gatherings:** Celebrate the Town's rural character, cultural identity, and local history.
- **Build Connected Neighbourhoods:** Strengthen bonds and foster neighbourhood pride and engagement.
- **Promote Active Recreation:** Support healthy, active living and nature-based experiences for all residents.
- **Advance Inclusion and Well-being:** Promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.
- **Foster Civic Engagement and Volunteerism:** Encourage local volunteerism and active community involvement.
- **Ensure Equitable Distribution of Funds:** Allocate municipal funding fairly and transparently.

- Promote Environmental Health and Biodiversity: Invest in local projects that support environmental stewardship, ecological sustainability and climate action.

1.2 Enhanced Program Structure

To align with these objectives and improve service delivery, CGP now features four clearly defined funding streams:

- **Community Investment Projects**
Provides up to \$5,000 for one-time projects that strengthen organizational capacity or respond to specific community needs, such as strategic planning, new program launches, marketing and volunteer development.
- **Neighbourhood Projects**
Offers up to \$250 per neighbourhood annually to support resident-led initiatives, local events, and grassroots projects that build neighbourhood identity and foster local connection.
- **Special Events**
Supports events that generate cultural vibrancy, civic pride and economic impact. Support is available through a waiver of town fees and/or direct funding to support increasing event costs, as outlined in the Special Event Classification System:
 - Small Scale Events: Up to \$1,000 annually
 - Community Events: Up to \$2,500 annually
 - Signature Events: Up to \$5,000 annually
- **Environmental Stewardship Projects**
Introduced as a new operational stream, this funding was formerly delivered through the Climate Change Investment Fund - which previously resided as a capital budget item. Now consolidated under the CGP, the Environmental Stewardship stream provides up to \$2,500 per project for biodiversity restoration, native plantings, community education, and other local environmental stewardship initiatives. This change was made possible through the reorganization of previously separate service areas into a unified Community Services department - enabling more accessible and flexible support for grassroots environmental action.

1.3 Clarified Eligibility and Evaluation Criteria

The updated policy standardizes eligibility and introduces consistent evaluation criteria across all streams, ensuring that funding is awarded based on:

- Demonstrated community benefit and alignment with Town priorities;
- Commitment to inclusivity, accessibility and equity;
- Evidence of collaboration and community engagement; and

- Innovation and sustainability in project design.

Each stream includes a tailored guideline document outlining eligibility, application requirements and reporting obligations.

1.4 Improved Accessibility for Community Volunteers

Recognizing that many applicants are volunteers with limited time and administrative support, the updated Community Grant Program introduces several user-focused improvements to make the process more accessible, inclusive, and manageable for all community members:

- **Simplified Application and Reporting Requirements**
Application forms have been shortened and redesigned with plain language, fewer open-ended questions, and clearer instructions. Final report templates have also been streamlined to focus on outcomes and basic financial accountability.
- **Pre-Application Support and Coaching**
Staff offer optional pre-application coaching calls to help applicants understand eligibility, develop ideas, and navigate the application process. This ensures first-time applicants or volunteer-led groups feel confident and supported throughout the process.
- **Budget Templates and Sample Forms**
Standardized budget templates and sample documents are provided to help applicants submit well-organized and complete applications.
- **Multi-Year Agreements for Recurring Events**
Recurring events may now be eligible for three years of pre-approved support under the Special Events stream. This reduces the obligation of annual reapplication for long-standing events.

These changes reflect the Town's commitment to reducing red tape, empowering local volunteers, and making community funding accessible to a broader and more diverse range of residents and organizations.

1.5 Special Events Stream Enhancements

In Spring 2025, Council reviewed and approved key enhancements to the Special Events Stream as recommended through Report No. CSE-2025-003. These updates mark a significant step forward in ensuring greater clarity, fairness and alignment between event support and community impact.

The approved changes included:

- Events will be categorized as Small Scale, Community, or Signature based on their scope and community benefit. This classification system will guide funding levels and the allocation of municipal support.
- Council endorsed the proposed funding levels to support the classification system, with specific funding thresholds for each event tier. These increases are subject to final approval through the 2026 Budget process.
- Four long-standing events (Georgetown Highland Games, Georgetown Fall Fair, Acton Fall Fair, and Head for the Hills Craft Beverage Festival) are eligible for support beyond the amounts outlined in the Event Classification system, pending confirmation in the 2026 budget.
- In recognition of their history, community value and participation, Council approved an exemption for the Georgetown and Acton Terry Fox Runs, allowing them to remain eligible for CGP funding despite fundraising for a national organization.

The updated policy, if approved, will also provide for grants to event organizers which are intended to help with funding the increased costs associated with operating events (e.g. policing, emergency response, insurance) which are not eligible under the existing grant program guidelines.

2.0 Community Consultation

Following the Council Workshop, 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's 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 processes, 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 2024, to seek further consultation with community groups, Town staff hosted a workshop to discuss survey findings and potential additional program updates. Feedback from that discussion 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.
- Administrative changes that have been made to the program have been helpful in shortening the application process and to creating clarity to the program.

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 community groups, the existing level of funding is not adequate. Community event organizers have consistently identified rising costs such as insurance, emergency management and policing costs as challenges when considering the costs of undertaking community events.

In February 2025, Memorandum [CSE-2025-001: Community Grant Program Update](#) provided key results from public consultation for Council's information.

This collaborative approach ensured that the revised policy reflects the voices and priorities of the community, fostering a more responsive and effective grant program.

3.0 Budget Considerations

The CGP has experienced growing demand and increasing service delivery costs over the past two decades. However, program funding has remained largely static, creating significant budgetary pressures and limiting the Town's ability to equitably support community-led initiatives. To ensure the continued success and sustainability of the program, the following financial considerations have been identified.

Despite substantial growth in event participation, community engagement, and municipal service costs, the CGP has received minimal base budget increases over the past 17 years. As of 2025, the total program budget remains at \$84,700, a level that no longer reflects the scope, complexity or the cost of delivering the program or responding to emerging community needs.

The program has also not been adjusted to account for annual inflationary pressures including the Town's annual adjustment to rates and fees, which directly impacts facility permits, equipment rentals, and the value of in-kind services provided through the CGP. This erosion in purchasing power particularly affects the Special Events stream, where municipal support (such as road closures, fencing, and waste management) comprises a significant portion of event-related costs.

To fully implement the new Special Event Classification System and continue supporting existing recurring events, the Special Events stream requires a total of

\$96,000, an increase of \$11,000 over the entire current CGP budget. Even with the increase of \$11,000, the Special Events stream alone would consume 100% of available program funds, leaving no capacity to support Community Investment Projects, Neighbourhood Projects or Environmental Stewardship initiatives. This estimate reflects only currently supported events and does not account for any new applications anticipated for 2026. To address community demand for the program, an additional \$10,000 is recommended to accommodate new and emerging events. Should Council wish to support event organizers with additional event expenses (such as paid duty officers), beyond what is already outlined in the event classification system, additional budget requests would be required to support the four long-standing events (Georgetown Highland Games, Georgetown Fall Fair, Acton Fall Fair, and Head for the Hills Craft Beverage Festival) that are eligible for support beyond the amounts outlined in the Event Classification system.

To preserve support for Community Investment Projects and Neighbourhood Projects, an additional \$30,000 is required in addition to the amounts listed above. This ensures ongoing funding for group development, strategic planning, training, and grassroots neighbourhood-led activities that are foundational to civic engagement and local innovation.

The Climate Change Investment Fund (CCIF), previously delivered through the capital budget, is recommended to be integrated into the CGP as the “Environmental Stewardship” stream. To formalize this transition and deliver ongoing support for environmental initiatives (e.g. biodiversity restoration, native plantings, climate education), an operating budget of \$15,000 is required. This aligns with the Town’s environmental sustainability goals, enables broader community participation, and is a more stable funding model versus annual capital budget consideration.

To meet existing demand and implement the full scope of the updated Community Grant Program, a total operating budget of \$150,700 is required to be considered through the 2026 Budget process. This represents a \$66,000 increase over the current allocation.

Inflationary increases may be required annually to reflect annual municipal fee increases and rising costs. These increases will be assessed on an annual basis and incorporated as necessary into the base budget as part of the annual budget review process.

4.0 Risks

Existing funding levels pose a number of significant risks to the program’s sustainability and the applicants that rely on the program. Without additional funding, the Town will not be able to accept new applicants or support emerging initiatives, particularly from grassroots neighbourhood groups or organizations responding to evolving community needs.

Key local events may face reduced municipal support or risk cancellation due to escalating delivery costs, additional insurance and safety requirements and unavailable funds impacting local events, cultural vibrancy and volunteer engagement.

Maintaining a static budget while demand increases will compromise the Town's ability to equitably allocate resources, forcing difficult decisions between event support and project funding. Staff note that events in other nearby municipalities have been cancelled due to lack of funding and rising event costs. Typically, the cost of a municipality taking on previously community-led events supported with grants, is a significantly larger cost.

Many organizations rely on the CGP to sustain their programming. Funding uncertainty or reductions may result in volunteer burnout or diminished organizational capacity.

Approving the updated policy and related budget increases will ensure that the Town remains a committed partner in fostering local leadership, healthy community, cultural celebration, community resilience and environmental stewardship.

5.0 Next Steps and Implementation

If the recommendations of this report are approved, staff will proceed with implementing the program under the revised policy in 2026. Under the new policy, staff would initiate the following steps to ensure a smooth implementation:

- **Communication Plan:** Develop and execute a comprehensive communication strategy to inform community members about the updated policy, application procedures, and funding opportunities. This will include outreach through social media, newsletters, and community meetings to ensure wide dissemination of information.
- **Training and Resources:** Provide training sessions for staff and potential applicants on the new policy requirements, application process, and available resources. This will empower community organizations to navigate the grant application effectively and understand the matching contribution requirements.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish a tracking method for ongoing monitoring of the program's performance, including application numbers, funding distribution, and community feedback. Regular evaluation will help identify areas for improvement and ensure that the program meets its objectives.
- **Annual Reporting:** Commit to an annual report to Council detailing the financial impact of the program, including an analysis of funding allocations, community engagement outcomes, and recommendations for any necessary adjustments to the budget or policy to align with community demand.

- **Feedback Mechanism:** Implement a continuous feedback mechanism for applicants and community members to share their experiences with the grant program. This input will be vital for making iterative improvements and ensuring that the program evolves to meet changing community needs.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report identifies a safe and welcoming community as one of the Town's Strategic priorities. It also supports the Natural Areas and Heritage priorities.

RELATIONSHIP TO CLIMATE CHANGE:

This report is administrative in nature and does not directly impact or address climate change and the Town's Net Zero target.

However, the updated program will continue to support and strengthen community action on the environment through the updated "Environmental Stewardship" stream.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public Engagement has been conducted as follows: Online Survey, Stakeholder Meetings, and discussions with Staff.

INTERNAL CONSULTATION:

Community Development staff lead the policy and program update, collaborating closely with other members of the Community Services Department, including those from Facilities, Community Programs, Environment & Climate, and Recreation & Culture. In addition to this, staff from the Public Works Department and the Halton Hills Public Library have been consulted. This cross-departmental consultation ensures a comprehensive approach to the Community Grant Program, allowing for a thorough understanding of community needs and available resources. In regards to financial implications, the Finance division reviewed this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

This report has the potential to require funding in a future budget year and therefore needs to be referred to budget committee for tracking purposes.

As outlined above, a budget increase of \$66,000 is necessary for the current CGP program budget to implement the updated CGP Policy, as recommended by staff. This increase includes the integration of the Climate Change Investment Fund (CCIF) program currently completed under capital project 7300-22-1501 for \$15,000. Staff recommend closing the capital project and returning remaining funds to the Strategic

Planning reserve and including the cost to support community organizations through the Community Grant Program operating budget as the Environmental Stewardship stream.

This budget increase will be referred to Budget Committee for consideration as part of the 2026 operating budget process.

Reviewed and approved by,

Damian Szybalski, Commissioner of Community Services

Bill Andrews, Commissioner of Transportation & Public Works and Acting Chief
Administrative Officer