



**To:** COUNCIL  
**Meeting Date:** 9/23/2025  
**Subject:** **Community Grants Program Interim Policy Review**  
**Submitted By:** Alix Aitken, Acting Director of Recreation and Culture  
**Prepared By:** Alix Aitken, Acting Director of Recreation and Culture  
**Report No.:** 25-006-CS  
**File No.:** C11  
**Wards Affected:** All Wards

### **RECOMMENDATION(S):**

THAT Report 25-006-CS Community Grants Program Interim Policy Review be received;

AND THAT Community Grants Program Interim Policy #A09-FIN 004 revisions identified in report 25-006-CS be approved.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an Interim Community Grant Program Policy update prior to the launch of the 2026 Community Grant Program. While a more comprehensive review is planned for 2026, the updated policy will help ensure that the process of allocating municipal funds is current, effective and transparent for the next granting cycle.

#### **Key Findings**

The Community Grant Program was implemented to provide support to not-for-profit organizations who deliver programs and services that benefit the quality of life for Cambridge residents.

The purpose of the Policy update is to provide clarity to applicants, staff and Council when applying, reviewing, recommending and ultimately approving funding. This update also reflects feedback received since the policy was implemented in 2021.

The Community Grants Program Policy # A09-FIN 004 (Appendix A) provides a more robust framework to make funding decisions from.

Revisions to the policy include:

### **Under Purpose:**

- The Recognition that community impact is not limited to formal organizations. A total of \$10,000 from the annual allocation will be set aside annually for the new Community Connections Program, which will fund smaller-scale projects led by individuals or informal groups, with a maximum request of \$2,500 per application.

### **Under Definitions:**

- **Activity** includes programs and / or events that have general appeal, a theme of interest, a public profile and public access on a free and / or paid basis. Activities must occur on a reoccurring basis e.g. annually or seasonally and must be held in an accessible space.
- **Emerging Groups** are organizations that are newly formed within the past three years and have been operating for at least one year prior to the close of the grant application period and have a minimum of five board members.
- **Performance Measure** A performance measure quantifies the achievement of a desired result. For the purposes of this policy, applicants will be required to provide some performance measures on the application that, if they are successful, will help show what impact the funding had and what was achieved for residents. Successful grant recipients will be expected to report on the actual performance results after the grant has been spent. Measures are determined by the community grants review committee and may include but are not limited to the following:
  - What was achieved (e.g. the number of participants who attended a program)
  - How well was the work done (e.g. the number of participants who successfully completed a program)
  - What difference the funding made (e.g. the percentage of program participants who reported that their quality of life improved as a result of the program).

### **Under Policy Values and Guiding Principles**

- The Community Grants Program, its policy and procedures will be guided by the City of Cambridge Core Values and the Public Conduct Policy– ADM 041.

### **Under Forms of Assistance**

- Removal of the Category Operating Funds
- Capital Funds: Partial financial assistance may be provided for the purchase of minor capital items (e.g. equipment purchases) which are external to normal operating functions of the organization, and not likely to occur on an annual basis.
- Notes: Training Proposals will only be accepted from organizations with a minimum of 80% Cambridge resident participation.

### **Under not eligible for funding**

- Flow-through funding (where the intent is to directly redistribute funds)

### **Under General Criteria**

- Each organization shall hold an annual meeting at which time their accounts and proposed budget will be presented to the membership for approval, and any financial assistance or service from the City of Cambridge would be recognized at that time. As part of the application process organizations will need to provide the date and minutes of their annual meeting and submit a copy of the Annual Report for City purposes. If an organization is not able to meet this criteria an explanation shall be provided with the request for funding for further consideration by the Grants Review Committee and/or Council.

### **Under Eligibility Criteria**

- The majority (80%) of participants in the program/service must be residents of the City of Cambridge.
- Applications will only be considered from the Board of Directors or the Executive Committee of an organization and not from a “part group” of the organization.
- The organization must carry valid General Liability Coverage in the amount of \$2 million with the City named as an additional insured with a 30-day cancellation period.
- The Community Grants Program will not provide funding to:
  - Organizations that currently have a property lease with the City of Cambridge

## **Under Financial Eligibility Criteria**

- The organization must indicate other City contributions that are made to the organization (e.g. In-kind staff support, free or subsidized use of City facilities, programs, discount hours, promotional support, etc.).

## **Under Community Grant Program Process**

- f) Following these deliberations, the Grants Review Committee will compile a list of recommended grant applications for approval. Grants under \$5,000 can be approved by the Community Grants Review Committee without requiring Council approval. All recommended funding applications above \$5,000 will be submitted to Council for final approval.
- h) Following Council approval of the Community Grants Review Committee recommendations, the Finance Department will issue grant payments to successful applicants by Electronic Funds Transfer.
- i) Grants awarded must be used in the current calendar year.

## **Under Evaluation of Applications**

- a) Grant applications will be assessed based on the following criteria:
  - Alignment with the City of Cambridge Strategic Plan, Public Value Statement and the Public Conduct Policy – ADM 041
  - Community Impact
  - Merits of the funding request
  - Organizational profile
  - Organizations finances
  - Benefit to the community

## **Under Notice of Application**

- Applicants will be notified of the status of their application in April, unless otherwise noted.

## **Under Grant Appeal Process**

- The Community Services division will review all appeals to determine the criterion that is being challenged and provide a summary to Council of appeals greater than \$5,000 for further review.

## Financial Implications

- The revised Community Grants Policy recommends \$10,000 of the total fund allocation be held for use through the Community Connections Grant Program annually, which will fund smaller-scale projects led by individuals or informal groups, with a maximum request of \$2,500 per application.
- The revised Community Grant Policy also requests recommended applications under \$5,000 can be approved by the Community Grant Review Committee.

## STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT:

Strategic Action

**Objective(s):** Choose an Objective

**Strategic Action:** Choose a Strategic Action

**OR**

Core Service

**Program: Grants**

**Core Service:** Grants Provided

The Community Grants Program helps support strategic objectives by providing financial resources to initiatives that align with the City's vision and goals. Organizations seeking funding can apply in the following categories: Social Services, Recreation & Sport, Arts/Culture & Events, Civic & Leisure Interests and Not-for-Profit Organizations that further the interests and prosperity of the City of Cambridge. Community Grants play a pivotal role in supporting the strategic plan by providing funds to address specifically all local needs and priorities.

By aligning grant funding with strategic initiatives, municipalities can leverage community driven initiatives to achieve broader policy objectives efficiently.

## BACKGROUND:

The Community Grant Program Policy was last revised in September of 2021. Since then, the City of Cambridge has continued to evolve and the number of applications to this program has continued to increase.

The Grants Review Committee felt the need to strengthen the policy with an understanding that a full comprehensive review was not possible in time for the opening of the 2026 Community Grant program. An interim policy review was conducted with the goals of enhancing accountability and transparency, improving upon inequities, refining program focus and ensuring funded projects deliver the greatest amount of impact through measurable outcomes.

### **ANALYSIS:**

The City of Cambridge recognized a gap in its current Community Grants funding model. The Community Foundation of Waterloo Region filled that gap in 2025 with one time funding to support small scale projects that are led by individuals or informal groups. To continue to support this great work, the revised policy speaks to a total of \$10,000 from the Community Grant fund be set aside annually for the new Community Connections Grant program, which will fund smaller-scale projects led by individuals or informal groups, with a maximum request of \$2,500 per application.

Small changes to definitions will help clarify expectations for applying organizations.

Council will notice the addition of the corporate Public Conduct Policy under the Policy Values and guiding principles section. This has been added so applying organizations have a better understanding of the expectations of those who receive municipal dollars.

The 2025 Community Grant Program approved 18 funding requests for support under the \$5,000. By allowing these to be approved by the Community Grants Review Committee. Small organizations will receive funding quicker giving them more time to use the funds in the calendar year.

It is also important to note that included in the Community Development Coordinator's future work plan is a comprehensive review of this policy. Recommendations will be brought to Council for approval at a future date.

### **EXISTING POLICY / BY-LAW(S):**

Policy #A09 FIN 004- Community Grants Program

The purpose under the Community Grants Program Policy includes:

- To improve the wellbeing of Cambridge residents through the direction of City grant funding to eligible organizations that can demonstrate their positive contribution to the achievement of the community wellbeing goals;
- To provide municipal funds or other forms of financial assistance, in limited amounts, to community groups and/or organizations that align with the City's strategic direction;

- To consider each grant on its own merit and to deal with it in a transparent, equitable and objective manner; and
- To ensure that a proper system of accountability is developed and maintained by the community groups and/or organizations receiving funding from the City.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

There are two updates to the Community Grant Policy that speak to a change in how the annual operating dollars for Community Grants are being allocated and approved.

The revised Community Grants Policy recommends \$10,000 of the total fund be held for use through the Community Connections Grant program annually, which will fund smaller-scale projects led by individuals or informal groups, with a maximum request of \$2,500 per application.

The revised policy also speaks to Grants under \$5,000 being approved by the Community Grants Review Committee. All funding requests over \$5,000 will require final approval by Council.

### **PUBLIC VALUE:**

By conducting and approving an interim policy review prior to the start of the 2026 Community Grants program we will be able to better provide clarity to Applicants, Staff, the Community Grants Review Committee and ultimately Council when applying, reviewing, recommending and ultimately approving funding to organizations.

This policy review supports responsible management of financial resources, ensuring transparency for the public and accountability to program applicants.

### **ADVISORY COMMITTEE INPUT:**

Not Applicable

### **PUBLIC INPUT:**

Understanding the challenges of previous applicants and answering their questions from September 30 to November 30, 2024 helped shape some of the changes recommended in this interim policy review.

Future consultation will also take place when a more comprehensive review is completed.

### **INTERNAL / EXTERNAL CONSULTATION:**

Internal Consultation occurred with feedback from the Community Grants Review Committee and staff in Finance and Recreation and Culture Divisions.

**CONCLUSION:**

The City recognizes the value of the Community Grants Program. By aligning grant funding with strategic initiatives, municipalities can leverage community driven initiatives to achieve broader policy objectives efficiently.

The policy revisions will further enhance the program bringing enhanced transparency and accountability, improving upon inequities, refining program focus and ensuring funded projects deliver the greatest amount of impact through measurable outcomes.

Staff are recommending approval of the policy revision to continue support this key program.

**REPORT IMPACTS:**

Agreement: **No**

By-law: **No**

Budget Amendment: **No**

Policy: **Yes**

**APPROVALS:**

**This report has gone through the appropriate workflow and has been reviewed and or approved by the following as required:**

**Director**

**General Manager**

**Chief Financial Officer**

**City Solicitor**

**City Manager**

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. 25-006-CS Appendix A – Policy # A09-FIN 004 Policy Amendment; Community Grant Program Policy