



Community Services *Staff Report*

REPORT NO: CS-2024-34

TO: Council

SUBMITTED BY: Chris Catania, Director of Community Services

PREPARED BY: Chris Catania, Director of Community Services

REVIEWED BY: Greg Clark, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: December 16, 2024

SUBJECT: Community Grants Program

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report CS-2024-34, Community Grants Program be received for information; and

THAT Council approve amendments and Policy to the Community Grants Program for implementation in 2025 as presented in this report

SUMMARY:

To provide Council with information, amendments and implementation of the Community Grants Program for 2025.

BACKGROUND:

Each year, the Township budgets an amount for the Community Grants Program. Staff prepare and advertise the program, receive applications, review and make recommendations to Council for the award of grants to various community groups.

The process for the Community Grants applications is made available on-line each year and as well giving previous applicants notification by email of the timing when grant window is open.

Processes, criteria, eligibility and evaluations for the Community Grants program have not been reviewed in several years. Current criteria including Program/Service Obligation, Public Need/Benefit, Financial Need and Quality of Life serve as a guide for reviewing applications.

In 2024, staff from Community Services assisted Corporate Services Division in reviewing and preparing recommendations for grants to Council. For 2025, the Community Services department has taken the lead. Strategically, this department currently works with many of the applicants, delivering of services, events, and programs with the assistance of many of the applicants. As a commitment to Council, the criteria for the program will be fully reviewed and will include further accountability and oversight. The commitment ensures that any recommended changes would be presented to Council for approval prior to any applications for 2025 being available to applicants.

REPORT:

Community organizations are of great benefit to the residents of Wilmot as they provide recreation, leisure and wellness programs and services the Township might not otherwise be able to offer. The Township of Wilmot recognizes the fundamental importance of working side by side with these groups and organizations, continually reaffirming the appropriate roles for all parties. Sometimes the municipality is best able to lead and deliver community wide services. In other circumstances community groups and organizations are much closer to understanding the evolving needs and interests of residents, and hence better able to provide services specifically tailored to those needs.

The goal of the Community Grants program is to help support not for profit organizations in capacity building for the delivery of high quality, inclusive, and well-organized programs. With this in mind, the Township's goal is to balance the needs of not-for-profit organizations with good governance principles of affordability, accountability, accessibility, and transparency.

The Township of Wilmot has established the Community Grants Program to:

- Improve the wellbeing of individuals, neighbourhoods and Wilmot by directing Township grant funding to eligible organizations that can demonstrate the greatest need in the community while supporting Council's strategic priorities
- Diversify the availability of activities available to all residents of the community
- Contribute to enhancing the quality of life in the community
- Through this support, it is hoped that other funding may be leveraged, and participants and volunteers can be supported, attracted and retained
- Ensure that the process to review and allocate grant funding is transparent, consistent and achieves the optimal impact for the investment provided

Stakeholder Engagement

Staff conducted outreach to various stakeholders that included non-profit community organizations, organizations that previously benefited from the Community Grants Program, Council and Staff. Feedback was conducted on timing for accepting applications, improvements to process, criteria for eligibility, financial accountability and overall feedback on the program. Furthermore, specific stakeholders were also consulted on potential draft changes that may or may not impact eligibility.

Generally, consensus on feedback was positive. Further specific comments included:

- Application was clear and easy to navigate
- Further reporting out use of received grant funds, impact to the program/service it provides
- Financial accountability and sustainability
- Maximum limit on grant award
- Expectation on staffing costs
- Further promotion of the grant program, better advertising and communication
- Stronger criteria
- Service level increase, Different funding streams
- Community group sustainability vs annual operating award

Municipal Scan

Through this process, staff researched policies of other local municipalities and began documenting for refinement a draft policy that is applicable for Wilmot. Staff have noted that throughout the research conducted, there were similarities and differences (not a one size fits all) on processes for criteria, eligibility, and evaluations on administering a community grant program. Those municipalities in the municipal scan included:

City of Kitchener
Township of Centre Wellington
Municipality of West Perth
Town of Halton Hills
Township of Blandford-Blenheim
Township of Norwich
Township of Woolwich
City of Stratford

Staff made some recommendations based on feedback received as well as conducting a scan across some municipalities administering grant programs. Many similarities exist across the spectrum with administering a grant program regarding criteria, eligibility and ineligibility. Differences are also evident specifically as they relate to the varying types of grants and overall funding being provided by Council in their municipal budgets.

Eligibility & Criteria

With the research conducted, staff are proposing to align eligibility and certain criteria that is consistent with other municipal comparators, with a made in Wilmot approach providing a robust approach and clear parameters from the previous policy. These key draft changes include:

- Organizations must be not-for-profit organizations or charitable organizations (operating for at least 1 year) with a volunteer board of directors.
- Organizations must offer activities within the Township of Wilmot that serve the needs of Wilmot residents.
- Funding requests not exceeding \$15,000 in any single grant cycle. Organizations requesting more than this amount shall be explicit in their reasoning for requesting a larger grant.
- Organizations will have to justify surplus funds not identified for a specific purpose.
- Organizations will not be able to use funds for Administration payroll costs
- Successful applicants who receive funding from the program must report on how the funding was spent and the impact the funding achieved.

Evaluation of Applications

The Community Grants Program will have representatives from Community Services, Corporate Services and Office of the Chief Administrative Officer that will review, evaluate and provide sound recommendations to Council based on the established policy criteria and financial parameters set within the annual budget.

In addition to Program/Service Obligation, Public Need/Benefit, Financial Need and Quality of Life, additional criteria have been included for evaluation:

- Evidence of support from other partners, volunteers and other sources of funding to enable the organization or event to be sustainable.
- Additional financial and non-financial resources being leveraged from other sources.
- Sound organizational track record. This considers if the organization has the ability, skills and capacity to undertake the work.
- That the activities do not unnecessarily duplicate successful efforts that already exist in the community.
- Sustainability of the organization and activity as applicable; and
- The amount of funding requested by applicants and the funding available in the program.

All criteria will be given specific weighting, based on their relative importance, and assigned values by the Staff Community Grants Evaluation Team. Evaluation Team members will compile a list of approved grant applications and their respective funding allocations. Community Services will generate a report with recommendations for approval by Council.

At time of Council approval, Council may grant special consideration to entities that do not meet eligibility but are unique in nature and fulfill a specific need in the community. All applicants will receive notification either way of Council's decision on the status of application.

Next Steps

Once the amended Community Grants Policy is approved and pending the 2025 budget process, staff will begin refining the on-line grant application process. This will include guidelines and application due dates, communication to local organizations, advertisements in local media and on the Township website at www.wilmot.ca

ALIGNMENT WITH THE TOWNSHIP OF WILMOT STRATEGIC PLAN:

Healthy Community - Working with our community partners to enhance our quality of life by strengthening relationships with community groups by developing partnership agreements that include clear and consistent policies, processes, roles, and responsibilities.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Financial considerations are addressed throughout each fiscal operating budget year. At such times of budget approval, Council decides on the total amount of funding that is allocated for the Community Grants Program.

As the number of grant requests may exceed funds available and budget priorities may change from year to year, applicants are not guaranteed funding. A grant approved in any year is not considered a commitment by the Township of Wilmot to continue financial assistance in future years.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft Updated Community Grants Policy