

Community Support Policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear, consistent and strategic framework for how Whitsunday Regional Council (Council) provides discretionary community support to organisations, initiatives and activities that contribute to the wellbeing, resilience and vibrancy of the Whitsunday region.

Community support is a key mechanism through which Council delivers on the priorities of the Corporate Plan 2025-2030, enabling targeted investments that strengthen community capacity, respond to local needs and support the delivery of social, economic and environmental outcomes.

Community support is funded through public monies and must be administered responsibly, transparently and in a manner that demonstrates value for money for the Whitsunday community. This policy establishes the principles, governance arrangements and decision-making framework that guide Council's provision of community support.

1. Scope

This policy applies to all forms of discretionary community support provided by Council.

Community support refers to financial or non-financial assistance provided at Council's discretion to support community organisations, initiatives or activities that deliver a demonstrable benefit to the Whitsunday community, including:

- Grants
- Donations, including:
 - fee concessions, waivers or relief
 - in-kind support such as staff time, equipment, materials, facilities or services
- Sponsorships and partnerships
- Community Service Obligations (CSOs)
- Subsidised leases or peppercorn leases.

The policy applies to:

- Councillors
- Council staff involved in the assessment, approval or administration of community support
- Community organisations seeking or receiving support from Council.

This policy **does not apply** to:

- Funding provided as a fee-for-service arrangement
- Delivery of core council operational services
- In-kind support provided as part of budgeted and/or planned service delivery undertaken by Council staff under delegation
- Projects delivered with community organisations or partners that form part of Council's approved works program or corporate strategy framework.
- Strategic partnership agreements that are for the delivery of core Council operational work
- Procurement or contracted services
- Capital works delivered directly by Council
- External grant programs administered by Council

2. Policy intent

Council's approach to community support aims to ensure that support provided by Council is strategic, transparent, proportionate, equitable and responsible.

This policy establishes the framework through which financial and in-kind assistance contributes to strong, connected and resilient communities across the Whitsunday region while ensuring public resources are used responsibly and in alignment with Council priorities.

3. Principles

Council's approach to community support is guided by the following principles, which ensure support is delivered in a way that is fair, strategic and beneficial to community.

- **Aligned and meaningful community benefit:** community support will deliver tangible outcomes for the Whitsunday community by advancing wellbeing, inclusion, liveability and resilience through strategically aligned funding and in-kind support that prioritises initiatives with clear and measurable community benefit.
- **Responsive to community needs:** community support will be tailored to the distinct needs of towns, rural areas and island communities, using flexible funding pathways to support both high-impact initiatives and responsive action where emerging needs arise.
- **Fostering partnerships and collaboration:** community support will leverage partnerships with community, business and government to align resources, reduce duplication and strengthen shared outcomes.
- **Equitable, inclusive and accessible:** community support will promote equitable access to opportunities by recognising diverse community needs, removing participation barriers and strengthening community capability.
- **Transparent and accountable:** community support will be delivered through clear and consistent processes, supported by strong governance and open communication to ensure fair, evidence-based decision-making.
- **Sustainable and value for money:** community support is provided within Council's approved budget capacity and must not create ongoing financial commitments or expectations unless explicitly approved by Council. Community support will invest in sustainable initiatives that strengthen community capability, deliver value for money and apply proportionate governance based on scale and risk of the support provided.

4. Outcomes

Through this policy, Council seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

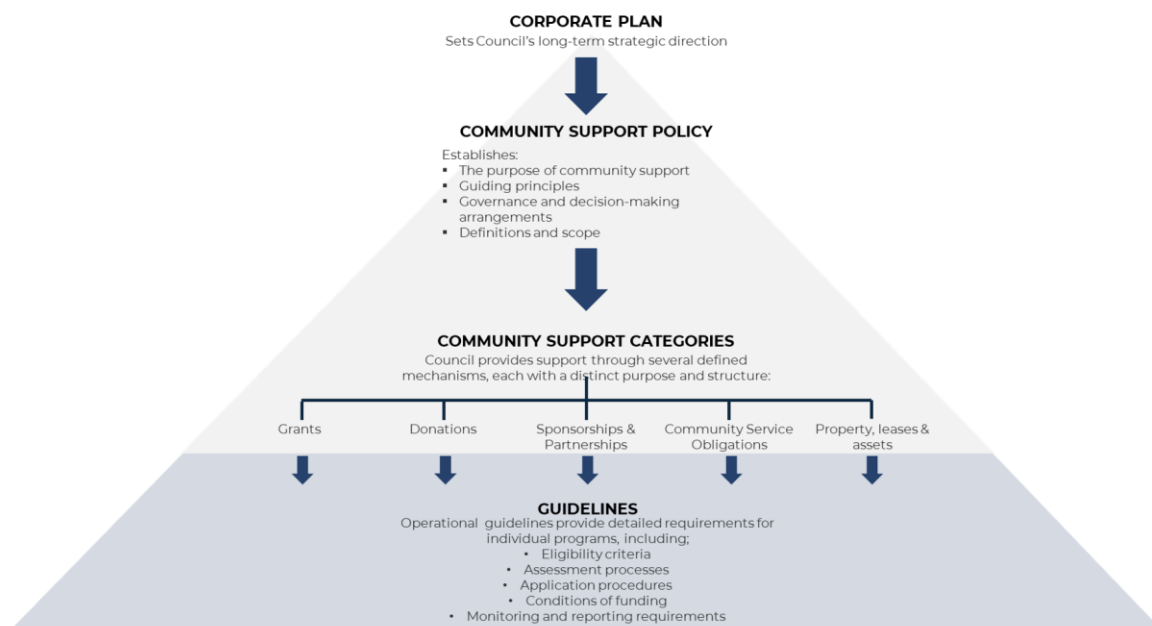
- Community support is aligned with Council's Corporate and Operational Plans
- Community organisations and initiatives deliver clear benefits for the Whitsunday community
- Community support is provided through consistent, transparent and accountable processes
- Council's financial and in-kind community investment is clearly defined, tracked and reported
- Community organisations are supported to build capability, resilience and long-term sustainability
- Community support is distributed equitably across the region, recognising diverse community needs

- Council resources are used responsibly and deliver value for money.

5. Community Support Framework

The Community Support Framework provides a structured model for how the community support arrangements operate across the Council. It shows the relationship between this overarching policy, the defined categories of support (support programs), and the operational guidelines that govern individual programs.

This framework enables Council to maintain strategic intent while allowing flexibility in program design and delivery.



6. Types of Community Support

Council provides the following community support programs.

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION	KEY CHARACTERISTICS	EXAMPLES
Grants	Competitive, time-limited funding provided to support specific projects, programs and events that address identified community needs, build community capability, and contribute to social, economic and environmental outcomes. They are Council's primary mechanism for targeted and discretionary investment in initiatives that deliver defined community outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delivered through defined grant programs or funding rounds ▪ Competitive or non-competitive, depending on program design ▪ Provided as cash (and potentially a component of in-kind support) ▪ Time-limited and purpose-specific ▪ Assessed against published eligibility and assessment criteria ▪ Subject to acquittal and outcome reporting. 	Community events, infrastructure improvements, equipment purchases, community development programs

Donations	Discretionary financial and non-financial contributions provided to support immediate or low-value community needs, typically with minimal application requirements and no expectation of return.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Typically lower value and lower risk than grants ▪ Often non-competitive and responsive ▪ May include cash, in-kind support, fee waivers or concessions ▪ Minimal reporting relative to grants ▪ No expectation of reciprocal or commercial benefit. 	Small event contributions, assistance for community participation, minor operational costs
Sponsorships / partnerships	Financial or in-kind support provided in return for agreed benefits to Council, such as visibility, economic impact, or community activation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Based on mutual benefit and visibility ▪ Typically higher value and higher risk than grants or donations ▪ Requires clear articulation of expected return on investment ▪ Formal agreements define roles, deliverables and performance measures ▪ May involve not-for-profit entities. 	Major regional events, tourism or economic development activation activities, strategic community initiatives
Property, leases and assets	Provision of Council-owned land or facilities at reduced or no cost to support long-term community infrastructure and service delivery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involves use of Council land, buildings or assets rather than direct funding ▪ May be short-, medium- or long-term arrangements ▪ Often represents significant in-kind support through foregone commercial rent ▪ Includes peppercorn leases and other subsidised access arrangements ▪ High cumulative financial, asset and equity implications over time. 	Peppercorn leases, subsidised facility hire, use of Council venues, equipment or plant
Council-directed Community Service Obligations (CSOs)	Non-competitive support approved by Council to enable the delivery of services, access or outcomes that Council has determined should be subsidised or provided in the public interest, in order to achieve defined social, economic or environmental outcomes for the Whitsunday community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Established through Council resolution, policy or adopted budget decisions ▪ Intended to operate on an ongoing or medium-term basis ▪ Clearly linked to the Corporate Plan and stated community outcomes ▪ Fully costed, including foregone revenue and in-kind or opportunity costs ▪ Transparently reported as community support rather 	Subsidised community services, reduced fees for community facilities, provision of services that support community wellbeing

		than absorbed into business performance.	
CEO-directed CSOs	Non-competitive support approved under CEO-delegation to respond to emerging needs, events or circumstances where timely support is required, while remaining consistent with Council-approved principles, policies and financial limits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Approved by the CEO or delegated officer within defined policy, budget and risk parameters ▪ Typically applied on a case-by-case basis or for limited periods or trials ▪ Time-bound and purpose-specific ▪ Costed and recorded as CSOs, even where individual Council resolutions are not required ▪ Must align with existing Council-directed CSO frameworks or community support principles. 	Staff time or technical support, traffic management support, waste services support, infrastructure or operational assistance

7. Roles & Responsibilities

Clear governance arrangements ensure community support decisions are transparent, defensible and consistent.

BODY / ROLE	RESPONSIBILITIES
Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Endorse and review the Community Support Policy (this policy) ▪ Establish or amend community support programs and guidelines ▪ Allocate budgets for community support programs ▪ Approve funding allocations, where required, by delegation ▪ Monitor overall community support outcomes ▪ Endorse membership of community support assessment committees and panels where required
Elected Council Members	<p>Councillors play an important role in supporting community awareness of Council programs and may refer community organisations to appropriate funding opportunities.</p> <p>Councillors will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Direct unsolicited requests for funding or in-kind support towards established community support programs and processes ▪ Not prepare, submit or sponsor applications for community support on behalf of organisations or individuals ▪ Not be applicants for community support programs administered under this policy. <p>Councillors must not seek to influence the assessment or recommendation of applications outside of formal Council decision-making processes.</p>
Chief Executive Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure community support programs operate in accordance with Council policy and strategic direction ▪ Implement appropriate delegations and approval processes ▪ Ensure reporting and oversight arrangements are in place
Council Officers	<p>Council officers are responsible for administering community support programs and providing guidance to applicants.</p> <p>Responsibilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Directing unsolicited funding requests to established programs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing guidance and assistance to potential applicants regarding Council processes, permits and approvals ▪ Assessing applications in accordance with program guidelines ▪ Administering funding programs and processes ▪ Providing recommendations within delegated authority ▪ Maintaining records and reporting on community support provided
Community Services and Facilitation Officer	<p>This function is responsible for the coordination and administration of community support programs.</p> <p>Responsibilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coordinating the preparation of funding guidelines, application forms and supporting materials ▪ Administering application, assessment and approval processes ▪ Promoting funding opportunities and supporting applicant capability ▪ Liaising with grant recipients regarding variations or reporting requirements ▪ Maintaining records of funding allocations and acquittals ▪ Preparing annual reporting on community support outcomes ▪ Providing advice and recommendations for this policy's review
Assessment Panels	<p>Where competitive funding programs are used, assessment panels may be established to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ensure objective and consistent assessment ▪ apply assessment criteria in accordance with the relevant community support guidelines ▪ provide recommendations to decision-makers.
Community groups / recipients	<p>Applicants and recipients of community support are responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ preparing complete applications that address eligibility and assessment criteria ▪ demonstrating community benefit and alignment with Council priorities ▪ delivering funded activities in accordance with agreed conditions ▪ maintaining appropriate insurances and approvals ▪ meeting acquittal and reporting requirements

8. Administration of community support

8.1 Program Guidelines

All community funding and support programs will operate under guidelines that specify:

- The purpose of the funding program
- Eligibility requirements
- Eligible activities
- Maximum funding amounts
- Application processes
- How applications are assessed
- Assessment criteria
- Acquittal and reporting requirements.

Program guidelines will be reviewed periodically and any significant changes will be presented to Council for endorsement.

8.2 General Eligibility for Community Support

Unless otherwise specified in program guidelines or Council resolution, organisations seeking community support from Council will generally be expected to meet the following baseline requirements.

These requirements establish a consistent foundation across all community support categories. Specific eligibility requirements for specific community support programs will be detailed within the relevant program guidelines.

Applicants will generally be expected to:

- **Deliver clear community benefit** – the proposed activity or initiative should provide a demonstrable benefit to the Whitsunday community and contribute to community wellbeing, participation, resilience or other outcomes aligned with Council priorities.
- **Demonstrate a connection to the Whitsunday region** – initiatives should occur within the Whitsunday local government area or deliver clear benefits to residents and communities within the region.
- **Operate as a legitimate community organisation** – support is generally provided to not-for-profit organisations such as incorporated associations, community clubs, volunteer organisations or unincorporated groups (applying through an eligible auspice organisation), although other organisations may be considered where the activity delivers a clear and inclusive community benefit.
- **Demonstrate appropriate governance and accountability** – applicants should have governance and financial management arrangements proportionate to the level and type of support requested.
- **Comply with Council requirements** – applicants must comply with relevant legislation and Council policies, acquit any previous Council funding where required, and not have outstanding debts to Council unless otherwise agreed.
- **Manage risk appropriately** – organisations must hold or obtain appropriate insurance and manage risks associated with the proposed activity where relevant.
- **Disclose other sources of funding** – applicants may be required to disclose other funding or support related to the proposed activity as part of Council’s assessment and prioritisation process.

8.3 Individuals

Individuals may apply for support through specific grant funding streams as outlined in the corresponding guidelines.

9. Priority Theme Areas

To ensure community support remains responsive to emerging needs and aligned with Council priorities, Council may identify Priority Theme Areas to guide the focus of community support over defined periods.

9.1 Selecting Priority Theme Areas

Approximately every two to three years, Council may undertake targeted engagement and analysis to identify areas where community support could have the greatest impact.

This process may consider:

- Areas where community demand or pressure is increasing
- Areas where community capability or service capacity is under strain
- Opportunities where Council support could deliver meaningful community benefit.

Potential Priority Theme Areas will generally be assessed against considerations such as:

- Demonstrated community need
- Alignment with the Corporate Plan and strategic outcomes

- The appropriateness of Council intervention
- Potential impact over a two- to three-year period
- Equity and accessibility considerations across the region.

Following this process, Council may identify a limited number of Priority Theme Areas to guide community support over the upcoming cycle.

9.2 Applying Priority Theme Areas

Once adopted, Priority Theme Areas will be reflected in the design and administration of community support programs.

This may include:

- Assessment criteria and weighting within program guidelines
- Examples of eligible activities or initiatives
- Applicant guidance and supporting materials
- Communication to the community regarding funding priorities.

Applications that align with Priority Theme Areas are not automatically funded, however they may be assessed more competitively against relevant criteria.

9.3 Review and Continuous Improvement

Priority Theme Areas will be reviewed periodically to ensure they remain relevant and responsive to community needs.

At the end of each priority cycle, Council may review outcomes and consider:

- Where community pressures have eased or persisted
- Where community support has delivered the greatest impact
- Emerging issues or opportunities for future focus.

Priority Theme Areas may then be updated to reflect evolving community priorities, creating a continuous feedback loop between community input, funding decisions and future investment.

10. Assessment of Community Support Requests

Council will assess requests for discretionary community support in a manner that is transparent, equitable and aligned with Council priorities.

Assessment processes may vary depending on the type, scale and complexity of the support being considered. However, the following considerations will generally apply across all community support categories.

Requests for community support will generally be assessed against the extent to which they:

- **Deliver community benefit** – the proposed initiative provides clear and demonstrable benefits to the Whitsunday community and contributes to community wellbeing, participation, resilience, or liveability.
- **Align with Council priorities** – the proposal supports the objectives and priorities outlined in Council’s Corporate Plan or other relevant strategies.
- **Provide value for money** – the request demonstrates efficient and responsible use of Council resources, including consideration of the scale of investment relative to expected outcomes.
- **Support community capability and sustainability** – the initiative strengthens community participation, capability, partnerships or long-term sustainability.
- **Demonstrate the capacity to deliver** – the applicant has the governance, skills, resources and planning necessary to deliver the proposed activity responsibly and effectively.

- **Represent an appropriate use of public resources** – the proposal is proportionate to the level of support requested and does not create unreasonable financial, operational or reputational risk for Council.

Specific assessment criteria, scoring frameworks and weighting will be defined within the relevant community support program guidelines, reflecting the purpose and design of each program.

Assessment processes may include eligibility screening, criteria-based assessment by Council officers and, where appropriate, review by an internal assessment panel or committee.

The level of information required from applicants will be proportionate to the level of funding available or in-kind support requested.

Approval of community support does not guarantee ongoing or future funding. All support is subject to annual budget considerations, strategic priorities and Council decision-making.

11. Annual budget review

Council develops and approves an annual budget.

During this process the funding allocated to community support programs will be reviewed and updated as required.

12. Managing conflicts of interest

Council will manage actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest in the administration and assessment of community support programs in accordance with Council's governance framework.

Councillors and Council officers involved in the assessment, recommendation or approval of community support must declare and manage conflicts of interest in accordance with:

- The Local Government Act 2009
- Council Standing Orders (Meetings),
- Councillor Conduct Investigations Policy
- Financial Delegations Policy
- Fraud and Corruption Control Policy
- Any other relevant Council policies.

13. Monitoring, Reporting & Acquittals

Funding recipients must comply with all acquittal and reporting requirements within the specified timeframe. Failure to submit a satisfactory acquittal may impact eligibility for further and future funding.

Council will maintain systems to monitor and report on community support provided across the organisation. This includes:

- Recording financial contributions and in-kind support
- Monitoring delivery of funded activities
- Requiring acquittal or outcome reporting where appropriate
- Reporting on the total value and distribution of community support.

Councillors will be provided with updates on funding allocations throughout the year.

A formal report will be provided to Council periodically, outlining the levels of support provided across each community support program.

14. Related Documents

- Councillor Conduct Investigations Policy
- Financial Delegations Policy
- Fraud and Corruption Control Policy
- Community Support Donations Guidelines
- Community Support Sponsorship Guidelines
- Community Support Grant Guidelines
- Young Achievers Grant Guidelines
- Donations on Rates and Service Charges Guidelines
- Regional Arts Development Fund RADF Guidelines

15. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed:

- Within 12 months of adoption and then every five years
- Earlier if legislation or policy changes occur
- Where deemed necessary by the Mayor, Council or CEO.