

STRATEGIC POLICY:

Major Events and Conferences Sponsorship Policy

Endorsed by Council
OM2025/10/29.8

Governance use only

1. Purpose

1.1 The Whitsunday 2030 Economic Development Strategy identifies major events as critical drivers of regional economic development, destination branding, and cultural vibrancy. These policies emphasise the importance of diversifying the economy, growing the creative industries, and strengthening the Whitsundays' reputation as a premier tourism destination. Festivals, events and conferences contribute strongly to these objectives by attracting visitors, supporting local businesses, and reinforcing the Whitsundays' position as a naturally iconic destination.

1.2 The purpose of this Policy is to:

- 1.2.1 Define the framework and parameters under which Council may provide sponsorship to organisations hosting Major Events and Conferences in the Whitsunday Region;
- 1.2.2 Ensure Council's financial commitment does not exceed annual budgetary limits;
- 1.2.3 Provide for the consideration and management of reputational, financial and delivery risks when allocating funding; and
- 1.2.4 Ensure all supported events align with Council's strategic and financial frameworks, including the Corporate Plan, Operational Plan and Whitsunday 2030 Economic Development Strategy.

2. Scope

2.1 This Policy applies to:

- 2.1.1 All organisations seeking financial or in-kind support to host major events and conferences in the Whitsunday Region.
- 2.1.2 Council Officers, Councillors, and Contractors involved in assessing and managing event sponsorships.

2.2 This Policy does not apply to:

- 2.2.1 Community Events (see Community Grants Policy);
- 2.2.2 Events with an existing sponsorship agreement in place under another Council Policy;
- 2.2.3 Religious, fundraising, or charitable events; and
- 2.2.4 Private or invitation-only events not accessible to the public.

3. Policy Statement

3.1 Whitsunday Regional Council plays a strategic role in enabling events that deliver measurable economic outcomes. Council provides sponsorship to stimulate the regional economy, increase visitation, support off-peak tourism, and build the Whitsunday brand.

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Council also recognises that business events and conferences are higher-yielding, mid-week events, that generate strong economic outcomes through delegate spend, extended stays, and professional networks. These events also contribute significantly to the Whitsundays' destination profile.

4. Guiding Principles

Strategic Alignment

4.1 Council will support only those events that demonstrate alignment with:

- 4.1.1 Whitsunday 2030 Economic Development Strategy;
- 4.1.2 Council's Corporate and Operational Plans; and
- 4.1.3 Regional branding and destination marketing strategies.

Funding Parameters

4.2 Council sponsorship will generally not exceed 25% of the total event expenditure, inclusive of both cash and in-kind contributions, unless otherwise resolved by Council.

- 4.2.1 Support may be provided as cash and/or in-kind contributions, as determined by Council.
- 4.2.2 Any funding commitments are at Council's absolute discretion.
- 4.2.3 There is no fixed minimum or maximum amount of funding that event organisers can request from Council. The level of Council's investment will be based on the event's performance against the Assessment Criteria and any applicable budget limits. Council may approve the full amount requested, a different amount, or choose not to provide funding.

Assessment Criteria

4.3 Eligible applications will be assessed against the following criteria and weightings:

Criteria	Weight
Visitation Impact	30%
Economic Impact	20%
Business & Marketing Strategy	20%
Whitsunday Visitor Branding	10%
Financial Sustainability	20%
	100%

Uplifts for New Events

4.4 To encourage the development of the regional events' pipeline, applications from new events will receive a 10% uplift applied to the final assessment score after scoring against the above criteria.

Application and Eligibility Process

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4.5 To ensure transparency and alignment with regional priorities, Council will establish a Major Event and Conferences Sponsorship Panel to assess applications under this Policy.

4.6 The Sponsorship Panel will include representatives from:

- 4.6.1 Whitsunday Regional Council Councillor/s
- 4.6.2 Tourism Whitsundays,
- 4.6.3 Bowen Tourism and Business, and
- 4.6.4 Whitsunday Regional Council Economic Development team.

4.7 The panel will review applications against the published criteria and provide a recommendation to Council through a Ordinary Council Meeting for resolution.

Eligibility Guidelines

4.8 To be eligible for support under this policy, an event must:

- 4.8.1 Be held within the Whitsunday Regional Council LGA;
- 4.8.2 Attract measurable out-of-region visitation;
- 4.8.3 Align with Council's economic, tourism, and agritourism priorities;
- 4.8.4 Be open to the general public (ticketed or free); and
- 4.8.5 Demonstrate sound financial and risk management.

4.9 The following will not be considered eligible:

- 4.9.1 Events of a primarily charitable, religious or political nature;
- 4.9.2 Events that have already received Council funding under another policy or grant within the current financial year; or
- 4.9.3 Events closed to the public or by invitation only.
- 4.9.4 Council reserves the right to deem any event ineligible, based on strategic misalignment or budget constraints.

Sponsorship Rounds

4.10 Applications for sponsorship will be considered through scheduled funding rounds each year. Council may also consider out-of-round applications where an event presents significant strategic value to the Whitsunday Region.

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Strategic Sourcing of Major Events

- 4.12 In addition to the sponsorship rounds, Council may proactively seek to attract and secure new major events and festivals that align with the strategic intent outlined in item 1.1.
- 4.13 To achieve this, Council may procure experienced event organisers. This approach enables Council to partner with professional organisers to deliver strategically targeted major events and festivals that strengthen the Whitsundays' events calendar.

Business Events and Conferences

- 4.14 Council recognises the value of business events and conferences in supporting the visitor economy, driving midweek and offpeak visitation, and enhancing the Whitsunday brand. To encourage business events in the region, Council will maintain a sponsorship allocation for eligible conferences and business events. Applications may be considered on a case-by-case basis outside the standard sponsorship rounds.

5. Related Policies and Legislation

5.1 This policy refers to:

- 5.1.1 Local Government Act 2009;
- 5.1.2 Whitsunday 2030 Economic Development Strategy;
- 5.1.3 Corporate Plan 2021 – 2026 and Operational Plan;
- 5.1.4 Community Grants Policy (for community events); and
- 5.1.5 Procurement and Risk Management Guidelines.

6. Definitions

- **Council** – Whitsunday Regional Council
- **CEO** – Chief Executive Officer
- **Event** – Major Event or Conference with an out of region focus
- **In-Kind Support** – Non cash assistance, including venue access, services, or promotions

COUNCIL POLICY (Governance use only)

Date Adopted by Council	29/10/2025	Council Resolution	OM2025/10/29.8
Effective Date	29/10/2025	Next Review Date	29/10/2026
Responsible Officer(s)	Economic Development	Revokes	Major Festival and Event Support Policy (2019-2023)
Public Consultation: Yes / No	Yes		