

Community Wellbeing Grants Review – Update Summer 2021

This review considers feedback from the team administering the grant, applicants and the decision panel members.

Summary of considerations for the next round of Community Wellbeing Grants

- **Refine criteria again with clearer guidance on weighting**
- **Continue to provide advice to applicants where needed**
- **Gather applications through a dedicated Grants email inbox and set up automatic replies.**
- **Create two funding streams, larger grants with an in depth application and smaller grants stream with a simpler application form.**
- **A longer grant term to reduce the officer time required to process applications.**
- **A panel decision could only be required for the larger grants.**
- **Smaller grants with simpler applications could be available on a quarterly basis and be decided by the Lead Officer and the Committee Chair.**
- **The Community Wellbeing grant could be extended to a 2-year term on condition of satisfactory monitoring.**
- **A specified amount of the budget could be held back for a limited number of Year 2 and Year 3 applications.**

1. Feedback on grant criteria:

The revised grants criteria were an improvement on previous years but the weighting was difficult to judge for the decision panel. Some applicants who were unfamiliar with thinking about their work in a 'wellbeing' context found it hard to apply the new criteria to their work. The lead officer helped applicants with this over the phone.

Considerations for the next round of Community Wellbeing Grants:

- **Refine criteria again with clearer guidance on the weighting.**
- **Continue to provide advice to applicants where needed.**

Emma Keating Clark, Community Health & Wellbeing Manager
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2. Feedback on application process:

The online tool used to gather applications at first seemed simple but when dealing with over 70 applications at once, was not fit for purpose. It was easy to mistakenly submit without saving, some applications were lost completely and had to be re-sent by email, and automated messages were difficult to manage. The experience was not good for applicants or the team managing the process.

Completing the application questions was time consuming, much more so than the previous Community Investment Grant which was only a couple of simple questions. For many this was standard for bid writing, and for larger grants the time spent applying was worth the time invested. For less experienced organisations it was a difficult task, and for grants of only a few hundred pounds the application needed to be shorter.

Considerations for the next round of Community Wellbeing Grants:

- Gather applications through a dedicated Grants email inbox and set up automatic replies. Access can be shared with appropriate staff and information retrieved easily.
- Create two funding streams, larger grants with an in depth application and smaller grants stream with a simpler application form.

Feedback on Decision Making Process:

The panel consisted of six officers from the 2030 Strategy team, Youth Service, Leisure Services, Community Wellbeing and Cultural Services. Unfortunately, due to staff absence, no one from Housing could attend. Their insight was missed.

Reading 79 in depth applications before the panel meetings took about two days of work for each officer. In addition to the two afternoon decision panels, this is too much officer time investment to continue as an annual process.

The panels were a great opportunity to learn how our community organisations contribute to the work of other Council departments. It would have been really useful to have had Housing's contribution for this. The panel tested a number of ways of sharing scores and deliberating on decisions and feel prepared for the next round of applications.

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Considerations for the next round of Community Wellbeing Grants:

- A longer grant term to reduce the officer time required to process applications.
- A panel decision could only be required for the larger grants to reduce officer time spent reading long applications.
- Smaller grants with simpler applications could be decided by the Lead Officer and the Committee Chair as is the current COVID Response Grant process.

Feedback on term of award:

Feedback from our colleagues in the voluntary and community sector and county advocates for the voluntary sector, (the VCS Alliance and Gloucestershire Rural Community Council) tells us that two or three year funding is preferable to a one year grant term. This creates a more resilient sector by allowing for continuity of service, more time spent on delivering than bid writing and gives new projects the chance to bed and make impact.

The downside of a longer grant term is, organisations who miss the first applications have to wait three years for the grant to be available again, if projects are not working, money may be wasted. In addition, this requires the Council's funding for Community Grants to be secure.

Considerations for the next round of Community Wellbeing Grants:

- The Community Wellbeing grant be extended to a 2-year term on condition of satisfactory monitoring.
- A specified amount of the budget could be held back for a limited number of Year 2 and 3 applications.
- Smaller, simpler grants could be available on a quarterly basis to support small projects.