



City of New Westminster

Report to Council

To: New Westminster City Council
in Regular Council

Meeting Date: October 6, 2025

From: Blair Fryer, Director, Community
Services

Report No.: 2025-283

Re: **Response to Council Motion on Community Grants Program**

Staff Recommendation

1. *THAT \$1,467,675 be approved to be allocated as the total budget for the 2026 City of New Westminster Community Grant program, in order to confirm the total funding envelope in time for grant application adjudication and awarding which will take place in fall 2025.*
 2. *THAT staff be directed to include an additional \$489,225 for Community Grants funding in the 2026 budget, bringing the total Community Grants budget to \$1,467,675, to be funded from property tax revenue.*
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Purpose

This report provides Council with additional context and information related to the overall Community Grants program budget, in alignment with Council direction received on August 25, 2025 to include a 50% increase in grant funding in the 2026 Budget process.

Background

On August 25, 2025, Council passed the following motions:

1. *THAT the (Grants) Committee explore the implementation of multi-year funding agreements, for up to three years, to support the financial stability and long-term planning of eligible legacy organizations.*
2. *THAT staff be instructed to include a 50% increase in the Community Grant funding envelope for 2026 as part of the 2026 Budget deliberations; and*
3. *THAT the City continue to actively advocate to the Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport to increase the B.C. Fairs, Festivals and Events Fund and also advocate to the Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation to provide increased support to local festival organizations, including arts and business improvement organizations who activate our communities, support*

cultural exchange and connection, and boost small business prosperity through festivals, fairs and events.

Discussion

In July 2024, Council approved a phased approach to refinements to the City's Community Grants program, developed after community consultation. This approach was devised to provide a careful and smooth introduction to changes so that community partners were well informed. Generally, all actions are on track as reported by staff in a [status update brought to Council on May 26, 2025](#).

Multi-Year Funding Agreements

The phased grant refinements proposed a move toward multi-year funding agreements of up to five years, an increase from previous three-year agreements. This was in response to the community feedback received during engagement during the grants program review. Multi-year agreements of up to five years were introduced in the fall 2024 intake for grants disbursed in 2025.

Advocacy to Other Levels of Government

Although there was grant funding available as the Province recovered from the effects of the pandemic, the BC Fairs, Festivals, and Events Fund was not renewed for 2025. It was replaced by the Destination Events program, which had a minimum event operating budget requirement of \$150,000, making many of New Westminister's community events ineligible. As a result, the demand on the City of New Westminister's Community Grant program has been high. Staff in multiple departments continue to advocate for additional funding for festivals and events wherever possible, including providing this as a recommendation in the recent engagement that informed [the report developed by the Commission of Inquiry into Community Events Safety](#).

Budget Increase

Included in the phased Grants program refinements was an increase to the overall grants budget for implementation in 2026 budget year. Council's direction to include a 50% increase in the 2026 Budget process would result in an increase of \$489,225 to the overall grant budget, bringing the total available grants funding from \$978,450 to \$1,467,675.

Grant Intake Cycle Implications

Staff note that the funding increase would need to be confirmed before the 2026 grant application adjudication and awarding process, scheduled in November and December 2025, in order to be included in the 2026 grants disbursement. Grant applications for the 2026 program are accepted in October 2025, with the grants adjudication committees convening in November to provide their funding recommendations to the Chief Administrative Office in early December 2025.

This timeline has been identified and shared with applicants so that funding notifications can be provided before the end of the year, a process that community organizations have requested so that they may prepare for their annual budgeting. If the increased

grant funding is not confirmed before this scheduled process for the 2026 funding cycle, there would be two options: 1) to hold off on all adjudication deliberations until the overall City budget is approved, or to 2) conduct a second application and adjudication process. Staff’s perspective is that both of these options would negatively impact community organizations that are reliant on the usual and publicized grant cycle.

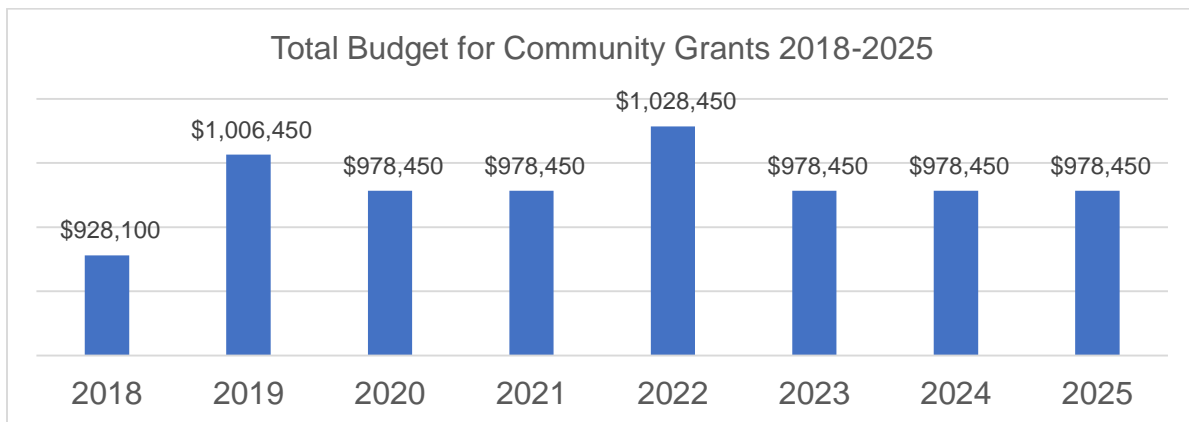
Historical Funding Information

In 2025, available Community Grants funding was \$978,450. This is divided into three sub portfolios, which are mostly based on historical funding requests. City Services are calculated within the overall grants budget – these amounts are intended to cover estimated costs that the City will incur for events and festivals such as policing, waste management, and/or traffic management.

The current breakdown of the Community Grants budget is noted in the following table.

Portfolio 1: Grants for Living: Community Livability and Social Equity	\$331,519
Portfolio 2: Grants for Involvement: Social and Cultural Vibrancy	\$343,611
Portfolio 3: Grants for Growth: Community Economic Activators	\$93,840
Residents Associations	\$2,400
City Services	\$207,080
TOTAL	\$978,450

The Community Grants budget has seen only minor variances in previous years since major restructuring of the program took place in 2018. In 2022, additional funds were allocated as a one-time pandemic response.



Applications Received Versus Applications Funded

In recent years, feedback from applicants has demonstrated that the cost of hosting events and festivals has risen dramatically including the City Services portion of the budget which covers services such as policing, engineering operations, and traffic management.

The following table outlines the number of applications funded versus the number of applications received over the last few years. The data demonstrates both an increase in the number of applications received, as well as a decrease in the percentage of applications approved for funding, especially in Portfolio 2: Grants for Involvement, which includes the majority of applications for festivals and events.

	P1 Grants for Living		P2 Grants for Involvement		P3 Grants for Growth		One Time Small Grants (2022-2023 only)	
	Applied	Approved	Applied	Approved	Applied	Approved	Applied	Approved
2022	34	33	51	46	4	4	41	21
2023	25	24	47	45	4	3	24	10
2024	30	24	48	40	6	4	0	0
2025	35	28	58	35	5	4	0	0

Staff propose that an increase in the overall grants funding envelope be allocated by staff equitably to the portfolios based on where there is the most need, rather than equally distributing the additional funds. This would allow for a more adaptive and reflexive approach rather than a prescriptive one.

Policy and Program Alignment

Three relevant policies or Council-endorsed projects are related to Council's direction to include a funding increase in the 2026 Budget process:

1. Strategic Plan – The City of New Westminster’s Council Strategic Priority Plan (2023-2026) prioritizes “Community Belonging and Connecting”. One of the stated outcomes in this priority area is “New and Growing Connections: Empower and support groups and organizations to more fully reflect the evolving diversity of the community and feel welcome to establish, grow, and evolve.” Increasing the total grants budget supports this outcome.
2. Grants Policy – An increase to the total grants budget is aligned with the Guiding Principles in the [Grants Policy](#), specifically item 3.1 (b) which notes: “All community organizations are the City’s partners in achieving its vision. The City supports these partners through both cash funding and in-kind City Services that help them make a meaningful impact.”
3. Community Advisory Assembly – Recommendations related to Community Belonging and Connecting were received by Council from the Community Advisory Assembly on [May 6, 2024](#). They called for an increase in grant funding, specifically in recommendation 5(a) which states: “offering more and actively promoting grants to support organizations that are delivering events and programming that support belonging and connecting”. Additionally, the Assembly also made [recommendations to Council on December 16, 2024](#) related to Cultural Observances and Community-led events (which were termed “Category B” Observances in the recommendations). They suggested that the City

“...establish a structure by which communities can identify and request City support for significant community-specific cultural observances. Roughly half of the resources (money and staff time) that City departments invest in observances should be spend in Category B. City support for cultural observances in this category could take the form of: providing grants to communities to run their own events, supporting community-led special events with supplies, staff and volunteer support, permitting, street closures, awareness raising activities, etc., and developing responsive programming at City facilities.”

Financial Implications

A 50% increase to the Community Grants funding envelope would be \$489,225. If approved by Council now, this amount would represent approximately a 0.4% property tax rate increase as part of the 2026 overall City budget.

Interdepartmental Liaison

Staff from Community Services and Finance collaborated on this report.

Options

There are three options for Council's consideration.

1. THAT Council approve \$1,467,675 be allocated as the total budget for the 2026 City of New Westminster Community Grant program, in order to confirm the total funding envelope in time for grant application adjudication and awarding which will take place in fall 2025.
2. THAT staff be directed to include an additional \$489,225 for Community Grants funding in the 2026 budget, bringing the total Community Grants budget to \$1,467,675, to be funded from property tax revenue. THAT staff be provided with other direction.
3. THAT staff be provided with other direction.

Staff recommend Option 1 and 2.

Conclusion

The City's Community Grants program is an important component in the City working toward a community where everyone feels a sense of community belonging and connecting through the empowerment of community organizations with funding to meet their mandates and goals. The program is aligned with the approved Strategic Priorities Plan, and policy and projects that are related to Community Belonging and Connecting.

Approvals

This report was prepared by:
Jen Arbo, Manager, Community Partnerships

This report was reviewed by:

Jennifer Miller, Deputy Director, Community Services

Stephen O'Shea, Community Grants Coordinator

Frank Lam, Finance Analyst

Gary So, Senior Manager, Financial Services

This report was approved by:

Blair Fryer, Director, Community Services

Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer