



REPORT

Council

Meeting Date: November 5, 2024

FROM: Recreation and Culture

DATE: October 22, 2024

SUBJECT: **Community Activation Grant**

LOCATION:

WARD: Town-wide

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RECOMMENDATION:

That the information contained in the staff report dated October 22, 2024, entitled Community Activation Grant, from the Recreation and Culture department, be received.

KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- The annual funding for the Community Activation Grant program is \$35,000.
- The Community Activation Grant program is intended to support small, community led initiatives for informal groups.
- Staff were requested to report back to Council after one year of operation.
- Due to high interest, in May 2024 staff determined the number of applications would exceed the budget and the maximum funding was changed from \$2,000 to \$750 per application.
- 67 applications were received by community groups, organizations, and residents.
- 38 applications have been approved or tentatively approved, utilizing \$28,700, to date in 2024.
- The grant provided support that positively impacted more than 2,000 community members.

BACKGROUND:

Council approved the 2023 Operating Budget, in February 2023, that included \$35,000 to develop and implement a Community Activation Grant program. The program is intended to distribute small value, or micro grants, to community-based organizations, residents and informal groups, to lead and organize initiatives focused on enhancing the sense of belonging for residents. A program framework was developed including a user-friendly online application, an evaluation framework and simple templates to assist applicants.

The program was launched in November 2023 to support projects in 2024. Submissions were evaluated by the Community Development team in Recreation and Culture using the established evaluation criteria. Successful submissions required applicants to enter into an agreement and all funds were required to be spent as documented in the submission. Applicants agreed to complete a final report after the project and while receipts were not required to be submitted, all proof of purchases were required to be retained for a period of 12 months. Staff were requested to report back on the success of the program and any recommended changes after one year in operation.

COMMENT/OPTIONS:

One of this Council's strategic priorities is community belonging: *Enhancing community belonging to ensure residents are invited to engage in a fulfilling community life that is built to support wellbeing.* The Community Activation Grant program enabled residents to come together to lead and implement initiatives that they wanted to see, in their local neighbourhood or community.

Applications were submitted throughout 2024 on an ongoing basis. Staff met with grant applicants to review projects, eligible expenses, and when necessary, provided additional support on navigating the facility rental and special event application process. The program provided financial support and staff guidance to make these small-scale but impactful ideas come to life. By building capacity in the community, to bring people together around a common interest, bring awareness and/or enhance spaces, a small investment can go a long way to enhance the vibrancy and livability of Oakville for all.

The objectives of the Community Activation Grant program are to:

- Focus on small scale community events, activities, and programs, to enhance community capacity and increase access.
- Support residents, ad-hoc groups, and not-for-profit organizations to enhance the community wellbeing for all Oakville residents by building capacity through engaging activations and project.
- Provide a user-friendly collaborative application and administration process to reduce barriers and provide opportunities.

- Prioritize new activations and projects that are not eligible for other direct or indirect town funding streams such as the Cultural Grant, Community Event Funding, or funding through the BIAs.

Supporting Council's strategic priority, community belonging, the Community Activation Grant program demonstrates how the project aligns with this mandate through:

1. Enhancing connectedness between neighbours.
2. Reducing isolation and loneliness amongst older adults.
3. Expanding access by providing programs and services to equity deserving individuals and groups.
4. Championing mental health and wellness.
5. Championing physical literacy and wellness.
6. Championing arts and culture in the community.

The Community Activation Grant received a high amount of interest from the community and in May 2024 staff determined the number of applications would quickly exceed the budget. After a review of multiple scenarios, it was determined to it would be best to fund more projects than fewer. This was achieved by modifying the staff developed program guidelines by changing the maximum funding from \$2,000 to \$750 per application.

As of the start of October 2024, 38 projects, totaling \$28,700 in funding, have been approved or tentatively approved. It is anticipated that the entire grant budget of \$35,000 will be allocated to eligible projects by the end of 2025.

A number of applications were denied and/or withdrawn. The primary reasons for not being approved for this program were because the applicant was receiving other tax-based funding, their event included a fundraising component, or a date/location conflict with their proposed event existed.

Applicants that successfully received funding demonstrated how the new initiative would enhance the target audience's sense of belonging in the community. Typical expenses included permit fees and insurance, food, equipment rentals, supplies, advertising, and entertainment.

Highlights of the Community Activation Grant program include:

- 67 applications were received by community groups, organizations, and residents.
- 38 applications have been approved or tentatively approved to date in 2024.
- Combined, these projects will receive \$28,700 of the total \$35,000 budget (82%).

- The grant provided support that positively impacted 2,000 community members.

A detailed list of the approved Community Activation Grant projects can be found in Appendix A.

During the first year of the grant program staff experienced some challenges including numerous applications being received less than four to six weeks before their scheduled start date. This posed a challenge to review the projects, meet with the applicants to provide clarification on eligible expenses and town procedures, and to process permits and funds prior to the event date.

One of the program requirements for potential projects included increased community participation and alignment with objectives such as reducing isolation and loneliness in older adults and expanding access to programs and services for equity deserving groups. Under the current program framework transportation costs are not an eligible expense and being able to access the location of an activation or event can be a barrier for some participants. Additionally, there are areas related to eligible entertainment expenses that could be included in the future such as attendance to a gallery or theatre for a group that would not typically have access as a lower income individual.

The nature of many non-profit organizations or informal community groups is the need for donations and fundraisers to support the work they do in the community. Under the current grant framework fundraising at events is restricted for applicants. While the event remains free and open to the public, groups have inquired about the opportunity to promote their fundraising initiatives at their event, such as selling gala tickets, a licensed raffle, or silent auction activities.

Staff intends to review the eligibility of transportation and entertainment costs as it relates to accessibility and participation, as well as other potential eligible expenses within the program framework in 2025. Staff will also review the restriction on fundraising to maintain the integrity of free events while balancing the needs of the community to showcase additional opportunities to support their organizations.

To assist in the effective administration of process timelines, as well as to streamline resources, scheduled and advertised application windows may be used in the future with additional consideration to when other town grant funding is administered.

In 2025, in the second year of operation, staff will be working towards accommodating new user group applications with increased awareness to the community. Consideration should be given to purchase some items that could be loaned to applicants to avoid rental costs. This would include commonly used items such as a portable microphone/speaker, folding tables and chairs, outdoor games.

Moving forward, the momentum and success of the Community Activation Grant will continue to grow as it fills a need within the community to enable residents to initiate and implement small-scale activations they want to see in their neighbourhood.

CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

This report provides information to the public regarding a review of the town's Community Activation Grant. The 2025 program launch will be broadly shared through town social media, past grant applicants, and relevant customer distribution groups as well as through various community partners.

(B) FINANCIAL

There are no financial impacts with this report.

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

Finance, Transportation Engineering, and the Special Events and Culture sections have been involved in the ongoing distribution and administration of the Community Activation Grant. Corporate Communications has also supported the implementation and communication phases.

(D) CORPORATE STRATEGIC GOALS

This report addresses the corporate strategic goal(s) to:

- Promote Livability to further Oakville's goal of being the most livable town in Canada.
- Promote an Engaged Community.

(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION

There are no impacts with this report.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A: Community Activation Grant Projects

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