THE CITY OF
GREATER GEELONG

COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING FIRST NATIONS GRANTS

2025-26 GUIDELINES

CITY OF GREATER GEELONG

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We Acknowledge the Wadawurrung People as the Traditional Owners of the Land, Waterways and Skies.

We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging. We Acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are part of our Greater Geelong community today.

Welcome

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet contains information about the City of Greater Geelong's Community Strengthening First Nations Grants. Please read it carefully before you apply.

Important words are explained at the back of this booklet (page 16).

THE CITY OF GREATER GEELONG COMMUNITY GRANTS

A grant is money given to a person, organisation or group for a specific purpose.

Our Community Grants help turn your idea into reality. Whether you're looking to purchase new equipment, offer group activities, run a community event, create an inspired arts project or upgrade facilities, funding is available.

You can apply to multiple City of Greater Geelong Community Grants programs, but each application must be for a different project, event, or activity.

APPLICATION SUPPORT

Contact the City

You must contact the City's Community Grants Unit before applying to discuss your eligibility, proposed activity and other grant matters.

E: communitygrants@geelongcity.vic.gov.au

P: 5272 5560

If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment

National Relay Service (NRS)

If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment, and you wish to contact us, you can do so through the National Relay Service (NRS) and ask for 03 5272 5272. Our call centre team will then connect you with the grants team.

Our business hours are Monday to Friday, 8.30am–5.00pm.

TTY users – call 13 36 77

Speak & Listen (voice relay) users – call 1300 555 727

SMS relay users – message 0423 677 767

Note: Area code must be included for each call.

Further information and NRS call numbers can be found on the Access Hub website: www.accesshub.gov.au/about-the-nrs/nrs-call-numbers-and-links

If you need an interpreter



If you need an interpreter, please call the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) on 131 450 and ask them to call the City of Greater Geelong on 03 5272 5272. Our business hours are Monday to Friday, 8.30am–5.00pm.

About this grant

OBJECTIVES

The Community Strengthening First Nations Grants support self-determined projects and initiatives aimed at increasing health and social equity for Wadawurrung Traditional Owners, First Nations People, organisations and groups living in greater Geelong.

The grant supports applications to:

- deliver on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap socio-economic targets
- deliver on the five pillars of the City's Community Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-29
- increase understanding, respect and celebration of First Nations perspectives and culture
- increase knowledge and understanding of the impacts of colonisation on First Nations People and Traditional Owners through Truth Telling
- strengthen and enable First Nations decision making and increase opportunities for community participation and diverse engagement.

CONTEXT

This grant is informed by key policies and strategies, including the City's Reconciliation Action Plan 2020-2021, Community Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2029, Council Plan 2025-2029 and Social Equity Framework 2022-2025 which identifies First Nations communities as a priority population group.

This grant is also informed by the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The data that supports the National Agreement on Closing the Gap comes from the Productivity Commission's Annual Data Compilation Reports, which track progress against 19 national socio-economic targets. This data includes detailed metrics across areas like life expectancy, health, education, and housing, and is used to assess progress and inform reporting on the agreement's implementation.

The objective of the National Agreement is to overcome the entrenched inequality faced by too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, so that their life outcomes are equal to all Australians. Under the Agreement, all levels of Government committed to strengthening partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to ensure their leadership is central to designing and delivering policies, programs, and services that affect them.

FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES IN GEELONG

The City is committed to supporting partnerships and collaborations with First Nations Communities across Geelong and recognises the rich diversity of these communities.

The City of Greater Geelong has the largest population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in any local government area in Victoria, with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of 1% (ABS 2016). This is larger than Greater Melbourne with 0.5% or Victoria with 0.8% of the population. Across Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples make up 2.8% of the total population[1].

There are two primary organisations who provide First Nations programs and services in Geelong.

The Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (WTOAC) is the representative body for the Wadawurrung people, legally recognized under the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 as the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) for Wadawurrung Country. Its primary role is to manage, protect, and preserve Wadawurrung cultural heritage, including artifacts, sites, stories, and land.

Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative provides culturally appropriate programs, support and services for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living on Wathaurong, Gulidjan and Gadubanud country, within the wider Geelong, Bellarine and Colac regions. Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative operates under the strategic direction of:

[1] 2021 Greater Geelong, Census Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people QuickStats | Australian Bureau of Statistics

- National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan
- Overarching Indigenous Australians' Health Programme (IAHP)
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

KEY DATES

Applications open:	22 December 2025
Applications close:	23 February 2026 by 5.00 pm (we do not accept late applications)
Notification to applicants:	24 June 2026
Project start date:	You cannot commence your project until after the notification date (above) and you have a signed funding agreement with us.
Project end date:	You must complete your activity within 12 months of the notification date.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY

Being eligible means, you can receive a grant, but it does not guarantee funding.

Applicants must be based in the greater Geelong municipality.

Wadawurrung Traditional Owners living outside Geelong are also eligible to apply when the project is delivered in Geelong. The City recognises Wadawurrung Country extends beyond Geelong's municipal boundaries.

To apply for this grant, you must be one of the following:

- incorporated not-for-profit organisation
- group with an auspice
- registered charitable organisation
- Early Years (playgroups, kindergartens, childcare centres)
- businesses
- individuals operating as sole traders (with an active ABN).

WHO CANNOT APPLY

You are not eligible to apply if you are any of the following:

- individual (without an ABN)
- school or learning institution (primary, secondary, tertiary)
- previous applicant with an outstanding acquittal for grant funding from the City
- applicant who has not complied with the terms of a previous funding agreement
- entity currently involved in legal proceedings with the City, bankruptcy or similar situations
- entity with outstanding debt to the City
- unable to demonstrate First Nations ownership or leadership OR partnership with First Nations organisations, groups or individual

HOW MUCH FUNDING CAN YOU APPLY FOR?

The total amount of funding available for Community Strengthening First Nations Grants is $100,000.

This grant has two categories, and you may request:

- Category 1 – up to $5,000

  Suits projects with shorter timeframes, smaller scope or engagement.

- Category 2 –$5,001 up to $25,000

  Suits larger scale projects, with greater impact, supported by comprehensive budgets and project plans, and in-depth community consultation, and include several partners.

You can only apply for one category per funding round.

We generally accept only one application per applicant. However, for this grant we recognise that strong partnerships are essential. As a result, we understand that a First Nations individual, group or organisation may be involved in more than one application as a partner. This involvement will not make any of the applications ineligible.

HOW WE ALLOCATE FUNDING

Our grants are competitive, so even if you meet the criteria, you may not get funding.

You cannot rely on the City's Community Grants for ongoing funding.

In some cases, we may offer partial funding for a smaller or modified project.

We typically fund projects only once. However, we may consider funding a project again if there is a strong reason that aligns with the objectives of this grant.

What you can apply for

To help you work out whether your project is the sort of thing we are looking to fund, we have developed the following list of example projects and costs we might cover.

Yes - we will fund	No - we will not fund
Types of projects	**Types of projects**
Examples of projects we may fund. Other project ideas may also be eligible. If you're unsure, please contact us for advice.	Black Cladded applications (cannot demonstrate transparent business practices or true Indigenous business ownership)
Projects within the City of Greater Geelong	Projects outside Geelong
Cultural awareness and capability building	Cultural Heritage Management Plans
Establish culturally safe spaces (e.g. signage, artwork acknowledgements, planting, enhancements or installations)	Permanent Public Art
NAIDOC celebrations and events	Capital Works (e.g. building property, structural improvements, alterations and extensions)
Reconciliation events and activities	Political or gambling activities
Truth Telling events and activities	Projects started before funding is approved
Promoting Wadawurrung Culture (may require WTOAC approval)	Core business expenses (e.g. rent, insurance, utilities, administration, finance, management)
Community development projects	
Community engagement activities	
Community events	**Expenses**
Training and development	Cost of Council services (e.g. rates, waste disposal, parking fees, fines)
Health promotion activities	Costs of organising and running competitions, prizes, awards, or fundraising events (e.g. prizes, gifts, trophies)
Arts projects and activities with demonstrated Health and Wellbeing outcomes	Gift cards
Expenses	Cash cards
Stipends and honorariums for Elder knowledge and participation	Volunteers
Cultural consultations and services	Own venue hire
Promotion, printing and materials	
Performers, artists, musicians and contractors	
Catering	
Equipment Hire, venue hire, (including City of Greater Geelong venues)	
Documentation and evaluation	

What you need for your application

You will need to provide certain documents and information with your application. This helps us confirm you can legally receive funding and practically deliver your proposed project.

CHECKLIST

Before you start your application, use this checklist as a guide – some items may not apply to your application:

- full and correct applicant name
- address and contact details of applicant
- name and contact details of the person authorised to apply for this grant
- certificate of incorporation
- auspice agreement letter (if your organisation is not incorporated)
- Australian Business Number (ABN) details registered to the grant applicant name
- a completed Statement by Supplier form (if you don't have an ABN)
- bank account details (account name, BSB and account number) which must match the applicant's name and ABN details
- evidence of First Nations ownership or partnership in the project (for all applications)
- communication and engagement plan (for applications requesting more than $5,000)
- letters of support from project partners and/or stakeholders
- copies of required permits or approvals
- confirmation of venue booking
- a budget showing all income, expense and how the grant funds will be used
- quotes or cost estimates for grant related expenses.

How we assess applications

We carefully check all applications to make sure they meet the guideline rules and are a good use of the City's grant funding.

ASSESSMENT

The complete list of checks we do on each grant application include:

Eligibility checks – we check if the applicant and project are eligible (see pages 5 and 7).

Officer panel review– if eligible, our officers review the application using the grant assessment criteria and funding priorities on pages 9 and 10.

Community panel assessment– a group of independent community members peer review the officer assessments and recommend funding to Council. The panel includes at least two First Nations Community representatives selected through an Expression of Interest process managed by the City.

Council endorsement –Council reviews and endorses funding recommendations.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Assessment criteria are used to evaluate your application. You must answer questions in the application form to explain how your proposal meets these criteria. Your responses to these questions help us compare all applications fairly, rank them and make funding decisions.

We use a weighted scoring system, which means the criteria each have a set percentage based on how important they are. The higher the percentage, the more it affects your overall score.

The following table lists the assessment criteria and explains what we are looking for when assessing your application.

COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING FIRST NATIONS GRANTS ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Criteria 1: First Nations Outcomes 40%

We assess this based on

- First Nations leadership or partnership to generate First Nations self-determined outcomes
- outcomes contribute to improved health, wellbeing, or social equity for First Nations people
- project supports the objectives of relevant strategies: Closing the Gap, City's Community Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Criteria 2: Community Engagement – 20%

We assess this based on

- a community engagement plan demonstrating knowledge of all stakeholders and the extent of active and continuous community engagement to be done throughout the life of the project

Criteria 3: Well-planned Project – 40%

We assess this on the following information to determine if a project is well planned and ready to proceed:

- a clear description of what is included in the project (i.e. scope)
- letters of support from all project partners
- permits as required and if applicable

- demonstrated understanding and application of First Nations Cultural Protocols and use of First Nations Cultural Intellectual Property.[2]
- Evidence that the applicant has the necessary expertise, capacity and support to deliver the activity.
- A clear, balanced budget that shows total income equals total expenditure. The budget must describe and show the total cost of the activity and list any other sources of funds that will contribute to the total project income.
- Written quotes that accurately reflect the complete scope of proposed project.

FUNDING PRIORITIES

Our priority is to support applications that are at least 50% First Nations led—either through a First Nations project lead or contracted lead, or by directing a minimum of 50% of the grant funds to First Nations people, businesses, or organisations to deliver project activities.

If the total funding requested by all applicants exceeds the available funding, we may prioritise:

- applications from First Nations owned or controlled organisations
- applications relating to items with immediate or urgent need as identified in the socio-economic targets of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- applications from organisations that do not receive money from electronic gaming machines or gambling.

[2] Aboriginal Community Partnership Principles 2020-2022 | Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
GUIDE_Respecting-and-Protecting-ICIP.pdf
AIATSIS Engagement Policy Snapshot 2020.pdf

How to apply

CONTACT THE GRANTS UNIT

Please contact the City's Grants Unit before applying to discuss your eligibility, proposed activity and other grant matters.

E: communitygrants@geelongcity.vic.gov.au

P: 5272 5560

APPLY ONLINE

All applications must be submitted online via SmartyGrants. You must log in or create an account before you begin. You can access the application form in two ways:

Visit the Community Grants section of the Geelong Australia website and navigate to the specific grant page. Click the **Apply Now** button and log in or create an account to access the form.

Visit SmartyGrants directly, log in or create an account, and select the grant you wish to apply for.

Paper or email applications will not be accepted.

PRESENTATION

In addition to the online application, you may request the opportunity to present to the assessment panel. This is optional, not a requirement of the application process. Applicants that do not make a presentation will not be disadvantaged.

WITHDRAWING OR CHANGING YOUR APPLICATION

If you have not yet submitted your application, you can log in to SmartyGrants at any time to make edits.

If you have already submitted your application and need to make changes, contact us before the closing date. We can reopen your application to allow edits.

Changes cannot be made after the closing date.

If you need to withdraw your application after submission, please notify the Community Grants Unit in writing.

ABOUT APPLICANT TYPES

To determine eligibility for a grant, please read all applicant types carefully. If you are unsure what sort of applicant you are, please check your details online.

incorporated associations – go to www.consumer.vic.gov.au

companies – go to https://connectonline.asic.gov.au

individuals or sole traders with an ABN – go to https://abr.business.gov.au

charities – go to www.acnc.gov.au/charity/charities

IF YOUR ORGANISATION IS NOT INCORPORATED

If your organisation or group is not incorporated, you can still apply for a grant by working with an auspice organisation.

An auspice is an organisation that meets our eligibility criteria and agrees to support and manage your grant. They take legal and financial responsibility for the funding.

Your auspice organisation will:

- sign the grant funding agreement
- receive the grant money and pass it on to you

- make sure all grant activities are completed
- submit the final evaluation and financial report on your behalf.

How to apply with an Auspice

If you want to apply with an auspice organisation, you must:

- get their approval before you submit your application.
- ask them to sign the application form and the funding agreement.
- submit a copy of a signed agreement with your auspice.

By using an auspice, your group can still access funding even if you are not legally incorporated.

What happens next

Once we have decided who is going to receive a grant, we will let you know of the outcome of your application, even if it was unsuccessful.

NOTIFICATION OF OUTCOME

The City of Greater Geelong will notify all applicants of their outcome by email by the date listed on page 5 of this booklet.

Successful Applications

If your application is successful, this does not guarantee funding. You must complete additional steps before receiving a grant payment.

You will receive an email with a link to a funding agreement outlining the terms and conditions of the grant (see **Funding Agreements** section below).

You must sign and return the agreement, upload a tax invoice and your public liability insurance certificate of currency before any payment is made.

Do not start your project until you have received a signed funding agreement.

Unsuccessful Applications

If your application is unsuccessful, we will notify you by email.

You are strongly encouraged to contact us for feedback which may help if you plan to apply again in future rounds.

PAYMENTS

If your application is successful, the City will transfer the approved funding amount to your nominated bank account after the funding agreement is signed.

We will only pay grant money to the applicant (or auspice).

A tax invoice is required before we pay any grant funds. Our team will contact successful grant applicants to arrange this.

If you do not provide either an ABN or a ‘Statement by a Supplier’ form, we may have to withhold tax from the grant payment at the top marginal rate of 45%.

FUNDING AGREEMENTS

Successful grant applicants will be required to enter into a funding agreement. The agreement will include:

- the terms and conditions of funding
- the details of the activity
- what you are expected to deliver
- your reporting requirements
- the schedule of payments.

General information

The following information applies to all City of Greater Geelong grants.

PERMITS AND APPROVALS

Some projects or events may need a permit or approval. These processes are separate to the grant application process and require additional time and budget in your project plan.

While you do not need to secure permits or approvals before applying, securing them will be a condition of the grant if your application is successful. As such, we may choose not to pay you any money until the relevant permits and approvals are secured.

You must demonstrate that you are aware of the necessary permits and approvals in your application. We will consider this information when assessing your application under the 'well-planned project' criteria on page 9.

INSURANCE

You must arrange public liability insurance (PLI) to cover the activity detailed in your application and provide the PLI certificate of currency if your application is successful.

Applicants using an auspice would include a PLI certificate from the auspice organisation.

A policy statement or receipt of payment is not an acceptable substitute for the certificate of currency.

REPORTING

If you receive a grant, you must submit an evaluation of your activity and a financial report within one month of your project finishing.

The evaluation report tells us about your project, and the financial report includes all income and expenses for the grant. It demonstrates you have spent the money how you said you would.

We may request meetings with you to check your progress or ask for an audit of your financial records to prove you have spent the grant as you said you would. As such, you must keep accurate financial records and make them available to us if requested.

MAKING CHANGES TO YOUR FUNDED ACTIVITY

Projects are funded for delivery as described in your funding agreement.

If you need to change something about your grant, you must seek our approval in writing. This includes:

- changes to your proposed completion date
- changes to the nature of your activity
- changes to how you want to spend the money.

We reserve the right to withdraw funding if:

- we do not support your request for changes
- your request is not made within a reasonable time
- you make changes without our knowledge.

If a project stops or the grant funds are no longer required, you must repay the funding to the City of Greater Geelong.

WITHDRAWING FUNDING

We reserve the right to withdraw funding if we do not receive a tax invoice within the financial year in which the grant was awarded, or by the due date/s included in the agreement.

We can also withdraw funding if you are in breach of your funding agreement.

ACKNOWLEDGING OUR SUPPORT

You must acknowledge the City of Greater Geelong on your promotional materials if you receive a grant. We will provide a guide with detailed instructions on how to do this.

Definitions

Following are definitions of some of the words we use in this document. If you find other words that you are not familiar with, please contact us for help.

COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING FIRST NATIONS GRANTS

Word	Explanation
Black Cladding	Supply Nation (Australia's leading database of verified Indigenous businesses) considers 'black cladding' as the practice of a non-First Nations business entity or individual taking unfair advantage of a First Nations business entity or individual for the purpose of gaining access to otherwise inaccessible First Nations procurement policies or contracts. Supply Nation's definition of a First Nations business is at least 50% owned by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islands person(s).
Cultural Awareness	Cultural awareness means being aware of, and developing sensitivity to, cultural difference and cultural diversity. It involves knowledge, attitudes and values that demonstrate an openness and respect for other people and other cultures, languages, religions, dress and communication styles.
Cultural Capability	First Nations cultural capability is the ongoing, lifelong development of the skills, knowledge, behaviours, attitudes, and systems needed to respectfully and appropriately engage with, plan, support, improve, and deliver services that reflect the unique cultures, histories, and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Cultural Safety	First Nations cultural safety is the creation of environments where the identity, culture, and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are respected and upheld, ensuring they are not challenged, assaulted, or denied.
Elder	An Aboriginal Elder is a respected community leader who is a recognised custodian of Indigenous knowledge and law. They are trusted guides who provide wisdom, advice, and support, passing down culture, traditions, and history to younger generations.
First Nations	First Nations recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the sovereign people of this land. It goes further than First Australians as it recognises various language groups as separate and unique sovereign nations.
First Nations Communities	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
First Nations Cultural Heritage	First Nations Cultural Heritage encompasses the living knowledge, spiritual beliefs, cultural practices, and physical elements that are significant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
First Nations Cultural Intellectual Property	Cultural and Intellectual Property (CIP) refers to First Nations peoples' rights to their cultural heritage, which includes traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, sacred sites, and traditional medicines, as defined by customary laws rather than Western legal systems.
First Nations protocols	First Nations protocols are established customs, ethical principles, and ways of behaving developed by First Nations communities to guide interactions with their cultures, knowledge, and lands, encompassing everything from respectful communication and the protection of cultural and intellectual property.
National Agreement for Closing the Gap	The National Agreement on Closing the Gap is a partnership between Australian governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations to improve life outcomes for First Nations People, shifting from a top-down approach to shared decision-making and accountability. The Australian Local Government Association is a partner to the Agreement.
Reconciliation	Reconciliation is a process aimed at strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-First Nations peoples, for the benefit of all Australians. Reconciliation is an ongoing journey.
Registered Aboriginal Party	A Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) in Victoria is a legally recognised Aboriginal corporation representing the Traditional Owners of a specific area of Country, responsible for protecting and managing Aboriginal Cultural Heritage under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006. Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation are the Registered Aboriginal Party in Geelong.

Word	Explanation
Traditional Owners	In Victoria, *Traditional Owners* are Aboriginal people with deep cultural and spiritual ties to a specific area of land and water (Country). Wadawurrung are the Traditional Owners of the lands on which the City of Greater Geelong operates.
Truth Telling	In Victoria, *truth-telling* is a process of openly sharing historical truths about colonisation, its ongoing impacts, and the injustices suffered by First Nations peoples, as well as acknowledging their strength and contributions.

COMMUNITY GRANTS

Word	Explanation
ABN	Australian Business Number is a unique number that identifies a business in Australia.
Application	A form you fill out to ask for grant money.
Assess	How we review and consider your application.
Auspice	An organisation that applies for a grant on your behalf if your group is not legally registered.
Budget	A plan that shows how much money you have and how you will spend it.
Categories	Different types of funding available within one grant.
Community panel	A group of community members who review applications and recommend which projects should get funding.
Eligibility	The rules that decide if you or your project can receive grant funding.
Evaluation and financial report	A report you must complete after your project ends, explaining what you did and how you spent the grant money.
Expenditure	The things you spend money on for your project.
Funding agreement	A document that explains why we are giving you the grant money and the rules you must follow when using it.
Grant	Money given to a person or organisation for a specific purpose.
Group	Two or more people who meet regularly and run projects or activities that other people participate in (e.g., youth group, seniors' group, cultural group)
GST	Goods and Services Tax. This is tax that applies to goods and services in Australia.
Income	Money that you have or expect to receive for your project. This can include grant money from the City, fundraising, sponsorship, ticket sales or other grant funding.
Incorporated	A group or organisation that has legally registered to become a formal entity.
Insurance	A contract you have with an insurance company that helps protect from financial loss if something goes wrong.
Log in	Your email and password used to access SmartyGrants.
Not-for-profit	An organisation that does not does not distribute profits to owners or shareholders.
Officer panel	A group of City officers who review applications and recommend which projects should get funding.
Online	Available on the internet.
Organisation	A legally constituted organisation that is registered or created by law. For example, incorporated associations, companies limited by guarantee or registered charities are all defined as organisations.
Quote	A written estimate of how much something will cost.
SmartyGrants	An online system we use to manage grant applications.
Submitted	When you finish your application in SmartyGrants and press the submit button.

Word	Explanation
The City	The City of Greater Geelong.
Unincorporated Group	A group that is not legally registered as an organisation.
Weighted average scoring	A method of scoring applications where some parts of the decision are more important than others.