

Creative Access Program Guidelines 2026

Introduction

The Creative Access Program supports local groups, artists, and organisations to activate Council venues with creative, inclusive and community-driven programs. Through in-kind venue access and collaborative support, this initiative aims to showcase the cultural richness of Greater Dandenong and encourage new partnerships that strengthen our city’s creative life.

This program will be administered through the Smartygrants system and will be assessed in line with two major policies:

- Community Facilities Access and Use Policy
- Arts and Cultural Heritage Strategy 2022-26

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1. Overview

Greater Dandenong-based community groups, organisations and individuals who meet the eligibility criteria are invited to apply.

Purpose:

To enable the community to deliver creative and cultural activities in Council venues through in-kind venue support and collaborative partnerships. This initiative is about more than affordable space, it's about building partnerships that create real benefits for our community. It's designed for projects that not only use our facilities but also contribute to shared outcomes, such as starting new programs or expanding existing ones that make a positive impact.

If you only need subsidised space and don't have a shared goal, you can apply for a fee subsidy or waiver through the **Community Facilities Access and Use Policy**.

What support is offered?

Successful applicants receive **in-kind use of selected Council venues** for activities such as rehearsals, exhibitions, workshops, or performances. In addition, Council officers may provide **practical support**—including advice, networking opportunities, and coordination assistance—to help you develop **new or expanded community programs that are sustainable and impactful**.

Who can apply?

We welcome applications from **community groups, not-for-profit organisations, and individuals** (see Definitions below) who:

- Have a program or activity aligned with Council priorities, such as **arts, heritage and culture, community inclusion, sustainability, and wellbeing** (see Council Plan)
- Are seeking **in-kind support**, such as space, mentoring, or promotional assistance and
- Meet the **eligibility criteria** (see Eligibility below)

Expected outcomes

- Delivery of **inclusive, community-accessible activities** that respond to local needs and interests
- Implementation of **high-quality programs** that reflect program priorities and support cultural and creative development
- Strengthening partnerships between **local artists, community groups, and Council** to foster collaboration and shared outcomes
- Increased activation and visitation of Council facilities through **engaging and relevant programming**

Program Overview

Rounds and Duration

This opportunity operates in two rounds annually, supporting projects that may be short-term or up to 12 months in duration.

Upcoming Rounds:

- Expression of Interests open February 25, 2026 – Close March 23, 2026
Projects can be occur/ start between April to October 2026

Application Process

Each round consists of two stages:

Stage One – Expression of Interest (EOI)

Applicants are invited to submit an EOI outlining their proposed project. EOIs must be lodged via the online application form.

All EOIs will be assessed by a panel comprising Council officers.

Stage Two – Detailed Proposal

Applicants successful at Stage One will be invited to submit a comprehensive proposal through the SmartyGrants system.

Stage Two applications will also be assessed by a panel comprising Council officers

Funding Agreement

Successful applicants will enter into a formal agreement with Council, which will outline:

- Access conditions
- Insurance requirements
- Reporting obligations

Program Priorities

This partnership supports projects that engage one or more of our program priorities. This year, we are focusing on the following programs and audiences:

- Children and families
- Youth participation
- All abilities creative arts
- Diasporic community engagement, especially by and for our diverse communities
- First Nations First

Definitions

Community group:

Not-for-profit or voluntary group that receives minimal or no funding to run group activities or programs that provide benefit to members and/or the wider community. Includes groups deemed to be providing services and activities that involve and benefit residents of the City of Greater Dandenong, such as seniors' groups, youth groups, children's and family's groups, cultural groups, service clubs, volunteer groups and social support groups (e.g. disability support groups).

Community Service group:

Not-for-profit service organisations, charities or voluntary service groups that provide services to support the community.

Incorporated:

Incorporated under the Associations of Incorporations Act 1981 or other Relevant Legislation.

Individuals:

Residents of the City of Greater Dandenong (excluding Council staff).

Individual Artist:

An individual artist is defined as a practicing artist who is recognised by their peers, is committed to devoting significant time to artistic activity and/or has a history of public presentation.

Not- for profit:

An organisation that does not operate for the profit, personal gain, or other benefit of particular people (for example, its members, the people who run it or their friends or relatives).

2. Eligibility criteria

Applicants must:

- Individuals must live or work in the South East Melbourne and applications have a program outcome;
- Groups and organisations must be Not-For-Profit, an incorporated association or community group, and must satisfy at least two of the following:
 - be based in the City of Greater Dandenong.
 - project activities are held within Greater Dandenong.
 - the project activities deliver clear benefits to the Greater Dandenong Community.
- Hold current public Liability Insurance.
- Demonstrate that the project will work in partnership with Council to deliver shared benefits for the community in one or more of the following ways:
 - **Collaborate with Council** to create programs or activities that align with community priorities.
 - **Contribute beyond space occupation**, such as developing new programs, expanding existing ones, or creating opportunities for participation and inclusion.
 - **Contribute to long-term outcomes**, like cultural development, community wellbeing, and activation of Council facilities.
- Be able to meet all reporting and safety requirements.

Note: Applications **must not overlap** with other venue subsidies / grant payments to offset venue hire costs for the same project.

Not eligible:

- Staff members of the City of Greater Dandenong;
- Private, profit-making organisations;
- Educational institutions and government departments, unless in partnership with an artist or community group and open to the community;
- Projects are not presenting a local program outcome or open to the public;
- Groups or individuals that have not satisfactorily acquitted previous grants to Council, have overdue acquittals or have outstanding debts;
- Political or religious groups seeking to promote their core beliefs;
- Fundraising activities;
- Retrospective requests.
- Projects and activities that have already received Council funding for the same or a similar activity in the same funding period.

If you are not eligible, other avenues for support are available, including:

- Community Grants Program: For projects requiring financial assistance
- Community Facilities Access and Use Policy: For one-off fee waivers or subsidised bookings outside this program's rounds.

3. Assessment

Stage One

The EOIs are reviewed and assessed based on the criteria outlined in the section on Eligibility criteria.

Eligible applicants will progress to Stage Two.

Stage Two

A panel of relevant officers and external stakeholders will assess the applications:

Assessment criterion	weighting
Encourage and develop community participation	20%
Develop community stakeholder relationships (including arts and cultural organisations)	20%
Clearly demonstrates community connection and alignment with CGD programming priorities.	20%
Increase and activate CGD facilities by engaging community	20%
The activity or program demonstrates potential to deliver a high-quality outcome	10%
Demonstrates safety compliance relevant to activity (eg Child Safe practices, cultural safety)	10%

It will be important that you outline the number of hours you are likely to require for the duration of your program, as well as preferred days/times. There is a limited allocation of spaces and available times, so requests cannot be guaranteed until contracted and booked. *See appendix for venue details.*

Staffing and equipment

Staffing and technical support are not automatically included. If required, applicants must outline how these costs will be covered. Additional technical equipment may incur fees.

Box office services

All tickets for events held at City of Greater Dandenong venues must be sold through our Bookable Events Box Office Service. A per-ticket service fee may apply.

Marketing

Council will promote supported programs through its channels (e.g. website, social media, newsletters). The program does not cover applicant marketing expenses. Applicants are encouraged to promote their activities independently and tag Council for cross-promotion opportunities.

Other in-kind support

Council officers may also provide advice, networking, and coordination assistance to help develop sustainable community programs and to find new audiences.

4. Budget and supporting material

You will be asked to include a budget as appropriate to demonstrate you have the resources to deliver the program.

- Your budget should include:
 - Maximum number of hours requested
 - Value of the support requested: the venue hire cost (community rate) which can be found in Council's schedule of fees and charges under each [venue for hire](#).
 - Other expenses (eg artist fees)
 - Project income (eg estimated ticket sales for performance outcome) if relevant
 - Other support for the project (cash or in-kind), including from your own organisation
- You will need to include supporting material (weblink, images, documents) that demonstrate:
 - Your track record with such programs and the quality of the program and personnel involved
 - Evidence of partnerships / collaborations if relevant
 - Evidence of safety compliance relevant to the activity (eg working with children checks, risk assessment)

6. Requirements for successful applicants

Successful grant recipients will be required to:

- Sign a grant agreement and adhere to the terms and conditions of the use of facilities, including providing all insurance requirements.
- Acknowledge the support of the City of Greater Dandenong on all promotional material (print and online) and in any speeches or announcements made at supported events. The City of Greater Dandenong must approve the use of logos before the printing or displaying of the material.
- Provide progress reports depending on the length of the engagement in the Creative Access Program; Submit a final report and acquittal within four weeks of completion.

7. Assistance

Application tips:

It is a good idea to create a Word document for your answers and cut and paste into the fields. This will avoid any issues with losing data and helps with word count.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to discuss proposals with Council officers before applying.

For program related question, please contact arts@cgd.vic.gov.au

For questions related to SmartyGrants user account, please contact service@smartygrants.com.au .

Appendix

Venues

Council's cultural and community facilities are available for in-kind use subject to existing bookings and staffing. Indicative options include:

Venue	Available spaces	Available (in-kind)
Walker St Gallery & Art Centre	Black Box Band Room	Most times, subject to availability
Drum Theatre	Rehearsal Room Function rooms (carpeted)	Monday – Friday 10am -4pm, subject to availability
The Castle	Single space with stage. No technical equipment.	Most times, subject to availability
Heritage Hill Museum and Historic Gardens	Various heritage spaces and gardens	Wednesday – Thursday 10am-2pm; Saturday 11am – 3pm, subject to availability
Community hubs and facilities	Venues for Hire Greater Dandenong Council	Subject to availability