

DATE OF MEETING OCTOBER 5, 2020

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SUBJECT PROGRAM REVIEW OF CULTURAL GRANTS

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To highlight issues related to the City's current grant funding programs through Culture & Events, and to seek endorsement from Council for Staff to undertake a program review including research on best practices and dialogue with stakeholders.

Recommendation

That the Governance and Priorities Committee direct Council to endorse a review of the three grant funding programs administered by Culture & Events (Culture & Heritage Operating Grants, Culture & Heritage Project Grants, and Downtown Event Revitalization Grants), including research on best practices and dialogue with community stakeholders, and return with recommendations to improve and evolve processes to continue to meet the needs of the Nanaimo cultural community.

BACKGROUND

Currently, three streams of grant funding are administered annually through Culture & Events, within the department of Parks Recreation and Culture:

- Culture & Heritage Operating Grants
- Culture & Heritage Project Grants
- Downtown Event Revitalization Fund (Downtown Event Grants)

Intake is now open for 2021 funding with an application deadline of 2020-OCT-19. In the last cycle, 47 organizations received funds through these programs, for a total of \$500,092.

In past years, grant applications were received and reviewed by Staff, then forwarded to a Council-appointed body for review, discussion and adjudication. The Cultural Committee, the Culture and Heritage Commission, and the Cultural Vitality Committee each played a role in reviewing and assessing applications, and making recommendations on funding amounts to Council for final approval.

The most recent comprehensive review of Culture & Heritage funding was undertaken in 2014, shortly after the approval of *A Cultural Plan for a Creative Nanaimo 2014-2020* and in conjunction with the creation of a Culture & Heritage department. At that time, the City engaged Melinda Mollineaux, a consultant who brought expertise on public sector arts funding to the project. Mollineaux's report, which included a comparative analysis of municipal funding for arts and culture in other jurisdictions within BC (Kelowna, Kamloops, Prince George, Victoria and the Capital Regional District), made a number of detailed recommendations on program design and process. Many of the recommendations were adopted and implemented.

DISCUSSION

This year, Staff have undertaken preliminary research on best practices related to municipal funding of arts and culture, including issues related to the assessment of grant applications. Jury panels consisting of community peers members assembled on a program-by program basis to assess applications are common practice in some municipalities, while others charge an inter-departmental group of Staff to undertake this work, before the final approval comes from Council. Both models have advantages and disadvantages.

An in-depth grant program review by Staff will look closely at some of the following issues:

- How other public funders have shifted their models to address issues of equity, accessibility and diversity
- Appropriate levels of funding (i.e. the percentage at which the City should fund organizations and projects)
- Feasibility of moving to an online system for applications
- Eligibility requirements, assessment criteria and budget requirements for grant applicants
- Reporting requirements that provide appropriate information without becoming onerous for small organizations
- How public funders are addressing the issue of compensation for peer-assessment labour and how these panels are appointed
- Identifying and reducing barriers to ensure accountability and transparency, while also being responsive to address the needs of the arts and culture community

Staff are well positioned to undertake this work, with new team members that have professional expertise in non-profit governance, arts management, grant writing and reporting, and experience convening and participating in grant adjudication processes at municipal, provincial and federal levels.]

OPTIONS

1. That the Governance and Priorities Committee direct Council to endorse a review of the three grant funding programs administered by Culture & Events (Culture & Heritage Operating Grants, Culture & Heritage Project Grants, and Downtown Event Revitalization Grants), including research on best practices and dialogue with community stakeholders, and return with recommendations to improve and evolve processes to continue to meet the needs of the Nanaimo cultural community.
 - The advantages of this option: Council will be provided with information and recommendations to enhance the City's cultural grant programs to ensure that resources are being leveraged and deployed in a way that is efficient, transparent, and provides support for the individuals and organizations delivering cultural programs and services in Nanaimo. This process will be supported and enhanced by REIMAGINE NANAIMO community consultations.
 - The disadvantages of this option: This project will involve an investment of Staff time.
 - Financial Implications: None.
2. That Council provide alternative direction.

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SUMMARY POINTS

- Currently, three streams of grant funding are administered annually through Culture & Events, within the department of Parks Recreation and Culture: Culture & Heritage Operating Grants, Culture & Heritage Project Grants, and the Downtown Event Revitalization Fund (Downtown Event Grants).
- In 2014, a comprehensive review of Culture & Heritage funding was undertaken by Melinda Mollineaux. From the review came a number of detailed recommendations on program design and process, many of which were adopted and implemented.
- Staff are seeking endorsement to undertake a new review the grant funding programs administered by Culture & Events, including research on best practices and dialogue with community stakeholders, and return with recommendations to improve and evolve processes to continue to meet the needs of the Nanaimo cultural community.

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