

**Submission  
No 61**

**INQUIRY INTO INTEGRITY, EFFICACY AND VALUE FOR  
MONEY OF NSW GOVERNMENT GRANT PROGRAMS**

**Organisation:** Penrith City Council

**Date Received:** 23 August 2020

---



# SUBMISSION

## PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO THE INTEGRITY, EFFICACY AND VALUE FOR MONEY OF NSW GOVERNMENT GRANT PROGRAMS

Penrith City Council welcomes the opportunity to provide commentary to the Inquiry into the integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grant programs.

### CONTEXT

The Penrith Local Government Area covers 404km<sup>2</sup> and is home to around 212,000 (ABS Estimated Resident Population 2020). The City has seen significant, sustained population growth over many decades, doubling between 1966 and 1976 and almost doubling again in the last 20 years. Penrith has also transitioned from a city on the fringe of a capital city to become a major regional centre, supporting a catchment of more than one million people for employment, services, retail, health and education.

This significant growth, alongside Penrith's large catchment, requires infrastructure, facilities and service delivery beyond that which can be borne by local ratepayers. For this reason, Penrith Council is appreciative of, and supportive of State and Federal government grant programs which can provide additional amenity and support worthwhile projects for the community, both residents and those drawn from other areas.

Council has strong links to the community and engages regularly to ascertain needs and aspirations, developing strategies and actions which can often only be serviced through partnering with other levels of government, including grants programs.

### SUBMISSION:

Our submission responds to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference as follows:

*(a) the range and availability of funding programs, including but not limited to:*

*(i) discretionary grants funds such as the Premier's Discretionary Fund and the Deputy Premier's Miscellaneous Grants*

*(ii) local government funding such as the Stronger Communities Fund and Stronger Country Communities Fund,*

*(iii) arts funding such as the Regional Cultural Fund,*

*(iv) sports funding such as the Greater Sydney Sports Facility Fund and the Regional Sports Infrastructure Fund,*

*(v) jobs for NSW funding, including the review into Jobs for NSW.*

The number, type, and diversity of funding programs currently available provide multiple and significant opportunity for Council to leverage its own budgets and, for community groups unable to fund projects, access to resources for both infrastructure and service delivery.

Council has a preference for grant opportunities which align with its key strategy directions and, support projects that have been developed as a result of comprehensive consultative and engagement processes.



Existing NSW Government grant program objectives generally align with desired Council outcomes including; promoting participation, capacity building of community groups, driving social and economic growth and sustainability, promoting infrastructure and service delivery excellence, developing sport or arts activity, creating active, healthy and vibrant communities and developing the liveability of the area.

We believe the intent, objectives and outcomes of grant programs are clearly stated and communicated through a range of mechanisms which are readily available. Opportunity to clarify grant application requirements is usually provided through direct contact with the grant administrators and, also, via webinars at the beginning of the process.

Given the funding opportunities available, the NSW Government may wish to consider that, where grants are similar in their intent, objectives and outcomes and opportunities it might be possible to consolidate these into fewer programs and increase maximum funding amounts available. This could reduce administration needs for both applicants and agencies in assessment and, also, enable Councils to target applications appropriately without tying up co-funding that may be required while awaiting decisions.

Specifically, in relation to Arts funding opportunities, in 2015 Deloitte Access Economics found that while Western Sydney represents 1 in 10 Australians, the region attracts only 5.5 % of NSW arts, heritage and events funding and 1% of Commonwealth arts program funding.

As populations in Western Sydney continue to increase, Council welcomes any investment in arts and cultural facilities in the region to both redress the legacy of funding shortfalls and provide a higher level of equity in the future.

Funding for arts and cultural facilities in Western Sydney is largely drawn from local Councils including facilities of a regional standard that draw audiences and provide opportunities for large catchments beyond their geographic boundaries.

Council would welcome the reintroduction of specialist funding cultural development and cultural facility funding for Western Sydney.

In terms of the Greater Sydney Sports Facility Fund, it was identified as a three-year program with \$100m made available. Two rounds have now been completed. Given the value of projects submitted to each round being considerably more than the grant funding available it would be appropriate for consideration of funding levels to be increased should there be future programs.

Strategic alignment of the program and funding with prioritised facility infrastructure plans of the sport sector, based demonstrated needs analyses, will strengthen the program and ensure connection between grassroots to elite sport infrastructure provision. The NSW Office of Sport has collected Future Needs of Sport data and has been developing District Plans. Publication of this documentation would provide a framework to guide Greater Sydney Sport Fund Programs.

Finally, given there is one more round of the Greater Sydney Sports Facility Fund currently programmed an early determination on the extension of this program and funding levels to be made available would be valuable to potential



applicants in developing projects and funding strategies for future sport infrastructure provision.

*(b) the manner in which grants are determined, including:*

- (i) the oversight of funding determinations,*
- (ii) the transparency of decision making under grants schemes,*
- (iii) the independence of the assessment of projects,*
- (iv) the role of Members of Parliament in proposing projects for funding,*
- (v) the scope of Ministers' discretion in determining which projects are approved*

It is difficult to provide specific commentary about each of items listed without being involved in the grant determining process.

Council submits grant applications, and has supported community grant applications, based on alignment of its strategies, projects and financial resource availability to the grant criteria and guidelines published. Council has in the past been successful and unsuccessful in its applications to multiple grant programs.

It is understood that when submitting applications there will be a competitive process with outcomes a result of evidence-based decisions based on clear and objective assessments by grant administrators. As part of the grant determination process the following considerations may be considered:

- Potential grant applicants could be assisted through the publication of a consolidated 'calendar' of NSW Government grant program opening and closing dates as well as grant determination/announcement dates and, in the case of multi-year grant programs, for these to be advertised in the first year of the grant program. Critically, established and advertised dates should be adhered to.
- When grants are made available to the community to apply and there are implications for Council resources such as financial support, impacts on assets, support for service delivery and the like, before determination, Council could be provided with the opportunity to provide commentary. This would confirm the alignment of the applications with Council's priority needs which have been established through consultative and planning processes.

*(c) measures necessary to ensure the integrity of grants schemes and public confidence in the allocation of public money*

Existing measures are evident to ensure the integrity of grants schemes through the publication of grant criteria, grant application form information requirements, funding agreements, milestone reporting, and grant acquittals and evaluation reports.

As highlighted in the response to part (b) it is understood that grant applications are submitted in a competitive environment and that grant administrators make evidence-based decisions based on clear and objective assessments.



In order to strengthen the existing range of measures already in place the following could be considered.

- Guidelines, assessment tools and priorities should always be available for review during a grant round.
- Grant assessment should be well resourced with appropriately trained grant administrators. An independent body should be involved in decision making.
- Assessment should not solely rely on the quality of the application but rather the merit of the application. Projects should be prioritised in line with;
  - The greatest identified need, evidence-based outcomes, alignment with relevant statistical data.
  - Those projects which are linked or identified with a strategic planning context and are endorsed by the relevant peak sports or arts organisations.
  - Generating participation and, improving the liveability of an area.
  - Partnerships that 'value-add' and generate social and economic return on investment.
- Decision making should be documented, transparent and published.
- There should always be a meaningful feedback mechanism.
- Advisory task forces, constituting independent and industry experts, could be established to review grant programs and advise Government of recommendations for continuous improvements.

*(d) any other related matter*

There are no other related matters to be raised in this submission.