

Report to Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee

To: Chair and Members
Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee

From: Cheryl Smith, Deputy City Manager, Neighbourhood and
Community-Wide Services

Subject: Anonymized Application Review for the London Community
Grants Program

Date: February 8, 2022

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager, Neighbourhood and Community-Wide Services, the following report on an Anonymized Application Review for the London Community Grants Program **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of ongoing work to remove barriers that racialized and marginalized groups may face when applying for the London Community Grants Program (LCGP) and specifically reviews the idea of an anonymized application process for the Program. Through a municipal scan, sector expert interviews, and a literature scan, it was concluded that while common practice in academic and scientific research funding; anonymized applications are not widely used in municipal or not-for-profit sector funding and are not recommended for the LCGP at this time.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

The London Community Grants Program is aligned with two strategic areas of focus, as presented in the City of London Strategic Plan 2019-2023.

- Strengthening Our Community – Londoners are engaged and have a sense of belonging in their neighbourhoods and community.
- Creating a Safe London for Women and Girls – London has enhanced the potential for women and girls to live safe lives.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

- [London Community Grants Program Policy Update](#) (January 26, 2021)
- [London Community Grants Program Allocations](#) (November 25, 2019)
- [London Community Grants Policy Update](#) (April 8, 2019)
- [London Community Grants Program: 2017 Annual Report & 2018 Innovation and Capital Stream Outcomes and Sustainability Plans](#) (March 26, 2018)
- [London Community Grants Program Innovation & Capital Funding Allocations](#) (September 17, 2018)
- [London Community Grants Program Innovation & Capital Funding Allocations](#) (September 18, 2017)

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

2.1 Background and Purpose

At its meeting held on February 2, 2021, Municipal Council resolved that the following action be taken with respect to the London Community Grants Program:
the Civic Administration **BE DIRECTED** to bring back recommendations for the potential introduction of an anonymized application process for the London

Community Grants Program that could be implemented for 2022 funding allocations and be used going forward. (2.1/4/SPPC)

The purpose of this report is to present findings from a review into the potential introduction of an anonymized application process for the LCGP and to provide an update on the ongoing LCGP review and next steps.

2.2 Anonymized Applications Key Findings

Anonymous review processes allow for the assessment of grant proposals without the inclusion of identifying information about the applicant. This concept has been used by some funders in an attempt to remove bias from the peer review process and stimulate innovation. While there are examples of funders implementing this process in scientific and academic communities it has not been widely adopted in the not-for-profit sector.

A municipal scan, interviews with sector experts, and a literature scan were used to develop the key findings included below. Further details can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Key Findings

- The use of anonymized applications presents both advantages and challenges and should be considered within the larger context of the grant review process and the objectives of the grant program.
- None of the municipalities interviewed used anonymized applications or recommended their use.
- None of the sector experts interviewed recommended the use of anonymized applications.

Themes

1. Proper administration of anonymized applications is complex.
 - Rather than simply removing an organization's name from the application, anonymization may require several steps and can add a significant amount of administrative burden.
 - Proper anonymization must remove identifying information while still allowing applicants to tell their story, including references to their mission, vision, goals, challenges, and voices of the communities they represent.
 - It is difficult to effectively conduct financial and risk assessments of anonymized applications, due to the limitations that anonymization imposes on supporting documentation such as financial records, proof of insurance, not-for-profit incorporation, etc.
 - The Community Review Panel must know the applicant identity in order to claim any conflict of interest prior to conducting an evaluation.
2. Use of anonymized applications can create unintended barriers for potential applicants.
 - Funders who are looking for diversity of applicants, particularly from underrepresented groups, may have difficulty meeting this goal with anonymous applications.
 - Grassroots organizations may want funders to know their identity in order to be recognized as a new or emerging service provider or group.
 - Using anonymized applications can create unintentional bias. For example, removing identifying information puts more focus on past accomplishments and history of funding received, rather than on potential.
 - Research on the effectiveness of anonymous applications to reduce bias is mixed. There is no consensus that anonymous applications are effective, on their own, as a tool to reduce bias.

3. If the granting process is equitable, anonymized applications are not necessary.
 - Municipalities that were interviewed as well as sector experts emphasized that a fair, transparent, and well-designed application process negates the need for anonymized applications.
 - If there are specific aspects of the application process that create barriers for potential applicants, it is better to fix those problems instead of using anonymized applications as a potential solution to these problems.
4. Anonymized applications are not a best practice in municipal or not-for-profit sector granting.
 - None of the municipalities interviewed used anonymized applications or recommended their use.
 - While anonymous applications are used in some academic and scientific granting, anonymized applications are not common in the not-for-profit sector.
 - Leaders in the not-for-profit sector are investigating the concept of redefining grant funding applications and related processes to better suit the applicant rather than the funder. Examples of this include trust-based philanthropy, single application portal for all funders, and alternate methods of applications such as story telling.

Based on the key findings presented in this report, and the current review taking place to remove barriers for racialized and marginalized groups, the introduction of an anonymized application process is not recommended at this time.

3.0 LCGP Review Update and Next Steps

Civic Administration is currently conducting a review of the LCGP to identify ways to remove barriers that racialized and marginalized groups may experience when applying for the program, as outlined in the [London Community Grants Program Policy Update](#) (January 26, 2021). As part of the review, two consulting firms with local expertise, Kiinew Kwe and Senomi Solutions Inc., were hired to engage and consult with community stakeholders.

From September to December 2021, consultants designed and administered an online survey, conducted interviews, and held focus groups with a wide cross section of racialized and marginalized groups and organizations.

Results from the LCGP review will be used to develop recommendations, and suggested actions for Council's consideration. All future changes to the London Community Grants Program will be fully implemented by the next multi-year funding cycle (2024 – 2027).

On March 28th, the application process for the 2022 LCGP Innovation and Capital stream will launch. Through this granting stream close to \$496,000 is allocated annually for programs and initiatives that align with the City of London's Strategic Plan or Council-directed emerging priorities.

Conclusion

This report outlines initial work completed to identify barriers that racialized and marginalized groups may face when applying to the London Community Grants Program. There is still work to do. Efforts to support a more inclusive and barrier free London Community Grants Program continue.

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Appendix A: Research Sources

Municipal scan

A scan of 13 Canadian municipalities was completed from July 1 – October 1, 2021. Interviews were conducted with staff who lead municipal grant programs in each city and relevant documents were reviewed and analyzed.

Municipalities included in scan:

- City of Calgary
- City of Edmonton
- City of Hamilton
- City of Oshawa
- City of Ottawa
- City of Toronto
- City of Vancouver
- City of Waterloo
- City of Windsor
- City of Winnipeg
- City Red Deer Alberta
- Region of Peel
- York Region

Interviews with sector experts and funders

- Director, Equity, Inclusion and Governance, Pillar Nonprofit Network
- Manager, Verge Capital
- Director, Grants, London Community Foundation
- Director Community Impact, United Way Elgin Middlesex
- Admissions at Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry