

REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

Grants Program Policy Review and Update

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Director of Corporate Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Grants Program Policy 6.26, be amended as attached to Report CS 2025-12 entitled “Grants Program Policy Review and Update”, dated March 26, 2025.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The Grants Program Policy, adopted in 2024, was to establish a governance framework for the annual disbursement of grant funds to local non-profit organizations and economic development offices.
- A review of the first year’s Grants Program will ensure the policy and procedures are well defined for the approval authorities and the grant applicants; and satisfies Council’s expectations of the governance model.

IMPLEMENTATION POINTS

Upon Council’s approval of the recommendation contained in this report, the Grants Program Policy will be updated in the County’s General Policy Manual and posted on the website, and staff will proceed with inviting applications under the 2026 Grants Program starting May 1, 2025.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts associated with the recommendation contained in this report beyond what has been approved in the current year’s budget.

Communications




The Strategic Communications and Engagement Team will initiate the 2026 Grants Program promotion campaign and the Manager of Strategic Initiatives will engage the Safe and Well Oxford Committee in considering potential initiatives that could benefit from the grant program.

2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

Oxford County Council approved the **2023-2026 Strategic Plan** on September 13, 2023. The Plan outlines 39 goals across three strategic pillars that advance Council's vision of "Working together for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future." These pillars are: (1) *Promoting community vitality*, (2) *Enhancing environmental sustainability*, and (3) *Fostering progressive government*.

The recommendation in this report supports the following strategic goals.

Strategic Plan Pillars and Goals

PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 3
		
Promoting community vitality	Enhancing environmental sustainability	Fostering progressive government
Goal 1.1 – 100% Housed Goal 1.2 – Sustainable infrastructure and development Goal 1.3 – Community health, safety and well-being Goal 1.4 – Connected people and places	Goal 2.1 – Climate change mitigation and adaptation Goal 2.2 – Preserve and enhance our natural environment	Goal 3.1 – Continuous improvement and results-driven solutions Goal 3.2 – Collaborate with our partners and communities Goal 3.3 – Attract, retain and engage staff Goal 3.4 – Financial sustainability Goal 3.5 – Advocate for Oxford County

See: [Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#)

DISCUSSION

Background

In response to a Council resolution arising from the 2024 business plan and budget process, staff developed a Grant Program Policy that was approved at their September 11, 2024 meeting. At the time of passing, Council gave staff direction to report back prior to commencing the 2026 Grant Program with any recommended changes for Council's consideration. The intent of the direction was to review the effectiveness and allow for improvements that may be identified in the first year of introducing the Program.

As part of the 2025 Business Plan and Budget process, there was a \$250,000 grant provision for the purpose of investing in initiatives within the community that would advance County Council's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, Safe and Well Oxford Plan and the efforts of Area Municipal Economic Development Offices.

In the first year of the Grant Program, the County received 16 applications. In accordance with the Policy, a Grant Approval Committee was established to evaluate and approve the grant applications which included the CAO, Director of Corporate Services, Acting Director of Human Services and Manager of Strategic Initiatives. The process was facilitated by the County's Procurement Officer who guided the decision making process as established within the Grants Program Procedure. That review process identified three successful applications meeting the Program criteria, being Creative Connection (Area Municipal Economic Development Offices), the Small Business Centre and Domestic Abuse Services Oxford. The grant allocations awarded totaled \$131,500, leaving \$118,500 remaining in the approved budget allocation.

Comments

Throughout the initial roll out of the Grant Program, staff noted weaknesses in policy wording to clarify interpretation; improvements to the procedure to clarify roles; and adjustments to the application to clarify eligibility. Staff also sought feedback from some applicants and a prior grant recipient regarding the program for input on potential improvements to the policy, related documents and information.

In response, the following provides a summary of proposed changes to the Grants Program Policy:

- A definition for "project" has been added to clarify that it refers to an initiative or event put forward by an eligible organization.
- Identifies the Safe and Well Oxford Steering Committee and their option to review applications for alignment with goals and objectives set out in the Safe and Well Oxford Plan for consideration of grant funding.

- Guiding Principles is updated indicating that eligible organizations shall identify the alignment between their project with the Safe and Well Oxford Plan and/or the Oxford County Strategic Plan; and that the grant application shall provide details of the project sustainability to continue to serve and operate in the future independently of the County's grant program funding.
- The Eligible Organizations and Expenses paragraph reinforces that the project or community event must be broadly available to, and impact, a large number of people within the community and include targeted groups identified in the Safe and Well Oxford Plan; and initiatives that are not currently or sufficiently supported in the community.
- The list of ineligible expenses has been expanded to exclude those currently funded through other Oxford County programs; and operational costs for ongoing or existing programs.

A redlined version of the proposed amendments to the Grant Program Policy can be found in Attachment 1 and minor amendments to the Grants Program Procedure are provided in Attachment 2. Staff are of the opinion that this review and implementation of the proposed amendments will meet Council's expectations of the program and service the community well until the next planned review following an update to the County's Strategic Plan.

CONCLUSIONS

The initial year of a governance framework for the disbursement of grant funding to local non-profit organizations and local economic development offices as set out in the Grants Program Policy, has proven to ensure that municipal funds are allocated transparently, equitably, and in alignment with the County's strategic plan. Enhanced by the proposed amendments to the framework will reinforce the structured approach, clarify accountability, strengthen community partnerships, and deliver tangible benefits to residents.

SIGNATURES

Departmental approval:

Original signed by _____

Lynn S. Buchner, CPA, CGA
Director of Corporate Services

Approved for submission:

Original signed by _____

Benjamin R. Addley
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Grants Program Policy 6.26, redlined version

Attachment 2 – Grants Program Procedure 6.26, redlined version