

City of Mississauga
Corporate Report



<p>Date: September 13, 2024</p>	<p>Originator's files:</p>
<p>To: Chair and Members of Subcommittee of Council - Arts, Culture, Festival Groups</p> <p>From: Jodi Robillos, Commissioner of Community Services</p>	<p>Meeting date: September 19, 2024</p>

Subject

Summary of Feedback and Staff Response to Culture Subcommittee of Council – Arts, Culture, Festival Groups

Recommendation

1. That the Corporate Report entitled “Summary of Feedback and Staff Response to Culture Subcommittee of Council – Arts, Culture, Festivals Groups” dated September 13, 2024 from the Commissioner of Community Services be approved.
2. That staff include recommendations in this report relating to grant funding in the 2025 Budget.
3. That staff develop an action plan to implement process improvements and address logistical supports requested by the arts, cultural and festival groups.
4. That staff meet annually with groups to continue to gain feedback and process improvements and report back to Council on proposed changes in advance of the Grant application process.

Executive Summary

- On June 26, 2024, Council established a subcommittee of Council to consider the feedback of arts, culture, heritage, and festival community partners to determine how the City can best support the needs of these groups and continue to collaborate to ensure a thriving arts and culture sector and economy in Mississauga.
- Opportunities for consultation were provided both through meetings where the committee heard from 22 groups and an online survey with 37 responses.
- The majority of culture groups have indicated that increasing operating costs are continuing to put pressure on their organizations and the City's funding allocations have

not increased accordingly. Staff will be bringing forward a recommendation through the annual budget process to continue to increase the Arts & Culture grant budget incrementally over the next 5 years. This increase is expected to be funded through the City's portion of the Municipal Accommodation Tax.

- A request was made to consider longer-term agreements to provide stability in funding and minimize the administrative burden for both the community group and City staff. This could include additional groups being eligible to apply for multi-year grant funding and for larger established cultural organizations, the ability to receive funding outside of the annual grant process through a direct agreement with the city.
- Throughout the deputations and survey results from festival and event groups, a common source of feedback was the need for an earlier decision process for when dates are allocated at MCS. Staff recommend that the 2025 intake for large events on the square consider applications for both 2025 and 2026, providing organizers with over a year's notice and date certainty annually, aiming to maximize programming at MCS where possible.
- Feedback indicated a need for investment in event spaces beyond MCS to support festivals across the City. This has been identified through the 2024 Future Directions Parks, Forestry & Environment Plan and will be considered through the capital budget process.
- Several groups had noted capacity challenges within their organizations with opportunities for City staff to provide additional support in a variety of areas. To address this, staff will formally establish both internal and external Special Events Advisory Teams (SEAT) to improve internal communication, collaboration and process improvements to support events throughout the city.
- Through ongoing consultation with stakeholders, staff are committed to further improvements to the administrative process, schedule, guidelines and transparency in the evaluation criteria in the years ahead for both the Grant process and Applications for Large Events on the square. We aim to ensure that groups we have not heard from during this process will have additional opportunities to contribute their expertise to shape grant & festival application guidelines as we move forward.

Background

Over the last year, cultural community groups have expressed concerns through both the grant administration process and the large event application process for Mississauga Celebration Square (MCS), where demand has grown significantly. As a result, on June 26, 2024, Council had established a subcommittee of Council to consider the feedback of arts, culture, heritage,

and festival community partners to determine how the City can best support the needs of these groups and continue to collaborate to ensure a thriving arts and culture sector and economy in Mississauga.

On July 18, 2024, staff presentations to the subcommittee outlined the existing process for both grant administration and the large event application process. Following the staff presentations, representatives from eight cultural groups attended the meeting on August 13, 2024 to speak to their current challenges regarding the city's Arts & Culture grant program. Lastly, fourteen festival groups were provided an opportunity to share their concerns at the meeting on September 5, 2024, followed by a staff presentation to outline the Sauga Celebrates program which supports events in City of Mississauga parks.

To ensure all arts, cultural and festival community groups had an opportunity to share their feedback, a survey was deployed on July 26, 2024 and sent to applicable stakeholders (including all grant recipients and festival organizers). The survey was open for 6 weeks with 37 responses received.

Comments

In reviewing the feedback from both the survey and the presentations from community groups, several themes emerged as opportunities for improvement. While the information captured in the report is simply a summary, all feedback was received and will be considered by staff.

Funding Needs

The majority of culture groups have indicated that increasing operating costs are continuing to put pressure on their organizations and the City's funding allocations have not increased accordingly. While the overall grant budget had increased annually from 2017 through to 2023, it has remained the same in 2024, limiting the review committee's ability to increase funding. In 2024, there was a record total of 81 applicants to culture grants. With this added demand, the amount requested relative to what could be accommodated was short by \$1,066,108.

Staff will be bringing forward a recommendation through the annual budget process to continue to increase the Arts & Culture grant budget incrementally over the next 5 years. Demand will continue to be monitored closely, with comprehensive reviews on a five-year cycle. This increase is expected to be funded through the City's portion of the Municipal Accommodation Tax.

Application and Evaluation Process

Grants

Groups have shared several challenges with the current application processes, noting that they take a significant amount of administrative effort to complete. Additionally, there was feedback to allow for increased notice time for decisions, flexibility with timelines for submitting documentation and increased transparency of the evaluation criteria.

A request was made to consider longer-term agreements to provide stability in funding and minimize the administrative burden for both the community group and City staff. Staff will explore this opportunity further. This could include additional groups being eligible to apply for multi-year grant funding and for larger established cultural organizations, the ability to receive funding outside of the annual grant process through a direct agreement with the city.

With the launch of the 2025 grant process this summer, several improvements have been made to update the application, including an improved format of questions that relate clearly to evaluation criteria and a significantly reduced financial reporting required. These changes to streamline the process have received very positive initial feedback from potential applicants and groups are encouraged to apply by October 11, 2024.

Festivals & Events

Throughout the deputations and survey results from festival and event groups, a common source of feedback was the need for an earlier decision process for when dates are allocated at MCS. In addition, groups desired more transparency and equity with the selection process for square events and recommended improvements to simplify the application process. Many survey respondents praised the support from City staff, noting that the staff was professional, reliable and helpful in navigating the application and event hosting process.

Staff recommend that the 2025 intake for large events on the square consider applications for both 2025 and 2026, providing organizers with over a year's notice and date certainty, aiming to maximize programming at MCS where possible. This will continue moving forward to allow organizers to know their event dates a year in advance at the square, where possible.

Through ongoing consultation with stakeholders, staff are committed to further improvements to the administrative process, schedule, guidelines and evaluation criteria in the years ahead for both the Grant process and Applications for Large Events on the square.

Infrastructure Needs

Beyond the desire for additional staff support, feedback indicated a need for investment in event spaces beyond MCS to support festivals across the City. This has been identified through the 2024 Future Directions Parks, Forestry & Environment Plan and will be considered through the capital budget process.

Support for Community Groups

Several groups had noted capacity challenges within their organizations with opportunities for City staff to provide additional support in a variety of areas. This feedback was received from both grant applicants and event organizers throughout the city.

Over the next year staff will continue to develop tools and process improvements to best support the groups in their areas of need. Staff intend to deliver workshops on grant applications and improved marketing strategies. A thorough review of the benefits available through the

Community Group Registry Program will occur to explore additional opportunities to enhance the benefits for the groups (i.e. communication of events through city channels).

Additionally, staff will formally establish both internal and external Special Events Advisory Teams (SEAT) to improve internal communication, collaboration and process improvements to support events throughout the city. The goal would be to achieve a single Special Events Permit issued to organizers to improve efficiency and reduce administrative burden.

City staff are committed to ongoing engagement with community groups to ensure transparency and accountability, and to ensure that groups we haven't heard from during this process will have additional opportunities to contribute their expertise. Continued engagement will help continue to shape grant & festival application guidelines as we move forward.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts resulting from the Recommendations in this report. Any additional funding requirements will be brought forward during the City's annual budget process for Council's consideration.

Conclusion

The feedback received through the community consultation has been incredibly beneficial in identifying both strengths and opportunities in how the City can continue to best support the Arts & Culture sector. Staff are committed to continuous improvement and ongoing collaboration through partnership with the valuable arts & culture organizations and festivals to continue to make Mississauga a vibrant place where people choose to live, play, visit and thrive.



Jodi Robillos, Commissioner of Community Services

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