



2026 Community meals subsidy program guidelines

The City of Melbourne respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land we govern, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong / Boon Wurrung peoples of the Kulin and pays respect to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge and honour the unbroken spiritual, cultural and political connection they have maintained to this unique place for more than 2000 generations.

We accept the invitation in the Uluru Statement from the Heart and are committed to walking together to build a better future.

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Purpose - Community Grants and Partnerships Framework

Through the Community Grants and Partnerships Framework, the Community Meals Subsidy Program provides funding and support to not-for-profit organisations that deliver outcomes including:

- opportunities for social cohesion and connection
- wellbeing programs and events
- access to nutritious, safe, fair and culturally appropriate food
- safe and independent living

Section 1: About the 2026 Community meals subsidy program

Getting together to share a meal contributes to wellbeing, friendships and builds stronger communities. Food encourages attendance and participation in programs. It removes barriers, helps build trust and can be an introduction to other cultures. Bonds and social connections between individuals and communities are strengthened and can lead program participants to connect with other support programs.

The Community Meals Subsidy Program aims to:

- Strengthen the community's capacity to address loneliness and social isolation and support access to affordable meals, recreation, activities and other community services for older people.
- Encourage older people to participate in activities that improve their health, wellbeing, social connections and celebrate cultural diversity.
- Encourage opportunities for community volunteers to develop skills, self-confidence, and sense of community.
- Partner with community organisations and groups offering a range of services and activities for older people.
- Encourage community organisations to welcome new participants by encouraging inclusive practices and policies that foster a safe and welcoming environment.
- Contribute to food security for everyone, especially the most vulnerable and enable older people to enjoy a community meal in the company of friends.

Subsidy funding level

A subsidy of \$6.00 per meal is available, with the funding level based on the average number of participants at a usual group meeting, up to a maximum of 140 participants per session.

The total subsidy is calculated using average attendance across a maximum 12 meal sessions; however, the funding can be used across more sessions as required to ensure the total number of funded meals are delivered. Sessions will need to be held between January and December 2026 and can include flexible delivery to support members who are not able to attend face to face meal sessions at any time during the year (see Flexible Delivery Arrangements below).

Important dates

Applications open	9am Friday 1 August 2025
Information and assistance	If you are unable to complete the application form online due to access issues or you have difficulty using technology please contact us at healthyageing@melbourne.vic.gov.au or phone 03 9658 9190 and we will discuss how we can assist you to complete it.
Applications close	5pm Sunday 31 August 2025

Who can apply

To be eligible to apply for a community meals subsidy, an organisation must:

- be a not-for-profit community organisation, incorporated association or similar type of entity.
- offer the community meal within the City of Melbourne municipality, or have a minimum of eighty per cent of the participants residing in the City of Melbourne municipality if the program is located outside of the municipal boundaries (please see attached map).
- have a majority participants in the proposed community meals program aged 55 and over
- maintain public liability insurance of no less than \$10 million on terms accepted by Council and provide a certificate of currency of insurance
- have complied with previous funding and grants or subsidies including acquittal, have no outstanding acquittal reports or debts to the City of Melbourne and have a good reputation.

Flexible Delivery Arrangements

The City of Melbourne recognises that public health pressures including extreme heat, Influenza, COVID-19 and other conditions present a range of specific risks for older people. These challenges can lead to difficulty with planning and delivering activities and meals, while adhering to health advice and prioritising community safety. The 2026 community meal subsidy will continue to accommodate flexibility to adapt to changing community circumstances.

If face to face group meal sessions cannot be delivered, some alternative program delivery options may include:

- More frequent meal sessions with fewer participants or additional meal sessions to make up for any sessions missed.
- Additional meal sessions during the warmer months
- Meal deliveries for people unable to safely access group meal sessions
- Virtual meal sessions on-line together with other social online activities
- Food relief such as food package delivery or meal vouchers for group participants who cannot safely access a community meal or are experiencing food insecurity.

However, if applicants need to vary funded delivery arrangements, they must first notify the City of Melbourne to discuss the proposed changes and confirm that they are permitted under the program.

Terms and conditions

If your application is successful, you must (among other things):

1. Enter funding agreement with the Council and comply with it. The agreement provides details about the terms and conditions of funding.
2. Have a Committee of Management or team of people whether volunteers or staff with responsibility for coordinating the subsidised community meal sessions including all associated tasks such as: shopping, cooking, cleaning, ordering, monitoring food wastage, taking bookings and providing social interaction and connection to members.
3. Use the community meals subsidy as set out in your application within the relevant period (by the end of the funded year), noting that you must provide the number of meals you were funded to deliver or refund the unspent meal subsidy to Council alongside your acquittal report, which must be completed to Council's satisfaction through Smartygrants by the end of February 2026.
4. Fully indemnify Council in respect of personal injury, loss or damage of any kind arising from or in relation to the subsidised activities or any damages resulting from a breach of this agreement.
5. Maintain public liability insurance of no less than \$10 million on terms accepted by Council and provide a certificate of currency of insurance.
6. Provide information for Council to be reasonably satisfied that you have not-for-profit status such as your incorporation number and/or registration as a charity or not-for profit.
7. Provide a list of names, suburbs and ages of members participating in the community meals program, confirming a majority will be aged 55 and over.
8. Provide demographic data about your group members participating in the community meals program including average age, gender and language spoken.
9. Issue Council with an invoice (being a valid tax invoice if requested by Council) for the grant amount to trigger the requirement for Council to pay the above subsidy within a reasonable time of receipt of the invoice. If the applicant is registered for GST or is required to be registered for GST, a valid tax invoice is required and Council will pay the subsidy plus GST noting that you are liable to remit the GST.
10. Acknowledge Council's contribution in any promotional material, publicity and financial statements to members and invite the Lord Mayor and/or Councillors to any significant community meal event.
11. Comply with all laws and otherwise operate safely.
12. Inform Council if any of your organisation's details or circumstances change, particularly as represented in your application including but not limited to:
 - contact persons or other contact details such as email address, telephone numbers and postal addresses
 - date and venue details where the subsidised meals will be served
13. Be available for reviews or audits of the program as reasonably required by Council.
14. Agree that Council terminate this agreement with immediate effect if it is breached and such breach is not capable of being remedied as directed by Council, and Council reserves the right to require the full subsidy be reimbursed to Council upon termination. Before terminating a representative of the Council will first seek to discuss the subject issue or issues directly with your organisation.
15. Supply all requested information prior to any funding being released.

Accessibility

Accessibility is an important consideration and as such successful applicants need to consider accessibility as part of their planning of the community meals and put measures in place to ensure that the meals venue is accessible to people participating. For example, you may wish to check the venues for clear walkways, toilets, ramps, door handles at an accessible height, adequate lighting and adequate space between tables and chairs and designated parking for people with disabilities.

Environmentally sustainable practice

Applicants are encouraged to use resources wisely in the provision of community meals. Some ideas on environmentally sustainable practices include:

- shop carefully to minimise food wastage
- dispose of waste sustainably
- avoid using disposable crockery and cutlery or if you must use disposable products, ensure they are eco-friendly
- if eating out, choose restaurants that use eco-friendly products
- use eco-friendly dishwashing products
- print and advertise your programs and activities on 100% recycled paper
- encourage group members to use public transport, or walk to and from your meeting venue
- make sure staff and volunteers are aware of these practices and can communicate those to attendees
- include your environmental achievements in any electronic communications such as newsletters

Quality food

The *Victorian Food Act 1984* seeks to ensure food safety. Anyone selling food is required to comply with the Food Act. Please see the [Guide for community and not-for-profit](#)¹ groups that involve the sale of food

There are two main methods by which your organisation can provide the community meals:

1. Contract catering – Under this arrangement you may contract a caterer to prepare and/or deliver meals to your venue. The contract caterer must be a registered food premise with their local council and must comply with the Food Safety Standards. Alternatively, you do have the option to nominate to eat out at a restaurant located within the City of Melbourne or outside of the LGA municipality for group's with membership made up of at least 80% per cent of City of Melbourne residents.

2. Self-catering – Under this arrangement members of your group prepare the meals and do all the associated tasks of shopping, cooking, reheating, portioning, cleaning and serving. In this case, you are required to register your venue with Council's Health and Wellbeing Branch.

Community volunteers are encouraged to complete the Food Safety Unit's free, online learning program, DoFoodSafely, to improve knowledge of safe food handling techniques at [Do Food Safely](#)²

For further information regarding Food Act registration and food safety handling information contact the Council's Health and Wellbeing Branch on 9658 8815 or the Healthy Ageing Team, Ageing and Inclusion on 9658 9190.

Section 2: Completing your application

Submitting your application

Applications will be submitted online via SmartyGrants. SmartyGrants is the City of Melbourne's grants management software program. Applications can be accessed from the [Smartygrants](#)³ Council webpage <https://melbourne.smartygrants.com.au/2026CommunityMealsSubsidy>

¹ <https://content.health.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/migrated/files/collections/policies-and-guidelines/g/guide-for-community-not-for-profit-groups-act-food-safety-regulation-mar-18.pdf>

² <https://dofoodsafely.health.vic.gov.au/index.php/en/>

³ <https://melbourne.smartygrants.com.au/2026CommunityMealsSubsidy>

We can provide you with a hard (paper) copy of the application form for you to work with however the application must be lodged in SmartyGrants.

Applications will automatically be closed by the SmartyGrants system at 5pm Sunday 31 August 2025. Do not leave submitting your application until the last minute. If there is heavy use of the system with others submitting applications, there may be delays which will affect your ability to fully lodge your application before the deadline.

We can assist you with your application but please note that you are required to submit your application in English. Language and interpreter services are available, please let us know what language support you require.

Essential attachments

To ensure eligibility, applicants must provide the following.

- Proof of not-for-profit status such as an incorporation number
- A certificate of currency for public liability or other relevant insurance; if your group's application is being auspiced by another organisation they will need to attach the above attachments on your behalf.
- An up-to-date membership list of people participating in the program containing their suburb and age.

All essential documents need to be uploaded in SmartyGrants

Auspice organisations

To be eligible for the community meals subsidy, recipient organisations must be a not for profit legal entity such as an incorporated association. If your group is not a legal entity you will need to arrange for another not for profit incorporated association to 'auspice' your application and if successful, agrees to take legal and financial responsibility for administering the grant on your behalf and manage the subsidy. By doing this the auspice or host organisation is accepting all responsibility and will enter into an agreement with the Council.

Groups that enter into an auspice arrangement should have in place a Memorandum of Understanding (or equivalent) with their auspice organisation, specifying the nature of the auspice relationship and each organisation's roles and responsibilities.

Lobbying

Canvassing or lobbying of councillors, employees of the Council or assessment panel members in relation to any grant, subsidy and sponsorship applications is prohibited.

Contacts and assistance

SmartyGrants provides an online help guide for applicants. You can find this in the [Smartygrants help guide](#)⁴

If you experience technical issues with the SmartyGrants system please contact them directly on email service@smartygrants.com.au or by phone: (03) 9320 6888 Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

For general enquiries and assistance please contact Council during business hours on 9658 9190 and ask for the Healthy Ageing team or email healthyageing@melbourne.vic.gov.au

⁴ <https://applicanthelp.smartygrants.com.au/help-guide-for-applicants/>

Please let us know if you need a language or sign interpreter. For a language interpreter please let us know the language required. Or alternatively you can contact the Telephone Interpreting Service (TIS National) on 131 450.

If you are deaf, hearing-impaired, or speech-impaired, we ask that you call us via the National Relay Service on Teletypewriter (TTY) users phone 133 677 then ask for 03 9658 9190 or Speak and Listen users phone 1300 555 727 then ask for 03 9658 9190. The SMS relay number is 0423 677 767.

Section 3: Assessment and approval

Applications are assessed by an internal panel of Council officers based on the eligibility criteria and the objectives of the 2026 guidelines.

The Community Meals Subsidy Program is limited by the amount of funds available and applications will be viewed within the context of Council's overall budget. Applicants are not guaranteed funding nor can any applicant be guaranteed full funding. The assessment panel reserves the right to:

- Reject any application that does not meet eligibility, objectives or assessment criteria.
- Request further information in considering applications.
- Recommend partial funding.
- Recommend alternative use of funding in line with the information in your application on how the program will be modified during any period in 2026.

Applications that are ineligible will be excluded from the recommendations for approval and those applicants will be notified in writing.

Council is informed of the assessment panel's funding recommendations via a Councillor briefing note.

Timeline and process for successful applicants

Successful applicants will be notified in December 2025 or early in 2026 and asked to enter into an agreement in SmartyGrants. **Payments will be processed upon submission of any outstanding Community Meals Subsidy acquittals for 2025, as well as receipt of an invoice and updated public liability insurance.** Both of these documents need to be attached in SmartyGrants. Payments are usually transferred 30 days from the date of the invoice.

Unspent funds need to be refunded. This can be done by deducting outstanding funds from incoming grant payments or by refunding the unspent subsidy at the time of the acquittal or earlier depending on your circumstances. For example, if you receive the meal subsidy and the group makes a decision to disband before December 2026 then you must notify us immediately and refund any unspent subsidy.

The subsidy is awarded at \$6 per meal provided. If your acquittal report identifies you delivered less meals than you were funded to provide, the outstanding amount will be deemed unspent and will need to be refunded. This is regardless of whether or not overall program expenditure exceeds the total grant amount.

For example, if you are funded to provide a total of 480 meals at \$6 per meal, your grant will be \$2,880. If you only deliver 400 meals you will need to provide a refund of \$480, to account for the 80 missing meals, regardless of your overall program spend.

Application feedback

Decisions are final but applicants who are not satisfied with the decision of their application can request to meet with City of Melbourne officers to debrief.

Section 4: Acquittal reporting and record keeping

In February 2027, all successful applicants are required to provide a satisfactory acquittal report in SmartyGrants regarding:

- the number of subsidised meals provided
- details about any variations to the program
- information about the types of activities you have provided
- financial information
- your group's participant satisfaction rating for the program.

Please ensure that you maintain accurate records throughout the year for the purpose of the report. The information from the acquittal report will:

- account for the use of public funds, demonstrating that the subsidy is used for the provision of community meals at the capped rate per meal provided, in accordance with the Agreement
- assist us to assess if this funding program continues to meet the needs of older people in the city of Melbourne community
- provide you with the opportunity to make suggestions regarding improvements to the funding program.

If your organisation is auspiced by another organisation, the auspice must sign off and submit the form but it is expected that it will be completed collaboratively.

Once the City of Melbourne is satisfied with your acquittal report, this satisfies an obligation under the Service Agreement. If a satisfactory acquittal report is not provided, you will not be eligible to apply for further Council funding.

Privacy statement

The Council is committed to protecting your privacy in accordance with the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*. Any **personal** information collected by Council will be used for the purpose of assessing applications and requests for meals under the Community Meals Subsidy Program, to confirm the suburb where your members reside and any other directly related purpose.

This information will not be disclosed to any other external party without your consent, unless required or authorised by law. If you choose to provide the names and addresses of members to Council, please ensure that your members are aware that you are doing so.

The **applicant contact information** you have provided for the organisation in your application will be used by us to assess your application, to provide information relevant to your membership in the Program, to promote a range of activities and to make referrals for new participants to your program. If you do not want us to use the contact information you provide in this way, please let us know and we will not provide these details to any external party (unless required or authorised by law).

By submitting an application you consent to Council publishing the successful applicant's organisation name, and amount funded on our website. You can view the [City of Melbourne Information Privacy Policy⁵](#) on our website.

To ensure our records are accurate and up-to-date, please let us know if you wish to access or alter any of the personal information you have supplied to Council by phone 9658 9507 or email healthyageing@melbourne.vic.gov.au.

⁵ <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/about-council/governance-transparency/policies-protocols/pages/information-privacy-policy.aspx>

Attachment A: Map of City of Melbourne



Suburb boundaries

- Suburb boundary
- Municipal boundary

