

BUSINESS GROWTH AND IMPACT GRANTS GUIDELINES 2026



CITY OF MELBOURNE

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

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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OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

The City of Melbourne's Business Growth and Impact Grants (the Grants) is a competitive funding program that supports businesses to grow, innovate, and contribute to a thriving local economy. We want to back businesses that will help shape Melbourne's future - making it a leading destination for investment, jobs, and innovation.

The Grants are designed to help passionate and innovative small businesses or start-ups bring their ideas to life and reach new markets. Funding is available for businesses with market-ready products and services that will boost Melbourne's reputation for innovation and creativity and support a vibrant and sustainable business community.

New and established businesses from any industry can apply, if they have a solid business plan and are ready to move forward with or without grant funding.

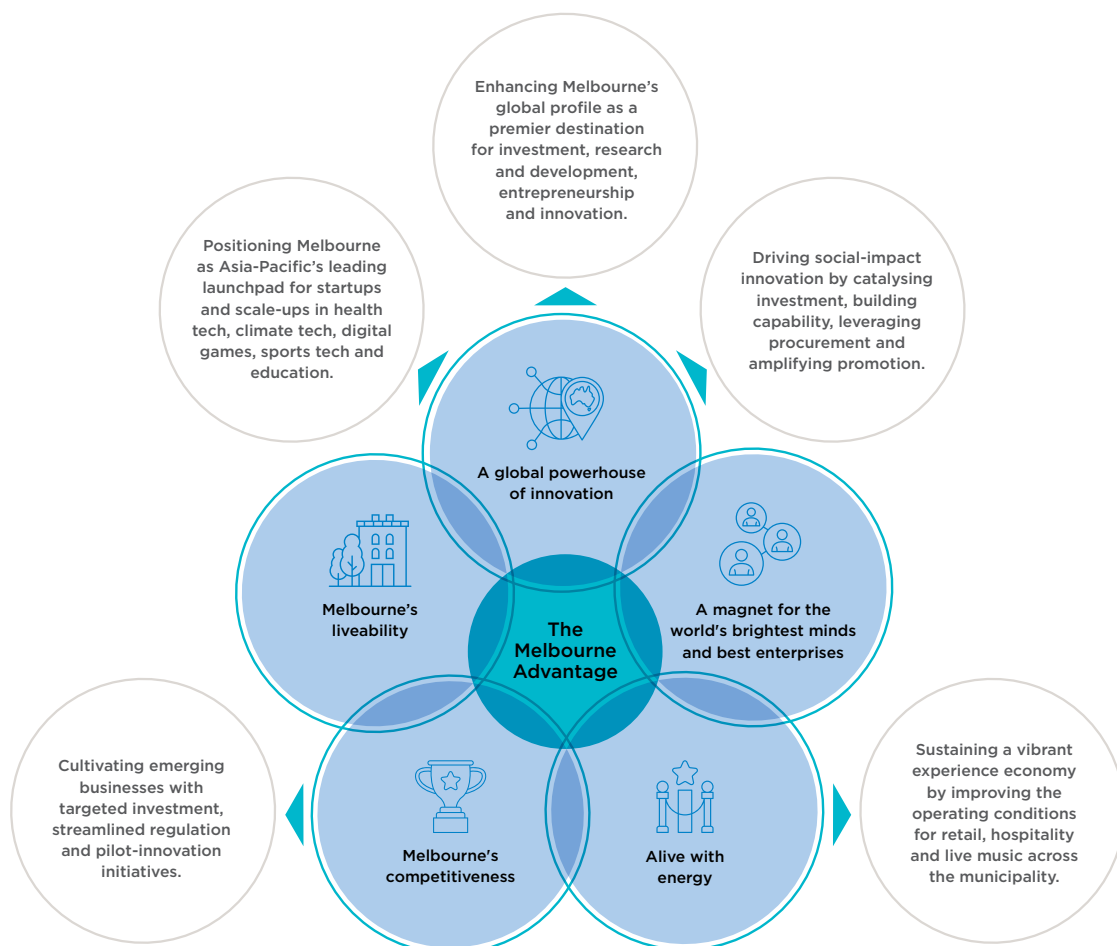
The Grants aim to:

- Support businesses to grow or set up in Melbourne
- Encourage new ideas, products and service
- Accelerate local or global solutions

- Promote new ways of working
- Drive social and environmental benefits for the community
- Add to the City's unique and vibrant business offerings
- Strengthen Melbourne's position as a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship.

The Grants align with **The Melbourne Advantage - Economic Development Strategy 2030 (EDS)**, which aims to make Melbourne the top city in the Asia-Pacific for innovation, talent and liveability. Applicants should show how their business supports the strategy's five key pillars.

Figure 1: EDS pillars and key priorities aligned to the Grants.



CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE APPLYING

To determine whether your business is a good candidate to receive a grant, you might consider the following questions before applying:

- Is your business proposal innovative, creative, and does it demonstrate a strong point of difference?
- Does your proposal demonstrate solid market potential?
- Does your proposal create employment opportunities and increase the level of business investment in Melbourne?
- If you are proposing an online only business, can you demonstrate why you need to be physically located in the City of Melbourne? Can you demonstrate how the City of Melbourne will benefit from your proposal?
- Do you hold the rights to intellectual property for your product and / or service?
- Does your proposal enhance the city's reputation for innovation, business vitality, and environmental sustainability?
- Does your business operate or align to one of the City's priority sectors, which are:
 - Technology: climate-tech, digital gaming, education-tech, health-tech and sports-tech.
 - Experience economy: creative, hospitality, music, retail and tourism.
- For the **Expansion applicants**, are you introducing a completely new product / service into your company portfolio?
- For the **Shopfront Occupancy applicants**, what is unique about the business offering to the local neighbourhood?
- For the **Social Impact applicants**, how is your business creating social and / or environmental impact? Can you effectively measure the impact?



KEY DATES



Please note: successful applicants will be formally announced once funding arrangements have been finalised.



Image. 2024 recipient: Virtetic

GRANT STREAMS

Applicants can only apply for ONE of the following four streams in this grant round.



Start-up

This stream supports start-ups, scale-ups, and small businesses that are developing innovative solutions with the potential to compete nationally or globally or offer something unique that adds value and gives Melbourne a competitive edge.

By setting up in Melbourne, these businesses will help strengthen and diversify the local economy and strengthen key industry sectors.



Expansion

This stream supports innovative businesses that are:

- Expanding by launching a new product, service or activity, or
- Relocating within the municipality to grow their operations.

They're ideal for businesses looking to reduce risk, diversify and tap into new growth areas - especially those reshaping their business models or offering services that can scale globally.

The aim is to strengthen Melbourne's economy and key sectors through innovation and sustainable growth.



Social Impact

This stream is for businesses that are driving positive social and / or environmental impact or re-investing profits into a mission that delivers lasting community benefit.

The business may be certified B-Corporation or a for-profit business that meets Social Traders or People and Planet First definition of a social enterprise.

The aim is to strengthen Melbourne's reputation as a leader in purpose-driven business and social innovation.



Shopfront Occupancy

This stream supports street-level businesses looking to build on the city's reputation for unique offerings and enhance a local precinct by activating a commercial shopfront that has been vacant for more than six months.

For the purposes of this stream, a shopfront is defined as street-facing, ground level commercial property.

Occupation of long-term, street-level vacant properties will reinforce Melbourne's position as a thriving and vibrant city.



ELIGIBILITY

The applicant must:

- Be located within or committed to relocate promptly (within six months of receiving a grant) to the [City of Melbourne municipality](#)
- Have a valid Australian Business Number (ABN)
- Have less than 20 full-time or equivalent employees at the time of applying
- Provide evidence as an Australian registered business, sole trader, company, business cooperative or partnership and its legal structure
- Provide evidence of appropriate business insurances
- Provide evidence of financial viability (required financial documentation must be provided)
- Have no outstanding acquittals or debts to the City of Melbourne
- Provide all mandatory supporting documentation requested in the application form.

Shopfront occupancy stream applicants must also provide the following:

- Copy of the commercial lease, with a minimum length of 3 years (commenced no earlier than 1 July 2025)
- Letter from property owner, or their representative, confirming the length of time it was vacant before the applicant signed a lease agreement.

Applications will be INELIGIBLE if the applicants:

- Have an outstanding debt to City of Melbourne or that have failed to comply with the terms and conditions of any previous funding agreement with City of Melbourne
- Are franchisees, subsidiaries of larger companies or unincorporated associations
- Are from government departments or agencies, foundations or grant making bodies
- Are political organisations or organisations that have a political purpose
- Are current City of Melbourne employees, immediate families and contractors
- Will not comply with anti-discrimination / anti-vilification legislation and / or are incompatible with Council's policies, priorities or values. Council's priorities include those set out in the [Inclusive Melbourne Action Plan 2024-26](#) (IMAP)
- Have received funding from other sources for the same activity being requested in this program.

Ineligible applications will not advance to the assessment stage and applicants will be notified.



Image. 2025 recipient: Cupcake Central

FUNDING OPTIONS

Applicants have two options for funding from between \$10,000 and \$50,000.

OPTION	FUNDING	CO-CONTRIBUTION
1. No co-contribution	\$10,000 to \$25,000	No financial contribution required.
2. Co-contribution required	\$25,001 to \$50,000	Requires a 25 per cent co-contribution from the applicant.

Examples of co-contribution

If applying for:

- \$40,000, applicant contributes \$10,000 for a total budget of \$50,000.
- \$50,000, applicant contributes \$12,500 for a total budget of \$62,500.

Choosing the right option for your business.

Applicants may choose **Option 1** if they:

- Need up to \$25,000.
- Don't have matching funds available.
- Are an early-stage business.

Applicants may choose **Option 2** if they:

- Need more than \$25,001.
- Can co-contribute 25 per cent of the requested amount.
- Are scaling up or investing in a larger initiative.

Applicants are encouraged to refer to our website to see what previous recipients have achieved with their funding.

What won't be funded:

This round of grants will **NOT** fund:

- Operational or general business expenses (i.e. rent, wages, utilities, professional service fees, travel and accommodation costs, existing software or subscription fees, insurances, vehicles or any personal expenses).
- Expenses incurred by the applicant prior to the date an application is submitted.
- Costs associated with preparing a grant application.
- Costs outside of the agreed proposal and budget.
- Other expenditure as determined by City of Melbourne in its sole and absolute discretion.



Image. 2025 recipient: Urban Antidote

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Eligible applications will be reviewed to determine level of completeness and adherence to the assessment criteria. Shortlisted applications are put to an Assessment Panel, made up of City of Melbourne staff from various divisions

and members of Council's External Assessment Panel, who will use the weighted assessment criteria outlined below. Only applications that sufficiently address all the appropriate criteria will be assessed.

All streams

CRITERIA	CONSIDERATION	WEIGHTING
 Business proposal	Does the business clearly outline its core purpose with a realistic proposal that identifies a need and presents an innovative, market-ready solution that adds value to Melbourne's business mix and economy.	20%
 Strategic alignment	Does the business clearly demonstrate alignment with City of Melbourne's strategic direction.	20%
 Financial viability	Is the business financially viable, sustainable and has realistic and credible proposed expenditure.	20%
 Stream specific	Refer to page 11	20%
 Community impact	Has the business detailed its alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and identified key areas for improvement.	10%
 Priority sector	Does the business align to one, or more, of the City's priority technology or experience economy sectors.	5%
 Application standard / quality	Has the applicant provided sufficient detail, complete information, and a clear demonstration of the skills, experience, and track record required to deliver the proposed activity.	5%
TOTAL		100%

Stream specific

CRITERIA	CONSIDERATION	WEIGHTING
START-UP ONLY		
 Proposed innovation	Clearly details the business's development stage and proposed innovation.	20%
EXPANSION ONLY		
 Business growth plan	Clearly demonstrates of how funding will assist the business to expand its operations.	20%
SHOPFRONT OCCUPANCY ONLY		
 Value - add to street level offerings	Clearly demonstrate the value being added to street level offerings of the neighbourhood where shopfront is located.	20%
SOCIAL IMPACT ONLY		
 Benefit to the community	Clearly demonstrate how the business or the initiative delivers a social and / or environment benefit and to which segment of the community.	20%



Image. 2025 recipient: Maternal Health & Wellbeing

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

To assess the success and impact of the funding provided to a business through the Grants, a range of indicators, called the Key Performance Measures (KPMs), will be established.

These KPMs align with the purpose the Grants and will be used to monitor progress, evaluate outcomes, and ensure accountability.

The following KPMs in this table may be tracked and reported.

KPM	TARGET	POSSIBLE EVIDENCE
 Employment creation	Number of new roles created as a direct result of the grant.	Payroll records.
 Turnover growth	Percentage increase in revenue compared to the baseline at time of application.	Financial statements, BAS reports.
 Investment generation	Value of new investment secured during the grant period.	Investment agreements, bank statements.
 Sustainable development goal delivery	Progress against chosen goals over the grant period.	Impact Report.
 Local or social procurement	Total spent with local suppliers and social enterprises.	Supplier invoices, procurement logs.
 Business visibility and engagement	Number of media mentions or partnerships during the grant period.	Media tracking, clippings, partnership records or agreements.

Successful applicants will be required to demonstrate their achievement against those KPMs established as part of their funding, with the appropriate evidence (e.g. financial statements, employment records, procurement logs, and impact reports) provided in their submitted reports.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Submitting your application

The City of Melbourne uses SmartyGrants to administer grant funding programs, and applicants must register to complete their application.

A copy of the application can be downloaded to review prior to completion.

Applicants are advised to read these guidelines thoroughly to ensure they meet the relevant eligibility criteria, address the assessment criteria, and upload supporting documentation.

On submission, the applicant will receive an electronic reply to acknowledge receipt from SmartyGrants.

Completed applications must be submitted before the closing date and time.

Please note:

- Only one application per business be submitted for this funding round.
- Once submitted, no further editing or supporting materials will be accepted.
- Late applications will not be accepted.
- Support and guidance provided by the City of Melbourne's Business Concierge does not guarantee relevant permit approvals will be received and holding relevant permits at the time of application will not have any bearing on the outcomes of grant applications.
- The City of Melbourne does not seek to correct errors in applications or supporting material. Applications are assessed as they have been submitted.
- Canvassing or lobbying of Councillors, employees of the City of Melbourne or assessment panel members in relation to any grant application is prohibited. No further consideration will be given to an application submitted by an applicant who has canvassed or lobbied City of Melbourne staff, Councillors or assessors in relation to their application.
- Applications are confidential. The contents will not be disclosed to any person outside the application and assessment process. Applicant names and brief description of the funded activity will be used in reports to Council and be made publicly available, including publication on the City of Melbourne [website](#) and in media releases. For further details, City of Melbourne Privacy Statement can be found [here](#).

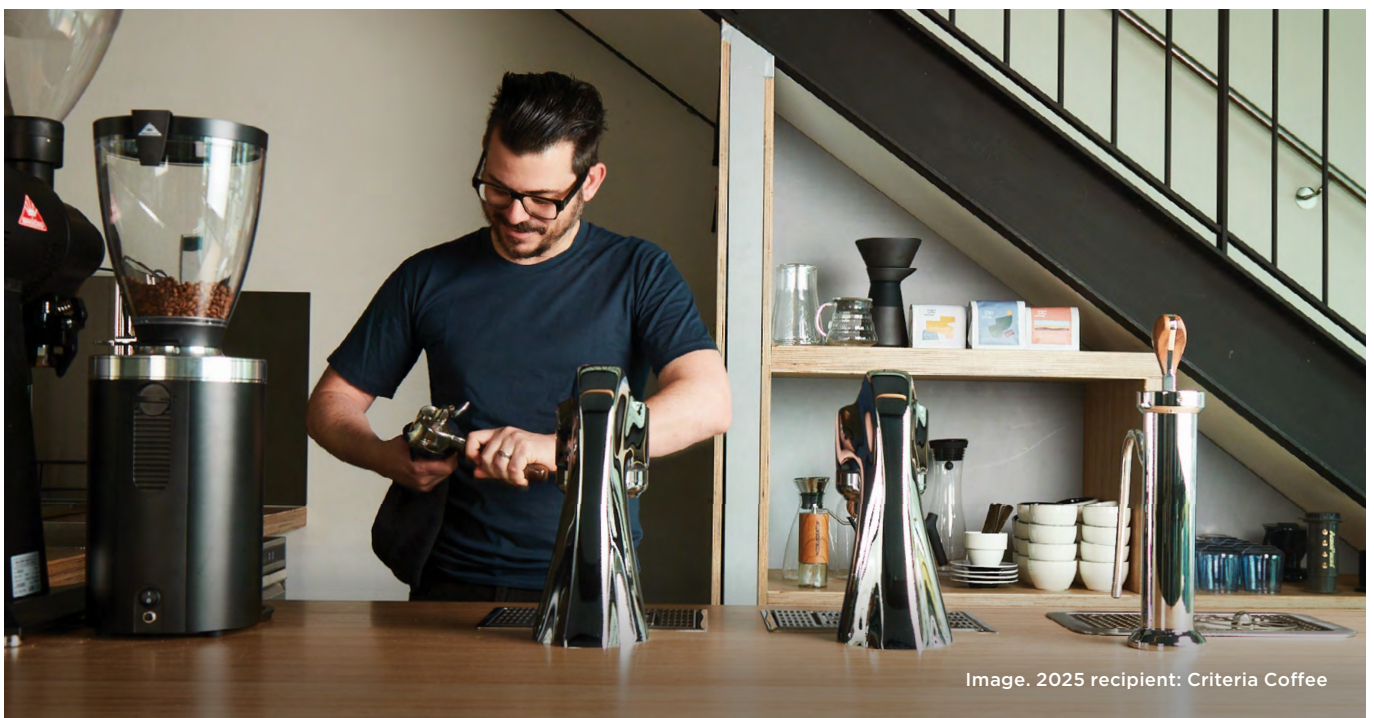


Image. 2025 recipient: Criteria Coffee

Assessing applications

Applications will be assessed as follows:

- **Due diligence** is conducted to ensure all applications are compliant. To be compliant an applicant must have met all eligibility criteria, completed all required sections and uploaded appropriate documentation.
- An **Assessment Panel** will review compliant applications in a competitive round, against all other compliant applications.
- As the Grant receives more applications than it can support, the outcomes are determined on the following basis:
 - The applications ability to meet the assessment criteria.
 - The ability to demonstrate adherence to the criteria as per the relevant stream.
 - The amount of funding requested, and the total request for funding by all applicants within the application round.

- The City of Melbourne reserves the right to request further information in considering any application, as well as the right to reject any application that is ineligible or does not meet the eligibility and assessment criteria.

Note: Assessment outcome may recommend an application receive part funding. All funding decisions of Council are final.

Notifying applicants of outcomes

Recommendations from the Assessment stage are put forward not at a formal Council meeting for consideration and approval.

Applicants will be notified of their application outcome through SmartyGrants.



Image. 2025 recipient: T.I.N.A

FUNDING AGREEMENTS

Successful applicants will be required to enter into a funding agreement with City of Melbourne, which includes the terms and conditions, their funded program and performance measures as outlined in the submitted application.

The maximum term of each agreement is one year.

Successful applicants are allocated a grant case manager for the duration of their agreement.

Note: The funding decision made by Council is final and is contingent upon the delivery of the funded program as outlined in the application submitted. In the event there are significant changes to the funded program, the funding amount may be reviewed.

Payment

Successful applicants will also be required to accept City of Melbourne's standard payment schedule, which will have funding released as follows:

- 50 per cent paid on signing of a Funding Agreement.
- 25 per cent paid on submission of a progress report (see 'Reporting').
- 25 per cent paid on submission of an acquittal report, due after the end of the funding agreement.

Payment terms are 30 days from the date of invoice.

Note: The City of Melbourne will not be responsible for shortfalls in project budgets if the grant recipient is unable to meet project costs. Any changes to the approved funding agreement will need to receive approval from the City of Melbourne. Changes are not guaranteed to be accepted for funding.

Reporting

Successful applicants will be required to report on the progress and outcome of their funded program, as set out in their Funding Agreement. Reports provide valuable feedback to the City of Melbourne on the success of the proposal, in relation to the agreed outcomes, performance measures and any lessons learnt.

Applicants should be aware that as part of the final acquittal report the City of Melbourne will request information about investments outside of the grant amount.

Note: Reports are confidential. Applicants are advised that a short summary of their report will be shared in reports to Council. Final acquittal reports must be submitted no later than four weeks after the end date stated in their Funding Agreement, unless otherwise agreed.



Image. 2025 recipient: Amplify Bookstore

SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE



General enquiries

For more information about the grants, contact businessfunding@melbourne.vic.gov.au or call 03 9658 9658.



Business Concierge

Contact the City of Melbourne's Business Concierge to discuss starting and growing your business within the municipality. May include potential locations and navigating council permit approval processes and linking to other opportunities like networking events, workshops and training.

To request an appointment please fill out the [online form](#) and Business Concierge will be in contact to discuss prior to applying.



Technical assistance

Refer to the [SmartyGrants help guide](#) for technical assistance related to submitting your application. The SmartyGrants support desk is open 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday on 03 9320 6888 or by email service@smartygrants.com.au.



Interpreter and translation Services

If you need an interpreter when calling the City of Melbourne, please call the following relevant translation services:

If you are deaf, hearing-impaired, or speech impaired, please call us via the [National Relay Service](#):

- Teletypewriter (TTY) users phone 133 677 then ask for 03 9658 9658.
- Speak and Listen users phone 1300 555 727 then ask for 03 9658 9658.
- Our multilingual information telephone service offers assistance to people from a non-English speaking background. Visit [Interpreter services](#).

Child Safe Standards

Council is committed to being a child-safe organisation and has zero tolerance for child abuse. All children and young people are valued members of our community and have the right to be and feel safe. We are committed to embedding child safety into the everyday thinking and practice of all employees, volunteers, and contractors. We require contractors / funded organisations to understand and act to prevent, detect, respond and report any suspicion of child abuse and maintain a culture of child safety. A child or young person is under 18 years.

More information can be found on our [keeping children and young people safe page](#).

Other Grants and Sponsorships

Applicants that are not eligible for support via this Grants may wish to review City of Melbourne's alternative programs of support.

More information can be found on our [grants and sponsorship page](#).

Please note businesses or enterprises that are already receiving support from the City of Melbourne may not be eligible to receive this grant.