



Community Use of Venues Policy

Date Authorised by Council:	10 August 2022
Commencement Date:	15 August 2022
Review Date:	August 2025
Responsible Department	Community

1 Introduction

Council is the custodian of several buildings across the municipality. Some of these are community venues, facilities and meeting rooms managed by Council that are available for hire.

Council recognises the contribution that community groups, clubs and organisations provide in helping to make Merri-bek a thriving community which supports and celebrates diversity. The demand for community meeting space is increasing, driven by population growth and the rapidly emerging needs of migrant and refugee communities.

2 Context

This policy aims to clarify the purpose of Council's venue, facilities, and meeting rooms available for hire and their intended community benefit. This policy provides a framework for the equitable allocation of bookings consistent with our social, economic, and environmental policy objectives and for the discounted use of venue hire spaces. It will provide guidance to Council officers to ensure venue charging and use is consistent, transparent, fair, and equitable and complies with the Trade Practices Act and National Competition Policy (NCP).

2.1 Alignment

Council Planning sets out our Strategic direction and objectives:

- Merri-bek Community Vision – Our Community 2025
- Human Rights Policy 2016 – 2026
- Social Cohesion Plan 2020 - 2025

2.2 Organisational Context

This policy applies to all Council owned community venues, facilities, and meeting spaces currently available for hire. It does not apply to commercial properties that are leased from Council, and for which contractual lease agreements have been established. It does not apply to sports clubs and pavilions under a seasonal allocation or tenancy/lease arrangement, or the Glenroy Hub who have established an independent fee structure and usage agreements.

3 Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Optimise the intended social outcomes (or community benefit)
- Establish equity of access
- Provide a framework for the application of discounting of venue hire spaces
- Improve transparency through reporting on how eligible community use is subsidised and the social outcomes realised through this support.

4 Policy Details

4.1 Purpose of our Council managed community venues

The purpose of our Council managed hire spaces is to:

- Facilitate and increase access and participation in social, cultural, recreational and community activities.
- Cater for a diverse range of cultural, social, and recreational activities; and
- Meet the changing needs of the community through flexible and responsive use arrangements.

4.2 Social Outcomes of Council managed community venues

The intended benefits of Council's hire spaces include:

- Strengthening of our community through connections and opportunities for enhanced participation in public life and community groups.
- Contribute to the social, cultural, environmental and economic development of our community; and
- Achieve higher levels of social cohesion for our multicultural, established and newly arrived community, by fostering opportunities for shared learning and celebration.

4.3 Equity of community access to council managed community venues

To ensure equity of access to free or discounted space, Council has a maximum limit on the availability to any one group, booking or community of interest for recurring bookings. These limits are identified by Category and supplementary to these conditions. Council commits to encouraging broad and diverse community access to our venues and will ensure that no community of interest or demographic monopolise the booking of a venue, with a limit of 50% of venue availability booked to any one community of interest or priority group.

Hirers where an historical arrangement has been established, are subject to an annual review.

4.4 Relevant Value Discount

Assessment for relevant value discount may apply where groups can demonstrate their activity or service:

- meets a broader community need.
- encourages local community participation.
- increases community access to activities and services, particularly access by disadvantaged and socially isolated groups as identified in our Human Rights Policy.
- embraces Council’s commitment to access and equity, health and wellbeing and lifelong learning.
- is of benefit to the residents of Merri-bek, by providing the percentage of service users residing in the City of Moreland.
- does not have an entry fee or fee for participation, increasing accessibility and removing barriers to participation.

Organisations which are determined by Council to have reasonable access to funds (e.g., substantial funds in reserve or access to funds through their annual operational income streams) will not be eligible for a relevant value discount. Council officers reserve the right to determine this at its discretion.

4.5 Community Venue Hirer Categories

There are 3 hirer categories:

Category A	Private/Commercial/Religious Worship <i>For profit organisations and private bookings. Including some not-for-profit groups where a fee is charged.</i>
	<p>Private - refers to: individual private bookings; not-for-profit, incorporated, and unincorporated groups/organisations that charge a fee for entry, participation, service or purchase; government bodies conducting internal meetings.</p> <p>Commercial – refers to commercial organisations that operate on a for profit basis.</p> <p>Political – refers to: organised political meetings, campaigning and fundraising*. Only bookings from political groups that enhance social cohesion and align with Merri-bek’s community vision will be eligible for hire</p> <p><i>Please refer to Merri-bek City Councils governance rules section 6.3.1 regarding use of venues leading up to and during an election period.</i></p>

	Religious worship – refers to venue hire for the purpose of organised religious worship.
Category B	Not-for profit organisations/community agencies <i>Receive some funding to provide services. May include some organisations and community groups based outside Moreland.</i>
	<p>Community Organisation – refers to an incorporated organisation that has a charitable status and principally provides community services for the aged, disabled, youth, children, families and multi-cultural communities. Organisations claiming to be a Community Organisation or Not for Profit; will be required to provide proof of such through the provision of either a copy of their certificate of incorporation in the state of Victoria stating the above or a copy of their Australian Charity and Not for Profit Commission registration.</p> <p>Merri-bek Schools – Private - Kindergarten, Primary Schools and High Schools located within Moreland.</p> <p>Government – refers to government bodies that receive funding to provide services</p>

Category C	Not-for-profit or voluntary community groups <i>Receive minimal or no funding to run group activities or programs. Includes groups deemed to be providing services and activities to the local community.</i>
	<p>Community Group -refers to an unincorporated club or a group of people engaged in a hobby, and or social and cultural exchange that provides community benefit.</p> <p>Unfunded Community Group - refers to an incorporated and unincorporated body as indicated under a Community Organisation or Community Group, that does not receive Federal, State or local Government Funding for operational or targeted program delivery.</p> <p>Merri-bek Schools – Public - Kindergarten, Primary Schools and High Schools located within Moreland.</p>

* Refer to Operational Guidelines/Principles for further definitions

4.6 Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible to receive a discount under Categories B or C, the Hirer must:

- Be a 'Not for Profit' and managed by a volunteer board/committee of management.
 - Be incorporated or auspiced by another incorporated organisation.
 - Have adequate public liability insurance (or purchase public liability insurance through Council).
 - Have no outstanding debts owing to Council.
 - Be able to supply financial statements and information as requested.
 - Be able to meet conditions associated with receiving the discount.
- Demonstrate the proposed activity is consistent with Local, State and Federal laws including *Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 1995*.

Groups should demonstrate their activity or service:

- meets a broader community need.
- encourages local community participation.
- increases community access to activities and services, particularly access by disadvantaged and socially isolated groups as identified in our Human Rights Policy.
- embraces Council's commitment to access and equity, health and wellbeing and lifelong learning.
- is of benefit to the residents of Merri-bek, by providing the percentage of service users residing in the City of Moreland.
- does not have an entry fee or fee for participation, increasing accessibility and removing barriers to participation.

4.7 Groups that are not eligible for venue hire

Organisations, community agencies and or groups that do not align with Merri-bek's community vision, values and policies will not be eligible for venue hire.

The intended use of Merri-bek's halls and meeting rooms is to strengthen and contribute to the social, cultural and environmental development of our community.

Any bookings deemed not to foster and contribute to social cohesion or align with the Human Rights Policy and Social Cohesion Plan, will not have their booking/ hire application processed.

4.8 Managing Request for free access

Any discretion to reduce fees or provide additional subsidy due to hardship is subject to consideration by the Council prior to the event.

Requests for council-funded use of community facilities may be submitted in writing via the relevant department (Libraries, Community Venues, Facilities) outlining reasons for the request including the purpose of the booking and the benefits to the Merri-bek community. Requests to be submitted 2 weeks prior to the event date with a completed Venue Hire Agreement form. Council Officers will assess the application in line with Community Use of Council Venues Policy and the Human Rights Policy with a recommendation made to the CEO or their delegate for approval.

In special hardship circumstances, discretion can be used to reduce or waive fees or provide additional subsidy subject to consideration by the Council.

Decisions regarding Council funded use of community facilities will be reported within the Governance report to ensure transparency and equality.

Waiver of fees only applies to hall hire cost and all associated costs (e.g., bond, public liability insurance, crowd controller requirements, equipment hire) must be paid prior to the event date.

**Please refer to Community Venues Operational Procedures and Principles for further definitions*

4.9 Internal use of community facilities

All 'internal' use of community facilities which involves use by Council staff must have a corporate purpose, a link to an adopted plan/strategy or be identified in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to receive free use.

4.10 Visibility of support

Any group in receipt of discounted access to a Council managed community venue will be required to provide appropriate acknowledgement of Council's support. This will vary depending on the nature, frequency and duration of event(s) and Council will require evidence of this acknowledgement.

5 Roles and Responsibilities

Party/parties	Roles and responsibilities	Timelines
Venue Hirer	As per the terms and conditions of hire.	Ongoing in line with confirmed booking requests
Community Venues Facilities and Libraries	Ensure acknowledgement requirements are communicated and bookings terms managed. Audit of Council venues.	As required
Bookings Officers	Processing of bookings, bonds and payments. Audit of group information provided and acknowledgement of Council support	Ongoing
Grants Officer	Support and advice on assessments	As required
Community Wellbeing Branch Manager	Confirmation of 'Emerging Community' for an exemption from documentation.	Ongoing
Director	Exercise discretion over and above policy and guidelines.	As required
CEO	Authorise recommendations for requests for free usage	As required

6 Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

Council officers will determine the eligibility and assessment of each application based on the content of this Policy and relevant Guidelines.

Amendments to the Policy may occur if:

- Legislative requirements alter,
- Legal issues highlight a need for change, and
- Insurance and risk management issues arise.
- Following a review of historical arrangements

A review of this policy will be undertaken three (3) years from its date of authorisation to ensure it continues to be relevant in meeting our community needs unless otherwise instructed.

7 DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Community	<p>Community is a flexible term used to define groups of connected people. It can refer to everyone affiliated with the Merri-bek municipality, or smaller groups defined by interest, identity, or location, and not necessarily homogenous in composition or views.</p> <p>A community linked by location could include a group of people who live in the same neighbourhood or street; businesses linked to an activity centre.</p> <p>A community of interest could be a group of people who have a shared interest, including artistic or cultural interest, ethnic origin, recreational interest. Note: a community of interest often extends beyond municipal boundaries, which can be particularly challenging for these communities.</p> <p>A community of affiliation could be a group of people who are members of a group or club, including a sporting club, religious group, seniors' group, Lions Club / Rotary.</p> <p>It is acknowledged that communities also define themselves, and some may be temporary or virtual.</p>
New Emerging and Priority Community (Priority Group)	<p>New and emerging and priority communities are defined as being small in number, newly arrived and have all or a combination of the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Significant increase in numbers over the last five years.• Often lack established family networks, support systems, community structures and resources, relative to more established communities.• Can be more vulnerable than established communities as they are often from a refugee background and have experienced displacement due to civil unrest.• Comprise individuals with limited education and skill due to displacement.• Comprise individuals who have limited English language skills.• Comprise individuals who are unfamiliar with the government services available and are less likely to be able to locate services that can help them meet their basic needs.• Tend not to have community infrastructures and organisations that can attract funding. <p>Have a primary purpose to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote the empowerment and autonomy of the community and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status.• Advance equality and equity and the empowerment of the community.• Build capacity to take advantage of new social or economic opportunities.

Term	Definition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The elimination of all kinds of violence, prejudice or discrimination against cohorts of the community.
Historical arrangement	A tailored arrangement in recognition of longstanding use through the custom and practice arrangement with the group and alignment of activities to strategic objectives. Subject to an annual review and health check of each group.
Incorporated Association	Be not-for-profit and managed by a volunteer board/committee of management
Auspice Organisation	When an incorporated association applies for and receives funding on behalf of an unincorporated individual, group, or organisation, and is responsible for ensuring that the project or activity for which the funds have been granted is completed, acquitted, and the funds accounted for.

8 Associated Documents

- Merri-bek 2025 Community Vision
- Merri-bek City Council Plan 2021–2025
- Human Rights Policy 2016–2026
- Social Cohesion Plan 2020–2025
- Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2022
- Community Grants Policy 2022