



South East Water

Workplace Giving Australia Awards 2023
Winner

Best Grants Program

Program Case Study



South East Water Program Summary

South East Water is driven by their purpose to deliver healthy water for life for its customers, community and environment. As a metropolitan water retailer, they support healthy and liveable communities by delivering water, sewerage and recycled water to 1.8 million people every day and night in Melbourne's southeast. Theirs is one of the most diverse catchment areas in Australia – from those who are new to the region to the Traditional Owners of the land and water they rely on. Their customers live and work along 270km of coastline and 3,640km² of land, including high-rise communities, growth suburbs, agricultural holdings and large industrial areas.

South East Water developed its Community Grants program in 2019 following feedback from their Price Submission 2018–23 community engagement. Their employees developed the idea to commit to a community-led Guaranteed Service Level (GSL) where they'd contribute up to \$10,000 for each sewer spill incident resulting in a beach closure to fund community projects. Through this program, they take ownership of their responsibility to communities they have adversely impacted. The grants help make projects a reality, supporting the community in affordability, health and liveability, environment and water security and knowledge. Through reviews in 2020 and 2022, they have refined the program using employee and applicant feedback.

From The Judges

“Long history of grant giving across community groups with substantial value per year provided.”

Program Details



South East Water designed their grants program to be accessible to all community groups. They achieved this by updating all externally facing material with plain language and using photos of volunteers, community groups and community to promote and celebrate their achievements.

To implement their program, they promote it annually through organic and paid social media campaigns, internal news articles, targeted media releases through local newspapers, banners on the homepage of their website and emails shared with their database of community groups including groups that expressed an interest in applying.

Each year they have around \$100,000 in funds to share amongst the grant recipients. Due to the growth in interest in the program, they're now seeking to expand funding to make more projects happen.

South East Water are seeing the engagement with this program grow year-on-year. For example, in 2019 they received 72 applications and in 2023 received 160 applications. In 2020, 24 employees took part in the grants judging panel. By 2023 they had 55 employees on the panel.

South East Water engages employees to take part in the judging panel each year through a series of news articles on their intranet and weekly employee newsletter. Over the lifespan of the program, they have seen some employees return to the judging panel.

South East Waters's employees are also the biggest advocates for the program, and each year they encourage the 700+ person workforce to share information about the grants program with their own community groups by supplying resources such as templated emails.

Implementation Of The Program

Each year they set measures to evaluate the success and impact of the program. For 2023 they set out 9 success measures to assess performance. This included SMART goals aiming to improve communications and multi-channel engagement, making the application process simpler and faster – especially for multicultural and Aboriginal communities. This helps increase application numbers and ensures recipients are from diverse causes and local government areas.

South East Water develop a Program Report at the end of each grant intake to assess the delivery, success, and areas for improvement for the following year. The report also evaluates engagement performance across communication channels, where and from what causes the applications came from and how the employees were involved.

South East Water also ask all grant applicants and employee judges to complete a survey to supply feedback on the application and judging process, and how they can improve the experience for the following year.

Some changes they have implemented based on this feedback include simplifying the processes to make it easier to apply, taking a strategic approach to promoting the program with targeted engagement and implementing the PEGA platform to automate the application and judging process.

South East Water's new Price Submission 2023–28 includes a measure for community trust, with an aim for a score of 68% for the first year of the regulatory period 2023–24. Their organisational community strategy aims to increase this trust measure, with the Grants Program designed to support this strategy and increase community trust.



Results Of The Program

Since 2019 they have supported 66 community groups in the service region to make their grassroots community projects happen with over \$320,000 of funding. Year-on-year they receive more applications and more employees volunteering to be on the judging panel, showing increased engagement in the program each year and a clear community culture growing within the organisation.

Through targeted social media to postcodes with high multicultural populations and supplying plain english communications about the grants on their website, they saw a 183% increase in applications in 2023 from multicultural community groups.

Each year they track and celebrate the great work of volunteers that bring these projects to life. Some examples of the projects they have supported since 2019 include:

- Supporting Food for Change to expand their water system, increasing their capacity to grow and provide food to those in need across South East Victoria
- Supporting Lighthouse Foundation's Sustainable Garden Project to create a garden, complete with a watering tank and irrigation system for vulnerable young people to learn new skills
- Funding A Better Life for Foster Kids to buy 60 crisis suitcases filled with age-appropriate hygiene essentials, clothes, toys, and books for foster children
- Supporting Derrimut Weelam Gathering Place to run a water safety program for Aboriginal children in partnership with Mordialloc Lifesaving Club
- Funding new drinking taps at Somerville Primary School.

"We're honoured our grants program has been recognised. The program and this nomination are a reflection of the amazing contributions of community groups and volunteers across Melbourne's south-east who help protect our environment and support our communities. We're grateful to work with them on this."

Lara Olsen
South East Water Managing Director



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