

Major Events and Festivals Charity Partners - 2025/2026

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Summary

The City appoints a charity partner for each of its 3 major events: Sydney Christmas, Sydney New Year's Eve and Sydney Lunar Festival. The selected charity partner for each event is promoted through event marketing and communications.

Association with these major events provides charity organisations with a highly visible platform to build awareness of their work and use the events program as an opportunity for fundraising. It gives event audiences the opportunity to reflect on broader community issues and needs.

Charity partners for each event are chosen through an open and competitive process in accordance with the City's Support for Charities Policy. The recommended charity partners for the 2025 / 2026 event season (with option to extend one year) are:

Sydney Christmas - Variety - the Children's Charity (NSW / ACT)

Variety - the Children's Charity (NSW / ACT) delivers vital support to children who are sick, experiencing disadvantage, or living with disability. The charity creates long-term benefits for families and communities across Greater Sydney. They provide support such as funding for therapy, mobility and communication equipment and inclusive programs that help children build independence, confidence and connection.

Sydney New Year's Eve - Beyond Blue Limited

Beyond Blue Limited is one of Australia's most well-known, trusted and visited mental health organisations in Australia. Since 2000, they have continually evolved to meet community needs and maximise their impact. The charity works across the country to help people get well earlier and stay well. The organisation works with a number of services, organisations and institutions to raise community awareness about anxiety and depression and reduce the associated stigma.

Sydney Lunar Festival - Kids' Cancer Project

Kids' Cancer Project is a national charity dedicated to funding innovative childhood cancer research across Australia. The charity aims to provide scientists with the funding needed to make discoveries, translate pioneering research, advance treatments and build support programs. Their vision is to see 100% of children, adolescents and young adults not only survive cancer, but go on to lead long, healthy lives without the lasting side effects of harsh treatments.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve the appointment of Variety - the Children's Charity (NSW / ACT) (ABN: 38 003 354 934) as the charity partner for Sydney Christmas 2025, with the option to extend to 2026;
- (B) Council approve the appointment of Beyond Blue Limited (ABN: 87 093 865 840) as the charity partner for Sydney New Year's Eve 2025, with the option to extend to 2026;
- (C) Council approve the appointment of Kids' Cancer Project (ABN: 13 061 138 181) as the charity partner for Sydney Lunar Festival 2026, with the option to extend to 2027; and
- (D) authority to be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to enter into agreements with Variety - the Children's Charity (NSW / ACT), Beyond Blue Limited, and Kids' Cancer Project to establish their charity partner status for the respective events.

Attachments

Nil.

Background

1. An Expression of Interest was advertised seeking proposals from suitable charitable organisations to partner with Sydney Christmas 2025 (with the option to extend one year), Sydney New Year's Eve 2025 (with the option to extend one year) and Sydney Lunar Festival 2026 (with the option to extend one year).
2. The Expression of Interest was promoted through the City of Sydney News announcement and email digest, LinkedIn advertising and posts, the City's corporate webpage, and the Major Events and Festivals charity database on 10 April 2025 and was open until 11:59pm 1 May 2025.
3. The benefits offered by the City to charity partners include incorporation in the City's event marketing materials and event collateral, the opportunity to support on-site event activations and conduct fundraising at the event, the opportunity to conduct an online campaign to raise awareness, provide speaking opportunities (as appropriate) and leverage opportunities through other event partners (where possible).
4. The City received 41 submissions from 26 organisations. They responded to the criteria for each of the events, listed on the City's corporate webpage.
5. Organisations had the opportunity to apply for more than one event.

Sydney Christmas

6. Sydney Christmas runs from the last Saturday in November through to Christmas Day and consists of up to 5 outdoor Christmas concerts, a Christmas street fair, a choir program, decorations (including lighting installations) throughout the CBD and neighbourhoods including the Martin Place Christmas tree, and a program of associated events.
7. Previous charity partners include: Sydney Children's Hospital Foundation (2023 - 2024), Kids' Cancer Project (2021 - 2022), OzHarvest (2020), Surf Lifesaving Australia (2019), Variety - The Children's Charity (2017- 2018), Guide Dogs NSW / ACT (2015 - 2016) and the Australian Children's Music Foundation (2011 - 2014).
8. In the selection of a charity partner for Sydney Christmas, the following criteria were considered:
 - (a) The charity undertakes work which produces significant benefit to our communities.
 - (b) The charity has an organisational focus that is compatible with our values and the Sydney Christmas event.
 - (c) The charity has demonstrated experience in successful online and / or face to face fundraising including the ability to provide and manage employees and volunteers to operate an interactive paid activation on site (minimum of 2 employees or volunteers per activation).
 - (d) The charity has point of sale infrastructure and floats for interactive activations.
 - (e) The charity has a cash handling policy.

- (f) The charity is an official registered charity or public benevolent institution with no religious affiliation.
 - (g) The charity must hold insurance reasonably required by the City of Sydney.
9. The recommended charity partner for Sydney Christmas 2025 (with the option to extend one year) is Variety - the Children's Charity (NSW / ACT). Variety - the Children's Charity (NSW / ACT) provide practical, life-changing assistance that promotes inclusion, independence and opportunities for people who face barriers to accessing support through mainstream systems. They do this through funding therapy services, inclusive education programs, events, provision of equipment and more, giving children the opportunity to be able to thrive.
10. Variety - the Children's Charity (NSW / ACT) demonstrated its capacity to deliver beyond the minimum requirements for the Sydney Christmas charity partnership through their understanding and addressing of compatible values with the City and the event and their ability to align strategically with Sydney Christmas. They demonstrated their excellence and experience in both face to face and online fundraising through their established processes and inclusion of elements used for fundraising activations.
11. The charity partnership is an opportunity for Variety - the Children's Charity (NSW / ACT) to build awareness around their work through brand and face to face activation as part of Sydney Christmas, continuing their support of children who are sick or disadvantaged as well as build empathy and awareness in the community to foster more inclusive behaviour.

Sydney New Year's Eve

12. Sydney New Year's Eve is an annual event viewed by more than one million people around the harbour foreshore and an estimated 425 million around the world.
13. Previous charity partners include: National Breast Cancer (2023 - 2024), The Smith Family (2021 - 2022), Refugee Council of Australia (2019), Habitat for Humanity (2015 - 2016), Engineers Without Borders (2013 - 2014), the Fred Hollows Foundation (2012), and CARE Australia (2011).
14. In the selection of a charity partner for Sydney New Year's Eve, the following criteria were considered:
- (a) The charity undertakes work which produces significant benefit to our communities.
 - (b) The charity has an organisational focus that is compatible with our values and Sydney New Year's Eve.
 - (c) The charity has demonstrated experience in successful online and / or face to face fundraising.
 - (d) The charity is an official registered charity or public benevolent institution with no religious affiliation.
 - (e) The charity must hold insurance reasonably required by the City of Sydney.

15. The recommended charity partner for Sydney New Year's Eve 2025 (with the option to extend one year) is Beyond Blue Limited.
16. Beyond Blue Limited offers mental health support for individuals and their supporters, which is easily accessible, personalised and allows people to feel safe and connected. Their aim is to ensure people have access to the right support at the right time. Their services include support services, peer support forums, and webchats to optimise counsellor support time.
17. Beyond Blue Limited demonstrated their impact over the last financial year where over 276,000 people reached out to their charity for support. The feedback they received for their support services demonstrated successful outcomes in people feeling less distressed, able to receive the information they were seeking, and allowing people to feel that they were being heard and understood. This successfully results in people feeling more hopeful after using their support forums.
18. Beyond Blue Limited were able to address the criteria successfully around their values and alignment with the Sydney New Year's Eve event, through their focus on community and fostering positive, collaborative and inclusive environments, empowering people to proactively take charge and get the support they need. New Year's Eve is a time for new beginnings, new outlooks and a time for hope, and their goals align successfully with spirit of New Year's Eve celebrations.

Sydney Lunar Festival

19. Sydney Lunar Festival is a celebration of the Lunar New Year. It is one of the largest Lunar New Year celebrations outside of Asia and includes the Lunar Streets event in Haymarket, decorative installations, community performances and associated event programs.
20. Previous charity partners include: Settlement Services International (2024 - 2025), Benevolent Society (2022 - 2023), OzHarvest (2021), The Fred Hollows Foundation (2020), Surf Lifesaving NSW (2019), Guide Dogs NSW / ACT (2018), Cure Brain Cancer Foundation (2016 - 2017), Barnardos Australia (2015), Chinese Parents Association - Children with Disabilities (2014) and Taronga Foundation (2012 - 2013).
21. In the selection criteria for Sydney Lunar Festival, the following criteria were considered:
 - (a) The charity undertakes work which produces significant benefit to our communities.
 - (b) The charity has an organisational focus that is compatible with our values and Sydney Lunar Festival.
 - (c) The charity has demonstrated experience in successful online and / or face to face fundraising.
 - (d) The charity is an official registered charity or public benevolent institution with no religious affiliation.
 - (e) The charity must hold insurance reasonably required by the City of Sydney.

22. The recommended charity partner for Sydney Lunar Festival 2026 (with the option to extend one year) is Kids' Cancer Project. The charity presented a submission highlighting their work which is dedicated to funding innovative cancer research and treatments for children that aim to be less invasive and more effective. The ultimate goal of the charity is for children to survive cancer and go on to lead long, healthy lives.
23. Kids' Cancer Project clearly outlined their core values and alignment with the City through their community focused work with other stakeholders, their work with families to ensure integrity, their research and innovation, and their respect for equitable access for all. The charity were able to successfully address and respond to our criteria around fundraising and were able to demonstrate the success of their work, which includes established campaigns as well as accessible community-based opportunities for families.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

24. Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision renews the communities' vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2050. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This sponsorship is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 6 - An equitable and inclusive city - the charity partnership is an open opportunity for local charities to engage with the community and leverage their brand and cause from the impact of our events. The recommended charities aim to provide the best possible services for the community through research, support services, community awareness, and inclusive programs.
 - (b) Direction 8 - A thriving cultural and creative life - charity partnerships contribute to the creative and cultural life of the events they represent through the activations and programs they offer.

Organisational Impact

25. The impact of the charity partnership is minimal in terms of staff support, guidance and contract management. Charity partnership programs are designed for external organisations to be able to leverage from existing work that the City is already presenting.

Risks

26. Partnering with appropriate charities for the City's major events reflects a recognition of the fact that our reputation is a valuable asset that influences stakeholder trust. The recommendations in this report are within the City's risk appetite, which states:
- (a) We make decisions that align with our corporate objectives, policies and strategies and are committed to conducting our activities in full compliance with applicable laws, regulations and relevant industry standards.
 - (b) We foster a culture of ethics, integrity and responsible behaviour across our organisation. By creating a strong ethical foundation, we aim to minimise the likelihood of reputation-damaging incidents and enhance our ability to respond effectively when challenges arise.

Social / Cultural / Community

27. The appointment of charity partners each year is intended to engender a favourable community sentiment for the selected charity, the City and the event.
28. Festivals and events add to a city's cultural layer and they also attract economic benefits for retail, hospitality and tourism sectors. A charity partnership allows not-for-profit organisations to leverage community awareness from the cross-promotional opportunities associated with the City's major events and festivals.
29. As outlined in the City's Draft Inclusion (Disability) Action Plan 2021 - 2025, Direction 1: Positive community attitudes and behaviours, the City aims to increase the understanding of the importance of social inclusion through community programming at City events. The successful charity partner has the opportunity to increase client event participation and a forum to conduct community awareness programs.

Environmental

30. Any proposed activities provided by the Charity Partner would be guided by the City's Major Events sustainability guidelines and principles.

Economic

31. Only registered charities are able to respond to the Expression of Interest. Involvement of the charities in the program is directly related to fundraising and has no impact upon local businesses.

Financial Implications

32. To support the work of the Charity Partner, the City may produce a paid activity which would be operated by Charity volunteers. All income is paid directly to the Charity partner. The cost of the activity is provided for within the 2025 / 2026 draft operating budget of the Major Events and Festivals unit.
33. There is no payment made to a Charity Partner by the City as part of the arrangements, in line with the Support for Charities Policy.

Relevant Legislation

34. Any support is subject to the applicant meeting the definitions of charity and charitable purpose under the Charities Act 2013 (Cth).

Critical Dates / Time Frames

35. Signed Charity Participation Agreements with the appointed charity partners are required by mid-July 2025, to enable:
- (a) public announcement of the appointment as part of the first release of the event information
 - (b) sufficient time to produce effective initiatives and attract sufficient numbers of volunteers to plan and implement such initiatives
 - (c) integration of partnership opportunities into event programming for the 2025/2026 event season

Options

36. There are no other options available. The process for the appointment of a charity partner is specified in the City's Support for Charities Policy.

Public Consultation

37. No public consultation was undertaken. Charities have been recommended through an open Expression of Interest.

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