

UTS Social Impact Grants

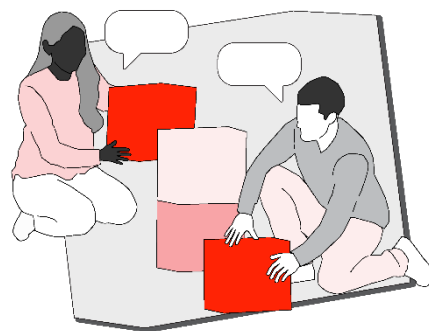
2017–2021 Evaluation

Snapshot

- The UTS Social Impact Grants is a small but powerful program providing \$5000 seed funding to staff and students for projects that create meaningful social change.
- In its first 5 years, 45 projects delivered outcomes for communities locally, nationally, and globally, tackling issues such as inclusive education, refugee resilience, climate anxiety, disability access, modern slavery, and mental health.
- The value of the program extends far beyond funding. For many recipients, the grant was a catalyst, enabling work that otherwise wouldn't have happened, building confidence in community-engaged practice, and signalling that UTS genuinely values this work.
- The most consistent and enduring benefit was the genuine partnerships with community that the program fostered. This laid the groundwork for impact that continued well beyond the life of the grant.

Introduction

Since 2017, the UTS Social Impact Grants have enabled staff and students to work alongside communities to design and deliver projects that put social justice into action. This summary highlights the program's first 5 years of impact, and the lessons learned along the way.



About the Social Impact Grants

The Social Impact Grants are delivered annually by the UTS Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion. Each year, 10 projects receive \$5000 funding (often matched by faculties) to tackle pressing social challenges in partnership with communities. The grants are open to all UTS staff and students, creating opportunities for academics, professional staff, and students at every level to lead social impact work. To be eligible, projects must be developed in partnership with a community organisation, ensuring the work is grounded in lived experience and community priorities. The program is designed to build capacity, foster collaboration, and showcase the university's commitment to creating a healthier, more sustainable, and socially just society.

Why the grants matter

Universities exist for public good. The UTS Social Impact Grants program makes that real by:

- giving staff and students the chance to turn ideas into action, with quick, flexible support
- providing accessible funding, especially for early-career academics, students, and casual staff
- creating space for co-designed projects with communities, embedding lived experience in research and practice
- building a culture of social impact at UTS – shifting attitudes and strengthening recognition of socially engaged work

'Without this grant, the project wouldn't have happened. It gave us the resources and the confidence to pursue work that mattered.' – Grant recipient

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre: improv theatre for wellbeing



In Indonesia, refugees face life without work, schooling, or healthcare. With UTS funding, Dr Lucy Fiske co-created improv theatre workshops at the Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre, boosting resilience, creativity, and connection. The

program's success sparked repeat workshops, strengthening wellbeing and community through laughter, trust, and shared storytelling. [Read the case study.](#)

Evaluating our impact

We evaluated the first 5 years of the Social Impact Grants (2017–2021) to understand the programs value and improve program design. Drawing on surveys, final reports, and case studies, the evaluation revealed significant impacts for grant recipients, the communities they partnered with, and UTS as an institution.

Impact for grant recipients

The grants provided funding to launch and grow socially impactful projects. Recipients reported increased confidence and skills in social impact and community-engaged work, as well as strengthened partnerships.

‘The grant provided us with the ability to formalise outreach and relationships with community partners and to critically reflect on the possibilities of these relationships for future collaborations.’ – Grant recipient

Impact for UTS

The program strengthened UTS’s reputation as a university committed to social change, showcasing its role as a catalyst for community-engaged research and practice.

‘I was drawn to the [grant] because I believe in research that promotes equity outside the university. I think its value is in its encouragement of these partnerships with local community organisations, and the emphasis on public good.’ – Grant recipient

Impact for community

From employment pathways for people seeking asylum, to culturally responsive preschool programs, to 3D-printed prosthetics for children with disabilities, the projects funded enabled various real-world outcomes. Many projects resulted in immediate, tangible improvements in people’s lives – particularly among marginalised communities:

‘A portion of the money has gone directly toward a handful of children in refugee programs, giving them a greater sense of independence (being able to walk on their own), they might not have been able to access as quickly or at all.’ – Grant recipient

Enduring change

Follow-up in 2023 showed many projects continued well beyond funding – influencing policy, sustaining partnerships, and building community resilience. Many of the tools, resources, and networks created are still in use and many staff reported personal transformation and long-term shifts in practice. The Social Impact Grants are more than a funding program, they are:

- a **launchpad** for innovative, community-driven projects
- a **platform** for students and staff to build confidence, skills, and recognition
- a **catalyst** for long-term partnerships and change.

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

Democratising access to evaluation



This project, conducted by the UTS Business School, developed a free online course and began building a repository of evaluation tools to strengthen practice. In its first year, 86 students completed the “Measuring Social Impact” course. The course and repository support academics, not-for-profits, and government to apply rigorous tools to assess and enhance their impact. Importantly, this work laid the foundation for today’s Social Impact Toolkit, a sector-wide resource that is democratising access to evaluation and building capacity for positive social change.

Recommendations

The evaluation revealed a key opportunity to sharpen the program’s identity as a vehicle for high-quality, community-engaged research and practice. The following recommendations seek to refine program delivery and to expand reach and visibility as a model of engaged scholarship.

1. **Deepen community engagement:** build in training and resources to further build community engagement capacity.
2. **Strengthen systems:** standardise reporting and evaluation tools, adopting a digital platform for grant management.
3. **Foster peer learning:** build communities of practice, informal networks, and enhance cross-faculty collaboration.
4. **Increase visibility and recognition:** share stories widely across UTS and beyond, positioning the program as a flagship for engaged scholarship.
5. **Expand resourcing:** explore opportunities to offer larger or follow-on grants to scale successful projects and unlock greater impact.

With sustained investment and sharper focus on community voice, the program can continue to strengthen UTS’s social justice agenda – creating a healthier, more sustainable, and equitable society.

More information

Read the full report: **Muller, A., & Blair, K. (2025). *The UTS Social Impact Grants: 2017–2021 Evaluation*. Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion, UTS. DOI: 10.71741/4pyxmbnjq.30463241**

Contact us

Website uts.edu.au/socialimpactgrants

Email socialimpactgrants@uts.edu.au