

REGIONAL BUSINESS GATEWAYS GRANT APPLICATION

EDA | 58/1/2 | #7938815

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council:

1. Approves an application for funding under the State Government's Regional Business Gateways program for the Cairns Creative and Screen Industries Connector project.
2. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to finalise any and all matters relating to the above application including the finalisation of associated project documents as described in this report ahead of submission of the grant application, and the execution of any funding agreement should Council's application be successful.

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Screen Queensland
Cairns Chamber of Commerce
Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business (CDSB)

Note: The identification of interested parties is provided on a best endeavours basis by Council Officers and may not be exhaustive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Queensland Government's Regional Business Gateway Program offers grants of \$250,000 to \$600,000 for community-led initiatives that support and strengthen small and micro businesses across regional Queensland. The program aims to enhance business resilience, strengthen supply chains, and drive regional economic growth.

The program is delivered through a two-stage application process. Following the successful submission of an Expression of Interest (EOI), which closed on 17 July 2026, Cairns Regional Council has been invited to progress to Stage 2 and submit a full application for its Cairns Creative and Screen Industries Connector project. Developed in partnership with Screen Queensland and the Cairns Chamber of Commerce, the project will be delivered collaboratively to support the growth and development of the region's creative and screen industries.

It is recommended that Council submit an application for funding for the Cairns Creative and Screen Industries Connector project.

This report seeks Council approval for the application to be finalised and lodged.

BACKGROUND:

There is an opportunity for Council to apply for grant funding from \$250,000 to \$600,000 (excluding GST) through the Regional Business Gateways Program (the Program). Project costs can be fully funded by the Program. Co-contribution is not required but is encouraged. Eligible costs include funding of external contractors and specialist consultants to deliver project activities, meaning the work can be resourced externally.

The Program is a targeted Queensland Government initiative designed to strengthen support for small and family businesses located in regional Queensland. The Program aims to enable local councils, chambers of commerce, industry and trade organisations, and not-for-profit groups to establish 'regional business gateways' which deliver locally tailored services and place-based initiatives that respond to the unique needs of their small and family business communities, enhancing business capability, resilience and long-term sustainability, and improve access to practical knowledge, tools, opportunities and networks, helping small and family businesses to sustain, grow and adapt.

Many local businesses are unaware Cairns has a film studio and are therefore also unaware of the potential opportunities of supplying into film productions. This project aims to identify the scale of opportunity and associated supply-chain gaps and provide a structured program to help businesses understand the supply-chain opportunities.

The project is intended to be delivered in partnership with Screen Queensland and Cairns Chamber of Commerce, with both organisations expressing support for the concept and EOI submission. Council Officers will continue to work with these two partner organisations to confirm their involvement, and the extent of their involvement, and to refine the proposal accordingly.

COMMENT:

Project identification

In identifying which projects to apply for funding under the Regional Business Gateways Program, Council Officers have:

- Considered the likely performance of the project against the grant program objectives, which are:
 - Build the capability of small and family businesses in Regional Queensland;
 - Support small and family businesses to capitalise on emerging opportunities and navigate economic challenges; and
 - Address identified gaps in the regional business support ecosystem.
- Considered the projects' alignment with one or more of the following guiding streams of the grant program:
 - Business Connectors – projects that strengthen local supply chains and business to business collaboration;

- Business Accelerators – Projects that support under-represented, early-stage, and micro businesses; and
- Business Enablers – Projects that build resilience and operational efficiency in sectors facing long-term challenges, to sustain growth and regional development.

Based on the objectives and funding streams above, an application is proposed to be submitted for the *Cairns Creative and Screen Industries Connector* project. This project aligns strongly with the objectives of the funding program, as well as linking well with the Business Connector and Business Accelerator streams due to the project's focus on strengthening the supply chain of the emerging screen sector. It is intended to support existing businesses, but also under-represented, early-stage businesses, accessing new opportunities. This initiative also identified through conversations with Screen Queensland and other screen sector stakeholders and was a very clear opportunity we could endeavour to address through the Regional Business Gateways program in the timeframes provided.

A summary of the grant proposal can be found below in Table 1 with further detail continuing in this Comment section.

Table 1: Summary of grant proposal

Funding agency	Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business (CDSB)
Grant stream	Regional Business Gateways Program – Round 1
Estimated funding request*	\$400,000 ex GST
Estimated total in-kind contributions from project partners*	\$34,214 ex GST
Estimated total project costs*	\$434,214 ex GST
Project title	Cairns Creative and Screen Industries Connector
Partners	Screen Queensland, Cairns Chamber of Commerce
Strategic alignment	Economic Development Strategy: Small business targeted intervention Corporate Plan: Focus One- Robus Economy Draft Games 2032 Roadmap: Screen Industry Attraction

**Project costs will be subject to adjustment as the grant application documents and detail contained therein are refined ahead of submission.*

Proposed Project

The project proposal is complementary to services already offered through Screen Queensland, and support organisations such as Screenworks. The project aims to build a baseline of economic and supply-chain data and connect local Cairns businesses into the screen industry supply-chain. This will be done over 24 months and consist of two components:

Component 1 — Economic Assessment & Gap Analysis: This would include an economic impact assessment of the screen sector in Cairns; supply chain mapping to quantify the local technical supply gap (e.g. camera, lighting, sound), which currently

forces productions to transport equipment from the south at considerable cost; a local supplier register; and a gap analysis of existing support to confirm no duplication.

Estimated cost of Component 1 over the project period: \$150,000 (ex GST) excluding in-kind contributions.

Component 2 — Connector Role & Program Delivery: A Film Business Connector role will be created to deliver a program for micro and early-stage businesses (with consideration to be given to a dedicated First Peoples stream), including events (such as a film-industry ‘Meet the Buyer’ or Expo style event) and workshops. The dedicated industry connector role will be differentiated from the existing Film Liaison Role which has a primary focus on filming operations and logistics, coordination and collaboration, permits and approvals and film friendly advocacy, whereas the Film Connector role would be an outward facing industry support function. A summary of each role is as follows:

Film Liaison role (existing role within Council): Responsible for enabling productions to film successfully in region. Acts as the central point of contact for productions and ensures filming activities are delivered safely, efficiently, and with minimal disruption. *This role supports productions coming to Cairns to film.*

Film Connector role (new role associated with this project): Responsible for strengthening the local screen ecosystem by working directly with businesses, industry participants, and community stakeholders. Rather than supporting the day-to-day operational needs of productions, this role focuses on building the capability and capacity of local businesses to participate in the screen industry. *This role will support local businesses to benefit from productions.*

Estimated cost of Component 2 over the project period: \$250,000 (ex GST) excluding in-kind contributions. This figure will be inclusive of two years of staffing costs. The Film Connector role would be a contract role for the period of this component of the project and is subject to 100% of funding for financial costs being secured.

Financial considerations

The following table sets out the estimated project costs and requested funding amounts, which are subject to final agreement with project partners. As indicated in Table 2, it is recommended that Council apply for the Regional Business Gateways Program for 100% of total project financial costs.

Table 2: Estimated project costs and funding amounts.

Estimated project cost*	\$434,214
Estimated Council in-kind contribution to project cost if application successful*	\$23,814
Estimated Screen QLD in-kind contribution to project cost if application successful*	\$10,400
Grant funding sought*	\$400,000
<i>Regional Business Gateways Program funding as a % of estimated project financial costs</i>	100%

**Project costs will be subject to adjustment as the grant application documents and detail contained therein are refined ahead of submission.*

Submission of application

Council officers recommend approving submission of this grant funding application to the Regional Business Gateways Program, and in doing so approve Council officers to develop and finalise all associated project documents ahead of submission, including (but not limited to) the Project Plan, Risk Management Plan, Evaluation Plan, and to finalise consortium/partnership arrangements with Screen Queensland and Cairns Chamber of Commerce for the purpose of confirming roles and responsibilities of each party.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 (Recommended)

That Council:

1. Approves an application for funding under the State Government's Regional Business Gateways program for the Cairns Creative and Screen Industries Connector project.
2. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to finalise any and all matters relating to the above application including the finalisation of associated project documents as described in this report ahead of submission of the grant application, and the execution of any funding agreement should Council's application be successful.

Option 2

That Council **does not** support the submission of applications for funding under the State Government's Regional Business Gateways program for the project referred to in this report.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Risk Management:

There is a risk that actual project costs may differ from anticipated costs. These risks are mitigated/managed in accordance with Council's normal project and operational management processes.

Council Finance and the Local Economy:

It is expected there will be minimal operational impact on existing resources for the Economic Development and Major Events teams beyond application submission, monitoring and evaluation and final acquittal.

Roles: Economic Development team to coordinate application, and to provide monitoring and acquittal support. Film Connector function to sit within the Major Events team alongside the Film Liaison Officer.

Council **in-kind** input would be limited to preparing and submitting the application, project monitoring, and acquittal and management oversight of the Film Connector role, as well as provision of event/workshop space, and it is intended that this will not draw significantly (beyond those aspects mentioned here) on Council's operational resources to deliver the project itself.

Corporate and Operational Plans:

The project aligns directly with Council's Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030; the project builds on existing initiatives such as the small business focused Meet the Buyer event; procurement capacity building; First Peoples business support; and it supports the Strategy's targets of \$1.5 billion economic growth and 10,000 new jobs by 2030. It represents a Strategic Economic Initiative (Targeted Intervention) that seeks to leverage a strategic competitive advantage for Cairns being the opportunity for screen sector development supported by the Screen Queensland studios in Cairns and Council's aim to position Cairns as a 'film friendly' destination.

The project also aligns with the Corporate Plan 2025-2030 under Focus One: Robust Economy (promoting diverse industries and small business, innovation, and growth in employment), and if a First Peoples steam is included, could potentially support Council's reconciliation commitments through its First Peoples procurement pathway.

It is also expected that this project will support Council's forthcoming Games 2032 roadmap which is currently in development and not yet endorsed by Council.



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