



Small
Business
Commissioner

Supporting your small business community

A guide for local councils



Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Small Business Commission acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of Australia, and recognises their continued custodianship of Country – land, seas and skies. We acknowledge the diversity of First Nations cultures, histories and peoples, recognise their enduring connection to our State, and we pay our deepest respects to Elders past, present and emerging.



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Introduction



Councils can play an important role in supporting the success of small businesses in local communities.

NSW's almost 842,233 small businesses account for 98 per cent of our State's businesses. They employ over 1.8 million people and contribute more than \$400 billion dollars each year to our State's sales and service income. However, these economic measures paint only a partial picture of the value of small business.

Small businesses provide consumer choice, innovate to meet consumer needs and diversify their offerings to embrace new technologies or fill emerging gaps in the market. In smaller communities, they may be the only local provider of a good or service.

Small business owners tend to perform many functions within a business and are often time poor, meaning they tend to spend more time working in their business than on their business.

Councils can help business communities by supporting them to better navigate council services and approval processes and providing initiatives and resources to support small business development. This includes working with small businesses to minimise the impact of disruption when carrying out public infrastructure works and proactively engaging with the small business sector to better understand their needs.

This guide is targeted at new and existing Economic Development staff who would like to better understand or refresh their understanding of the needs of their small business stakeholders.

The guide includes a range of tips and resources, as well as case studies from metropolitan and regional NSW Councils. Councils may wish to utilise this guide for ideas and strategies to include in their Community Strategic Plan, Delivery Program and Operational Plan or as a reference when developing or updating an Economic Development Strategy.

1. Finding small businesses (and their networks)



It is important to know the types of businesses in your local government area to understand their needs, operating challenges and build stronger relationships. While the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) publishes data: www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/search-by-area; it is useful to closely engage with local businesses to better understand what makes your local small business community unique. This can then inform initiatives and strategies.

1.1 Making contact

Finding local small businesses

- Get a better understanding of your local area by reviewing data published by the ABS: www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/search-by-area
- Use the Australian Business Register (ABR) contact data (which is free for councils) to identify and connect with local businesses (Note: some businesses use the address of their accountant/professional adviser): www.abr.gov.au/government-agencies
- Engage with local networks such as local business chambers.
- Provide opportunities for small businesses to register with council to receive regular communications and updates, procurement opportunities, consultations and information on any support initiatives.
- Organise or participate in local events and markets or find other ways to engage in person (such as conducting street walks and going door-to-door for businesses in retail and commercial areas). It is preferable

to avoid busy times for businesses, such as lunch time for a sandwich shop.

- Promote Council's small business services through local media, council newsletters and social media channels.
- Regional Economic Development Strategies (REDS) can be used to identify region-based needs and priorities and to support planning future economic activities: www.nsw.gov.au/regional-nsw/regional-economic-development-strategies
- Be aware that many small businesses are small home-based businesses and can be difficult to engage. There is specific information on finding home businesses later in this guide.

- Promoting training or other business opportunities.

Not all businesses access the same technology (due to preference or availability), so councils may need to utilise a range of channels. Where possible, councils should minimise unnecessary contact with small businesses and identify opportunities to reduce the amount of times businesses must supply the same information (adopting an 'ask once, use many times' approach where technology enables).

Remember

Any time you interact with small businesses, it is good practice to add their contact information to your database. Ensure you ask permission to add small businesses to any lists or CRM database. Advise them upfront of the ways you may use their information (for example, for newsletters, surveys and consultations) and review compliance requirements under the *Privacy Act 1988*. For more details, see: www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/privacy-legislation/the-privacy-act

1.2 Finding local business information and data

There are different information resources available to help you find local small businesses and understand the types of industries in your local area. Understanding the composition of local industries can help councils target communications to the right businesses, for example focusing nighttime economy strategies to hospitality businesses. Councils can also target development strategies and activities in a manner consistent with local strengths in accordance with key principles set out in [Regional Economic Development Strategies \(REDS\)](#).

Understanding the composition of local industries can help councils target communications, promote relevant opportunities, plan specific skills development and encourage resilience building activities. Councils have used the following to identify and analyse their local small businesses:

Storing small business contact details

Small businesses should be able to nominate their communication preferences in terms of what information they receive and contact method. Small businesses may receive multiple communications from different levels of government, leading them to feel bombarded or miss critical information.

Maintaining a customer relationship management (CRM) database of local small business contacts can help council maintain regular engagement with local businesses, including by:

- Providing short, regular e-newsletters. This is an efficient and cost-effective way of keeping small businesses up to date with important information relating to council services and local developments. The Small Business Commissioner prepares a monthly newsletter, the content from which can be adapted for use in your council's own communications to small businesses.
- Advising of planned service outages, road closures or construction activity.
- Assisting in managing disaster response and recovery. This may include contacting businesses with announcements and assessing impacts on the local economy.

- The Australian Business Register (ABR) can provide detailed information and data to councils on local industries and small businesses.
- The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) provides free [community profile information](#) for local government areas. This includes detailed demographic information on residents and communities, and key Working Population Profile data.
- Many councils procure proprietary data and analytical services to provide more detailed information than what is ordinarily provided by official government statistical sources. Your council may already have access to these services so check with your colleagues.

1.3 Building relationships with local business chambers

Active local business chambers and industry bodies are key stakeholders for councils. Some chambers may represent specific industries or trades, but most represent a local region. Chambers provide a direct link to the business community and can offer opportunities to facilitate education, feedback, support and other opportunities for local business communities.

Local business chambers can:

- Help raise awareness about council initiatives that benefit local small businesses
- Provide useful feedback on key challenges experienced within a local area, including pain points when dealing with council
- Act as a partner when trying to facilitate networking and relationship building between local businesses (including events and other activities).

Common chamber advocacy issues may include:

- Planning requirements.
- Improved local economic development policies.
- Local infrastructure.
- Local procurement and tendering opportunities.
- Place-making opportunities.
- Red tape reduction.
- Reducing costs to local businesses.
- Workforce capabilities, capacity, availability and opportunities.

Working with local business chambers can provide good outcomes for your local business community, especially when collaborating to identify and implement solutions to meet local business needs. However, some chambers are resourced better than others and while chamber representatives are good spokespeople for the business community, on specific issues there may be a diversity of viewpoints among the small business community.

1.4 Other important small business networks

In many communities, other business networks support businesses to meet specific needs. These networks often attract members who may not feel they fit the traditional business chamber model or have unique needs. Examples include entrepreneurs, micro businesses, women or multicultural small businesses. These networks can grow quickly and be quite active, though some may fly under the radar. They may promote or base themselves on social media (such as a Facebook Group).

It is valuable for council to reach out and regularly engage with these groups too. Their members may have different needs and challenges from those faced by more traditional businesses. These new networks may bring some important perspectives and insights when seeking feedback from small businesses (such as groups representing the perspective of home-based businesses).

2. Engaging with local small businesses



2.1 Effective ways to engage with local small businesses

Councils can engage and collaborate with small businesses in many ways. The following tips provide a starting point:

- Ensure small businesses know your council is committed to helping them and explain how to access available supports.
- Grow and develop council's relationship with local small business networks.
- Hold welcome events for new small business owners who have just started or recently moved into the area.
- Send regular small business email newsletters with information on grants, training, networking events, tendering opportunities, surveys and other opportunities.
- Find other opportunities to promote business supports and raise community awareness.

When engaging with businesses, make sure you also have a plan to reach and communicate with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) businesses. CALD businesses are a valuable part of the small business community and are an important source of economic opportunity. It is important to communicate effectively with CALD businesses and ensure their interactions with council are positive.



Resources

The Commission's [Advice for councils: Engaging with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse \(CALD\) businesses and communities](#) can help councils connect with and support CALD businesses and communities.

2.2 Small business reference groups

Some councils have benefited from establishing small business reference groups. Reference groups can act as advisory bodies and provide helpful feedback on council's customer service and processes or provide early advice or feedback when developing new initiatives.

There may be established business networks that are active and willing to work with council however it can be beneficial to cultivate a group of engaged local small businesses that is representative of council's stakeholders. For example, to ensure council hears a variety of perspectives, a council reference groups could be established with membership that includes entrepreneurs, start-ups and home businesses and/or business owners who are young, female or culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD).

2.3 Networking and training programs

Small business owners can often feel isolated from other businesses and may find it hard to keep up with skills-development, governance and emerging technology. Many councils run regular or ad hoc networking events and training programs to help small businesses build their capacity. Networking can also help councils connect with their small business community and hear about emerging issues or receive feedback.

Targeted training not only helps businesses upskill, but it can also have great community benefits and help to achieve council's strategic goals. See the case studies below for specific examples.



Case studies

Griffith City Council – [The Better Business Seminar](http://www.griffith.nsw.gov.au/cp_themes/edu) was a practical workshop encouraging innovative thinking in the workplace. Understanding the importance of prioritising training and how it can help businesses get more from their customers, time and revenue. See: www.griffith.nsw.gov.au/cp_themes/edu

The Hills Shire Council – [Local Business Welcome Events](http://www.thehills.nsw.gov.au/News-and-Publications/Local-Business-Welcome-event) are regular events for new businesses in the area, providing information about active local networking groups and support the available opportunities. The initiative was designed to help new local business and existing businesses who have moved to The Hills district. The events help businesses connect with The Hills business community. See: www.thehills.nsw.gov.au/News-and-Publications/Local-Business-Welcome-event

City of Ryde Council – Council ran sessions with a professional visual merchandiser and provided grants that encouraged businesses to enhance their street appeal, foster social interaction and stimulate economic activity. The [Shop Shapers](http://www.ryde.nsw.gov.au/Home) program provided a holistic approach to address a range of challenges impacting local small retail businesses in West Ryde. See: www.ryde.nsw.gov.au/Home

City of Sydney Council – [The Retail Innovation Program](http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/business-support-funding/business-innovation-program) helped local small retailers explore innovative ways to become more competitive in a digital economy, to meet future opportunities and cement the future of retail for Sydney city as part of a vibrant, liveable city. See: www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/business-support-funding/business-innovation-program

Examples of council initiatives:

- E-Newsletters (e.g. including information on procurement opportunities, grants, new requirements, and promoting upcoming initiatives.)
- Mentoring programs.
- Networking events.
- Training and education programs (e.g. on specific skills, technology or systems.)
- Speaker presentations or webinars on relevant and topical matters.
- Strategic, business and financial planning activities (e.g. business plans, marketing, fundraising and membership.)
- Resilience building activities (e.g. developing a business continuity plan or preparing for disaster.)
- Best practice resources and guides.

2.4 Partnering with NSW Government Agencies

There may also be an opportunity to partner with NSW Government agencies to share information about available support, including by hosting events with regional representatives and other advisors.

- **NSW Small Business Commission** – The Commission provides strategic advice, advocacy and affordable dispute resolution services. The Commission also provides a range of resources, guides and a regular newsletter to businesses. For more details see: www.smallbusiness.nsw.gov.au
- **Small business month** – NSW Small Business Month is a month-long program created for small businesses across NSW to attend events aligned to their individual business interests. Events are organised to help small businesses learn new skills and new ideas and get the opportunity to connect and collaborate with other small business owners and operators.

Organisations are invited to apply to host an event in October. To find out more: www.smallbusinessmonth.nsw.gov.au

- **Business Connect** – The Business Connect program supports NSW small businesses to start, run, adapt and grow. Many councils have partnered with their local [Business Connect Adviser](#) to run training and events for their local small businesses. For more information see: www.service.nsw.gov.au/business/business-connect/how-business-connect-works
- **Training Services** – Training Services NSW has services to support small business owners and employees to reskill and upskill. Businesses can find out about the range of practical skills and knowledge programs Training Services provides that supports local needs. Visit Training Services at www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government/departments-and-agencies/departments-and-agencies/training-services-nsw to learn more
- **NSW Reconstruction Authority** – run local resilience building training events for small businesses which provide helpful information to help them better plan and prepare for disaster disruption. For further details see: www.nsw.gov.au/emergency/nsw-reconstruction-authority

3. Making council processes easier for small businesses



Small business interactions with their local council tend to be non-routine meaning they may be unfamiliar with procedures or what to expect. Council should actively consider how to make these interactions as simple and as stress-free as possible.



Tips

Provide clear information that is easy to find online, via telephone or in person

Respect the small business customer's time and try to resolve any queries and issues quickly as delayed responses can hold up other business decisions and approvals.

Avoid situations where small business customers are transferred between different sections of council without a council officer taking responsibility for their matter.

Provide options and guidance to customers if they are not satisfied with the outcome of an issue and implement an effective complaint-handling process.

Embed customer service best practice and standards across all council teams and contact points.

Welcome and use internal and external feedback to make continual improvements and to streamline processes.



Resources

The NSW Ombudsman provides an effective complaint handling process, guidelines and free e-learning modules. The principles are based on accepted best-practice and may prove to be useful. For more information see: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/guidance-for-agencies/effective-complaint-handling



3.1 Providing a contact point for small business

Many councils provide a dedicated, knowledgeable point of contact for small businesses to assist them when they contact council. This can be a customer service officer, an economic development team or a dedicated help line. They can provide general small business support as well as information and guidance on processes, costs and timeframes associated with applications. This service can be promoted via newsletters, on council's website and through local stakeholder networks.

If a dedicated contact point is not viable, general customer service staff should be readily available, easily contactable, and able to address business queries and concerns.

3.2 Streamlining approval processes

Councils have a critical role in supporting economic development and activity in their regions by ensuring efficient administration of their planning functions. This includes ensuring timely and professional Development Application (DA) processing and ensuring best-practice systems and processes are used for DAs and other activities that require Council's consent.

Most small business owners are time-poor and have many other governance and reporting requirements on top of running their business. Taking advantage of any opportunities to streamline approval processes, improve communication and reduce red tape can help businesses get on with running their day-to-day business activities.

Provide clear, upfront information on all charges, timeframes and processes. Also include 'frequently asked questions' (FAQ) and who to contact for more information.

Provide information on what small businesses can expect from approval processes and what documentation will be needed.

Ensure the application and approval processes are as easy as possible by including:

- checklists (so both parties are aware of what is requested and what is received)
- templates
- diagrams and examples
- workflows showing how the approval process will work.

Utilise the [NSW ePlanning Portal](#). The Planning Portal hosts a range of digital planning services as well as mapping and reporting tools which improves application determination times, increases transparency of the planning system and ensures greater accountability for all stakeholders. The Portal is mandatory for development applications, complying development certificates, building information certificates and post consent certificates. Councils can use other services available on the portal at their discretion.

Provide and promote specialist support for planning, building and development matters. Pre-DA meetings encourage a better quality of application and supporting information being provided. This saves time and effort for applicants and allows assessment officers to make informed decisions sooner.

Identify and encourage opportunities to allow small businesses to self-assess and obtain pre-approval or test improved processes for low-impact activities via a trial or short-term approval.

If there are processing delays, the applicant should be advised in writing of the reason for the delay, and the next steps and timeframe associated with the assessment.

3.3 Mutual recognition

Under Section 68 of the *Local Government Act 1993*, approvals are required for a range of activities for small businesses engaging in trade or business on community land.

Upcoming changes will facilitate mutual recognition of certain council approvals (licenses or permits) for businesses operating across different local government areas. The new arrangements require amendments to Local Government (General) Regulation 2021 which the Office of Local Government are developing. Once the mutual recognition scheme is established, councils will be able to mutually recognise certain regulatory approvals from other NSW councils. This will enable small businesses to apply once for approval, rather than apply for approval for every LGA they operate in.

Small businesses that operate across a number of LGAs are likely to benefit from this change, including:

- Market stall holders and operators
- Mobile food vendors (food trucks)
- Fitness trainers.

Councils can adopt consistent, good practice policies for relevant mutual recognition activities to further assist businesses. It can be difficult for small businesses to comply with different policies and requirements to undertake the same activities in neighbouring areas.

4. Facilitating council purchasing from small businesses



There are a range of ways councils can make it easier for small business suppliers to participate in procurement opportunities. Effective procurement policies do not require small businesses to be preferred over other suppliers that offer the best value for money, but instead improve choices available to councils by breaking down barriers that may discourage small business participation.

Your council may also wish to refer small businesses to existing NSW Government resources including those offered by the Commission, TAFE NSW, and NSW Business Connect. These resources can provide training, support and assistance to support small businesses to get 'tender ready'. See: www.smallbusiness.nsw.gov.au/small-business-guide-selling-to-nsw-government

4.1 Improve the existing procurement process

Establish a small business local procurement policy:

- Seek feedback from suppliers about any challenges with council's current procurement processes and get their feedback on opportunities to improve them.
- Do not require small businesses to meet unnecessary additional requirements such as providing corporate policies which are unlikely to be held by smaller firms.
- If additional requirements such as corporate policies are required for compliance or other reasons, support small businesses to comply including by providing template policies and procedures.

Establish and use diverse supplier lists:

- Supplier lists make it easier for council to engage businesses quickly.
- Establish an easy registration process to enable prequalification for specific supplier lists on council's website.
- Ensure there are no unnecessary requirements to become a supplier, for example onerous insurance coverage. If insurance is required as a condition of undertaking work, allow the business to be considered on the condition they acquire the insurance only if they are successful.
- Consider expanding current supplier lists to include additional categories.

Help local small businesses access other opportunities if there are significant local infrastructure projects:

- Advertise opportunities locally to increase awareness of opportunities to be on a council supplier list. Participation can be encouraged through local business chamber networks and council communications.
- Arrange 'meet the buyer' events with small businesses to promote council's procurement policies, requirements and upcoming opportunities.
- Councils have successfully run commercial 'speed networking' events, which can build connections between major infrastructure developers, head contractors and local small businesses.
- Some councils have also run training for local businesses so they can understand what they need to do before they tender with a head contractor, get familiar with tender processes, have any required policies in place and can ensure they meet Work Health & Safety (WHS) requirements.

Simplify tender processes:

- Develop simple processes to enable small business friendly procurement.
- Do not charge for tender documents.
- Provide clear tender documents that include all requirements and evaluation criteria. This will help small businesses understand how they will be assessed.
- Remove unnecessary requirements in tender processes, for example:
 - Only ask for insurances that are necessary, reasonable and required at the time of awarding the tender, and only ask this of successful businesses.
 - Australian Standards Organisation (ASO) and International Standards Organisation (ISO) requirements can be costly for businesses to implement and obtain. They should only be required if necessary.

Other strategies to support local small businesses to supply to council:

- Provide a customer service contact point for local small businesses.
- Publish tender FAQ/help resources on your website.
- Develop contracts which are concise, in plain English and do not include any unfair contract terms or warranties.
- Ensure contracts do not place unnecessary risk exposure on small businesses, particularly where they have limited ability to take mitigating actions (such as contracting out of proportional liability).
- Provide feedback to all bidders on each tender so small businesses can understand why they were unsuccessful and how they can improve for future opportunities.
- Pay small businesses quickly.



Resources

The Commission also provides resources to help small businesses do business with NSW Government, noting the approach for applying for a government, council, or private sector tender can be similar:

- [Selling to Government Guide](#)
- [Selling to Government quick reference factsheet](#)
- [Online TAFE training modules on selling to NSW Government](#)
- [Local Procurement: A guide to doing business with local councils](#)
- [Winning Business learning module](#)

Business Connect offers free webinars for small businesses on a range of business and procurement topics as well as experienced business and specialist procurement advice. Businesses can contact Business Connect on 1300 134 359 or visit their website: www.nsw.gov.au/working-and-business/business-advice-and-support/about-business-connect

4.2 Benefits of eInvoicing

It is becoming increasingly common to use eInvoicing to keep track of and facilitate faster payments between purchasers and suppliers. The Australian Tax Office (ATO) administers the Australian Peppol Authority and helps businesses take advantage of eInvoicing. Peppol is an international standard used in 40 countries globally, providing reliable and secure eInvoicing networks.

The NSW Government has implemented eInvoicing across most agencies. There is a range of companies also in the process of implementing eInvoicing. Many small businesses who use accounting software providers will already have access to eInvoicing as part of their package.

Council could consider adopting eInvoicing to improve the invoicing and payment process for small business suppliers. The benefits of eInvoicing include:

- **Cost savings** – according to the ATO, an emailed paper-based PDF invoice costs between \$27 and \$30 to process. EInvoices cost less than \$10 per invoice.
- **Labour savings** – eInvoicing removes the manual work involved in processing an invoice and connects seamlessly with any system on the network reducing the need for paper-based or PDF invoices.
- **Fewer errors** – eInvoicing data is standardised and validated and saves time by not having to re-key or scan invoices, make corrections, or chase missing information. EInvoices are more accurate and leave less margin for errors. Businesses will still need to apply normal approval process before paying invoices.
- **Cyber security benefits** – eInvoicing is secure, minimises the risk of fake or compromised invoices, and reduces the chance of paper or PDF invoices being intercepted. Strict protocols are followed to ensure invoices and sender and receiver details remain secure while they are sent across the network, allowing for greater security and peace of mind.
- **Faster payments** – effectively managing cash flow is key to the long-term survival of small businesses – getting paid faster via eInvoicing can improve their cash flow.



Resources

The Commission's fact sheet on [Why your small business should consider eInvoicing](#).

See the ATO website for information and resources on eInvoicing for government: www.ato.gov.au/business/eInvoicing/eInvoicing-for-government

5. Boosting economic development



In recent years, many councils have successfully implemented practical and effective initiatives to boost economic development and facilitate an operating environment that encourages small businesses to start, grow and thrive in their LGA. Each community is unique, so different strategies and initiatives may suit the needs and opportunities of each LGA.

5.1 Activation and place-making

Councils play an important role in creating and nurturing vibrant communities and making their local area a great place to live. Unfortunately, many NSW businesses have been impacted by natural disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic, changing customer behaviour and online shopping. This has contributed to store closures and extended retail vacancies. Shopfront vacancies can create knock on effects as customers and other small businesses may be deterred from shopping and operating there.

Activations and place-making can help improve existing business centres and high streets by increasing the vibrancy of public spaces and making main streets and other local places an attractive retail option for locals and visitors. Councils can also leverage their ability to approve businesses, run events, manage land use permissions and provide services to help reinvigorate areas and generate commercial and investment opportunities.

Activations and place-making can:

- Create places that are enjoyable to visit, accessible and well-connected.
- Increase visitation, foot traffic and visitor spending in local economies.
- Create jobs through increased investment.
- Attract key industry partners.
- Create greater opportunities for small businesses.
- Build business, community and local networks.
- Better utilise public and private spaces.
- Improve infrastructure.
- Reduce shopfront vacancy rates.
- Provide more diverse recreational offerings.
- Increase safety and reduce crime.
- Create a sense of community.

Activation ideas include:

- **Pop-up shops, arts and culture** – work with retail shop owners to better utilise vacant stores or the footpath to provide opportunities for new start-ups, home-based businesses, online stores expanding into retail, creative businesses, art displays or craft and music lessons.
- **Co-working spaces** – investing and partnering to provide co-working areas in the main street for the benefit of home-based businesses, professional services, new arrivals in town and agile work practices.
- **Dual businesses/multi-occupancy** – includes shops like shared retail spaces or dual tenancy arrangements (two different businesses, for example running a cafe by day and a small bar by night).
- **Shop facade, front and wraps** – dressing up vacant premises, shop front or facade improvements.



Consider other successful models and determine if they will need local needs. These are examples in the case studies below, but the Commission also maintains a [case study library](#).

When considering place-making opportunities, determine the geographic boundaries and location suitability. Consider whether the location matches council's place-making vision and whether existing businesses, community and infrastructure allow the vision to be realised.

Form effective relationships with business and community stakeholders and adopt a 'co-design' approach. Consider whether proposals may impact negatively on some businesses and how they can be mitigated.

Establish governance frameworks for place-making that clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

Streamline council policies to enable activation, special events, main street revitalisation programs and pop-up initiatives.

Assess the costs and benefits of proposals to be confident the benefits outweigh costs to participating businesses and council itself.



Resources

NSW Government has provided guidance for [public space activation](#). The [NSW Guide to Activation](#) and the [NSW Guide to Preparing an Activation Framework](#) are guides that can be used to support the preparation, delivery, and evaluation of activated public spaces and the benefits these provide.

The [Festival of Place](#) is a celebration of the breadth, beauty and possibilities of NSW's public spaces. This festival celebrates our connection to place, every day of the year.

The NSW Government is supporting more [vibrant streets](#) to generate positive social, economic, cultural and environmental outcomes. Learn from the available case studies, resources and toolkits to help rejuvenate local streets.

The Commission's [Keeping main streets vibrant](#) article gives councils practical ideas on ways to support small businesses boost their business and revitalise main streets. This can help put a town or suburb on the map as an attractive retail option for locals and visitors alike.

The NSW Government's [Local Character and Place](#) guideline provides tools to help communities and councils define the character of their area.



Case studies

Coffs Harbour City Council's [Trading Places Footpath Activation](#) focused on creating vibrant spaces on the footpaths outside local shops to encourage people to stop, look, stay and buy from local retailers. The initiative waived footpath fees and simplified processes for footpath use including A-frame signage, outdoor dining, merchandise displays, temporary street stalls and other footpath activations.

Liverpool City Council trialled their [Pop-Up Shop Program](#) enabling small businesses and start-ups an opportunity to trial their small business ideas in a low-risk environment by providing a shopfront for up to six months at very low rent costs. The program has transformed Liverpool's retail strip into a vibrant shopping destination and boosted retail occupancy rates in the area.

5.2 Promoting a vibrant nighttime or 24-hour economy

Some regional and metropolitan councils have undertaken initiatives to promote a vibrant nighttime or 24-hour economy in their LGA. Such initiatives can create a sense of community connectedness, improve safety, reduce vandalism, increase customer spending and provide local jobs.

The [24-Hour Economy Strategy](#) sets out a unified vision to transform Greater Sydney into a 24-hour economy centre that is vibrant, diverse, inclusive and safe. The COVID-19 pandemic has also presented a unique opportunity to consider how to extend the economic vibrancy of the day into the night, to support recovery.



Resources

Local Area Acceleration Toolkit for Councils – a resource to support councils to identify key elements of a plan to develop a local nighttime or 24-hour economy in their communities.

The Nighttime Economy Councils' Committee was established by a group of committed councils and Local Government NSW (LGNSW). The committee is a working group of council staff who meet monthly to share, advocate and strategize nighttime economy solutions for their local areas.

- LGNSW have also held several Masterclasses to help council staff extend their knowledge and facilitation of the nighttime economy. Presentations, summary documents and research reports are available to LGNSW members.

The 24-Hour Economy Strategy recognises nightlife as one of the most important parts of a city or town's culture. The strategy emphasises how arts, culture and hospitality can contribute to local economies and make nightlife a safe and exciting space for communities.

The Neon Grid newsletter is a guide to Sydney's 24-hour economy, including industry information, events and news about support programs to assist Greater Sydney's transformation into a 24-hour economy centre that is vibrant, diverse, inclusive and safe.

5.3 Events

Many councils find they can increase activation and visitation to their areas through running regular, annual or once-off events. Councils can maximise the success of events by identifying community and business opportunities, and ensuring events are held safely and sustainably.

Councils may also wish to provide support and resources to businesses leading up to events. Running information sessions and training leading up to events can encourage small business participation. This can help businesses take advantage of the opportunities the event presents. For example, some councils provided 'visual merchandising' training for local retailers which helped businesses prepare, present their merchandise and shop in a visually attractive way, and generated a material increase in the visitor spend within the local area.



Resources

Office of Local Government developed a framework and resources toolkit to help councils develop a customised events management policy that fit the needs of the local community.

Visit NSW (Destination NSW) has a calendar of events listings including theatrical performances, workshops, seminars, live music, food and wine events, exhibitions and other cultural experiences.

Department of Premier & Cabinet's Events Starter Guide can help community members navigate the process of organising events.

The Commission's Visual merchandising guide has tips to help keep customers coming through the door and making purchases. The guide includes tips about store layout, lighting, music and window displays.



Case studies

Gilgandra Shire Council held multiple events in the lead up to Christmas. The [12 Days of Christmas](#) involved more than 50 businesses, makers and artists co-locating in a large space which was left vacant by the previous anchor retail tenant. With prolonged drought conditions impacting the region, the pop-up shops offered a centralised shopping experience, showcasing existing businesses and Gilgandra region's local products and services. It also helped reinforce the established 'Shop Local' campaign and kept the main street active.

Gunnedah Shire Council held a night market on the main streets of Gunnedah. NightQuip, which coincided with the first evening of AgQuip (Australia's largest primary industry field day) and which attracts around 100,000 visitors. NightQuip saw food vans, market stalls and late-night shopping set up throughout the heart of Gunnedah, promoting retail offerings and increasing patronage for local businesses.

City of Ryde's [Shop Shapers](#) project was designed to encourage ground-level, street facing businesses to enhance their street appeal, foster social interaction and stimulate economic activity. The initiative included educational workshops, personal business consultations, shopfront improvements, and an award in the Local Business Awards.

5.4 Tourism attraction

The tourism sector contributes billions in annual revenue to the NSW economy and supports tens of thousands of jobs across NSW.

Councils can attract tourists and visitors by promoting their region as a tourism destination, running special events, and implementing services and infrastructure that support both tourism and businesses servicing the industry.

Councils may wish to partner with a range of stakeholders to maximise tourism opportunities and encourage cross-government and industry collaboration. For example, councils often work with Destination NSW, local Destination Networks, business chambers, neighbouring councils, Joint Organisations/Regional Organisations of Councils and local small businesses.

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Case studies

Inverell Shire Council partnered with Yetman Hall and Progress Association, to deliver the inaugural [Yetman Music Festival](#) in 2019. The two-day music festival offered family-friendly activities and a market for home businesses to showcase and sell their products.

Queanbeyan-Palarang Regional Council responded to the economic impacts of the 2019-20 bushfire season by developing the [Treasure Trail campaign](#). The project provided a multi-faceted economic recovery campaign developed to increase destination awareness, tourist visitation and expenditure.



Resources

Destination NSW's [NSW First Guide – Develop your tourism business](#) guide has practical tips and insights for developing businesses, creating market-matched products and standing out from the crowd.

[Destination Networks](#) coordinate destination management and work with local government, tourism organisations and operators. They are responsible for implementing regional Destination Management Plans.

[Visitor profiles and accommodation reports for Local Government Areas \(LGA\)](#) are useful for marketing and planning available local destinations.

[Local Government NSW](#) develops networks and partnerships across the tourism and government sectors to help NSW councils manage their tourism activity. They also run an annual Local Government Destination and Visitor Economy Conference.

Economic Development Australia's [knowledge hub](#) shares resources for economic development professionals on the economic importance of tourism and how to leverage local tourism activations.

The NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 commits Destination NSW to work with councils and to collaborate with industry and governments.

5.5 Helping new businesses and start-ups

Many small businesses approach their local council seeking assistance to start their business. Starting or growing a business is exciting but can also be daunting. Depending on the type of business there can be many application forms, licences and approvals required from multiple government agencies. There are a range of support and resources that councils can utilise and recommend to new and prospective businesses.



Resources

[Service NSW for Business](#) helps guide small businesses from having a viable idea to opening. Service NSW for Business offers:

- Business Concierge service which provides small business owners with free personalised support.
- Guidance and information on government licences, approvals and regulations.
- An online dashboard guiding customers through the process of starting and managing their business.
- [Business Connect](#) program provides independent business advice, events and resources helping businesses start, run, adapt or grow.

[Business.gov.au](#) has helpful resources to guide new businesses through some early stages of planning a new business and choosing a business structure, including:

- [Are you ready to start a business?](#)
- [Prepare yourself for business](#)
- [Choose your business structure](#)

[Australia Business Licensing and Information Service \(ABLIS\)](#) can be used to check licensing, permits and other requirements.

5.6 Home businesses

Home businesses are an important and rapidly growing part of NSW's economy as connectivity and technology have improved and traditional work patterns have changed. A home-based business is typically one that primarily operates from the place of residence of the business operator. They often have different needs from traditional small businesses and some may lack the traditional business skills needed to set up and run a successful business. Some also find they are quite isolated operating from home, and that it is hard to keep up to date with technology and governance changes.

Note: home business, home industry and home occupation are defined in the *Standard Instrument—Principal Local Environment Plan 2006*.

While often digitally well-connected, home businesses cannot always be found using existing channels and may not be integrated into traditional local business networks such as business chambers.

How to find home businesses

- Identify home businesses from their advertisements in local media or social media.
- Liaise with local professional services and advisers such as lawyers, bookkeepers and accountants.
- Use local social media groups, such as Facebook pages and online networks.

Engaging with home businesses

Some home businesses may not contact council for assistance or advice. Some may avoid making contact if they are unaware of what approvals may be required and fear they may be non-compliant (even if no approvals are required). Others see themselves as a sole operator working from home but don't realise they're technically a home business. It can be helpful for home businesses to understand the benefits and support councils can provide.

Approvals and planning

Many councils have adopted flexible regulatory frameworks allowing small-scale, low-impact businesses to operate from home without the need for local government approval.

- In NSW, the *State Environmental Planning Policy (Exempt and Complying Development Codes) 2008* outlines potential small business activities that can operate without council approval.
 - This includes home businesses that do not involve the manufacture of food products or any skin penetration procedures.
- If council's Local Environmental Plan (LEP) has additional controls or requirements for home businesses, ensure this information is readily available for local home businesses.
- Provide clear, user-friendly guidance on approvals and requirements, and the steps needed to meet them.
- Develop user-friendly starter kits and checklists to enable self-assessment for approvals and permits.

Helping home businesses transition

- Start-up hubs or co-working spaces can help growing home businesses transition from home to an established office or retail space.
- Some LGAs have privately-run spaces and some councils have launched their own start-up hubs leveraging existing community facilities and improving utilisation.



Resources

The Commission has developed [information and resources](#) to help councils support their local home businesses. This includes an online home business resource and a checklist for home businesses.

The Commission also undertook a survey of home businesses to understand their challenges and things they considered would assist them. The [NSW home business survey report](#) shares survey results and feedback which may provide some helpful insights for councils to assist in understanding the challenges home businesses face.

The [Business Connect](#) program available through Service NSW for Business, provides advice and training opportunities for home businesses.

There are some online networks that can help provide further advice, networking opportunities and support for small home businesses.



Case studies

Sutherland Shire Council's [home business web hub](#) has helpful information, resources and contact information to help home businesses get started.

Fairfield City Council established [The Workary](#), a business incubator and networking hub to support start-ups and home businesses test ideas in a safe, low-risk environment.

5.7 Alfresco and outdoor dining

Alfresco and outdoor dining can help create vibrant local communities and additional opportunities for food-based businesses within public spaces. The NSW Government has made changes to streamline the approval process for existing licenced venues applying for outdoor dining. This means that existing cafes, restaurants, pubs and small bars no longer must submit a DA to council for outdoor dining. They are only required to apply to council for an outdoor dining permit to use the footpath or public space and have their liquor licence boundaries changed (if applicable).

Councils can make the most of this opportunity by identifying areas within their towns (such as central business districts and high streets) where outdoor dining is appropriate and encouraging businesses to consider using these areas for outdoor dining purposes.



Tips

Ensure there is an outdoor dining policy (or street/footpath trading policy) easily accessible on council's website. Consider including step by step examples, do's and don'ts, images and diagrams.

Develop a standardised application form and/or checklist to help applicants provide all necessary information upfront and to streamline the assessment process.

Review internal processes to fast-track application assessment for new or expanded outdoor dining. Some councils offer provisional approval while applications are assessed.

Use the [e-Planning portal](#) to further streamline processing. This digital service refers applications to relevant State Government agencies for their input.



Case study

Coffs Harbour City Council's [Trading Places Footpath Activation](#) focused on creating vibrant spaces on the footpaths outside local shops to encourage people to stay for longer and buy from local retailers. The initiative waived footpath fees and simplified processes for footpath use, including A-frame signage, outdoor dining, merchandise displays, temporary street stalls and other footpath activations.

Key considerations

Explore how outdoor dining area approvals can be fast-tracked by considering the issues associated with approving outdoor dining sites. Council may wish to provide self-assessment guidance or general tips for businesses that covers:

- **Location and site suitability** – Facilitate the appropriate use of footpaths and public places for outdoor dining activities (e.g. minimum distances, neighbours.)
- **Safety** – Maintain an equitable and safe thoroughfare around outdoor dining areas for all users (e.g. public safety, road safety, accessibility, line of site, management of animals.)
- **Amenity** – Facilitate improvement to the local character, street vitality and economic viability. In some areas, such as heritage precincts, councils offer guidelines to ensure businesses know how to meet any local requirements relating to physical characteristics such as colour schemes or styles.
- **Function** – Ensure the design, furniture, fixtures and day-to-day requirements of the outdoor dining space reflect the local area.
- **Legal and compliance** – Ensure the management of outdoor dining activities avoids nuisance, endangerment or inconvenience to neighbours and the public. Address public liability, manage risks and ensure compliance with state legislation (e.g. liquor laws, noise, waste, operational conditions, council inspections, insurance.)



Resources

NSW Government's [Alfresco and Outdoor Dining](#) project.

The Office of Local Government NSW's [Streamlined Outdoor Dining Approvals – A Guide for NSW Councils](#) supports councils to increase outdoor dining opportunities in their local communities.

[Service NSW Business Concierge](#) can provide businesses with information on how to apply for outdoor dining.

5.8 Agritourism

Agritourism provides a tourism-related experience connecting visitors with existing agricultural products, people or places such as visits to a farm or rural land. Agritourism enables primary producers to diversify their income streams and build their resilience to future disruptions, such as drought.

In December 2022, the NSW Government simplified the agriculture planning system and streamlined approval pathways to help landowners implement innovative activities on their farms, including agritourism. This will help make it easier for small business to introduce activities and low-impact agricultural development on NSW farms.

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Economic opportunities

Agritourism provides a great potential economic development opportunity for NSW and regional, rural and outer metropolitan councils. The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) valued agritourism at \$10.7 billion in 2018 and estimates its future value to be \$18.6 billion in Australia by 2030.

Feedback obtained from primary producers, industry and government agencies as part of an Agritourism Pilot run by the NSW Government highlighted a widespread desire across the State to start new agritourism ventures. Participants in the pilot indicated they would be likely to invest an average of \$150,000 in their tourism ventures. They estimated their income would increase by \$65,000-\$78,000 and they were likely to employ 2-3 additional staff per venture. This does not include additional spending from visitors at other local businesses or the publicity gained by having an LGA increasingly considered as a tourism destination.



Tips

Establish clear policies and approval processes for agritourism projects and invest in council staff training to ensure consistency of decision-making, processes and costs.

- Conflicting advice, information and terminology may be discouraging and lead to missed opportunities.

Provide guidance for small businesses on how to establish an agritourism business.

Provide templates to facilitate applications and establish a single point of contact for each application.

Consider necessary changes to local planning controls or instruments to enable agritourism businesses.

Run information sessions and training for prospective agritourism businesses.

Investigate opportunities for local businesses to 'test' ideas without needing development approval. For example, small scale, low frequency or low impact activities that are ancillary to primary production.

Promote local agritourism businesses, for example through trails, festivals and events.



Resources

NSW Department of Planning and Environment's [Planning amendments for agriculture](#).

CSIRO's [Growth opportunities for Australian food and agribusiness](#).

5.9 Networking and other support for practitioners

Council economic development officers can find some great ideas for opportunities to support their local small business communities by networking with like-minded peers from other councils. This can include sharing knowledge and resources, promoting case studies of successful initiatives, building a network of industry contacts and undertaking training.

Local Government NSW

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) supports and facilitates several free networks for NSW council staff to connect, share information and discuss local government issues. Employees of LGNSW Member Councils can log on to the LGNSW website using their work email and select which networks to join from the Network Hub. Some helpful resources in the Networks Hubs are:

- The **Economic Development Network** is a forum for council staff working to promote sustainable economic development for the benefit of their local communities.
- The **Nighttime Economy Network** helps councils foster safe, sustainable and vibrant night economies in their local communities.
- The **Learning and Development Network** meets quarterly to share information and discuss issues pertaining to professional development. LGNSW also coordinates high-quality, cost-effective Learning and Development for council staff and elected officials.

Economic Development Australia

Economic Development Australia (EDA) is the national peak body for economic development professionals. It aims to build capacity, promote excellence and provide leadership on economic development issues that matter to its members.

- EDA membership offers access to resources, best practice research and case studies and a range of online resources, including an Economic Development Evaluation and Measurement Toolkit and the Recovery and Resilience Hub.
- The National Education and Training Program is an accredited professional development course for Australian economic development professionals. The modules deliver knowledge, skills and insights using practical case studies, a global perspective and adaptable tools to help practitioners build a strong and resilient local economy.



Small Business Commissioner

First published August 2023
TA23/01424

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