



interactive games & entertainment association

**The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities and
Arts NT**

NT Arts Strategy

March 2024

IGEA acknowledges and pays respect to the past and present Traditional Custodians and Elders of this land and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We would like to extend our acknowledgments to the indigenous people from countries overseas & recognise their strength, wisdom and creativity.

Introduction & Overview

The Interactive Games & Entertainment Association (IGEA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to Northern Territory (NT) Arts Strategy consultation, led by the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities, through Arts NT. The consultation is seeking to develop an arts strategy for the Territory, to inform arts sector and government priorities and guide government investment into the arts over the next 10 years. Our submission addresses key questions posed by the discussion paper, highlighting how the Government can support the future of video game development in the NT.

IGEA is the industry association representing and advocating for the video games industry in Australia, including the developers, publishers and distributors of video games, as well as the makers of the most popular gaming platforms, consoles and devices. IGEA has over a hundred members, from emerging independent studios to some of the largest technology companies in the world.

Amongst our various activities, IGEA also organises the annual Games Connect Asia Pacific (GCAP) conference for Australian game developers and the Australian Game Developer Awards (AGDAs) that celebrate the best Australian-made games each year.

Artistic & Cultural Significance of Video Games

Video games and interactive entertainment are cultural and artistic outputs that in the past have been underappreciated and under recognised from a policy perspective, which has also been reflected in their omission from governmental research and data-gathering priorities. However, this is being rectified not only with the introduction of the Digital Games Tax Offset, but with increasing federal, state and territory funding and support for the video games industry. These are welcome investments and policy decisions for the video games industry, indicating an increased awareness of the culturally and artistically rich gaming industry, which for many years has passed under the radar.

Video games are a powerful way to promote a cultural dialogue, particularly through Australian game development. Australian games provide a unique showcase of local art and culture, and they deserve to be recognised and celebrated. Further, as our Australia Plays 2023 research shows that 81 per cent of Australians are video game players and 94 per cent of Australian households having at least one device on which games are actively played,¹ pointing to the widespread popularity of video gaming in Australians' lives. The future of digital storytelling is ultimately one through games, presenting an influential and unavoidable artistic and cultural force. Embracing this future and putting the Australian video games industry on the map, should be a forefront consideration for policy makers.

Beyond the artistic and cultural significance of video games, in supporting local content, the video game industry is a significant contributor to the Australian digital economy.

¹ [IGEA Australia Plays 2023 Report](#)

According to our data, video games are worth around \$4.21 billion annually in Australia,² while Australian-made games brought in \$345.5 million in largely export revenue last year.³

Moreover, because the video game sector uniquely sits at the intersection of entertainment, the arts and technology, video game companies hire a wide range of artistic, technical and professional roles and are thus a wellspring of high-quality sustainable careers and are an engine for growth in the Australian national economy. Indeed, Australian game developers are internationally renowned, and ours has the potential to be one of Australia's most important future growth industries and an integral component of the Australian Government's vision for Australia to be a top 20 digital economy and society by 2030.

Northern Territory Arts Strategy 2024-2034 Discussion Paper

Protected Creativity: New technology and innovation

Regarding new technology and innovation, we would like to use this opportunity to address concerns raised in the discussion paper regarding digital mediums and technology as art forms, particularly in relation to traditional art.

The industry understands that video games are certainly not a traditional form of art. We believe video games are an accessible and innovative way of experiencing the arts. However, video games and interactive media are a unique way to show case traditional arts, providing an accessible and entertaining medium for experiencing art, creativity and storytelling. For example, in the 2023 Australian Game Developers Awards, [The Master's Pupil](#) by Pat Naoum Games won the Excellence in ART category. The game is a puzzle game set inside the eye of Impressionist painter Claude Monet, and the entire game is hand-painted.

In addition, although video games are not a traditional art form, their development require traditional art skills, concepts and principles. Video game development teams often employ a range of artists to ensure that video game design is of the highest quality and invokes the same humanity and emotions as traditional art forms. The game development process also requires writers, actors, designers, audio engineers, musicians, producers and a range of other roles with skills that are used in traditional art forms.

Moreover, the video games industry provides another opportunity to celebrate the arts, and allow for traditional artists to expand their remit, rather than devaluing their work. Video games allow art to extend to players; our latest research showed that of adults who play games, 71 per cent enjoy building in-game and 65 per cent enjoy making mini-games and levels.⁴ Even further, 76 per cent of adults think games inspire students to be creative.⁵

² ['Australians subscribe to video game growth' \(IGEA Media Release, 8 June 2023\)](#).

³ ['Aussie game developers pull in \\$345.5 million for the local economy' \(IGEA Media Release, 18 December 2023\)](#).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Supporting video game development as an arts medium can also help drive the NT Government's Digital Territory Strategy.⁶ Video games present an intersection of arts, culture and technology making it an attractive industry for building skills, businesses and bringing investment into the Territory. Recognising video games and video game development as part of the NT's arts and culture is an opportunity to invest in a growing and attractive industry, whilst bolstering access to and celebration of Territorian art.

Shaping the arts: Advocacy and policy

Leveraging on investment in the video games industry can help to accelerate the advancement of the arts and culture scene in the NT. This in turn also maximises the value of such investment, given its wider impact.

For instance, video games made in Australia are being recognised around the world. Not only does investing in the video games industry ensure local creators are supported, but it can also attract national and international talent and attention to the Territory. As we have seen from other states like Victoria and Queensland, the appropriate government support in the local industry can attract international studios and talent, expanding their local ecosystems.

Including video games in arts funding

To properly invest in video games, government departments must first recognise screen activities as a core part of contemporary art and culture. In the NT, there is an opportunity to immediately address this and unlock additional funding for video games.

The NT Government offers significant funding for arts organisations over a certain period of time such as the 2025-29 Arts Organisations funding, providing Territorians with the opportunity to learn, create and thrive through the arts.⁷ Recently, a video games business applied for such funding. However, they were ineligible because screen activities, including video games, did not appropriately fit into the arts criteria for that fund.

We believe sustainable approaches to supporting the NT video games industry in the longer term should be explored, such as working with organisations that provide collaborative spaces for video game creators such as *The Array* and extending access for video games organisations to the Arts Organisations funding.

We recommend access to Arts Organisations funding be extended to include organisations involved in video games and other screen activities. This will enable video game development studios and other organisations to plan for the future and ensure local creators can be supported in the longer term.

Boost Screen Territory funding

Screen Territory recently announced support for the video games industry with new Games Development Grants: up to \$10,000 for concept development; up to \$25,000 to develop a

⁶ [Digital Territory Strategy \(nt.gov.au\)](https://nt.gov.au/digital-territory-strategy)

⁷ <https://nt.gov.au/leisure/arts-culture-heritage/grants/2025-29-arts-organisations-funding>

prototype; and up to \$40,000 for early access.⁸ This funding is critical for indie game developers and individual creators. However, larger studios and other video game ventures require different support. Unfortunately, the current funding options, being project based, do not necessarily encourage a sustainable approach for long-term employment of additional video game developers, including artists and designers. Therefore, sustainable funding options for local studios in the NT is needed to encourage employment and expansion, and even allow incentives for recruiting interstate and international talent.

Larrikin Interactive is an NT based video game studio, with a focus on local stories and global video games, and also supporting the game dev community through education and upskilling opportunities. In addition, Salty Games in the NT is an open opportunity employer, employing people of all backgrounds and abilities, as well as welcoming work experience. Using funding as a way to encourage employment in the video games industry can open up opportunities for Territorians to be involved in the arts and creative industry, without needing to leave for opportunities interstate.

Other states have implemented such strategies to incentivise building local capabilities in the video games industry for their regions. For example, in Queensland, companies developing games can apply for a 15 per cent rebate, which can be combined with the federal Digital Games Tax Offset.⁹

In addition to project funding, the key to creating a sustainable video games industry is ensuring that creators have the business skills to grow and sustain their projects on their own. For example, Screen Queensland facilitates a Games Residency program which includes the provision of office space, mentorship and guidance to assist video game developers in fostering the skills and knowledge to develop games and businesses.¹⁰ Although developers may receive support to complete a creative project, without the right skills and guidance it may be difficult to self-generate sustainable funds to ensure the project is ongoing and business oriented.

We recommend increasing funding to Screen Territory to allow for the creation of sustainable video game grants, rebates and programs. We recommend two funding options be introduced:

- 1. A rebate should be created to support larger studios and compete with interstate support.**
- 2. Support for a professional development program be developed by Screen Territory, or subsidies for private programs.**

⁸ <https://screenterritory.nt.gov.au/news/2023/screen-territory-grants-expand-into-exciting-new-field>

⁹ <https://screenqueensland.com.au/games/digital-games-incentive/>

¹⁰ <https://screenqueensland.com.au/games/games-residency/>