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10 February 2025

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate
ACT Government
GPO Box 158
Canberra ACT 2601

Via email: budgetconsultation@act.gov.au

ACT 2025-26 Budget Consultation

CanDev would like to thank the ACT Government for the opportunity to submit to this budget consultation. We write to recommend that Screen Canberra's 10% Screen Attraction Fund and Screen Investment Fund be opened up to support local video game projects.

[CanDev](#) is Canberra's volunteer-run game developer community group, founded in 2014, featuring monthly meetups and now supporting over 850 members. CanDev is organised by Jarrod Farquhar-Nicol and Ruqiyah Patel, both of whom are nationally-recognised Australian Game Developer Award (AGDA) recipients.

Hundreds of skilled game developers have studied and begun their practice in Canberra. Local studios have worked on world-renowned titles such as *BioShock* and *Wild Bastards*. However, the lack of local financial support has led to developers leaving the ACT, while those who remain to tough it out are constantly juggling their game creation with other ways to make ends meet.

Canberra Game Developers' Success

While the Interactive Games and Entertainment Association (IGEA) has covered the current state of the industry and local funding well in their submission to this budget consultation, we want to bolster this by highlighting some recent and historical successes of ACT-based game developers.

Local developers are performing strongly on the national stage: Mount Stromlo Observatory commissioned local developer Ricky Vuckovic to create an original game, *Guide Star*, to celebrate their 100th Anniversary; *Ascending Inferno* won one of six highly-competitive places in the PAX Aus 2024 Digital Indie Showcase; ACT developers have been selected for prestigious opportunities like Screen Australia's Future Leaders Delegation to San Francisco and VicScreen's Play Now publisher market; Canberran individuals and teams have brought home AGDAs in

2020, 2024 and 2025 for Rising Star, Excellence in Narrative, and Excellence in Gameplay, respectively; and local studio *UpperCut Games* has recently landed a multi-year co-publishing deal that has created dozens of jobs in the ACT.

Important to note: like the ACT itself, most Canberran game development studios are small, made up of about 1-5 people, with few more than 10. This includes emerging developers and recent graduates, but even many of our experienced developers (are forced to) keep their teams small and lean - yet they still compete with the best on the national stage, winning accolades. We are left only to imagine just how high they could score with the proper financial support.

Several members of our community got together last year and made over a dozen different Canberra-themed games in under 48 hours. We did this for fun and to show our love for our home. You, and anyone, can play them for free at canberra.games/jam24

But “Canberran-at-heart” is a term we’re sadly using more and more as our skilled local developers find themselves with little choice but to leave their beloved Bush Capital home and cross the border to New South Wales, or beyond to other states like thriving Victoria, to tap into serious opportunities and career development in the games sector.

We train them up locally, only to lose them – and to lose claim to their successes. Last year alone ~~Canberran~~ Victorian game developer Dana McKay’s *The Ruby Court* was nominated for the 2024 AGDA for Excellence in Narrative; ~~Canberran~~ Victorian game designer William Dyce spoke at Game Connect Asia Pacific (GCAP) 2024, helped launch critically-acclaimed *Solium Infernum* as Senior Technical Designer, and has since been employed for his internationally-honed game design skills by two Melbourne-based Screen Australia grant winning studios; Shy Kids Club is a small ~~Canberran~~ Victorian studio whose upcoming game *With Friends Like These* has already won several international showcase selections and prizes, and when it launches it will be another feather in the cap for ~~the ACT~~ Victoria. We could list many more examples of the talent and sector knowledge we’ve lost, but we trust you understand the significant impact – Victoria certainly does, as they proudly celebrate the wins of these once-Canberran developers.

Our Recommendations

We echo IGEA’s concern about the large gap between game funding in the ACT and almost every state in Australia. To assist Canberra in regaining its competitive footing in this sector, we support IGEA’s budget consultation submission of 13 January 2025, and their two recommendations regarding the use of Screen Canberra’s existing funds, which we reiterate here verbatim:

1. We recommend that the 10% Screen Attraction Fund also be opened up to video game projects in order to attract larger studios and more ambitious projects to the territory.
2. We recommend that the Screen Investment Fund be opened up to video games. It will ensure that it becomes a true ‘screen’ fund and can support the region’s emerging studios.

We believe that taking action on these two recommendations will boost the ACT's growing video game industry and re-establish Canberra as a serious place to make games.

Closing

We see a bright future for Canberra's game development sector, but only with sufficient financial support from the ACT Government. We know the skill and talent is here. We know we have world-renowned, award-winning local developers. We know they want to stay here, with their homes and families. In our local community, we do our best to support and nurture each other, but that only goes so far when we're stretched thin financially. Our skill, art, new IP, passion, job creation potential, transferable skills and technological expertise are here in Canberra... for now.

We want to live and work in Canberra, but we can't win this game alone. We need you on our team.

Thank you for your time and consideration of Canberra's game development sector and these recommendations. Should you wish to further discuss our submission, please contact us.

Sincerely,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JFN' with a horizontal line underneath.

Jarrod Farquhar-Nicol

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