

Small Business Friendly Program

Annual Report 2025 - 26

Member information

Details	
Organisation name:	Western Downs Regional Council
Main address:	30 Marble Street, Dalby, QLD, 4405
Main email:	info@wdrc.qld.gov.au
Main phone:	(07) 4679 4000
Main website URL:	https://www.wdrc.qld.gov.au/Home
ABN:	91 232 587 651

Authorised representatives

The nominated staff members will take on the responsibility for Small Business Friendly (SBF) activities, which includes participation in SBF meetings. They will be the primary contact for receiving program details, updates, and inquiries.

Authorised SBF representative details	
Full name:	Susan Johansen
Position:	Economic Development Officer
Email:	Susan.johansen@wdrc.qld.gov.au
Mobile:	0439 372 300
SBF Proxy details	
Full name:	Rachel Bailey
Position:	Economic Development Program Leader
Email:	Rachel.bailey@wdrc.qld.gov.au
Mobile:	0458 484 984

Report information

Details	
Report date:	30/09/2026
Prepared by:	Susan Johansen - Economic Development Officer
Stakeholders consulted:	Yes ☒ No ☐
Report published:	Yes ☒ No ☐
Report URL (if online):	WDRC Small Business Friendly Council

Commitment performance

Celebrate achievements

What were the three most significant initiatives or achievements your council delivered this year to support small business? Where possible, include the outcomes or measurable impacts (for example, number of businesses supported, attendance, investment, or customer feedback).

During 2025–26, WDRC delivered a range of practical, place-based initiatives to support small businesses across the region, with a focus on disaster recovery, local procurement visibility, business engagement and strengthening connections between business, Council and government support services

1. Small Business Disaster Response - Chinchilla Floods

Following the March 2026 flooding in Chinchilla, Western Downs Regional Council (WDRC) delivered a coordinated recovery response with a strong focus on supporting small businesses to recover, reopen, and rebuild resilience.

WDRC undertook targeted engagement to identify impacted businesses and understand their needs:

- Direct engagement with businesses through surveys, site visits, and stakeholder networks
- Collaboration with local organisations including the Chinchilla Chamber of Commerce (CCCI)
- Ongoing communication to promote available funding, support programs, and recovery updates
- Liaison with State Government and Community not-for-profits and disaster response representatives to ensure that the business community were well serviced at a pop-up recovery centre based in Chinchilla.

Council leveraged strong local partnerships and external funding to deliver targeted, practical support for small businesses impacted by the flooding:

- 34 local businesses were directly assisted through the program
- Including 18 businesses less than 12 months old, ensuring emerging enterprises were supported through a critical early-stage disruption
- Approximately \$181,000 distributed, demonstrating strong uptake and efficient delivery of funds
- 44 businesses received support with grant applications, including access to pro bono grant writing services
- This support contributed to 31 businesses successfully accessing grants or concessional loans

Council worked across regulatory and operational areas to enable businesses to reopen safely:

- Environmental Health support provided to affected food businesses.
- Coordination with agencies to ensure safe access to premises and essential services.
- Integration of business needs into the Return Home Strategy, ensuring safe and staged re-entry to commercial areas.

2. Buy Western Downs Business Directory Fosters Opportunities & Connections

- Currently 422 businesses showcased on the directory
- Businesses utilising the directory for B2B networking
- Out of region organisations are utilising the directory to source local goods and services
- Increased subscribers to Economic Development eNewsletter currently total 596

3. Small business Month May 2026

- Interacted with 98 businesses
- One-on-one business calls
- Attended Small Business Month partnered events
- Promoted resources available through Council and Small Business Friendly Council status
- Provided opportunity for business community to help inform on future Small Business Friendly activities

Challenges and barriers

What were the biggest challenges your council faced in supporting small business this year? Were there any barriers you were unable to overcome?

The biggest challenge Council faced in delivering the 2025-26 Action Plan was balancing competing organisational priorities and resource demands. As a result, Council was unable to complete the Procurement Supplier Web Page Update within the planned timeframe.

Despite efforts to progress the project, internal dependencies and competing project commitments created barriers that could not be fully overcome during the reporting period. Rather than leave this gap unaddressed, Council reviewed the intended outcomes and developed an alternative initiative that will provide similar benefits to small and family businesses by improving access to procurement and supplier information.

This revised project has been included in WDRC's 2026-27 Small Business Friendly Action Plan and is scheduled for completion in Quarter 2. While the original activity was not delivered, Council remains committed to achieving the intended outcomes and continuing to strengthen opportunities for local businesses to engage with Council and major project procurement opportunities.

What do you think local small businesses would say are their biggest challenges in working with your council and in working with broader government (state and federal)?

Local small businesses identify access to information, navigating government processes, and understanding procurement opportunities as some of their biggest challenges when working with Council and other levels of government.

Small businesses also identify workforce-related challenges, including attracting and retaining skilled staff, managing training and compliance obligations, and responding to changing economic conditions - the lack of housing in the market being the most pertinent example. These factors can limit their ability to pursue growth opportunities or engage fully with government programs.

Council continues to work closely with local businesses and stakeholders to reduce these barriers by providing a single point of contact through the Economic Development team, promoting relevant support programs and procurement opportunities, connecting businesses with government agencies and industry networks, and advocating on issues affecting the local business community. Through these efforts, Council aims to improve accessibility, simplify engagement where possible, and ensure the needs of small and family businesses are represented at all levels of government.

What additional support from the Small Business Friendly Program or QSBC could help your council overcome these challenges?

Centralised and targeted communication resources that simplify complex state and federal government programs, grants, regulatory requirements, and procurement opportunities into clear, business-friendly information that can be easily shared with local businesses.

Procurement education and capability-building programs that help small businesses understand government procurement processes, tendering requirements, supplier registration systems, and how to successfully compete for government and major project opportunities.

Continued advocacy by QSBC on issues affecting regional and rural businesses, particularly around reducing administrative burden, simplifying government processes, improving payment practices, and increasing procurement accessibility for small and family businesses.

Practical resources and training on AI, cyber security and online safety would help small businesses confidently adopt new technologies while protecting their operations, data and customers. Business-friendly guidance on AI use, cyber risks, scam awareness and digital resilience would be particularly valuable for regional businesses with limited access to specialist expertise and digital capability-building opportunities.

Procurement

Do you have a Procurement and/or Local Buy Policy?

Do you have a Small Business and/or Local Buy procurement target?

What percentage of procurement was awarded to Queensland small businesses in your council region?

Procurement and Contracting Policy

Council's current Procurement and Contracting Policy was adopted on 19 February 2026 and outlines the principles Council applies when purchasing goods, services and works. The policy is owned by the Chief Financial Officer and applies to anyone undertaking procurement activities on behalf of Council.

Key principles of the policy include:

- Achieving value for money while considering whole-of-life costs and benefits.
- Ensuring open and effective competition.
- Encouraging the development of competitive local business and industry.
- Maintaining ethical behaviour and fair dealing in all procurement activities.
- Supporting environmental sustainability and responsible procurement practices.

The policy also supports local participation by encouraging consideration of local economic benefits where this aligns with legislative requirements and value-for-money principles.

Regional Procurement Percentage

Council's local spend is included in the divisional reporting each quarter with Quarter 4 2026 reporting:

- Local spend 52.10% of operating
- Local spend 20.65% of capital

As a regional local government, WDRC faces unique challenges in procuring certain goods, services and specialised expertise locally. While Council is committed to supporting local businesses and maximising local procurement opportunities, the size, scale and technical requirements of some projects can exceed the capacity or availability of suppliers within the region. In some cases, highly specialised products, professional services, or contractors are not available locally, requiring Council to source providers from outside the Western Downs.

While Council does not currently have a formal small business or local procurement spend target, its Procurement and Contracting Policy supports the development of competitive local business and industry and encourages local supplier participation wherever it delivers value for money and meets procurement requirements. Council actively promotes procurement opportunities to local businesses through tender, quotation and supplier engagement processes and continues to explore initiatives that improve local business awareness, capability and participation in procurement opportunities. Through these efforts, Council seeks to maximise local economic benefit while ensuring compliance with legislative and value-for-money obligations.

Small Business/Local Buy Procurement Target

At this time, Council is unable to report the percentage of procurement awarded specifically to Queensland small businesses within the Western Downs region. While procurement data is captured through Council systems, the ability to consistently identify and report spend with local small and family businesses requires further investigation and refinement.

Recognising the importance of this information, WDRC has included a dedicated action within its 2026-27 Small Business Friendly Council Action Plan to improve transparency around local procurement spend. This action includes quarterly reporting on Council's local spend through the Economic Development e-Newsletter and local Chambers of Commerce, as well as investigating Council's ability to identify and report on procurement expenditure specifically with local small and family businesses.

Through this initiative, Council aims to increase awareness of its local procurement performance and establish the capability to provide more detailed reporting on procurement spend with local small and family businesses in future reporting periods. This deliverable is scheduled for completion by 30 June 2027.

Feedback

As a result of your council's participation in the Small Business Friendly Program this year, which of the following outcomes has your council experienced? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Introduced a new initiative supporting small business
- ☒ Improved engagement with local businesses
- ☒ Improved engagement with other councils or levels of government
- ☐ Changed a policy or process that benefits small businesses
- ☐ Reduced red tape
- ☒ Improved procurement opportunities
- ☒ Developed new partnerships
- ☒ Increased executive awareness or support for small business
- ☐ Other / additional comments - provide data if applicable

Program Evaluation

We'd appreciate your feedback on your experience with the Small Business Friendly Program. Your responses will help us improve the support and services we provide to members.

Feedback	Rating				
	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
How would you rate the overall value your council has received from participating in the Small Business Friendly Program?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
<i>Consider the support provided to small business, networking opportunities, policy improvements, and community impact.</i>					
	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
How satisfied are you with the delivery of the Small Business Friendly Program?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
What improvements or additions would you like to see in the Small Business Friendly Program?					
WDRC would recommend that updates from participating councils at Small Business Friendly (SBF) roundtable meetings be provided in writing and distributed with the meeting agenda or minutes, rather than requiring verbal updates from every council during the meeting. Providing updates in a written format would allow participants to review initiatives, achievements, and challenges at their own pace, while also creating a useful record that can be referred to after the meeting. To make more effective use of meeting time, the SBF Program could consider selecting two or three councils each session to present a brief overview of a specific project, innovation, lesson					

learned, or success story. This approach would encourage deeper discussion and knowledge sharing, while reducing the significant amount of meeting time currently spent on individual council updates. It would also provide participants with more opportunities to engage in collaborative discussions on common challenges and emerging opportunities for supporting small businesses.

Membership requirements

Requirements		Status			
1.	Authorised representative and proxy appointed.	Yes ☒	No ☐		
2.	Small Business Action Plan (or equivalent) implemented.	Yes ☒	No ☐	Review Date:	September 2026
3.	Participated in at least four SBF Program activities in the previous FY. E.g. Roundtable meetings, conference.	0 ☐	1-2 ☐	3-4 ☐	>4 ☒

Please complete the annual report template by 30 September 2026 and return to commissioner@qsbc.qld.gov.au

Additional Information

- Link to published Annual Report 2025-2026 [Small Business Friendly Council Western Downs Regional Council](#)
- Link to [Procurement and Contracting Policy WDRC](#)