



CAIRNS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

2026
BUSINESS
EXCELLENCE
AWARDS

HOW TO ENTER GUIDE

MAJOR SPONSOR



2026 BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS

2026 Cairns Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards How to Enter Guide

1. Confirm that you are [eligible](#) (page 6) to apply.

2. Decide on the [category](#) you are going to enter.

This does not have to be the category that you were originally nominated, or self-nominated for. If after reading the submission questions, you feel you are more suit to another category, we recommend you proceed with that.

3. Start drafting your responses to the [submission questions](#) for the category you have chosen to enter.

Do not spend time formatting your responses during the draft phase. To be eligible for the awards program, all applications must be submitted through an online platform known as Award Force. When you copy and paste your responses into Award Force, all formatting is cleared. This includes the removal of inserted pictures, videos, hyperlinks, and font/text formatting.

4. Review the [judges and writing tips](#) (page 18).

5. Review the guidelines on [supporting materials](#) (page 19).

6. Once you are satisfied with your answers, you are ready to start uploading your submission into the online portal known as [Award Force](#).

To be considered for the 2026 Business Excellence Awards, YOU MUST submit your application via the online portal by 11.59pm Friday 18 September 2026.

7. Register or Login to [Award Force](#).

If you have participated in the Business Excellence Awards before, you will be able to login to your old account.

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Cairns Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards

Welcome to the 2026 Business Excellence Awards Submission Portal!

We cannot wait to hear all about your EXCEPTIONAL business.

The portal will open 9.00am AEST Friday 21 August 2026 and close 11.59pm AEST Friday 18 September 2026.

For everything you need to know about the awards program including the eligibility criteria, categories, key dates and submission questions [CLICK HERE](#).

Best of luck and if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email us at bexawards@cairnschamber.com.au or give us a call on (07) 4031 1838.

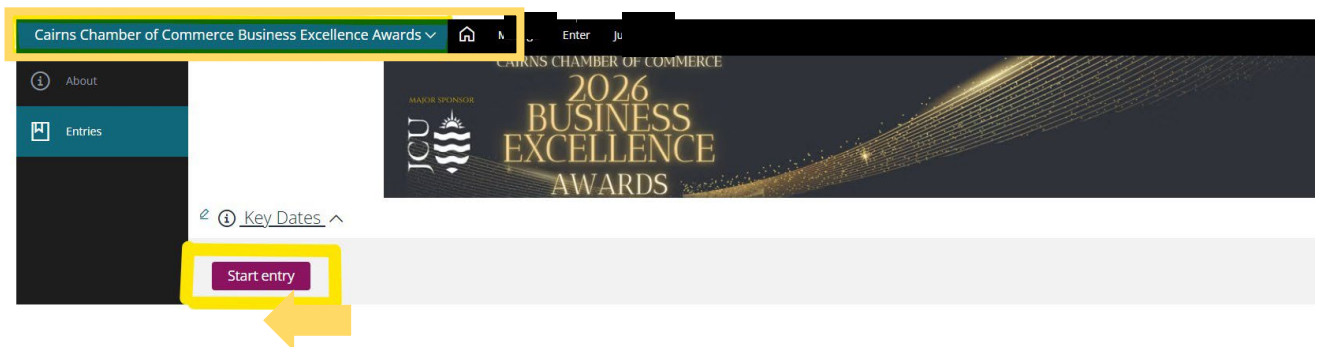
Kind Regards,
The 2026 Business Excellence Awards Committee

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Once logged in, select “**Start Entry**” to commence your application.

If you are logging into an existing account, make sure you select the correct awards program from the top left-hand corner of your screen.

Once you start your submission, you can complete it over several sessions. You can edit, save and exit your submission up until the closing date.



8. Select Your Award Category.

 A screenshot of the 'Select Your Award Category' form. At the top, there is a navigation bar with tabs: 'Start Here', 'Contact / Eligibility Information', 'Award Criteria', 'Marketing Information', and 'Final Submission'. Below the navigation bar, the title 'Select Your Award Category' is followed by an information icon and an upward arrow. The form contains a 'Category' dropdown menu, which is highlighted with a yellow arrow. Below this is a text input field for 'Name of Business/Individual making this submission'. At the bottom left, there is a checkbox with the text: 'I have read and understood the eligibility criteria and confirm that I/my business is eligible to enter this award category in 2024.' To the right of the checkbox, under the heading 'Eligibility Criteria:', there is a bulleted list: 'Businesses are required to have a valid ABN and must have a registered business/physical address within the Cairns Regional Council boundaries.'

9. Complete the Contact / Eligibility Information section.

 A screenshot of the 'Contact / Eligibility Information' section. It shows a navigation bar with four tabs: 'Start Here', 'Contact / Eligibility Information', 'Award Criteria', and 'Marketing Information'. The 'Contact / Eligibility Information' tab is highlighted with a yellow box.

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10. Copy and paste your responses into the **Award Criteria** boxes provided.

Award Criteria

Describe Your Business (0%) 0 / 600 words

Your response should include reference to:

- Snapshot of your business history and where you are today
- Business purpose and values
- Products and / or services offered
- Target audience
- Number of employees

Provide examples of exceptional initiatives that your business has implemented and/or products or services that you sell to generate positive environmental outcomes (100%) 0 / 2000 words

Your response should include reference to:

- Describe the sustainable products, services and/or practices your business has implemented or sells
- Explain how and why you implemented them, including the goals and objectives of their implementation and how you have effectively engaged your stakeholders
- Demonstrate how you monitor and measure the success of these products, services and/or practices and provide evidence of positive environmental impacts or outcomes

You will notice that each criteria box has a word limit. The word limit is just A LIMIT– it is not a guide to the amount you should write or a challenge you need to meet.

If you have said everything you need to say, do not feel as though you have to keep writing in order to reach the word count.

The percentage next to the criteria, identifies its weighting towards your final score.

11. **Format** your responses.

DO NOT LEAVE FORMATTING UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE. Award Force uses a system called 'Markdown' for content formatting.

[CLICK HERE](#) for instructions about how to create Headings, Bold, Italics, Bullet Points, Lists and Line Space using Markdown text.

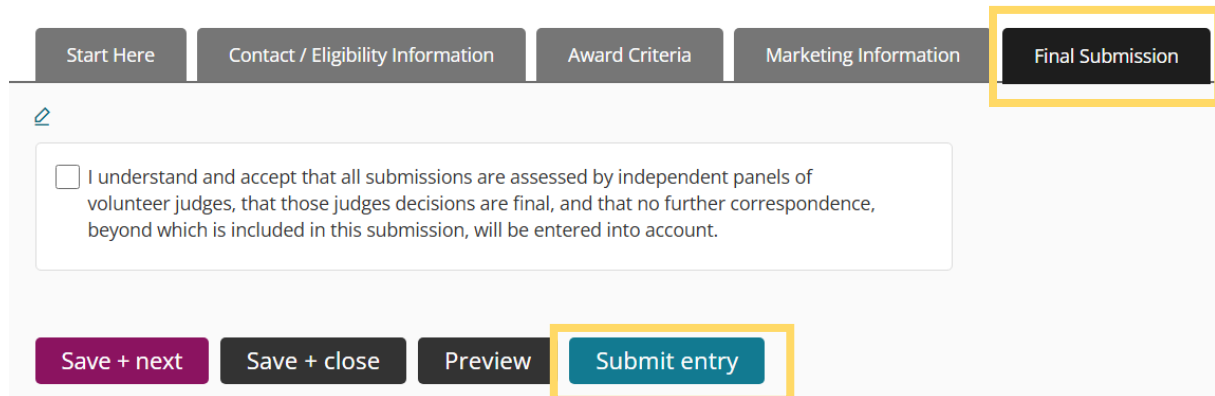
12. Complete the **Marketing Information** section.

Marketing Information

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13. **Submit** your entry by 11.59pm Friday 18 September 2026.

TICK the final acceptance checkbox and CLICK “Submit entry”.



Start Here Contact / Eligibility Information Award Criteria Marketing Information **Final Submission**

☐ I understand and accept that all submissions are assessed by independent panels of volunteer judges, that those judges decisions are final, and that no further correspondence, beyond which is included in this submission, will be entered into account.

Save + next Save + close Preview **Submit entry**

14. Check out our [FAQ](#) page.

Have any questions about the awards program? It is likely that the same questions have been asked in the past.

Alternatively, please do not hesitate to [contact](#) the awards committee.



2026 BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible to enter the Business Excellence Awards, entrants must meet the following eligibility criteria:

Businesses must:

- Have a valid ABN
- Have a registered business / physical address within the Cairns Regional Council Local Government Area (LGA) boundaries.
- Have a minimum trading history of 12 months within the region as of 1 July 2026.
- Can only enter one (1) award category.

Businesses and Emerging Leaders:

- Must disclose to the awards committee any litigation or insolvency proceedings that may foreseeably affect the reputation of the applicant or, through association, the Cairns Chamber of Commerce.
- Must provide honest and accurate answers to all questions. Failure to do so will result in disqualification.
- Past winners are not permitted to enter the same category in which they won the previous year. They can, however, enter another category or re-enter the same category if more than 12 months have passed since they won.
- You do not have to be a Cairns Chamber of Commerce member to enter the Business Excellence Awards.
- Current Cairns Chamber of Commerce Management Committee Members and current Cairns Young Chamber (CYC) President are unable to enter the Business Excellence Awards.
- The Cairns Chamber of Commerce reserves the right to declare any submission ineligible if, in the reasonable opinion of the judges, the entrant is unable to represent or promote the awards in a satisfactory manner. The applicant must not, to their knowledge, be involved in any unlawful or illegal conduct.

Emerging Leaders must:

- Work or live in the Cairns LGA and be born in, or between, the years 1991 and 2008.

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Submission Questions

Business Resilience Excellence Award

This award recognises a business that has demonstrated strong leadership, tenacity and a solutions-focused vision when faced with adversity.

Describe your business (5%)

Your response should include reference to:

- Snapshot of your business history and where you are today
- Business purpose and values
- Products and / or services offered
- Target audience
- Number of employees

800 words maximum

Provide evidence of your business's exceptional resilience (95%)

Your response should include reference to:

- What significant challenge/s has your business faced?
- What was the level of impact on your business and/or key stakeholders?
- How did you address or overcome the challenge/s?
- What was the outcome of the solution/s you implemented?
- What motivated you to persevere despite moments of wanting to quit?

2200 words maximum

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Community Contribution Excellence Award

This award recognises a business that has gone above and beyond to give back to the Cairns community.

Describe your business (5%)

Your response should include reference to:

- Snapshot of your business history and where you are today
- Business purpose and values
- Products and / or services offered
- Target audience
- Number of employees

800 words maximum

Provide exceptional examples of how your business has significantly contributed to the Cairns community and the positive impacts of these initiatives (95%)

Your response should include reference to:

- Describe what your business does that is going above and beyond, to give back to the Cairns community.
- Explain how and/or why you do it.
- Illustrate how you measure positive outcomes and provide evidence of successful results.

2200 words maximum

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Customer Service Excellence Award - Professional Services

This award recognises a professional services business that has achieved outstanding results through the implementation of exceptional customer service initiatives.

Describe your business (5%)

Your response should include reference to:

- Snapshot of your business history and where you are today
- Business purpose and values
- Products and / or services offered
- Target audience
- Number of employees

800 words maximum

Provide examples of exceptional customer service initiatives that have directly contributed to your business's success (95%)

Your response should include reference to:

- Describe the outstanding customer service initiatives your business has put into practice
- Explain how and/or why you implemented them, including the positive impacts for both your business and customers
- Demonstrate how you measure the success of these initiatives and provide evidence of outcomes

2200 words maximum

Definition of a Professional Services Business

According to the Australian Taxation Office, a professional services business employs professionals who:

- are required to be accredited and adhere to ethical guidelines in order to enter into and maintain practice in the relevant field
- those who are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised body of learning, derived from research, education and training at a high level and who are prepared to apply this knowledge and exercise these skills in the interest of others
- their behaviour and practice are beyond the personal moral obligations of an individual
- they uphold a high standard of behaviour in respect to the services provided to the public and in dealing with professional colleagues.

Examples of professional services businesses include, but are not limited to, accounting, architecture, engineering, financial services, law, medicine and management consulting firms.

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Customer Service Excellence Award – Trade, Retail & Services

This award recognises a trade, retail or services business that has achieved outstanding results through the implementation of exceptional customer service initiatives.

Describe your business (5%)

Your response should include reference to:

- Snapshot of your business history and where you are today
- Business purpose and values
- Products and / or services offered
- Target audience
- Number of employees

800 words maximum

Provide examples of exceptional customer service initiatives that have directly contributed to your business's success (95%)

Your response should include reference to:

- Describe the outstanding customer service initiatives your business has put into practice
- Explain how and/or why you implemented them, including the positive impacts for both your business and customers
- Demonstrate how you measure the success of these initiatives and provide evidence of outcomes

2200 words maximum

Definition of a Retail Business

A retail business purchases and on-sells goods to an end-user through a physical or virtual location. Retailing may include business-to-consumer or business-to-business.

Definition and Examples of a Trade / Services Business

A trade or services business engages in the sale and delivery of a service to an end-user. This may include, but is not limited to: beauty services, mechanics, plumbers, painters, builders, car detailers, mending and repair services, wedding and event planners, transport and logistics services.

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Indigenous Business Excellence Award

This award recognises a majority Indigenous owned and/or operated business (51% or more) that has made a significant and sustainable impact or contribution to the indigenous community.

Describe your business (30%)

Your response should include reference to:

- Snapshot of your business history and where you are today
- Business purpose and values
- Products and / or services offered
- Target audience
- Marketing strategy
- Number of employees
- Why is your business exceptional?
- What drives success in your business?

1000 words maximum

Provide specific examples of how your business has significantly benefited the indigenous community from a social and / or cultural perspective (70%)

Your response should include reference to:

- What initiative/s have you implemented to enhance the lives of indigenous people and / or to promote and preserve indigenous culture?
- How and why do you do it?
- How do you measure the success of these initiatives or operations and provide evidence of outstanding positive outcomes you have achieved.
- Has your business experienced any challenges along the way and how have you overcome these?

2000 words maximum

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Innovation Excellence Award

This award recognises a business that has successfully created or implemented an innovative new product, service, strategy or business model, that delivers economic, social and/or environmental benefits.

Describe your business (5%)

Your response should include reference to:

- Snapshot of your business history and where you are today
- Business purpose and values
- Products and / or services offered
- Target audience
- Number of employees

800 words maximum

Discuss the exceptional innovation/s you have created or implemented within your business, including the business case for implementation and positive outcomes it has generated (95%)

Your response should include reference to:

- Describe the innovative product, service, strategy and/or business model/s you have created and/or implemented.
- Explain how and why you created/implemented them.
- What measurable outcomes or achievements can you attribute to your innovation efforts?

2200 words maximum

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Marketing and Communications Excellence Award

This award recognises a business that achieved outstanding results for their business and/or their client's business, through exceptional marketing and communications strategies or campaigns.

Describe your business (5%)

Your response should include reference to:

- Snapshot of your business history and where you are today
- Business purpose and values
- Products and / or services offered
- Target audience
- Number of employees

800 words maximum

Provide examples of outstanding marketing and communication strategies or campaigns that you have implemented to generate significant positive outcomes for your business and/or your client's success (95%)

Your response should include reference to:

- Describe the marketing and communications strategies or campaigns you have implemented
- Explain how and why you have implemented them, including the goals and objectives, target audience, channels, format and timelines
- Demonstrate how you monitored and measured the success of these strategies or campaigns and provide evidence of positive outcomes

2200 words maximum

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People Management Excellence Award

This award recognises a business that has achieved outstanding success through effective people management initiatives.

Describe your business (5%)

Your response should include reference to:

- Snapshot of your business history and where you are today
- Business purpose and values
- Products and / or services offered
- Target audience
- Number of employees

800 words maximum

Provide exceptional examples of people management strategies you have implemented to generate positive outcomes for your business (95%)

Your response should include reference to:

- Describe the exceptional people management strategies you have implemented
- Explain how and/or why you have implemented them
- Identify how you measure the success of these initiatives
- Provide evidence of the positive outcomes for your staff and for your business, that you can directly attribute to your people management efforts

2200 words maximum

You may wish to consider one or more of the following people management areas. Please note, this list is not exhaustive and has only been provided as a guide. You are not required to address each of these.

- Hiring and interviewing
 - Onboarding and training
 - Assigning and evaluating work
 - Career development and training
 - Performance management
 - Recognition and rewards
 - Workplace culture
 - Change management
-

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Sustainability and Environmental Excellence Award

This award recognises a business who is actively working to reduce the impact of their operations on the environment and/or provides products or services that have a positive environmental impact.

Describe your business (5%)

Your response should include reference to:

- Snapshot of your business history and where you are today
- Business purpose and values
- Products and / or services offered
- Target audience
- Number of employees

800 words maximum

Provide examples of exceptional initiatives that your business has implemented and/or products or services that you sell to generate positive environmental outcomes (95%)

Your response should include reference to:

- Describe the sustainable products, services and/or practices your business has implemented or sells
- Explain how and why you implemented them, including the goals and objectives of their implementation and how you have effectively engaged your stakeholders
- Demonstrate how you monitor and measure the success of these products, services and/or practices and provide evidence of positive environmental impacts or outcomes

2200 words maximum

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Emerging Leader Excellence Award

This award acknowledges an outstanding individual, aged 18 – 35, who has demonstrated strong leadership qualities, is committed to personal and professional development, and has made a positive contribution to the Cairns community.

Emerging Leader Video (60%)

Required components of the video:

- Briefly introduce yourself.
- Identify how you are currently exhibiting leadership in your personal and/or professional life.
- Explain what the most important values you demonstrate as an emerging leader are and provide a practical example of how you may demonstrate these in your day-to-day life.
- Describe how you believe Far North Queensland can better attract and retain other ambitious young leaders.
- Tell us what makes you stand out from the crowd.

12 minutes maximum

Personal and Professional Development (30%)

- What personal and/or professional development have you recently completed or are currently undertaking?

600 words maximum

Giving Back (10%)

- How do you give back to the community and why do you do it?

600 words maximum

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Judges & Writing Tips

We asked our judges for feedback about what they felt made some submissions more competitive than others. Here is what they told us:

Judges Tips

- Competitive businesses are driven and passionate about what they do - and it showed in their applications.
- Winning applicants clearly articulated what they do, demonstrated how they do it and evidenced results - their achievements and the impact they have.
- There are so many amazing businesses in Cairns - winning businesses articulate why they are one of them. They articulate why they are exceptional, what sets them apart from their competitors and what is distinctive about what they do that makes them stand out from the crowd.
- These awards are about excellence, so tell us a remarkable business story and make your success blatantly obvious. Tell us why the Cairns region is better off because of what you do.

Writing Tips

- Do not assume the judges are aware of your business.
 - Explain your products and/or services in non-technical terms.
 - The word count is not a challenge. Don't waffle or ramble.
 - When used appropriately, headings, subheadings, dot points, white space and short paragraphs can make applications easier to read.
 - Competitive applications are logical and easy-to-follow. They are articulate, well-structured, and detailed, with plenty of relevant evidence to support each claim.
 - Give examples, testimonials, stats, data and comparisons. Metrics and KPIs relating to performance, growth and/or profitability can support your responses and increase the reliability and quality of your submission.
 - Write more than you need, then edit, refine, reduce and polish.
 - Make sure you're answering all of the questions.
 - Fresh eyes help - ask other people to read your submission and give you feedback.
-

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Supporting Materials

If you wish to include supporting documents, images, videos or audio files as part of your submission, you will have to embed them as URL links or upload them as attachments.

Please note, supporting materials are just that, SUPPORTING MATERIALS. Your written application must be able to stand alone without them. If you are including them, you must refer to them in your written submission.

Video and audio files must be no longer than 3 minutes long, with the exception of the video for the Emerging Leaders category which has a maximum duration of 12 minutes.

Submissions with attachments will not necessarily be marked more favourably than those without.

