

7.14. REGIONAL BUSINESS GATEWAY PROGRAM - DAINTREE BUSINESS GATEWAY INITIATIVE GRANT APPLICATION

REPORT AUTHOR	Tourism and Economic Development Officer
EXECUTIVE	General Manager Corporate and Communities
DEPARTMENT	Corporate and Communities
TEAM	Community Services
DATE	27 October 2026

RECOMMENDATION

That Council approve the submission of a grant application to the Regional Business Gateways Round 1 Grant Program, seeking \$600,000 to support the delivery of a collaborative digital visitor engagement initiative across the Daintree's small and family business sector.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks Council's approval to submit a \$600,000 grant application under the Regional Business Gateways Round 1 Grant Program, funded by the Department of Customer Service, Open Data, and Small and Family Business.

The funding would support a collaborative digital visitor engagement initiative for small and family businesses operating within the Daintree region. The initiative aims to strengthen digital capability, increase business visibility, enhance the visitor experience, and improve business resilience, while supporting the ongoing growth and sustainability of the region's tourism economy.

The project will provide a collaborative digital platform to connect local businesses with visitors, strengthen their digital presence, and support the long-term economic sustainability of the Daintree's small and family business sector.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL CONSIDERATIONS / RESOLUTIONS

This request has not appeared before council to date.

REPORT/BACKGROUND

The Daintree region is home to approximately 75 predominantly small and family-owned businesses across Daintree Village, Lower and Upper Daintree, Diwan, Cow Bay, Thornton Beach and Cape Tribulation. These businesses make an important contribution to the local visitor economy, employment, and the distinctive Daintree tourism experience.

There is an opportunity to strengthen the digital capability and collaboration of these businesses and improve how the Daintree is collectively presented, discovered and experienced by visitors, increasing visitation, visitor spend and ultimately creating more successful, connected and resilient businesses.

Council was successful in the Expressions of Interest stage and has been asked to submit a full grant application. The Daintree Regional Business Gateway project would support local businesses through:

1. Stakeholder Engagement and Co-Design:

Engage Traditional Owners, businesses, tourism operators and industry partners to identify opportunities, priorities and visitor experiences that reflect the unique character of the Daintree.

2. Digital Content and Story Development:

Capture and curate the region's cultural, environmental, tourism, food and business stories through high-quality digital content and destination assets.

3. Visitor Discovery and Digital Platform Development:

Develop a coordinated digital engagement framework, including visitor discovery pathways and digital tools that improve how visitors discover, plan and experience the Daintree.

4. Business Capability and Regional Collaboration:

Provide businesses with access to specialist expertise, shared resources and collaborative opportunities that improve digital visibility and visitor engagement.

The project aligns strongly with the objectives of the Department of Customer Service, Open Data, Small and Family Business Regional Business Gateway Program, particularly its focus on building the capability of small and family businesses, helping businesses respond to emerging opportunities and economic challenges, improving access to resources and networks, and addressing gaps in regional business support.

The initiative will provide additional, rather than duplicate existing tourism or business support, by creating a coordinated, place-based mechanism focused specifically on the digital capability, collaboration and visitor economy needs of Daintree businesses.

Council would lead project delivery, governance, stakeholder coordination and financial management, with support from Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation, Tourism Port Douglas Daintree, the Daintree Marketing Cooperative and Birdon (Daintree Ferry). Broader engagement would include Tourism Tropical North Queensland, Douglas Chamber of Commerce, the Daintree Coast Community Reference Group, Traditional Owners and local businesses.

The project will create a stronger, more connected and digitally capable Daintree business community, enabling local businesses to better capitalise on visitor opportunities and supporting the long-term sustainability of the regional economy.

FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Existing Council staff resources will be utilised to prepare and submit the grant application. Peak Services have been retained to assist in the preparation of the application.

If the grant application is successful, it is anticipated that due to increased business growth in the Daintree, use of the Daintree Ferry will also increase, further improving Council revenue.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are minimal risks associated with submitting the grant application. If successful, Council will be required to comply with the funding agreement, including meeting approved project outcomes, acquittal requirements and reporting obligations.

If this application is not supported, the risk is that there are currently no other means of supporting economic growth in the Daintree

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

If the grant application is successful, a better understanding of the unique environment will result and be educated and shared with visitors.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

If the grant application is successful, the Daintree and business communities will be better connected. The project has the potential to build capacity and strengthen local partnerships.

CORPORATE AND OPERATIONAL PLAN

This report has been prepared in accordance with the following:

Corporate Plan 2025-2030 Initiatives:

Theme 2 - Prosperity

Council plans, builds and maintains the infrastructure required to improve our lifestyle and promote economic growth, working actively to support local businesses.

2.3 - Advocate for/promote economic growth opportunities and economic transition.

2.6 - Recognise the contribution of established local industries.

Theme 4 - Recovery and Resilience

To partner with community to build resilience against natural disasters creating a strong sense of social capital.

4.3 - Foster collaboration, sustainability, and a strong sense of belonging.

Operational Plan 2026-2027 Actions:

New project arisen during the financial year.

LEGISLATION AND POLICY

- *Local Government Act 2009*

- Council's Role in Economic Development General Policy

CONSULTATION

Internal Consultation:

- Manager Community Services

External Consultation:

- Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC
- Daintree Marketing Cooperative
- Tourism Port Douglas Daintree
- Birdon (Daintree Ferry Operators)

CONCLUSION

The grant funding presents a valuable opportunity to provide practical digital support to approximately 75 small and family-owned businesses, strengthen collaboration across the Daintree, and improve how the region is promoted and experienced by visitors, supporting stronger business outcomes and long-term resilience.

The project aligns strongly with Council's role in supporting local economic development, tourism and sustainable regional growth, while leveraging the expertise and networks of key industry, Traditional Owner and community partners.

Funding would enable Council and its partners to deliver a coordinated, region-wide initiative that would otherwise be difficult for individual businesses to undertake independently.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil