

Business Plan - Guidelines

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1.0 Introduction

Planning the direction of a Visitor Information Centre (VIC), and refreshing this direction each year, is the key to future success. Studies show, and experts agree, that businesses with formal plans in place are more likely to be successful, irrespective of size and type. Planning is the activity of determining the actions that will take you from where you are now to where you want to be. Planning provides a clear focus for a VIC and helps identify and solve problems before they cause major damage. It eliminates guesswork and helps the VIC to control its own destiny, rather than being at the mercy of external factors. Planning is important for a VIC whether it's in its first year of operation or well established.

1.1 What is a Business Plan?

The purpose of a Business Plan is to establish a set of precise actions for the VIC manager to follow, and to chart and monitor how the operation progresses over a twelve month period. The Business Plan does not need to be complex, but should include basic financial and operational aspects of the VIC. A well prepared Business Plan will enable key organisations (including Local Government Authorities (LGAs), Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs), Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) and local business groups) to more effectively understand the vision, operational aspects and future direction of the VIC. The Business Plan will also be a helpful supporting document if the VIC seeks funding.

1.2 Developing the Business Plan

When developing the Business Plan, it's useful to involve as many staff as possible as it provides an important opportunity to discuss roles and responsibilities in the organisation and set future directions. It will also assist in creating a sense of common ownership of the Plan. Once the initial Business Plan has been developed, future revisions and updates to the Plan will be easier and more effective.

It is important to note that it is a requirement of the Queensland (*VIC Signage Policy essential criteria 1.2 Business & Management*) that the VIC Business Plan includes the contents within sections 2.0 to 10.0 of these Guidelines. It is not imperative to include all components within each section; each VIC can determine what it will include in each section as relevant.

Business Plan at a Glance

Item	Description
Executive Summary	
Business Profile	Administrative, ownership details Outcome of business activity Mission (vision) statement
Market Focus and Performance	Target markets Market research Marketing partners Market performance
Strategic Planning	SWOT analysis Goals/Objectives Strategic action plan
Human Resources Management	Policies and procedures that influence employee behaviour Training and induction program
Operational Procedures Manual	A separate document which outlines the day to day procedures for the VIC
Sustainable and Environmental Considerations	Environmental practices and goals Risk management strategies
Action Plan and Budgets	List of planned actions and strategies Budget for each action or strategy Communicating the plan Include a yearly review of the Business Plan
Appendices	

Visit the Business Queensland website www.business.qld.gov.au for further information on developing a business plan. For sample planning templates, visit www.business.gov.au, the Australian Government's principal business resource website.

2.0 Business Profile

The first section of the Business Plan clarifies the role, function and vision of the VIC. This section should be concise and to the point and limited to between half and one page in length.

2.1 Administrative and Ownership Details

This section can outline:

- who owns and operates the VIC
- how the administrative structure is set up
- who are the main stakeholders, for example, Local Government, RTO, LTO
- to whom the VIC is accountable
- why the VIC exists (what is the perceived need for the VIC in the geographic location it sits in)

2.2 Outcome of Business Activity

This is a relatively brief sub-section that provides an outline of the core functions of the VIC. It is important to approach this section by considering what the customers' needs are and how to fulfil these needs.

Following are some suggested core functions:

- to provide friendly, helpful, professional and unbiased visitor information services
- to provide an effective and efficient distribution outlet for tourism product
- to provide comprehensive and accurate information on the local area, local region and neighbouring regions
- to encourage extended length of stays and increased visitor expenditure in the region

2.3 Mission Statement

The Mission Statement is a very short affirmation statement, not usually more than 15 words, which answers the question, "What do we want to achieve?". Use the mission statement to communicate the purpose of the operation and to guide the VIC's activities. It might read something like this – "To help visitors enjoy every experience in our region and leave wanting to return".

3.0 Market Focus and Performance

The first section of the Business Plan clarifies the role, function and vision of the VIC. This section should be concise and to the point and limited to between half and one page in length.

3.1 Target Markets

The purpose of this section is to outline the target markets for the VIC. This should not be limited to visitor markets but also local businesses, residents, schools – everyone the VIC wants to attract and service. If possible, prioritise the markets according to their level of importance to the VIC.

If available, include in this section any planned **market research** which will assist the VIC management to better understand the target markets.

3.2 Performance

This section should include the recent achievements and current performance of the VIC. This information is essential in helping determine what future actions are required to improve performance. It also provides a benchmark which future performance can be measured against.

A VIC's recent achievements and current performance can be assessed by analysing past and current visitor statistics and activities conducted over the previous 12 to 18 months. It is useful to put the VIC's performance in the context of the 'big picture' by also including a brief summary of overall visitor activity in the region and likely future growth markets. This information is available from your RTO or at www.tq.com.au/research.

Some examples of recent achievements could be where the VIC:

- conducted a marketing campaign to increase awareness amongst the business community of the services it provides to locals and visitors
- was recognised in the local media for winning a Regional Tourism Award for best managed VIC
- had been remodelled to include additional seating areas for visitors, parking areas for RVs or having Wi-Fi installed
- conducted research at the local caravan park to identify what services travellers expect from a VIC

Ideally each VIC should have a Marketing Action Plan. It is a highly recommended criterion (*VIC Signage Policy highly recommended criterion 1.7 Business & Management*) and whilst not essential it allows the VIC to better plan its future and achieve its objectives. For more details on ways to market your VIC and prepare a "Marketing Action Plan" refer to [Section B: Marketing and Public Relations](#).

4.0 Strategic Planning

For a VIC to perform well it is important to step back and understand the environment in which it operates and the implications any proposed change (positive or negative) will have on the VIC. A successful VIC also requires a clear purpose with defined goals and strategies outlining how the staff and volunteers are going to achieve them.

This component of the Business Plan helps to determine the VIC's direction and sets the stage for the development of future actions and the associated budget for the next year.

4.1 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis

A SWOT analysis provides a helpful understanding of the external and internal work environments in which a VIC operates. It enables the VIC Manager and staff to set realistic targets in the context of the circumstances that the VIC must operate under.

Strengths and Weaknesses are internal characteristics of the VIC (such as resources, skills, equipment, knowledge and staff), whereas Opportunities and Threats are external to the VIC (such as economic, political, technological and social trends, and competitors). The SWOT analysis should highlight six to twelve key issues or opportunities that will have a significant impact on the VIC's future performance. Examples include:

Example SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> only accredited information centre in town a dedicated team of volunteers ideal location with plenty of passing traffic have an excellent brochure display has free WI-FI available to all visitors has a café within the building which provides freshly ground coffee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lack of volunteers to cover every shift lack of funding to do more familiarisation trips to neighbouring regions inexperience of new counter / reception staff surrounded by non-accredited Information Centres (Tour Desks) no parking for oversized vehicles
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop local 1, 2 and 3 day itineraries coordinate training workshops for all VICs in the region marketing of the trademarked  sign introduction of online booking system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> funding cuts by local government or RTO proposed town bypass highway

4.2 Goal Setting

Using the information gathered in the SWOT analysis, determine organisational goals or objectives for the VIC which will:

- capitalise on its strengths
- minimise areas of weakness
- pursue opportunities, and
- reduce the impact of potential threats

It is recommended that these goals and objectives be:

- S** specific (clearly defines the outcome you want to reach)
- M** measurable (you can measure if the goal has been achieved or not)
- A** achievable within available resources
- R** relevant to your situation
- T** time framed (based on a set time frame and budget)

The organisation and/or individual stakeholders responsible for achieving each goal should also be specified. Note these strategic goals will form the **VIC Marketing Action Plan** (*VIC Signage Policy highly recommended criterion 1.7 Business & Management*).

5.0 Human Resource Management

Human resource management refers to the policies, practices, and systems that influence employees' behaviour, attitudes and performance. Having human resource practices in place are essential in attracting, motivating, rewarding and retaining employees and volunteers.

This section helps the VIC manager to determine how to ensure the VIC has the necessary team in place who are engaged and have the appropriate knowledge, skills, experience and qualifications to contribute to the achievement of the VIC's goals.

Suggested details to include in this section of the plan are:

- how the VIC is structured (for example, an organisational chart)
- position descriptions for each role in the VIC (for example, Manager/Coordinator, Shift Supervisor, Visitor Information Officer)
- the VIC's staff recruitment policy
- the VIC's staff roster system
- the VIC's staff training program including:
 - staff induction
 - assessment of skill deficit
 - customer service training
 - workplace health and safety policies and training
 - professional development
 - maintenance of the VIC's personnel records (such as where they are stored, who can access them, how often they are updated etc.)

These details should be addressed for both the VIC's paid employees and volunteer staff.

Refer to [Section D: Staff Induction, Training and Professional Development](#) of this Resource Kit for further information.

6.0 Operational Procedures

It is an essential criterion for VIC accreditation that a separate Operations Manual is prepared (*VIC Signage Policy essential criterion 1.3 Business & Management*) outlining the processes to follow in the day-to-day operations of the VIC.

See [Section C: Operations Manual Guidelines](#) of this Resource Kit for further information.

7.0 Environmental Management Considerations

7.1 Adopting Environmental Practices

The tourism industry is committed to environmental best practice. There is an industry-wide expectation that tourism businesses will take measures to prevent unnecessary environmental degradation and improve their sustainability.

A sustainable VIC is one that seeks to maximise the economic, environmental, and social benefits from its operation and minimise any detrimental impacts. By accounting for your VIC's actions across these three areas you can take steps to reduce any negative impacts of your operation and identify opportunities to increase the benefits delivered.

Successful VIC accreditation requires a VIC to 'Complete and document environmental policies and procedures concerning (primarily) recycling, energy saving and water consumption' (*VIC Signage Policy essential criterion 1.6 Business & Management*). If the VIC intends to implement any other environmental practices, include these in this section of the Plan.

To help identify what environmental actions to take, refer to a simple [Sustainability Checklist](#) on the Tourism and Events Queensland website. The Checklist allows you to assess the VIC's current sustainability management procedures in relation to CO2 emissions, energy and water use, and waste production and disposal.

There are a number of factsheets at www.tq.com.au/sustainability to assist with the following areas:

- sustainable [policies and practices](#) – working with local suppliers, sharing information and encouraging better use of resources
- [Energy](#) – managing your energy usage and gaining efficiencies
- [CO2](#) – calculating and offsetting your CO2 emissions
- [Water](#) – managing your water consumption, water storage, recycling and irrigation
- [Waste](#) – waste minimisation, reuse and recycling methods and strategies

Other helpful resources include:

- [The Big Marketing Guide, Section 9 – Sustainability](#) – Tourism and Events Queensland
- [Better Business Guide](#) – Tourism and Events Queensland
- [Sustainable Tourism](#) – Tourism Australia
- [Environmental Planning](#) – business.gov.au

7.2 Environmental Support Programs

It is advisable that VICs are aware of environmental programs and codes of sustainable practice that may be relevant to not only the VIC but to tourism products promoted by the VIC. To help differentiate between the range of programs available, Tourism and Events Queensland has prepared an Environmental Benchmarking and Certification Program [Matrix](#) of programs that meet the following three criteria:

- offer environmental certification and/or benchmarking services
- available to Queensland tourism operators, including small to medium sized enterprises
- examine the operation, not the construction of a business

Visit [Benchmarking and Certification on the Tourism and Events Queensland website](#) for more information.

7.3 Crisis Management and Business Continuity

It is recommended that all VICs have a business continuity plan (or crisis management plan) outlining actions and responsibilities in the event of a crisis. It is important to work with your RTO and LGA to ensure your plan is aligned with theirs.

There are seven stages identified for “surviving and thriving” during a crisis:

- Stage 1:** Plan your response
- Stage 2:** Manage your communications
- Stage 3:** Be ready to go
- Stage 4:** Look after your staff and contractors
- Stage 5:** Protect your essential information
- Stage 6:** Have your insurance paperwork in order and accessible
- Stage 7:** Access any support available

If you work through all stages the VIC will have a better chance of surviving a crisis.

A case study of the Mission Beach VIC completed post Cyclone Yasi highlights some very valuable lessons learned by the VIC and its role in a crisis. Read the [case study](#) or watch the [video](#).

Here are some suggested points to cover in a VIC crisis management plan.

What to do to PREPARE:

- Identify the actions to minimise the VIC’s exposure to risk, prepare your response to a crisis and plan your recovery post-crisis, including:
 - prepare a “Go Pack” including all important documents, phone numbers, insurance papers
 - consider what alternative premises might be available should the VIC burn/flood/be blown away (must be done before a crisis)
 - ensure you have an up-to-date contact list. This should be available in the VIC (laminated and prominent by the telephone) but should also be carried by staff and senior volunteers

How the VIC will RESPOND:

- Identify what should be done in the first 24 hours following a crisis and in the short to medium term, including:
 - managing VIC communications
 - being ready to leave the centre
 - ensuring the wellbeing of staff and contractors
 - protecting essential information

What the VIC will do to RECOVER:

- Identify the actions required to get back to business, including working with stakeholders to provide support where needed.

Involve the VIC staff and volunteers in your crisis management planning and ensure they are clear about their roles and responsibilities in the event of a crisis.

To help you prepare a Business Continuity Plan see Tourism and Events Queensland’s [Risk Management Resources](#) and [Weather Proof Your Business Toolkit](#).

8.0 Actions Plan and Associated Costs

8.1. Program of Actions

On the basis of the information and details reported in the previous sections, list the actions which your VIC intends to pursue over the next 12 months in order to meet the VIC’s goals. It is important to remember that the actions should be related directly to achieving the goals that have been identified. Allocate the cost involved for each action item and the time frame for when the action is to be completed. To assist you in outlining your actions, a Program of Actions template is provided in [Section M: Templates](#) of this Resource Kit.

8.2. Operational Budget

To budget for completion of these actions, identify all of the costs associated with achieving them. This will serve as a benchmark and assist in guiding the VIC’s expenditure over the coming budgetary period. You may wish to create a format more appropriate to your needs and those of your funding agencies. A template giving an example of a layout that can be used to present the VIC’s annual Operational Budget is provided in [Section M: Templates](#).

9.0 Appendices of the Plan

9.1 Regulatory Compliance Issues

Every business must comply with a range of regulatory standards as required by Local, State and Federal Governments and industry bodies. VICs should have an understanding of the regulatory compliance issues which are relevant to their business and be able to demonstrate compliance with these regulations. Accompanying the Business Plan should be a table including the following regulatory compliance details where applicable to your VIC:

- Business Name Registration
- Certificate of Incorporation
- Australian Company and /or Business Number
- Insurance - Public Liability (minimum of \$10 million), Professional Indemnity, Workers Compensation
- compliance with all relevant licences and permits
- compliance with relevant legislation, codes of conduct/ethics
- compliance with all staffing and employment regulations
- compliance with all taxation requirements

Refer to [Section I: Regulatory Compliance](#) and [Section K: Insurance](#) of this Resource Kit for further information on these requirements.

10.0 Communicating the Plan

This section covers your process for communicating the Business Plan, including to whom, how and when. To maximise buy-in to the Business Plan it is recommended you seek the input of all relevant internal and external stakeholders including paid and volunteer staff, LGAs, RTOs, LTOs and tourism operators when it is in draft format and then again upon its completion. It is also recommended that VICs prepare an Annual Report for each financial year of operation. This Annual Report can be used to provide existing and potential stakeholders with an overview of the operations of the VIC for the previous financial year, including the success of the VIC in achieving its stated objectives and actions.