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Executive Summary

This document comprises Freeplay's response to the December 10th Australian Interactive Games Fund Options for Comment paper released by Screen Australia. It draws on the original options paper, additional research by Freeplay staff, other local and international research documentation, as well as historical trends observed and recorded during the Freeplay Independent Games Festival between 2004 & 2012.

Freeplay is an incorporated nor-for-profit organisation which runs the annual Freeplay Independent Games Festival, Australia's oldest and largest independent gaming event.

We strongly support the new Australian Interactive Games Fund as a significant opportunity to establish progressive, ambitious, and creative backing for Australian developers, shaping key aspects of the local development culture in the coming years. Building upon the option paper's proposal we also see a number of opportunities to support major areas of change in games development, notably in how it engages non-industrial development, emerging practitioners, and cultural infrastructure in line with that of other creative industries and arts practice.

Supporting this necessary independent and cultural practice requires a much broader view of games as creative and cultural practice and to deliver this, Freeplay proposes two additions to the Games Fund:

- An expansion of Enterprise Funding to include support for Cultural Infrastructure
- An expansion of pre-production and production funding to include a low barrier to entry Kickstart fund designed to foster risk-taking, experimental, and emerging practitioners.

Investment in both of these areas comprises a small amount - 5% for cultural infrastructure and 10% for Kickstart funding - of the total, but will work in tandem with enterprise and project funding to support existing and new practitioners, creating long-term sustainability and an engaged development community of highly experienced and innovative individual practitioners around which studios and projects can be built.

History of Freeplay

Freeplay is Australia's longest running and largest Independent Games Festival. Founded in 2004 by Katharine Neil and Marcus Westbury under the auspices of Next Wave, the festival was a response to the prevailing studio system at the time, focused as it was on a predominantly work-for-hire model of licensed development at a time when opportunities here and overseas were emerging in smaller, more creative games. In 2009, new directors Paul Callaghan and Eve Penford took over, and in 2010 it incorporated as a not-for-profit dedicated to expanding the impact and reach of the festival and organisation in championing games as artistic and expressive cultural product, their makers as prominent voices that added to wider cultural discourse, and games as a necessary part of both Melbourne and Australia's cultural life.

Since 2004, Freeplay has grown to 5 days with over 2200 attendees through a mix of public and maker-centric events, building partnerships with creative and cultural agencies such as ACMI, the State Library of Victoria, the National Gallery of Victoria, Federation Square, and co-presenting events with other festivals such as the Emerging Writers' Festival and the Melbourne Writers' Festival with the aims of broadening the discussion of what videogames are and what they might become.

Along with its local presence, Freeplay has also established worldwide connections by inviting international guests such as IGF Winner Petri Purho, creator of Canabalt and Hundreds Adam Saltsman, Independent Games Festival Chairman Brandon Boyer, and founding member of the Hand Eye Society and Metanet Software, Mare Sheppard. Freeplay also created the now annual Freeplay awards in 2010, which in 2012 received over 130 entries from around the world. 2012 also saw the appointment of renowned independent developers and critics Katie Williams and Harry Lee as directors for the upcoming 2013 festival.

Across all activities, Freeplay aims to support artistic and expressive game development, provide presentation opportunities for developers, create unique experiences for audiences, and advocate for games as cultural product.

Background Information

Industry & Sector

In the Screen Australia options paper, the use of Industry and Sector as they apply to games is used interchangeably. For clarity, Freeplay works from the following definition of Industry as it applies to games, drawn from the 2012 Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation report titled "[Working in Australia's Digital Games Industry](#)", which in turn references a UK Department of Trade and Industry report from 2002.

The digital games industry for console and stand-alone PC games consists of at least seven sub-sectors:

Development

Publishing

Middleware and Tools

Outsourcing and Service Companies

Format holders / Console Manufacturers

Distributors

Retailers

Working In Australia's Digital Games Industry, Page 41

For the purposes of this options paper and response, Freeplay considers Industry to mean **Development, Middleware and Tools, Outsourcing and Service Companies**, with the other sub-sectors outside the domain of the games fund.

Working alongside this, Freeplay identifies the games Sector as including a wider range of activity, including:

- Education, including primary, secondary, tertiary and vocational, whether skills or culturally focused
- Non-commercial development
- Exhibitions
- Events, both cultural and industrial
- Community organisations
- Game development collectives

Additionally, Freeplay considers games as being a creative industry rather than a technology or manufacturing industry and works from the definition taken from the ARC's Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, Australia's Creative Economy: Definitions of the Segments and Sectors:

“The specialist Creative Industries comprise a set of interlocking sectors of the economy focused on extending and exploiting symbolic cultural products to the public such as the arts, films, interactive games, or providing business-to-business symbolic or information services in areas such as architecture, advertising and marketing, design, as well as web, multimedia and software development. Most often Creative production delivers unique or customised products from incomplete or abstract specifications received either from a client or derived from a desire for personal, artistic exploration.”

Australia’s Creative Economy: Definitions of Segments and Sectors, Page 5

These distinction allow a meaningful view of the real-world practice of games development as it more closely aligns with film, writing, or music as an individually-centric path for a career rather than a studio led industrial one, allowing distinctions to be made for people at stages of their creative practice and tailored support being made available to them.

Being Independent

In the option paper’s ‘Context for Support’ section, the paper explores the changes in global market, local consumption, and their impact on local development. Outlining the last significant and accurate research from the ABS on the state of the Australian Game Development Industry undertaken in 2007, it then goes on to observe the shifts that have happened since then, stating that:

The ecology of the interactive entertainment industry has changed significantly since 2006/07, with the closure of several development studios focused on console games and the emergence of many independent developers specialising in online games and those for mobile and tablet devices.

Digital distribution has also meant that self-publishing has emerged as a viable business model, allowing developers to bypass the traditional publishers in making their product available. A number of local studios have had great success with digitally distributed and self-published games and as a consequence the independent game development sector has grown substantially.

Screen Australia Games Options Paper, page 5

Freeplay has observed the ecological shifts since 2006 / 2007 and has identified the following levels of practice that it classifies under the banner of independent development, drawing from the following schema taken from the CCI Definition of Creative Industries:

“Commercially relevant Creative activity occurs in three ways: first, by individuals (as sole traders or producers), second, by groups working

within specialist (often consulting) Creative organisations and third, by individuals employed by the broader industry or government organisations in specific Creative Occupations. The first two categories can be viewed as the specialist Creative Industries, while the third type of Creative production has often been unrecognised in the literature.”

Australia’s Creative Economy: Definitions of Segments and Sectors, Page 5

Each of these levels has different aims, methods, and challenges inherent to them, but in general all operate from a creative base rather than an industrial or economic. These key differences are summarised in the [“Working in Australia’s Digital Games Industry”](#) report, these independent practitioners operate at a more creative level alongside the traditional work-for-hire studios as described below:

“There is an observable difference between the career paths and skills of the entrepreneurs founding and growing enterprises in the games market, and the profile of specialist workers within the industry. Enterprise entrepreneurs in the industry are characterised by some eclectic mix of publishing passion, entrepreneurial flair and a commercial incentive to try and recoup a return on the investment of their sweat equity. The industry leadership group represented by the members of the Game Developers Association are quintessential information economy entrepreneurs.

The employee labour force is very different. As in film and television, the games labour force is motivated by the buzz of the current project, the attractiveness of being part of a specific team environment, and the ability to recoup intrinsic creative rewards.”

[Working in Australia’s Digital Games Industry Consolidation Report](#), Pg 35

Freeplay identifies the following levels of independent practitioners:

Independent Studios

In most discussions of the independent sector, these form the core of the discussion. Freeplay identifies these as studios that generate their own projects and intellectual property while remaining independent from publishing infrastructure. These studios may still work for existing publishers, but the projects are outside of the work-for-hire model, instead originating within the studio.

Examples: Halfbrick (Australia), The Voxel Agents (Australia), Capybara (Canada), thatgamecompany (USA)

Microstudios

Freeplay identifies the idea of a microstudio as a studio with a very small, highly creative core of employees – around 2-5 people - which employs contractors for additional development skills without significantly increasing overheads. These

microstudios can explore niche genres or commit to exploring experimental mechanics without requiring the multi-million dollar sales of larger independent studios.

Examples: Tin Man Games (Australia), Fiasco (Australia), Hello Games (UK), Metanet Software (Canada)

Collectives

Collectives are collections of creative individuals operating with shared goals. Individuals within these collectives may also have individual or industrial practice, they may come on board for specific individual projects, or they may do the bulk of their work within the group.

Examples: League of Geeks (Australia), Kokoromi (Canada), Copenhagen Games Collective (Denmark)

Individuals

Changes in technology such as digital distribution and middleware have made it possible for individuals to create games which are far more personal or artistic in nature. In cases where additional skills are required, these are acquired in similar ways to micro-studios through working with other individuals on an ad-hoc, profit-share, or contract basis.

Examples: Alex Bruce (Australia), Farbs (Australia)

A Sense of Community

A key aspect of independent developers is the way in which they connect with their community, events, and critical achievement as part of their practice. Since 2007, these networks and events have grown significantly locally and internationally, creating presentation and peer-review opportunities for emerging and experienced developers, raising their profile, and establishing their projects on an international stage. As identified, these structures more closely mirror those of other creative industries than a more traditional tech industry - practitioners are driven by creative projects, teams, and buzz more than economic or industrial imperatives.

Locally, events such as Lunarcade, Graphic, Freeplay, and Game Masters, create spaces which celebrate risks, experimentation and makers. Organisations such as state level IGDA chapters and Perth's Lets Make Games, create non-industrial networks for makers, and internationally, the Independent Games Festival (IGF & IGF China), GameCity in Nottingham, Indiecade in Culver City, the NYU Game Center and LA Games Space, as well as organisations such as the Hand Eye Society, Kokoromi and the Copenhagen Games Collective, provide inspiration and reflection on what's occurring locally.

Engagement with these events & organisations is a fundamental aspect of independent success, creating a springboard for projects and individuals with feedback from peers and the public, and providing a focus for local and international media.

A Changing Demographic

A side effect of local changes in studio structures and the emergence of technology enabling greater ranges of independent development is that the demographic of game developers has changed since 2007.

Developers displaced by studio closures or shrinkages split into those who sought work in other industries, those who began their own independent studios, those who went overseas, and those who chose to operate freelance. As a result, significant local talent and knowledge has been lost.

New developers coming in to the sector from education are already aware of the fractured and difficult nature of employment, but many are still engaged in beginning small businesses to support their development practice, despite the difficulties inherent in that and the lack of support and mentorship both creatively and industrially.

At both of these levels, developers are working to pursue their own projects and creative goals rather than attempting to secure work-for-hire titles in contrast to the operations of the studio system which previously dominated.

Significantly however, there are still large gaps in representation of diverse voices in videogame production - women remain a minority at all levels of development, as do indigenous practitioners. Recent initiatives growing out of the independent sector such as the Difference Engine (Canada) and Widget (Australia) have sought to address this imbalance and create more welcoming spaces.

A Development Culture

Implicit in the options paper are a series of values which has informed the culture of Australia's development scene and which Freeplay believes should be explored and challenged as to their current and future applicability. These are:

- Original IP is desirable
- Mobile and digital distribution is a strength of local developers
- Growth is a necessary function of the sector, as well as something sustainable
- Studios - both new and established - are the best structures for games development
- A market exists for games, therefore development strategies should engage the market

Freeplay believes that a culture of game development is a collection of practitioners pursuing their own individual goals. Whether this is as individuals, studios, or through artistic or industrial means, any and all structures should be created to support that practice. To that end, Freeplay would extend the values of the fund to emphasise culture and creativity by including:

- Game development is a creative rather than technical pursuit and should be supported as such
- Studios and businesses built from a creative base rather than a technical or manufacturing base are more likely to attract engaged people

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- Support for new and emerging practitioners outside of business structures is essential for sector sustainability and growth
- Individuals make games for their own creative pursuits & expression rather than purely market-driven reasons

While funding may not directly dictate a cultural voice through a mechanism similar to the Significant Australian Content Test, Freeplay believes that the way Screen Australia approaches funding through business, projects, and events, will naturally dictate the shape and voice of Australian development culture.

The implications and outcomes of this in other countries is well described by Daniel Joseph's paper "The Toronto Indies: Some Assemblage Required", which also summarises the industrial and independent sectors of that city. Utilising assemblage theory, Joseph traces the arc of Capybara's *Sword and Sworcery* as a collaboration between individuals and institutions, noting in its conclusion:

"You start by finding unstable people, and making them come together. It helps that they are both close by. Adams meets Jim Guthrie and begins collaboration with him and Capybara, whose offices are located at Spadina and Queen in the heart of the Queen West neighbourhood. The line continues down the road to the OMDC, enmeshed in relationships with the government and global capital while defending its mandate and relying on the continuing growth of Toronto's high technology capitalism to gain access to funds to support projects like Sworcery. These funds, collected through taxes, are sent out into the world as capital for production of a videogame. As it happens this is a game created outside of the major production houses, but still just as much a part of the global marketplace. The game's very makeup is intertwined with the motives and reasons of Craig Adams; he chooses and deliberates about the affects that arise from the coding of aesthetics. These aesthetics flow from wider cultural currents, technologies, and platforms. The line continues to the publication of Sworcery – as it begins to accrue capital – expressing to the OMDC the success of their economic intervention, maybe leading towards more funding in the future. The line continues to a kind of strange offshoot of our sandbox world, one hinted at in the narrative, in the massive server farms where Apple hosts its online store."

The Toronto Indies: Some Assemblage Required, pg 14

A greater number of creative voices, support for individuals to find their path, a diversity of projects and practitioners, and opportunities for support, presentation, and networking, create the best chances for success and for a long-term sustainable industry

Response to Program Objectives

From the option paper:

The objectives of the Australian Interactive Games Fund are to:

- promote industry growth and sustainability
- support the development of new intellectual property
- encourage skills retention and renewal
- maximise the creative opportunities of fast broadband.

Promote industry growth and sustainability

Freeplay encourages clear metrics for the definitions of growth and sustainability in-line with Screen Australia's current KPIs. These metrics should also contain critical and audience awareness rather than simply organisational headcount, annual turnover, or downloads / units sold of projects. These include:

- International awards
- Presence of titles at international festivals and exhibitions
- Critical reception of final projects

Additionally, Freeplay strongly supports the investment in cultural infrastructure as a means of supporting emerging practice, sector growth, and industrial development.

Long term sustainability of Australian games development beyond the 3 years of the current fund will be enabled through the creation of a diverse creative industry ecosystem comprising a mix of large publisher owned studios, smaller industrial practice, independent creative developers, freelancers, and cultural engagement.

Support the development of new intellectual property

As well as the creation of new, franchisable intellectual property, Freeplay supports the development of new, original, experimental, and expressive games which expand the skillsets of their developers as well as engage meaningfully with games as a medium.

Freeplay encourages funding of highly experimental titles at a lower, less risky funding level, while still supporting more complex and potentially more commercial intellectual property.

In addition, Freeplay recognises the potential skill gap in new IP development which exists in both established and emerging practitioners and encourages the implementation of structures which enable rapid-experimentation, mentorship, overseas experience, and international-level idea generation.

Freeplay also recognises the need for clear definitions of what constitutes original intellectual property, as well as recognition of the quality of local and international works, how projects line up against that, and ways of improving ideation, development, and production processes to raise quality.

Finally, Freeplay supports clear application processes that show applicant's experience in IP development, including critical and commercial success.

As with the previous objective, Freeplay supports strong performance indicators and metrics for the fund to measure the success of new IP development.

Encourage skills retention and renewal

Freeplay believes that the best support for skills retention, renewal, and development is comprised of:

- A diverse ecosystem of development opportunities, including artistic, experimental, and industrial
- A vibrant games development culture which comprises emerging, experienced, and hobbyist practice
- Individual agency in building a career
- Skills sharing between local and international best practice developers

In its mix of cultural, business, and project funding, the fund should create a culture of learning, sharing, and building of creative experience.

Maximise the creative opportunities of fast broadband

The opportunities of broadband development will have the most significant impact on independent development by creating new opportunities for distributed working, bringing together geographically disparate freelancers working in a model closer to film production than the more traditional studio system.

Broadband also creates possibilities for new, highly experimental game projects that take advantage of the high bandwidth, low-latency capabilities of the network. To encourage development of this type, Freeplay suggests future implementation of targeted funding similar to the Australia Council for the Arts Broadband Arts Initiative - http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/news/items/news_features/broadband-arts-initiative

Response to Proposed Funding

Response to Guiding Principles

From the options paper:

When considering how to make the most of the available funds in providing support to Australian game development, Screen Australia is guided by the following principles:

target strong creative teams with a diversity of experience

prioritise projects with a clear target market and creative vision

support a diversity of game types, styles and scale

offer greater financial leverage for teams creating and retaining new intellectual property

encourage business models that expand audience reach and revenue, including developing a strong presence in the international marketplace

encourage new business partnerships and alliances

utilise leading expertise to ensure the best applicants are selected

return funds repaid or recouped from Screen Australia's games investments into the pool for future games investments

maintain confidentiality and avoid conflict of interest.

In addition to these, Freeplay advocates for the additions:

- Support for a strong development culture spanning all levels of game development and creative practice
- A focus on collaborative individuals as the driver of quality original work
- Principles of diversity, equality, and inclusion in both cultural and economic support
- A vision for the development of Australia's videogame sector which has creative work and development at its core

Funding Aims

Freeplay acknowledges the industrial focus by Screen Australia, but as previously identified, believes that games operating as a creative industry rather than a technology industry comprises a much wider and interconnected spread of makers, individuals, studios, and artists. In responding to the options paper, Freeplay proposes a broader suite of support that attempts to balance the economic needs of

studios with the creative needs of the wider game development sector with the following structure:

Enterprise Funding

- Funding for cultural infrastructure and special projects
- Business funding

Project Funding

- Kickstart funding
- Pre-production funding
- Production funding

Over the 3 years of the fund, this can be broken down into the following table:

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	2013		2014		2015	
Item	Percentage	Item Amount	Percentage	Item Amount	Percentage	Item Amount
Total Amount	100.00%	\$5,000,000.00	100.00%	\$5,000,000.00	100.00%	\$10,000,000.00
Operating Overhead	3.00%	\$150,000.00	3.00%	\$150,000.00	1.50%	\$150,000.00
Enterprise						
Cultural Infrastructure	5.00%	\$250,000.00	5.00%	\$250,000.00	5.50%	\$550,000.00
Business	40.00%	\$2,000,000.00	40.00%	\$2,000,000.00	40.00%	\$4,000,000.00
Projects						
Kickstart	10.00%	\$500,000.00	10.00%	\$500,000.00	7.00%	\$700,000.00
Pre-production	16.00%	\$800,000.00	16.00%	\$800,000.00	18.00%	\$1,800,000.00
Production	26.00%	\$1,300,000.00	26.00%	\$1,300,000.00	28.00%	\$2,800,000.00

Rationales for funding

Changes in development practice and opportunity

In recent years, the opportunities and career paths for individual developers and studios has changed dramatically. Digital distribution has opened up new avenues to connect with and engage audiences eager for new experiences. A vibrant maker class has evolved, far more interested in the community and expressive opportunities of games for themselves over working for a large studio on franchised titles, and experienced developers are branching out on their own, seeking to prove their own experience and ideas.

The Australian Interactive Games Fund should respond to the multitude of people's game practice - from individuals at the beginning of a possible career to established studios working on a long-term franchise plan to freelancers looking to work on a mix of hired and persona projects. In addition, the fund should prepare existing developers and newcomers for the inevitable technological, creative, and cultural shifts that will occur over the lifetime of the fund, creating careers that survive long after the fund is exhausted.

Freeplay's additions to the fund enable this by creating multiple entry points of support for a mix of individuals, organisations, studios, and projects.

Questioning the Studio Model

Freeplay believes that having the studio model at the heart of discussions about game development and funding creates a false sense of games as separate from individual practice and has the side effect of pushing new or emerging practitioners into a business mindset at too early a stage in their career, contributing to the short active life of people working in game development.

Freeplay's additions to the Games fund emphasises the individual's role in game development, creates opportunities for them to find their own career path and trajectory, and works to build creative momentum at earlier stages of personal and professional development.

Creative Industries

The changes in game development reflect the shift in games away from a technology industry towards a creative one more in line with writing, filmmaking, music or animation. Across the 3 years of funding, the fund should respond to this transition purposefully, creating a meaningful base for the next generation of game developers who will be best placed to transition into both the new console cycle as well as changes in mobile and digital distribution supporting and developing highly innovative individual practice operating at an international level alongside creatively driven businesses which are able to sustainably develop and engage with their own projects.

Freeplay's additions to the fund begin the process by creating opportunities at multiple levels and creating spaces where events such as exhibitions, festivals, awards, and conferences can contribute to the cultural and industrial conversation.

New practitioners and existing studios

Across all of these changes, the desire to create original and successful games is at the heart of the discussion, however both the skills lost from changing demographics as well as the historical emphasis from established studios raises questions about the best way to approach initial ideation, production, and audience engagement of internationally recognised games.

Analysis of existing funding support for games shows that significant proportions of funds go to established studios for original IP development, but many of these games fail to make it to market, and when they do, achieve limited critical success.

In developing original IP, Freeplay believes that strong ideation that illustrates a sense of the worldwide position of the title as well as the creative impetus behind it is communicated through applications and that historical performance is taken into account where necessary.

By 2015, applicants for all strands of funding will be new, and Freeplay believes that sustainability and growth comes from the fund creating a meaningful path for developers beginning in the initial round. Support for emerging practitioners now will create the businesses applying for enterprise funding in 2015, cultural funding and mentorships created now will inspire the innovative projects of 2014 and beyond, support for businesses to grow beyond mobile platforms will create digital launch titles for the next generation of the console cycle and more creative titles allow developers to establish an international presence and audience for future work.

Freeplay's support for the fund proposes a greater breadth of investment strategy, as well as encouraging more creative development at earlier stages of application.

Measuring Success

Drawing from Screen Australia's own KPIs as outlined in its Annual Reports, Freeplay believes that the same mix of cultural, production, and economic benchmarks should apply to the new games programs.

- Percentage of projects funded through prototype funding which proceed to full production
- Percentage of projects funded through project funding which proceed to publishing & distribution
- Critical reception of final projects
- Display of final projects at major local and international events and exhibitions such as IndieCade, IGF, and GameCity
- Invitation of developers to speak at local and international events
- Awards received from major local and international competitions
- Increase in Australian studio count
- Increase in headcount of Australian developers
- Increase in diversity of Australian game practitioners
- Amount of production investment triggered by Screen Australia's investment
- Diversity of platforms, especially more traditional platforms such as PC and Console
- Number of events supported, ensuring development of a diverse, critical, and complex local development culture
- Audience development through local events & promotion of development talent reaching broad and diverse bases
- Number of internships and mentorship opportunities offered through enterprise funding

Intersection with Other initiatives

Research and Development Tax Credit

As the R&D Tax Incentive operates as a refund up to \$20 million, it will only intersect with funding of businesses able to manage and maintain a long-term slate of projects. It will not significantly change the initial phase or creative development of new projects of new and emerging practitioners or startup studios. Additionally, the Incentive and Concession has been available to games companies for a number of years now, with no significant visible impact on creative development at the low to mid-end of studios where most emerging practitioners operate.

State level funding

State governments in New South Wales and Victoria already provide government support through Film Victoria and Screen NSW, with the Film Victoria fund having committed significant funds to game development over the years with varying levels of success.

The role for these funds in relation to federal funding can evolve from providing production & enterprise funding to include:

- Locally relevant support and opportunities
- A greater number of lower level funding for proof of concept before submitting to production funding through Screen Australia
- Focus on education, upskilling, and community development which all benefit from local activity.

Enterprise Funding

As part of Screen Australia's Enterprise Funding, Freeplay supports:

- Funding for cultural infrastructure and special projects
- Business funding

Rationale for Enterprise funding

Freeplay supports the role that dedicated businesses play as an essential part in the ecosystem of the creative industries through employment opportunities, international visibility, and publisher access. Freeplay's proposed breakdown of the funding amount allocates the single largest amount to Business Enterprise funding to support existing studios to pivot their activities or grow new opportunities.

However, Freeplay believes that businesses alone will not create necessary cultural visibility and support structures through any 'trickling down' of activity and that in addition to funding for businesses, funding for additional cultural organisations and activity such as exhibitions, awards, festivals, and masterclass style events as well as local research and auditing is required to augment skills, presentation opportunities, and cultural visibility of local developers.

Cultural Infrastructure

Freeplay proposes expanding enterprise funding to include a small proportion of the fund comprising 5% in year 1 & 2, increasing to 5.5% in subsequent years for cultural infrastructure comprising:

- Festivals and cultural gaming events
- International & local mentorship and residency opportunities
- Exhibitions
- Industry auditing, reporting, and research

Aims

An essential part of any creative industry is a suite of cultural activity to support new and emerging practitioners, provide a bridge between industry and wider sector activity, and to enable a greater range of artistic work.

By extending Enterprise funding to cultural organisations and activity, the Australian Interactive Games Fund can support activities that studios are unable to address but which form a necessary function in a diverse ecosystem.

Cultural infrastructure creates space for risk-taking, experimentation, support, feedback, skills development, and audience engagement. New and emerging practitioners are given opportunities to showcase their work to the public, to receive feedback from their peers, and to engage with mentors and role-models. Established practitioners have the chance to share their experiences, showcase best-practice,

and connect with a community. Studios have the chance to highlight new projects, give back to the community, and to support new generations of developers.

In addition, the infrastructure creates international presence for local developers by bringing participants out from overseas, highlighting events and individuals on an international stage through achievements, awards, or specific activities, and sending local practitioners to overseas events as participants or attendees.

Structure

Freeplay proposes that the funds allocated for cultural infrastructure operate in a similar way to funding for Screen Australia's special Initiatives such as Aurora, Film Lab, Film Victoria Genre Workshop, V21 Conference, X|Media|Lab, Robert Rosen Lectures, The Hive: ANAT Dome Lab.

Organisations and activities should focus on supporting the creative practice of game development along the axes of:

- Technology
- Audience development
- Creative thinking and ideation
- Presentation opportunities

Freeplay strongly supports the engagement of international speakers & workshops to cover identified skill gaps in local practice.

Applications should be taken as required, with funding commensurate with the scale and complexity of the activity, as well as the track record of the presentation organisation or individuals.

Eligibility

Purely business-centric activities should be exempt from cultural infrastructure funding, and should instead be addressed through the wider Enterprise funding or other grants.

The focus should be on organisations and events which emphasise creative development, risk-taking in presentation and format, and the forging of cross disciplinary and art-form links with other events and organisations.

Long-term support across the terms of the games fund should be available to organisations with established structure and commitment to innovation, risk-taking, and cultural development.

Outcomes

Proposed outcomes from Cultural Infrastructure funding are:

- An increase in the quality and number of events across Australia focused on games
- Establishment of new organisations to support game development practice, increasing the diversity of makers and players
- Internationally recognised events and awards

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- Increased presentation opportunities for creative and experimental games to new and existing audiences
- Broader engagement with established cultural events and organisations through shared presentation and programming
- Increase in international visits and mentorship opportunities
- A broader creative dialogue about local and international game development practice
- Networking opportunities for new and emerging developers

Measurement for these outcomes is in the form of:

- Critical reception of final projects
- Display of final projects at major local and international events and exhibitions such as IndieCade, IGF, and GameCity
- Invitation of developers to speak at local and international events
- Awards received from major local and international competitions
- Increase in diversity of Australian game practitioners
- Number of events supported, ensuring development of a diverse, critical, and complex local development culture
- Audience development through local events & promotion of development talent reaching broad and diverse bases

Funding for Business

Aims

From the options paper:

Games Enterprise funding should have the flexibility to assist larger developers who are poised for further growth as well as fostering alliances and partnerships among a growing number of individuals and small creative teams working in the digital market. It should also be diverse in the types of games it supports to maximise the full range of opportunities across the interactive entertainment industry.

The program could support companies in expanding staff, professional development and enhancing business, marketing and legal skills. It is envisaged that costs associated with infrastructure would only be eligible if they directly contribute to revenue-generating activities that are integral to the applicant's proposal. The funding could be used to accelerate completion rates, help establish or expand an international presence, offer mentoring opportunities and/or facilitate more frequent marketing activities.

Structure

Freeplay supports the existence of enterprise funding through similar structures to the current Enterprise funding applied to games studios with an emphasis on

supporting new creative business rather than established studios attempting to move away from a work-for-hire model.

In addition, Freeplay encourages support for greater cultural and educational engagement with studios in the form of interns, education programs, and events through cultural institutions and organisations such as libraries, museums, and festivals.

Freeplay would also strongly emphasise the role of both business and creative mentorship opportunities in expanding the operational capabilities of studios and their creative output, especially in areas identified by Screen Australia as global and local pressure points.

Freeplay supports the current mix of loan, grants, and partially recoupable equity as well as the business activities and expenditure in line with Screen Australia's current Enterprise Funding guidelines and structure,

Eligibility

Freeplay supports investment at multiple levels with the following indicators taken into consideration, with a focus on significant shifts in focus and ability along multiple areas triggered by investment:

- Scale
- Project mix
- Company creative track record
- Annual turnover

Freeplay believes that the credit eligibility threshold is set too high for the current state of Australian development. Rather than support or catalyse new or emerging studios, it narrows the opportunities to studios which have existed for a long time on work-for-hire practice and who have limited track record of both quality and original titles. Reduction in the threshold, with commensurate support and mentorship for smaller and younger organisations, would enable new studios with a creative base to grow rather than sustain existing studios.

Freeplay strongly supports that criteria which demonstrably create innovative & creative titles to be exploited - either through the studio retaining control or selling them to a third-party - be the main focus of Enterprise Funding Assessment, along with a company's track record in developing original properties, and its existing support for cultural and emerging practitioners.

Freeplay has no significant objections to expanding enterprise funding to include non-development companies, but would strongly urge that these companies demonstrate the ability of their business to indirectly trigger or support creative projects at the impactful stages of their lifecycle.

Freeplay supports a mix of critical and commercial success, weighted heavily in favour of the critical measured through a mix of reviews, awards, and exhibition.

Outcomes

Outcomes of Business Enterprise Funding should be:

Freeplay – Australian Interactive Games Fund Response

- Established mid to large scale studios developing new skills in original IP development or technology
- Midsized creatively driven studios delivering a broader stable of titles across a shorter timeframe
- Development of an active and agile freelancer base where skills can transfer between small & medium sized enterprise
- The transition of small - mid sized studios to larger operations
- Studios taking on new staff and engaging with mentorship opportunities for underrepresented groups in game development
- Mid to large scale studios establishing processes and titles in emerging platforms and technology as well as skills in next-generation development

Measurement for these outcomes is in the form of:

- Critical reception of final projects
- Display of final projects at major local and international events and exhibitions such as IndieCade, IGF, and GameCity
- Invitation of developers to speak at local and international events
- Awards received from major local and international competitions
- Increase in Australian studio count
- Increase in headcount of Australian developers
- Increase in diversity of Australian game practitioners
- Amount of production investment triggered by Screen Australia's investment
- Diversity of platforms, especially more traditional platforms such as PC and Console
- Number of internships and mentorship opportunities offered through enterprise funding

Project Funding

Freeplay supports project funding be broken down into:

- Kickstart funding.
- Pre-production funding
- Production funding

Each level of this funding is designed to support different games at different stages of their development and their plans for commercialisation.

Rationale for Project Funding

Project funding needs to support the different needs of practitioners and studios at different stages of their development and opportunities. Freeplay proposes clarifying the role of each level of project funding available to studios, as well as the introduction of a new low amount, low barrier to entry fund aimed at emerging practitioners and highly experimental projects.

Taking a broad spread of projects at this stage of the fund creates the most opportunity for the most number of projects rather than concentrating large quantities of funding in a small and potentially risky studio system which has limited historical success in the successful development and commercialisation of original titles.

Kickstart Funding

Aims

In addition to the proposed prototyping and production funding models, Freeplay proposes an additional strand aimed at kickstarting small-scale, highly experimental and innovative projects from a mix of emerging and early stage developers. This funding would be low barrier to entry with a limited pool, significantly reduced upper limits, and with a mandate to fund as many experimental and innovative projects as possible outside of industrial or commercial imperatives and the studio system.

Benefits from this funding would be bridging talented developers from education into the larger creative pool, supporting early stage developers in establishing studios, and in raising the profile of Australia as a vibrant and creative hub for game development through critical success.

Structure

Structurally, Freeplay proposes 10% of the total funding be allocated to this Kickstart fund in 2013 and 2014, dropping to 7% in 2015, with a funding band of \$5,000 - \$35,000 per project offered as a loan, and with a drastically simplified application and assessment process, with submitted materials potentially comprising:

- Visual target
- Mechanic technical proof of concept
- Game design document

- Technical experiments
- Mood boards

Funding could be augmented through experimental strategies such as alpha pre-sales or crowdfunding depending on the scale of the project.

Eligibility

Projects should come from new developers, microstudios, or small non-studio teams, and should be risky, highly experimental, innovative, or present a significant non-commercial proposition which would not receive funding in any other manner.

The funding should not be available for established studios, middleware, or any other developer operations.

Outcomes

Kickstart funding fills a significant gap in the current funding proposal - emerging practitioners exploring their craft before settling into their chosen career path. Support at this level is closer to an arts grant than a business-centric funding model, but Freeplay believes will generate positive outcomes including:

- A greater spread of development experiments from developers and artists
- New developers working outside of a studio business model, focusing on games creation rather than on business imperatives
- The establishment of new support and collaborative structures
- Promotion of Australia internationally as being supportive of experimental and creative development
- Long term establishment or growth of small studios arising from possible commercialisation of kickstarted titles.

Measurement of these outcomes is in the form:

- Critical reception of final projects
- Display of final projects at major local and international events and exhibitions such as IndieCade, IGF, and GameCity
- Invitation of developers to speak at local and international events
- Awards received from major local and international competitions
- Increase in diversity of Australian game practitioners

Pre-production Funding

Aims

From the options paper:

Funding through the Games Pre-production Program would support game developers to create a compelling prototype, vertical slice, or beta version to demonstrate the core game mechanics and features,

as well as associated materials such as a key art, game design document (GDD), technical design document (TDD) and pitch trailer.

Structure

Pre-production funding should cover development of commercially viable prototypes designed to trigger additional funding from investors or publishers. Projects should be in an early stage of their lifecycle - documentation or early stage prototype - and have a clear budget, scope, marketing, and investment plan. The funding should be used to support the inward investment in projects where the capital required cannot be sourced within Australia. This includes high-end AAA projects, as well as mid-range digitally downloadable titles with strong creative direction.

It should not support projects which will require a return to Screen Australia for development or production funding. Freeplay supports a clear restriction on projects applying for pre-production funding being directly ineligible for production funding.

Depending on the scale, budget, and scope of the project, submissions should comprise similar content to the current All Media Fund, comprising:

- Detailed design documentation
- Marketing plan
- Business plan
- Detailed budget
- Commercialisation plan
- Technical prototype

Eligibility

As with Enterprise Funding, Freeplay believes that the credit eligibility reduces opportunity for small and emerging practitioners and favours studios with limited success in the creation of successful original titles. A reduction in the amount of credits and experience is recommended, to be offset by other factors such as demonstrable functionality in a technical prototype, interest from third-party funders or other developers, external mentorship, or the strength of the idea creatively.

Freeplay supports a mix of critical and commercial success, weighted in favour of the critical measured through a mix of reviews, awards, and exhibition.

Games which include deliberately exploitative free-to-play mechanics such as energy systems or gambling activities should be excluded from support through all strands of the new game fund.

Freeplay supports the current thresholds along the lines of the All Media fund. The amounts requested should be in line with the project's scope and budget as determined by Screen Australia and external assessors.

Freeplay also supports the current funding structures in line with the All Media Fund applied to the prototyping section of the Game Fund, including amount thresholds for loans, grants, and recoupable investment.

For pre-production funding, studios should commit their own resources - financial or in-kind - commensurate with the scale of the production as determined by Screen Australia and external assessment.

Outcomes

Proposed outcomes for pre-production funding of this form are:

- Support for existing studios in development of larger scale projects
- Increased diversity of projects away from mobile / handheld development
- Increased engagement with international publishers and funding

These outcomes will be measured by:

- Percentage of projects funded through pre-production funding which proceed to full development, publishing & distribution
- Critical reception of final projects
- Display of final projects at major local and international events and exhibitions such as IndieCade, IGF, and GameCity
- Invitation of developers to speak at local and international events
- Awards received from major local and international competitions
- Increase in Australian studio count
- Increase in headcount of Australian developers
- Increase in diversity of Australian game practitioners
- Amount of production investment triggered by Screen Australia's investment
- Diversity of platforms, especially more traditional platforms such as PC and Console

Production Funding

Aims

From the Options Paper:

Production funding would contribute finance to games which are at the stage where a vertical slice has been produced to effectively demonstrate the core mechanics, features and key art, and some commitment from investors may be in place.

The amount and share of the budget accounted for by Screen Australia investment could vary significantly, depending on the nature and scale of the game. In the case of smaller games Screen Australia may contribute a higher proportion of total finance, reducing the reliance on other investors.

The program could support activity across all aspects of game development, including programming, animation, audio, to quality assurance, publishing and marketing. Any marketing expenditure must not replace, but rather add value to a publisher's commitment where one is attached.

Production funding should aim to support projects from their current state - whether a pitch, self-funded prototype, or in-development - to completion where it can be published, either through a previously established traditional publisher / distribution agreement or self-published via digital distribution.

Structure

Games in this category should be original and experimental, potentially risky and not necessarily immediately commercial.

Freeplay supports clear boundaries and guidelines, as well as performance indicators which are well communicated to applicants along with sample documentation and templates of creative & production documentation.

Depending on the scale of the application, materials would comprise a mix of:

- Marketing plan
- Game design documentation
- Art documentation
- Budget documentation
- Team biographies & experience
- Project Schedule
- Support letters
- Technical prototypes

The scale, scope, and budget of each project should be taken on its own merits, with assessments undertaken by external experts.

Freeplay strongly supports Screen Australia running workshops to communicate established scales & expectations of projects to potential applicants once the final fund guidelines are drawn up.

At a significant scale of project, an amount of in-kind support or 'sweat equity' should be required in the application, with the relative amount scaling with the experience, age, and turnover of the applicant studio.

Freeplay supports the current mix of loans, grants, and recoupable equity in line with the All Media Fund. The current guidelines and deliverables for the All Media Fund are transferable to the first round, but should be revisited in the 2nd and 3rd year of the fund.

Freeplay suggests that applicants can reapply in subsequent rounds for production funding, with an upper limit of their original budget +/- a small variance. This allows the fund to support more experimental projects in a 'proof of concept' phase separate to pre-production funding before committing to complete funding for the project. It also gives applicants a chance to secure alternative funding sources during development if necessary. Freeplay does acknowledge the risk of this arrangement for projects and developers, however based on the performance of other games funds, allocation of large funds in single blocks creates risks in the project reaching market and being critically and commercially successful.

Eligibility

As with other funding strands, games which include deliberately exploitative free-to-play mechanics such as energy systems or gambling activities should be excluded from support.

Games which are merely extensions of a studio's existing content - either in spirit or a direct sequel / franchise - should be exempt from production funding.

As with other funding strands, the eligibility threshold for production funding is set too high, reducing access to funds for new developers working on creative projects, on new platforms, or in innovative ways.

As with pre-production and enterprise funding, the critical and commercial performance of previous games should be taken into account with a strong emphasis on critical success, especially in cases where a studio proposes development of an original IP. Cases where studios have received significant prior funding for original projects with limited creative or commercial success should be de-emphasised in favour of new projects or smaller developers building on their success.

Depending on the scale of the project, third-party investment should comprise a part of the budget. Early stages of production funding could be used to develop materials for additional investment provided it is scoped within the original submission.

Outcomes

Proposed outcomes from production funding are:

- A greater range of creative game projects from Australian developers
- Support for a wider range of platforms
- Greater diversity in the voices and perspectives represented by Australian game developers
- Investment triggered in new Australian intellectual property

Measurement of these outcomes is in the form of:

- Percentage of projects funded through project funding which proceed to publishing & distribution
- Critical reception of final projects
- Display of final projects at major local and international events and exhibitions such as IndieCade, IGF, and GameCity
- Invitation of developers to speak at local and international events
- Awards received from major local and international competitions
- Increase in Australian studio count
- Increase in headcount of Australian developers
- Increase in diversity of Australian game practitioners
- Amount of production investment triggered by Screen Australia's investment
- Diversity of platforms, especially more traditional platforms such as PC and Console

International Events and Initiatives

Dare to be Digital - UK

<http://www.daretobedigital.com/>

Dare to be Digital is a video games development competition for extremely talented students at Universities and Colleges of Art. Teams of 5 students, usually a mix of artists, programmers and audio, assemble at Abertay University for 9 weeks during June to August to develop a prototype video game, receiving mentoring from industry. The students also receive a weekly stipend of £150 per student, free accommodation at the University's halls of residence and a team budget of £200.

At the end of the competition, the prototypes are displayed at talent showcasing event Dare ProtoPlay. The general public and industry experts get to play and vote for the games. At the Dare awards ceremony, three prizes of £2500 will be awarded to the three highest scoring teams based on the criteria of innovation and creativity, market potential and use of technology (none of the three will be specifically attributed to any particular criterion). Seven months later the winning teams attend the BAFTA Video Games Awards to compete for the coveted "Ones to Watch Award".

GameCity - UK

<http://festival.gamecity.org/>

Welcome to GameCity, Europe's biggest and best-loved videogame culture festival!

Experience a huge range of playful events in and around Nottingham from October 20th-27th 2012.

The festival is mostly free* to attend and there are loads of events suitable for all ages. It's overflowing with fun, exciting, interesting things to do during the October half term. There'll be a schedule of events for you to see really soon, plus lots of exciting news and surprise announcements to come over the next few months.

Our plan is to look at videogames from a different perspective, and encourage everyone to do the same. After all, games aren't just for playing. They're for learning. And for teaching. And for inspiring. At this year's festival, we want to achieve this in the most accessible, engaging way possible.

It's a unique exploration of what videogames really mean to the people who play them and the people who make them too.

Includes the GameCity Prize - <http://prize.gamecity.org/>

Indiecade - USA

<http://www.indiecade.com/>

IndieCade supports independent game development and organizes a series of international events showcasing the future of independent games. It encourages, publicizes, and cultivates innovation and artistry in interactive media, helping to create a public perception of games as rich, diverse, artistic, and culturally significant. IndieCade's events and related production and publication programs are designed to bring visibility to and facilitate the production of new works within the emerging independent game movement. Like the independent videogame developer community itself, IndieCade's focus is global and includes producers in Asia, Latin America, Europe, Australia, and anywhere else independent games are made and played. IndieCade was formed by Creative Media Collaborative, an alliance of industry producers and leaders founded in 2005.

Hand Eye Society - Canada

<http://handeyesociety.com/>

The Hand Eye Society is a videogame arts organization with three goals:

- To help people make games.
- To connect game makers with each other and with an audience, offline.
- To foster diversity in game creation and public perception of games.

The Hand Eye Society was founded in 2009 by Raigan Burns, Jon Mak, Jim McGinley, Jim Munroe, Mare Sheppard, & Miguel Sternberg, and incorporated as a not-for-profit in 2010.

Board of Directors: Jim Munroe, Mare Sheppard, Miguel Sternberg

Advisory Board: Raigan Burns, Alex Jansen, Jon Mak, Mark Rabo

Executive Director: Jim Munroe

Retired Board Members: Jim McGinley, Craig D. Adams

Current and ongoing projects include the Hand Eye Society Socials, the TORONTRON Indie Arcade Cabinets, the Difference Engine Initiative, and a variety of member-powered exhibitions and educational programs.

Copenhagen Games Collective - Copenhagen

<http://www.copenhagengamecollective.org/>

Copenhagen Game Collective is a multi-gender, multi-national, non-profit game design collective based in Copenhagen, Denmark. The collective comprises a network of people and companies interested in independent game culture. Our members include creative individuals first of all, but also small companies, non-commercial interest groups, and game communicators and disseminators.

We play, exhibit, create, and care about games of all types – digital or otherwise – with a slant towards types of play that the game industry's big boys can't or won't address. The diversity of our exhibits and game projects reflects our belief that

creativity breeds creativity. The loose structure of the collective, encompassing a network of developers and collaborators, aims to create synergies between all our various projects.

Indie Fund

<http://indie-fund.com/>

Indie Fund is a funding source for independent developers, created by a group of successful indies looking to encourage the next wave of game developers. It was established as a serious alternative to the traditional publisher funding model. Our aim is to support the growth of games as a medium by helping indie developers get (and stay) financially independent.

Additional details about the need for Indie Fund and the rationale behind it were shared at the Game Developers Conference in the talk titled Indies and Publishers: Fixing a System that Never Worked.

Independent Games Festival

<http://igf.com/>

UBM Tech (producer of Game Developer magazine, Gamasutra.com, and the Game Developers Conference) established the Independent Games Festival in 1998 to encourage innovation in game development and to recognize the best independent game developers.

We wanted to create a similar event to Sundance for independent game developers - and that's just what we've succeeded in doing with the Independent Games Festival, which has awarded hundred of thousands of dollars in cash prizes (and brought major exposure and a much higher profile) to a multitude of indie and student game developers who enter. There are three main elements to the Festival itself:

- The Independent Games Festival Pavilion
- The Independent Games Festival Awards
- The Independent Games Summit

Notable Australian Successes:

2008

- IGF Student Showcase - Mayhem Intergalactic, Chris Pelling, the Australian National University

2010

- IGF China, Best Mobile Game: [Train Conductor 2](#), The Voxel Agents

2012

- IGF Technical Excellence, Antichamber, by Alex Bruce
- IGF Student Competition Honorable mentions, Once Upon A Spacetime, RMIT
- IGF China, Excellence In Audio: Dustforce, by Hitbox Team, Australia
- IGF China, Excellence In Design: Diggin' Dogs, by Soap Creative, Australia

Lunarcade - Australia

<http://www.lunarcade.it/>

LUNARCADE is a collective that promotes independent games: games with innovative aesthetics or interaction models, developed without the support of major publishers.

During the year, LUNARCADE organizes two different kind of events: “INDIE GAMES CIRCUS“, a game night in which a selection of indie games – that share specific aesthetics, interactivity or meaning – is shown to the public, and “FACTORY“, workshops and game jams on specific themes.

The events are free and open to everyone: they aim at keeping in touch the community of game designers and authors, bringing more people into the indie game culture and helping those that want to approach indie game development.

Kokoromi - Canada

<http://www.kokoromi.org/>

Kokoromi is an experimental game collective formed by a rare union of Montreal gamemakers and curators to promote games as an art form and expressive medium worldwide. Based in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, Kokoromi produces events, develops games, and hosts a blog at www.kokoromi.org.

LA Games Space - USA

<http://lagamespace.org/alpha/>

A nonprofit center for VIDEOGAME ART × DESIGN × RESEARCH ■ Exhibitions / Talks+Workshops / Artist Residencies / Labs ■ ALL EVENTS ONLINE ■
<http://lagamespace.org/>

LA Game Space is a nonprofit center for videogame art, design, and research, where people of all backgrounds can discover the potential of games together. The Space consists of: Exhibitions, Talks+Workshops, the Artist Residency, and Research Labs.

All events are viewable online, for everyone!

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