



Australian Government



# Emerging Gamemakers Fund November 2023 - Trends Report

Prepared by the Screen Australia Games team

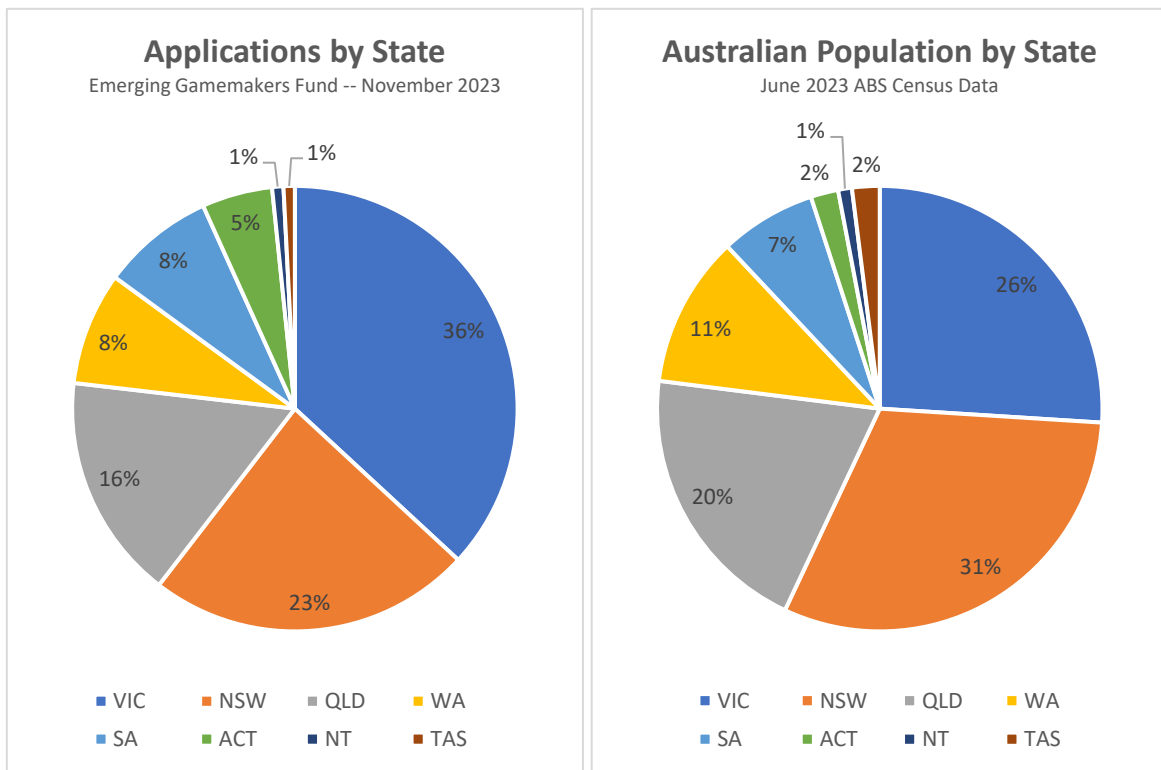
## Background

The Emerging Gamemakers Fund was conceived to offer support to emerging creators, diverse voices, and/or established creators who are interested in creative and artistic experimentation. A further aim was to democratise the early stages of gamemaking, providing an opportunity for those who would not otherwise have the means to create a prototype to do so, therefore unlocking a myriad of further games investment opportunities, many of which require a prototype for consideration.

## Data

Screen Australia received 130 eligible applications for the November 2023 round of Emerging Gamemakers Fund, alongside 79 eligible applications for the simultaneous round of the Games Production Fund making for a total of 209 applications received between both funds this round. This surpasses the number of applications received for both rounds of the Games Expansion Pack (110 in FY 2021/2022 and 186 in FY 2022/2023) and signals a growing awareness of Screen Australia’s games funding across the Australian games sector.

The state split by percentage of applications received is shown in the following graph (left), contrasted with the population split of Australia (right):



While it is excellent to see a high level of demand for games funding, this unprecedented level of demand increases the quality bar of applications that are recommended for funding. With the currently available budget, this allows for an approval rating of around 10-15%, compared to the first round of the Games Expansion Pack, where the approval rate was around 25-30%. In short, the demand for games funding is clearly growing and applications need to be exceptional in order to be competitive enough to receive funding.

## Observations

- With the introduction of two funds to replace the singular games fund (Games Expansion Pack), some applicants experienced **confusion about their suitability for one fund over the other**. Some applications to the Emerging Gamemakers Fund may have been more suitable for the Games Production Fund.
- Screen Australia received consistent enquiries from potential **applicants who wished to submit a prototype as part of an Emerging Gamemakers Fund application**. Due to resource limitations, assessing prototypes is not possible for this fund. Future applicants are encouraged to instead include gameplay footage of any prototypes as part of their application.
- The **Emerging Gamemakers Fund attracted a more diverse slate of projects** than the Games Expansion Pack or Games Production Fund, both in terms of the level of diversity and experimentation in the creative material and the diversity of the creative team.
- Exceptional **pitch videos** typically spent less than one minute talking about what the game is. They were able to confidently and quickly summarise the game's creative vision. This clarity usually reflects the fact that an idea has been refined to the point of being simple to communicate and typically indicates cohesion and clarity of vision. The remainder of the pitch video is spent talking about the project in bigger terms, addressing questions such as why they are making this project and how it will contribute to their overall career or creative practice goals. Less competitive pitch videos spend the majority of the video speculating about design intentions or game mechanics.
- In general, applications that are able to **clearly position their project in the 'big picture' of their ambitions were more competitive**. Uncompetitive applications would typically reduce their ambition to the current project, listing their longer term goals as 'to complete the project' with no context as to why this would be important or impactful for their career or practice. Applicants are encouraged to communicate beyond simply what they are making and also include why they are pursuing their project.
- Uncompetitive applications spent unnecessary time explaining the minutia of common game genres or mechanics (for example, explaining PlayStation as a platform or what an RPG is). Applicants can assume that assessors are fluent in game design and development.
- **Competitive applications were able to demonstrate or articulate what makes their game unique**, in terms of visuals, design, gameplay, gamefeel, story, and mechanics, even if the game sits within an established genre.
- It is **generally uncompetitive to indicate release on a large number of platforms without demonstrating any experience in releasing for them**. While Screen Australia appreciates the ambition behind this intention, unless the applicant is able to demonstrate experience in releasing or porting to these platforms, has a solution in mind to compensate for their lack of knowledge or experience, or notes

existing relationships with platform holders, selecting a large number of release platforms works against the applicant in terms of viability.

- Some applications dealt with **sensitive topics that would require subject matter experts** either on the team or consulted with. We encourage future applicants to conduct or have plans for conducting consultations and/or sensitivity reading.
- A large number of applications were concerned with themes of artificial intelligence related apocalypse.
- The general experience of economic recession and job layoffs may have impacted the high volume of applications received.
- A number of applications featured language written by generative AI tools. While Screen Australia does not have a clear policy opposing the use of generative AI, applicants are encouraged to consider that, as assessors see many dozens of applications each round it is always evident when generative AI has been used and due to generative AI's inability to conceive original creative thought, may not be an appropriate tool in crafting a competitive application for creative cultural funding.
- While the Emerging Gamemakers Fund is not biased to or against projects with commercial ambitions, **if an application does include commercial goals, Screen Australia would expect to see some thought around commercial 'game as a product' planning in the application** e.g. if the application plans to sell X number of copies by X date, a marketing and release strategy may be appropriate to include as supplementary material.
- A common concern regarding the viability assessment criteria was around the high personal risk involved with applicants planning to quit their full-time jobs to pursue the project, relying solely on this \$30,000 grant.
- This round received projects at vastly different project stages (everything from blank slate ideation through to a working polished prototype) and from gamemakers at a diverse range of career stages.