

CLIFFORD
GOULDSON
LAWYERS

TOOWOOMBA

CHAMBER

**BUSINESS
EXCELLENCE
AWARDS 2026**

Application
GUIDE





WELCOME

Welcome to the Toowoomba Chamber Clifford Gouldson Lawyers Business Excellence Awards 2026.

These awards celebrate the outstanding businesses, entrepreneurs and leaders driving the success of the Toowoomba Region. From agriculture, trades and construction to health, tourism, retail, professional services and the creative industries, our region is powered by a diverse and resilient business community.

Toowoomba is proudly a small business region. With more than 17,000 businesses across the region, local enterprise is the backbone of our economy, our employment base and our community life. These awards recognise the businesses and individuals who are not only achieving commercial success, but also helping shape a strong, vibrant and future-focused regional economy.

The Toowoomba Chamber CG Law Business Excellence Awards shine a spotlight on the people and organisations setting the standard in innovation, leadership, service and impact.

Above all, these awards are about excellence - recognising those who are doing exceptional work and making a meaningful contribution to the Toowoomba Region.



ABOUT THE TOOWOOMBA CHAMBER CLIFFORD GOULDSON LAWYERS BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS

The Toowoomba Chamber Clifford Gouldson Lawyers Business Excellence Awards 2026 recognise and celebrate excellence across the Toowoomba Region's business community.

This year's awards are held in the lead up to the Toowoomba Carnival of Flowers – a fitting time to recognise that the most vibrant outcomes come from dedication, hard work and careful nurturing. Just as the region's famous gardens flourish through tending and care, strong businesses grow through vision, persistence and leadership.

The awards process includes a **written application**, and a **one-minute video** submission, giving applicants the opportunity to showcase their business, tell their story and demonstrate what sets them apart.

Successful finalists will then be announced in July, with a site visit conducted by independent judges who reside outside of the Toowoomba region taking place in the following weeks.

Delivered by the Toowoomba Chamber in partnership with leaders from business, industry and the broader regional community, the awards aim to:

- celebrate the achievements of local businesses and business leaders;
- showcase the diversity, strength and innovation of the Toowoomba Region;
- promote best practice in business planning, leadership and performance;
- recognise the role business plays in building a strong, connected and prosperous community; and
- honour excellence in all its forms.

These awards are not simply about recognising success – they celebrate the people, ideas and effort behind the businesses helping our region thrive.



CATEGORY AWARDS

Agriculture

Includes, but not limited to, businesses that are actively cultivating, operating, or managing land (e.g., livestock, dairy, poultry, fish, vegetables, and fruit) and other primary production, (e.g., growing, and felling timber plantations) or other agricultural support services (eg seed and grain testing, feedlots, or ag feed suppliers).

Best New Business

Any locally owned business operating for less than two years as at the Awards Evening on 11 September 2026. Open to all industries, this category celebrates businesses that demonstrate strong vision, early success, innovation and clear potential for sustainable growth.

Community and Not for Profit

Any organisation operating as a registered not-for-profit, charity, social enterprise, or community organisation, whether government or non-government funded.

Creative Industries

Includes, but not limited to all creative businesses and organisations whose work shapes Toowoomba's cultural identity and enhances the everyday experience of our city. For example: design, music, art, film, craft, TV, radio, advertising and performing arts. This category celebrates creative enterprises that bring imagination into public life.

Gerry Doumany Export

Includes businesses that project Toowoomba's expertise onto the world stage. This award celebrates those driving global expansion and delivering significant economic returns to our regional economy. This award is open to any business successfully trading goods or services internationally. For example: physical exports; Service & knowledge exports such as professional services, education or digital technology; or Inbound exporting: attracting international students, tourist or foreign investment directly into the Toowoomba Region.



Health and Wellbeing

Includes, but not limited to professional coaches' mentors, personal trainers, gyms, health and allied health providers, wellness professionals, fitness coaches, beauty services, hairdressers, and other related businesses.

Hospitality – Food and Beverage

Includes, but is not limited to, wine bars, cafes, pubs, restaurants, catering and equipment services and food service providers.

Industry

Includes, but is not limited to any business that transforms materials into new products through manufacturing, producing, processing, repairing, altering, recycling, storing, distributing, transferring, or treating of products or testing machinery or equipment.

Innovation and Technology

Any businesses with commercially available products or services that demonstrate innovation in biosciences and genetics, marketing and communication, sustainability initiatives, information technology, software, app and device development, advanced engineering and/or other manufactured goods.

Professional Services

Any business whose primary offering is professional expertise or specialised services rather than the manufacture of goods. Professional services include, but is not limited to legal, accounting, life insurance, superannuation and financial asset investing to scientific research and management consulting, mortgage and insurance brokers, business broking, and human resources.

Retail

Any business who sells goods in shops or online to the public. Retail may include, but not limited to electrical, electronic, whitegoods, floor coverings, furniture, hardware, motor vehicles, food and groceries, recreational goods and the like.



Trades & Services

Any business providing skilled trade or technical services, including but not limited to electricians, plumbers, carpenters, mechanics, landscapers, painters, air-conditioning technicians, builders, subcontractors, maintenance providers, and other service-based trades supporting residential, commercial or industrial clients

Tourism & Events

Includes short term accommodation providers (hotels, motels, serviced apartments, caravan parks), transportation (e.g., airlines, car rental), travel facilitation and information (e.g., tour operators, travel agents, tourist information centres), and attractions and entertainment (e.g., heritage sites and theme, national, and wildlife parks), festivals, and events.

INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

Businesswoman of the Year

Recognises businesswomen role models who demonstrate outstanding entrepreneurial spirit, business achievement and innovation, whilst providing inspiration and encouragement to other people in business.

Young Professional of the Year

Recognises young business people who demonstrate outstanding entrepreneurial spirit, strategic direction, and innovative ideas, whilst providing inspiration to a new generation of upcoming young businesspeople.

This category is for individuals 35 years of age and younger (at the time of the award applications opening) and who have had significant success in their business.



NON-CATEGORY AWARDS

Sole Trader of the Year

Recognises the very best sole trader/owner-operator of the year. All applicants must have applied in one or more of the following categories:

- Agriculture
- Best New Business
- Community and Not-For-Profit
- Creative Industries
- Gerry Doumany Export
- Health and Wellbeing
- Hospitality – Food and Beverage
- Industry
- Innovation and Technology
- Professional Services
- Retail
- Tourism & Events
- Trades & Services

Judges may select eligible applicants from any above category for this award.

Micro-Business of the Year

Recognises the very best micro-business (A business with 2–4 fulltime equivalent employees, including owner-operators) of the year. All applicants must have applied for one or more of the following categories:

- Agriculture
- Best New Business
- Community and Not-For-Profit
- Creative Industries
- Gerry Doumany Export
- Health and Wellbeing
- Hospitality – Food and Beverage
- Industry
- Innovation and Technology
- Professional Services
- Retail
- Tourism & Events
- Trades & Services

Judges may select eligible applicants from any above category for this award.



Employer of Choice

Recognises the very best employer of the year, demonstrating exceptional commitment to creating a positive, supportive and high-performing workplace . All applicants must have applied in one or more of the following categories:

- Agriculture
- Best New Business
- Community and Not-For-Profit
- Creative Industries
- Gerry Doumany Export
- Health and Wellbeing
- Hospitality – Food and Beverage
- Industry
- Innovation and Technology
- Professional Services
- Retail
- Tourism & Events
- Trades & Services

Judges may select eligible applicants from any above category for this award.

Business of the Year

Recognises the very best from across our region. All winners from the below categories will be in the running for Business of The Year 2026:

- Agriculture
- Best New Business
- Community and Not-For-Profit
- Creative Industries
- Gerry Doumany Export
- Health and Wellbeing
- Hospitality – Food and Beverage
- Industry
- Innovation and Technology
- Professional Services
- Retail
- Tourism & Events
- Trades & Services

Toowoomba Chamber, Hall of Fame Inductee

Recognises long standing Toowoomba based businesses who have excelled in their industry along with their enduring contributions to the overall Toowoomba regional community. Businesses are nominated by the Toowoomba Chamber Board and are critically assessed by the board across all areas of the business and their commitment to engage with the economic vitality of our region. This award carries true prestige and all previous inductees still to this day continue to epitomise the values.





APPLICATIONS

Applications Overview

- All applicants must be based in the Toowoomba Region LGA
- All applications are strictly confidential.
- All judges are sourced from outside of the Toowoomba Region for independence and are required to sign a confidentiality agreement.
- All judges must declare any conflicts of interest.
- All categories with the exception of Businesswoman of the Year, Young Professional of the Year and Hall of Fame Inductee are to be judged by the same judges.
- All applications are to be lodged via the Toowoomba Chamber website.
- The judges will select finalists for each category, and conduct site visits with interviews for finalists following the finalist announcement function.
- Judges may elect to reallocate submissions to more appropriate categories.

Key Dates

EVENT	DATE
Toowoomba Chamber Clifford Gouldson Lawyers Business Excellence Awards applications open	20 April 2026
Toowoomba Chamber Clifford Gouldson Lawyers Business Excellence Awards applications close	29 June 2026 at 9.00am
Written Submission Judging	6 – 10 July 2026
Central Apartment Group Finalist Announcement Function	22 July 2026
Judging Site Visits	3-7 August 2026
Judging completed	14 August 2026
Awards Ticket Sales Close	28 August 2026
Toowoomba Chamber Clifford Gouldson Lawyers Business Excellence Awards	11 September 2026
People First Bank Sponsors & Winners Soiree	8 October 2026



Site Visits

Once finalists are announced at the Central Apartment Group Finalist Announcement function on July 22nd, The Judges will be scheduling site visits between **3-7 August 2026** to give finalists the opportunity to showcase their businesses. As our judges are travelling from outside Toowoomba, this judging week is not flexible. If applicants are not available, a proxy will be required.

During the site visit, judges will want to see evidence of strategy, vision, and values coming to life in your business. Judges are to visit each applicant together to reduce disruption to the business, and in the event of multiple category applications, conducted in a single appointment. Site visits will be 30-45 minutes in duration.

Feedback Provided to Applicants

By **12 October 2026**, the Toowoomba Chamber will have judges feedback available on request for any applicants.

Applicant Assessment and Criteria

Assessment criteria for the Toowoomba Chamber Clifford Gouldson Lawyers Business Excellence Awards 2026 are outlined in Appendices as follows:

- **Appendix A** | Category Assessment Criteria
- **Appendix B** | Businesswoman of the Year
- **Appendix C** | Young Professional of the Year.

This year the process will follow a similar path to the previous 5 years with further refinement, to deliver a shorter and simpler **application form**, submitted with a **video submission** and evidence of **financial viability**. Finalists will be determined based on this submission, and then receive an onsite visit from the judging panel. This process has been chosen to ensure due diligence and adherence to submission criteria.

Please note if the applicants' place of employment is not suitable for onsite visits, then the judges will book an alternative interview location instead – either face-to-face, online, or over the phone.



APPENDIX A | CATEGORY ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

This assessment criteria relates to the following categories:

- Agriculture sponsored by **Mort & Co**
- Best New Business sponsored by **Toowoomba Regional Council**
- Community and Not-For-Profit sponsored by **Southern Cross Austereo**
- Creative Industries sponsored by **The Empire**
- Gerry Doumany Export sponsored by **Toowoomba and Surat Basin Enterprise**
- Health and Wellbeing sponsored by **Barham Chiropractic**
- Hospitality sponsored by **Little Pig Consulting**
- Industry sponsored by **Bishopp**
- Innovation and Technology sponsored by **New Acland Coal**
- Professional Services sponsored by **Commonwealth Bank Australia**
- Retail sponsored by **JMK Retail**
- Tourism & Events sponsored by **Excavation Equipment**
- Trades & Services sponsored by **Ray White Commercial**

The judging framework assesses businesses across key areas of sustainable business excellence including strategy, performance, people, customer focus, community contribution and innovation.

The assessment breakdown for the Toowoomba Chamber Clifford Gouldson Lawyers Business Excellence Awards 2026 is as follows:

- Business Strategy | 15%;
- Business Performance & Improvements | 15%
- People Management and Development | 15%
- Customer & Market Focus | 15%
- Community Engagement and Activities | 15%
- Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Resilience | 15%
- A video of the business | 10%.

Note: Judges will reduce applicant scores who exceed word length limits (300 words for each question), video length limit (one minute) or choose not to provide a P&L Summary or Letter from their accountant.

The site visit will now only be provided for finalist businesses. During the site visit, judges will want to see evidence of your strategy, vision, and values coming to life in the applicant's business.



ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Business Strategy

Business strategy is key to success. This section is about demonstrating a sound understanding of business goals and objectives including evidence of strategic direction, goal setting and the processes you have in place to achieve them.

In your application:

- attach a summary of your strategic or business plan (maximum two pages); or
- write a summary of your strategic plan (300 words or less); or
- a combination of the above; and
- write or attach a graphic representation on how your business strategy was developed.

If you are a finalist, during the site visit, judges will ask questions like:

- How do you link your strategic plan or business strategy to day-to-day operations?
- How are your vision and values embedded in the organisation and communicated to the team?
- Describe what benefit your business has received from strategic planning and business planning?



Business Performance & Improvements

Successful businesses know what drives their economic engine and what they need to measure to ensure they are building a long-term sustainable and profitable business. Metrics are important to a business. It helps track how a business is performing and how it benchmarks itself.

In your application, in 300 words or less:

- outline the key financial indicators on how your business measures financial performance;
- outline how you measure customer relationships, customer retention, customer growth;
- outline other tools and measures you use to monitor performance;
- state what quality assurance processes and procedures you have in place; and
- outline how your business focuses on continuous improvement.

If you are a finalist, during the site visit, judges may ask questions like:

- Detail the financial management practices you have in place.
- Show us a graphical representation of financial performance which demonstrates profitability, liquidity, and sustainability of the business.
- Provide examples to demonstrate how you measure customer relationships, customer retention, customer growth.
- Show us how your quality assurance processes work in practice.
- How does your continuous improvement process integrate into your day-to-day operations?

Note: We ask that applicants provide either a summarised P&L as evidence, or a letter from their accountant (dated in 2026) about financial performance and sustainability. Financial summaries may exclude sensitive information such as revenue figures but must demonstrate financial sustainability. Choosing not to provide this will result in a score penalty.



People Management and Development

People are the central component of all businesses. How businesses manage this important resource and the initiatives they put in place to ensure the development and professional progression of their staff is a critical component of excellence in business.

In your application, in 300 words or less:

- describe the people practices your business has in place across the employee lifecycle. This may include:
 - attraction and retention strategies;
 - onboarding new employees;
 - training and development programs;
 - inclusion and diversity policies and practices;
 - workplace culture, staff engagement and staff wellbeing;

During the site visit, judges may ask questions like:

- Demonstrate how your attraction and retention strategies work.
- Walk me through how you would onboard me to your business.
- How do you develop individual training and development programs for employees?
- How do you actively seek to achieve your inclusion and diversity policy outcomes?
- How are you developing your workforce culture?
- How do you engage with your staff?
- How is your workplace wellness program implemented?
- What does your investment in your leaders and team include?

Note: Non-employing businesses who are unable to complete this section will receive an automatic 3/5 score.



Customer & Market Focus

Businesses need to understand who their customers are, how to attract them, what their needs are and how to retain/create loyal customers from them.

In your application, in less than 300 words:

- attach a summary of your marketing/promotional strategy (maximum two pages); or
- write a summary of your marketing/promotional strategy; and
- outline a summary of your customer service strategy

During the site visit, judges may ask questions like:

- Demonstrate how you implement your marketing/promotional strategy across your business?
- What gives you, your competitive advantage?
- What is unique value proposition that makes customers need your product and/or service?
- Show us how your customer service strategy works in practice?
- How do you keep abreast of your target market and customer needs and levels of satisfaction.



Community Engagement and Activities

A key component of excellence is engagement with and support of the broader Toowoomba community. The Toowoomba business community has a legacy of engaging and giving back to the community including volunteering, sponsoring local charities and interest groups, and holding events to support and contribute to the development of the local community.

In your application, in 300 words or less:

- describe how your business engages with and helps to support the broader community;
- identify what local community support (in-kind, financial etc.) you provide; and
- outline how you are involved in developing the local community.

During the site visit, judges may ask questions like:

- How does the business engage with and help the broader community?
- How did you go about choosing where and who to give back to?
- What types of specific activities are you in?



Innovation, Sustainability and Resilience

Innovation, sustainability and resilience enable businesses to respond to challenges, reduce environmental impact, create efficiencies and build long-term sustainable growth. Excellence in business does not necessarily mean being immune to the impact of the business environment, rather it is about the business' ability to face and recover from adversity and the agility to change and adapt when needed.

In your application, in 300 words or less:

- outline your innovative practices implemented to drive success;
- outline the measures your business has in place to be resilient in the changing business environment; and
- outline any environmental or sustainability initiatives your business has implemented and the impact they have delivered.

During the site visit, judges may ask questions like:

- Show us an innovation that drove business success?
- Show us how you face challenges, learn from failures, and adapt to changing market conditions, to achieve a goal.
- Describe a challenge(s) your business has faced that resulted in developing new or applying measures to make your business more resilient.
- Outline your expected businesses changes in the medium to long-term and what you have in place to limit impact on operations and achieve overall net benefits.
- Talk us through any unintended outcomes from the changes – positive and negative?



Business Summary Video

Applicants are afforded the opportunity to sell their 'business excellence' by highlighting how their business displays and delivers excellence.

In your **one-minute** video pitch, did you describe:

- who you are;
- what your business does; and
- why you believe you are an **EXCELLENT** and an award-winning business?

Note: This video is used for the purpose of your application only, and will not be shared further.



APPENDIX B | BUSINESSWOMAN OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by The Chronicle

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

This award recognises women business leaders who demonstrate outstanding entrepreneurial spirit, strategic direction, and innovative ideas, whilst providing inspiration to all businesspeople. Applications are sought from individuals who have had significant success in business.

The Businesswoman of the Year assessment process consists of two parts:

- written application – 75% of the assessment;
- a one-minute video – 25% of the assessment.

Judges may seek further information or clarification from any applicant or referee, at their discretion. This may be in the form of further written information or verbal contact.

After the Finalist Announcement Function on 22 July 2026, Finalists will then be asked to conduct a 30 minute interview with the judge via Teams/Google Meet.

Note: Judges have been advised that they should reduce applicant scores who exceed word and video limits length limits.



Submission Requirements/Interview Tips

A Businesswoman of the Year demonstrates their contribution to the business community. They will show the necessary skills and characteristics required to successfully lead a workforce or team of the future.

In your application:

- submit a current resume (maximum two pages) and one referee that can be contacted
- outline your most significant business achievement to date and what you did to achieve the result
- outline your greatest challenge as a businesswoman and how you dealt with that challenge
- detail your approach to leadership, diversity, sustainability, and inclusion, and how it influences your actions and activities in business
- describe your ongoing personal development and how you plan for it
- describe how you lead
- outline how you balance your personal life with your work life
- present what you have done to make a positive impact on the community
- profile how you have contributed to the Toowoomba business community.

Businesswoman of the Year Summary Video

Applicants are afforded the opportunity to sell themselves by highlighting their characteristics and skills, demonstrating why they should be businesswoman of the year.

Did your **one-minute** video pitch, describe:

- who you are;
- what you do; and
- why you believe you are the Businesswoman of the Year 2026.

Note: This video is used for the purpose of your application only, and will not be shared further.



APPENDIX C | YOUNG PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by Purpa.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

This award recognises young business leaders who demonstrate outstanding entrepreneurial spirit, strategic direction, and innovative ideas, whilst providing inspiration to a new generation of upcoming young businesspeople.

Applications are sought from individuals who are 35 years and under (at the time of award application opening) and who have had significant success in business.

The Young Professional of the Year assessment process consists of two parts:

- written application – 75% of the assessment; and
- a one-minute video – 25% of the assessment.

Judges may seek further information or clarification from any applicant or referee, at their discretion. This may be in the form of further written information or verbal contact.

After the Finalist Announcement Function on 22 July 2026, Finalists will then be asked to conduct a 30 minute interview with the judge via Teams/Google Meet.

Note: Judges have been advised that they should reduce applicant scores who exceed word and video limits length limits.



Submission Requirements/Interview Tips

A Young Professional embodies the necessary skills and characteristics required to successfully lead a workforce or team of the future. While setting a vision and executing a strategy is expected from a leader today, achieving these company goals also relies on the ability to motivate, communicate, and inspire a workforce.

In your application:

- submit a current resume (maximum two pages) and one referee;
- describe what professional and personal success means to you;
- outline your most significant career or personal achievement to date;
- illustrate your five-year plan for yourself;
- make clear the obstacles you have faced as a young business leader and how you have dealt with each of those challenges;
- detail your approach to leadership, diversity and inclusion, and how it influences your actions and activities within the company;
- highlight initiatives that you have developed as a leader in your business, detailing your success;
- describe your leadership style, what makes a good leader and any areas you need to work on in terms of your personal leadership style;
- outline how your leadership positively impacted on resolving a matter in your business, workplace and or community;
- present your contribution, interests and involvement in the community;
- profile how you have contributed to the Toowoomba business community, including the period, amount, nature, and level of the contribution; and
- articulate why you should be Young Professional of the Year 2026.

Young Professional of the Year Summary Video

Applicants are afforded the opportunity to sell themselves by highlighting how they have the characteristics and skills to lead Toowoomba's future.

Did your **one-minute** video pitch describe:

- who you are;
- what you do; and
- why you believe you are the Young Professional of the Year 2026.

Note: This video is used for the purpose of your application only, and will not be shared further.

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