

Judges Tips for Application 2026

SUNSHINE COAST BUSINESS
26 AWARDS

The process of applying for Awards is invaluable. It is an excellent tool for self-reflection and a motivation for ongoing business development and growth.

It may take a few goes before you get to stand on the podium, but it's important to remember that the process of applying is a great opportunity to stop and reflect on your business - what you have achieved to date and where you are headed in the future. Understanding every aspect of your business, why it is successful, and identifying where you can continue to make improvements is all part of the process.

Many finalists tell us that because of entering the awards they have improved their business, broadened their outlook, expanded their network and found new ways to collaborate with other businesses.

It works if you work it!

JUDGES TIPS

We asked our panel of judges for feedback about what they felt made some applications more competitive than others. Here's what they told us:

- Competitive businesses are driven and passionate about what they do - and it showed in their applications and interviews.
- Winning applicants clearly articulated what they do, demonstrated how they do it and evidenced results - their achievements and the impact they have.
- Winning businesses are extraordinary because they commit to do extra of the ordinary. They're great because they do the small things greatly and their applications showed how that achieved that.
- They put people first, listen to feedback, collaborate, create and innovate, and give back to the Sunshine Coast community. Strong applications made a point of highlighting these traits.
- There are so many amazing businesses on the Coast - winning businesses articulate why they are one of them; they articulate the problem they solve in a way that no one else does - and what makes them so outstanding.

Strong applications demonstrated and evidenced the following:

- **Clear, concise** and **consistent** responses
- Well thought out **business planning** with **clear goals** and objectives
- Logical **marketing strategy** tailored to the business goals
- Businesses that understand and cater to their **customers**
- **Sustainable** businesses – financially, socially and environmentally
- **Innovation** in product, services, processes and/or technologies
- Commitment to **people** development and positive team **culture**

What are the judges looking for?

- A great business story
- How you dug deep and made things work despite all the challenges
- How you got your message out and connected with your customers
- How you figured out what people needed and solved that problem for them
- How you make a difference - purpose, people, planet, profit
- How you come up with new ideas, products and services
- Why your staff and customers love you
- Why the Sunshine Coast is better off because of what you do

Application content tips

- Make every word count. Don't waffle. Don't ramble.
- Headings, subheadings and white space make it easier to read.
- Bullet points fit a lot of information into less space.
- Write more than you need, then edit, refine, reduce and polish.
- Study the questions. Make sure you're answering them.
- Evidence rules. Give examples, case studies, stats, data, comparisons.
- Fresh eyes help - ask other people to read it and give you feedback.

WRITTEN APPLICATIONS

Presentation

- Articulate, professional, well-structured, and detailed applications, with plenty of relevant stats, examples and data to support each claim.
- Competitive applications followed a logical, easy-to-follow structure:
 - Use of headings - one good heading can do the work of a whole paragraph! Use headings to provide context and present your application more logically.
 - The word count is not a challenge - less is more.
 - Applications that made use of dot points, short sentences, white space and short paragraphs were much easier to read and follow the line of reasoning.

Content

- **Include** specific stats, metrics and KPI details to support your responses and increase the impact and quality of your presentation.
- **Don't** make statements you can't back up with evidence. Follow any claims with "For example..."
- **Do** include specific examples and case studies - especially if you plan to use the Sunshine Coast Business Awards as a stepping-stone for other state or national awards.

For example, higher scoring applications included details like the following:

Details like these give greater substance, impact and credibility to your submission:

- Milestones in your business, challenges overcome, goals achieved.
- Testimonials from clients, other awards or professional recognition.
- Specific growth details related to income, number of staff, clients, products or services, bed nights, visitor numbers etc.

- Local economy impact: specific economic stats or data, especially in comparison to regional, state or national metrics.
- Growth or expansion SMART goals achieved or exceeded, including specific metrics or numeric/time intentions.
- Your unique selling point and the specific benefits to your clients of this USP.
- Specific metrics you use to measure the quality and efficiency of service delivery.
- Psychographic or demographic data about your customers and how this shapes your approach to your market base.
- Comparative national/regional industry growth statistics.
- Positive media coverage, and examples of how you were able to capitalise on positive media to grow your business.

Higher scoring applications also made good use of the guidance that appear to the right-hand side of the 10 main questions on the application form:

- Type of business:
 - Size, location, capacity, methodologies (online, bricks and mortar, mobile service, combo, other)
 - Any specific niche or target sector
 - Goals and associated marketing strategies
 - Examples of success
- Describe the products/services you offer, and demonstrate how you market these:
 - Describe your target markets and ideal clients
 - The types of products and services you offer each group
 - Your USP for each segment or target group
 - How you find, connect with and engage your ideal clients
- How you develop and enhance your business relationships with your customers:
 - Customer service: specific examples of what you mean by "personalise" and "special requests"?
 - Examples of how you measure customer satisfaction.
 - Client feedback that shows how you listened and made a change to your products or services.
 - Customer complaints: an example, even if minor or trivial, or a testimonial. An example of a specific customer complaint and how you handled it.
 - Understanding of the customer segments that provide your highest returns.
- How you foster a positive team culture:
 - Examples of challenges overcome
 - How you encourage, motivate, delegate to, train or empower your team
 - How you grow your own and your team's leadership capacity
 - How you onboard new staff
 - How you celebrate wins
 - How all the above feed into your business growth
- How you innovate:

- Examples of new products, processes or services created in response to market changes or feedback..
- Ways you have developed or tweaked technology, processes or systems to improve your business.
- Ways you have engaged with staff, providers and customers that are unique or different.
- New or unusual approaches to marketing and advertising that had an impact.
- Any research or analysis you've used or created to improve your products and service delivery.
- Ways you find to turn creative ideas and suggestions from staff or clients into new business.
- Economic contribution to the region:
 - Number of staff
 - Examples of local suppliers and providers engaged
 - Details about your contribution to the industry/sector/market in relation to national/state/regional economic data.
 - Comparative national/regional industry growth statistics.
 - Collaborations and joint ventures with other businesses
 - Investment in your business and the region including buildings, equipment, plant, and other assets.
 - Import/export activities.
 - How you add value to your sector's supply chains.
- Social impact of your business in the region:
 - How you improve wellbeing for your staff, customers or the community.
 - How you raise the quality of life for people in the region.
 - How you contribute positively to the region's culture.
 - How you support and encourage diversity.
 - Any mentorship, sponsorships, philanthropy or other community support activities.
- Environmental impact of your business in the region:
 - In what ways are you energy and water efficiency.
 - How you recycle, re-use, reduce, repurpose.
 - How you foster waste reduction.
 - How your business seeks to be efficient with transport and travel
 - Any sustainability projects you've initiated or support.
 - How you manage your environmental footprint.
- How you stand out from your competitors:
 - Ways you may be better, smarter, faster than other providers.
 - Ways your products are more reliable
 - How you are more effective or efficient than other products or services.
 - Ways your products are more desirable or valuable.
 - How you create greater accessibility for your clients.
- Why you deserve to business of the year:

- Ways that your business best represents the essence of the Sunshine Coast.
- How you shine a spotlight on or attract people to the region.
- Things you are most proud of as a contributor to the regional economy.
- The people who make your business shine - not just your own team, but also those other people associated with your business, collaborators, business networks, industry groups, clients, supporters and fans.
- What you see as your greatest contributions to the region's growth and success.

FINALIST STAGE: THE INTERVIEW PRESENTATION

Those who progressed to become a finalist had the opportunity to present a pitch about their business to a panel of judges. It is important to note:

- **Written applications and interview presentations are judged separately.**
- **Please assume your interview panel has not read your written application.**
- **Your presentation is judged purely and solely on what you share in the interview.**

Those who scored well in the presentation stage, did so for the following reasons:

- They did not simply repeat everything from their written application.
- They didn't list endless facts and data.
- They selected and drew attention to a few key points, significant milestones and achievements.
- They prepared well and practiced often.
- They practiced out loud and refined their timing, pitch, tone and body language.
- They arrived at the venue early so they were relaxed and unhurried.
- They kept within their allocated time limits.
- They told stories and gave examples to highlight key ideas and facts.
- They didn't read from a script - though they may have had dot points prompt them.
- They assumed the panel knew nothing about their business and gave a quick snapshot to set the scene.
- They presented like they were pitching their business on Shark Tank.
- They had thought about what questions may be asked and prepared brief, concise answers - they didn't ramble.
- Some had objects, images, samples or products to show the panel - but only when these enhanced their presentation.
- Many didn't use technology, they kept everything organic and personal.
- Those who did use technology well, were completely self-reliant, well prepared, practiced and professional.
- They included emotional content - especially about challenges overcome, outcomes achieved and lives changed or problems solved.

- They spoke with passion, inspiration and authenticity.
- They shared the human face of their business.
- They made it obvious why they love what they do.
- They were confident, concise, clear and compelling.

Thinking of applying?

Two things:

1. Start now! Download this year's questions from our [website](#) and get a headstart on your application. Involve your team and ask your customers why they love you.
2. And second, back yourself! You can't be a success if you're secret.

Information Sessions

We recommend you join us at one of our 4 information sessions where you will:

- Find out more about the application process and eligibility criteria.
- Discover tips about submitting a competitive application.
- Have the opportunity to ask questions of the Awards team.

Please Note: *Registration is essential and places are limited.*

Click here for dates and to register: [Key Dates – Sunshine Coast Business Awards](#)

All entries close at 5pm on Monday 17 August.

The submission deadline is final, and no extensions will be granted.

How Are Applications Assessed?

For more information about the judging process, please see:

[Judging – Sunshine Coast Business Awards](#)

All the best with your application

If you have any questions please contact the Awards Coordinator:

Bridie Burnip

awards@sunshinecoastbusinessawards.com.au

0447 242 795