



The Chief Minister  
Treasury and Economic Development Directorate  
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Dear Chief Minister,

### Budget Consultation Submission 2023–2024

The Academy of Interactive Entertainment Ltd. (AIE) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the 2023–2024 Budget Consultation process to provide feedback on how and where the Government should invest to boost the ACT’s services and infrastructure.

The AIE is a not-for-profit educational institution headquartered in Watson, Canberra<sup>1</sup>. AIE is also the parent company of AIE Institute Limited, which is a newly accredited degree-granting institute of higher education that will offer a Bachelor of Game Development specialising in game art, game design and game programming in 2024.

Historically, AIE’s focus has been on the delivery of vocational education and industry growth programs for the computer games, animation, and film visual effects industries. More recently, AIE has expanded its vocational course offerings to include filmmaking and virtual production to meet the demand for “below the line” film crew roles to attract incoming film productions to Canberra.

Through the support of the ACT Government, AIE was able to deliver the world’s first accredited course that specialises in virtual production<sup>2</sup>, which involved constructing and testing a LED virtual production volume at EPIC that will be re-assembled in a new purpose-built facility to be constructed during stage 1 works of AIE’s Watson Campus Renewal. Local and interstate (Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney) student projects were filmed at EPIC’s Mallee Pavilion, including local film director Denai Gracie’s short film “EXO-2 TWENTYSIX”.



Figure A: Filming of “EXO-2 TWENTYSIX” short film at EPIC Mallee building.

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<sup>1</sup> Academy of Interactive Entertainment website <https://aie.edu.au/>

<sup>2</sup> Media release from PR WEB

[https://www.prweb.com/releases/world\\_first\\_film\\_and\\_virtual\\_production\\_course\\_announced\\_by\\_the\\_academy\\_of\\_interactive\\_entertainment/prweb17919288.htm](https://www.prweb.com/releases/world_first_film_and_virtual_production_course_announced_by_the_academy_of_interactive_entertainment/prweb17919288.htm)



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AIE is also the founder of the not-for-profit coworking space Game Plus<sup>3</sup> and Canberra film production facilities, Film Plus<sup>4</sup>, both located at AIE's Canberra Campus at Canberra Technology Park in Watson.

AIE's combined entities work collaboratively with each other and in cooperation with games and screen industry associations and business networks including the Interactive Games and Entertainment Association (IGEIA), Screen Canberra, and the Canberra Innovation Network (CBRIN). AIE's vocational courses, degree courses, cooperative industry facilities and other industry development programs are being consolidated into a new purpose-built facility in Watson, which forms part of the broader education and innovation precinct that has grown in the inner north.

AIE's Watson Campus Renewal plans are detailed in a Future Intentions Plan that underwent community consultation and was approved by the ACT Government in December 2021. The AIE subsequently purchased Section 13, Block 4 Watson from the ACT Government at market rate in April 2022.

Our budget consultation submission is tied to AIE's stage 1 works detailed in the Future Intentions Plan and has a particular focus on funding for infrastructure that supports the following areas that all contribute towards the wellbeing of the Canberra and region community:

1. Education and lifelong learning
2. Jobs and economic growth
3. Community support and social inclusion
4. Culture and entertainment
5. Environment and climate.

### **Expand the eligibility criteria for the Canberra Screen Attraction Fund and allocate additional funds to achieve Screen Canberra's infrastructure goals.**

AIE recommends that the ACT Government includes the establishment of film infrastructure that is in alignment with Screen Canberra activities and recent consultation around the review of the fund into the scope of the Canberra Screen Attraction Fund. This would achieve the outcome of increasing the pool of film projects that meet the criteria of the existing fund and compete with other states which have significant film infrastructure to support incoming projects.

AIE has worked jointly with Screen Canberra since its inception. Our collaboration has seen films such as *Me and My Mates Vs The Zombie Apocalypse*<sup>5</sup>, *The Furies*<sup>6</sup> and *Sissy*<sup>7</sup> produced at the AIE Film Plus collaborative workspace for filmmakers. *Sissy* received nomination for 3 Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA)

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<sup>3</sup> Game Plus website <https://gameplus.com.au/>

<sup>4</sup> Film Plus website <https://filmplus.com.au/>

<sup>5</sup> Me and My Mates vs. The Zombie Apocalypse (2015) <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2846938/>

<sup>6</sup> The Furies (2019) [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8228172/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8228172/?ref=fn_al_tt_1)

<sup>7</sup> Sissy (2022) [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8228172/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8228172/?ref=fn_al_tt_1)



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awards, including Best Lead Actress in Film, Best Film and Best Direction in Film. *Sissy* also received a raft of other nominations and awards including:

- **Audience Award for Feature Film (Winner)** at the Bucheon International Fantastic Film Festival (BIFAN).
- **CGA Award for Best Casting in a Feature Film (Nominee)** at the Casting Guild of Australia (2022) Awards.
- **Audience Award (Winner)** at The Overlook Film Festival (2022).
- **Best Score For A Horror Film** at The Movie Music International Recognition Awards 2022 for ANU Composer Kenneth Lampl for *Sissy*.

For Screen Canberra to attract major motion pictures and TV series to Canberra, critical film industry infrastructure such as a soundstage, workshop and other specialist film production facilities are needed. AIE is addressing this need through its AIE Campus Renewal Project in Watson, the details of which are outlined in AIE's Future Intentions Plan<sup>8</sup>. The completion of these facilities will assist Screen Canberra to attract such projects as larger productions with minimum \$2M Qualifying Australian Capital Territory Expenditure (QACTE) require these facilities.

The AIE is committed to start building Stage 1 of its Watson campus; however the rising building costs have delayed and reduced the scope of our spend and has therefore delayed several major motion picture productions to consider Canberra.

We would like Screen Canberra's CBR Screen Attraction Fund (SAF) – which provides support of up to 10% of the QACTE for big budget, incoming productions – to be expanded to include the construction of infrastructure that has a minimum development cost of \$10M that meets set criteria in line with broader Screen Canberra and ACT Government goals. The objectives of the SAF are to:

- **Support the growth and sustainability of Canberra's screen industry<sup>9</sup>.**  
AIE's facilities would enable major motion pictures and TV series of budgets of \$10M or more to be filmed in Canberra, on an ongoing basis.
- **Raise the national and international profile of Canberra's screen industry<sup>10</sup>.**  
AIE's LED virtual production soundstage will assist many independent filmmakers in Canberra and nationwide to produce TV shows or feature films.
- **Demonstrate local economic impact<sup>11</sup>.**  
*Sissy* alone created over 100 jobs (over 50 of which were local). With such a facility, hundreds of jobs would be created. As Canberra's local industry grows, more of these positions would be local jobs.

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<sup>8</sup> AIE's Future Intentions Plan [https://community.aie.edu.au/document-library/Academy%20of%20Interactive%20Entertainment%20Future%20Intentions%20Plan\\_condensed.pdf](https://community.aie.edu.au/document-library/Academy%20of%20Interactive%20Entertainment%20Future%20Intentions%20Plan_condensed.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> CBR Screen Attraction Fund Guidelines <https://screencanberra.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CBR-SAF-Guidelines-Sept-2022.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

<sup>11</sup> CBR Screen Attraction Fund Guidelines <https://screencanberra.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CBR-SAF-Guidelines-Sept-2022.pdf>



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If required, the funding could require a return of capital to the fund, similar to the requirements of the Canberra Screen Investment fund. Under this model, the funding could be a mixture of grant funding and debt paid from the rental of the facilities to incoming productions.

AIE's current plans include the construction of a 1,000 m<sup>2</sup> Student Production Hall which will not only allow filmmaking students from AIE and UC to utilise this facility for their projects, but importantly, allow Screen Canberra to attract big budget productions. We also plan to build a 750 m<sup>2</sup> workshop which will allow the creation of props and sets for incoming productions, as well as install the large LED virtual production volume that was recently demonstrated to many businesses, federal government and local government at EPIC during 2022.

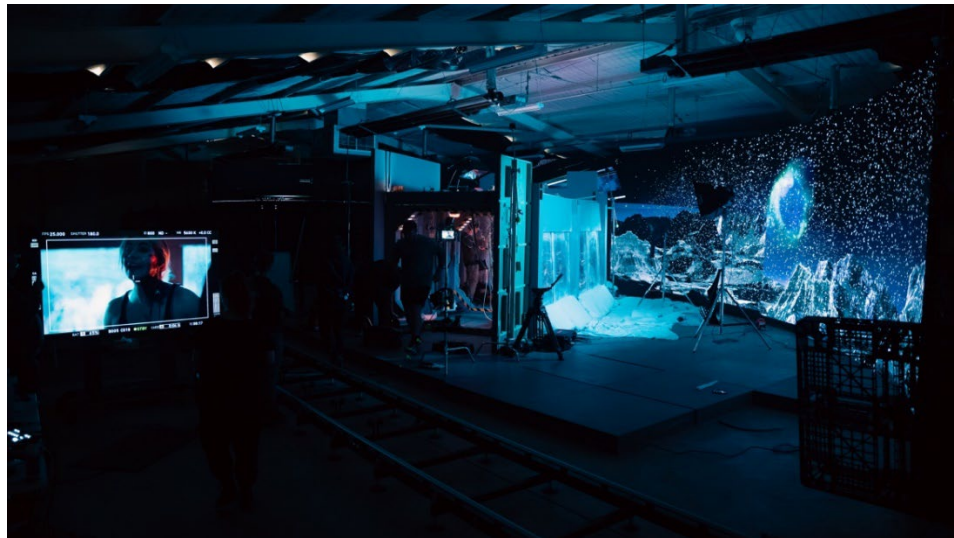


Figure B: AIE's LED virtual production installation at Mallee Pavilion Epic)

AIE's investment in the \$1M motion control Technodolly requires a soundstage for it to operate correctly. This specialised unit was demonstrated at EPIC, but we have no space to utilise it for incoming productions until the production hall is completed in Watson.

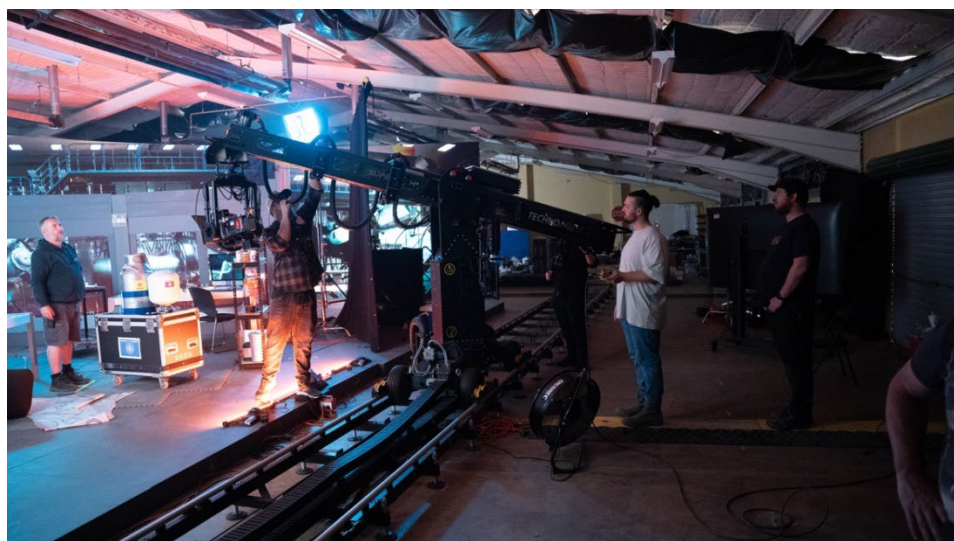


Figure C: Australia's only \$1M Technodolly motion control crane at Mallee Building, EPIC

AIE also recommends that it participates in a strategic planning session with Screen Canberra and relevant government stakeholders.



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## Support local attempts to secure Federal infrastructure funding through a commitment to match (at a capped level) federal government contributions

AIE intends to re-approach the federal government to seek a contribution to support infrastructure projects outlined in AIE's Future Intentions Plan for the AIE Watson Campus Renewal that will contribute towards promoting the significance of the Nations' Capital to all Australians.

AIE's ambitious campus renewal plans include the establishment of industry grade film production facilities that specialise in virtual production. These plans will build Canberra's reputation as a creative hub for local and visiting productions and will provide a professional location with the required infrastructure and equipment to meet the needs of a full production lifecycle. The global virtual production market size was valued at USD1.46B in 2020 and is projected to reach USD4.73B by 2028<sup>12</sup>. Canberra has the opportunity to convert a small portion of the market share into an ongoing revenue stream that will significantly grow the Canberra economy.

## AIE Workshop doubling as an ACT Community Shed location.

AIE has identified potential opportunities to link community support and social inclusion offerings with AIE's stage 1 works of the Watson Campus Renewal that would offer a secondary benefit to the already offered educational, jobs and economic growth outcomes. AIE proposes that the AIE Film Studio Workshop (*Workshop Plus*) also serves as an ACT Community Shed location under the Australian Men's Shed<sup>13</sup> Association Framework (when not in use for core AIE purposes). This enhanced outcome could be achieved through a financial contribution from the ACT Government to ensure a dual fit-for-purpose build.

Initial estimates for the workshop (including amenities and green room) are in the vicinity of \$808,983 + GST. This excludes fit out and tools. This workshop was initially planned for Stage 2 works; however, it has been re-prioritised to maximise the value of the state-of-the-art sound stage and virtual production studio in the Student Production Hall. The workshop will enable set extensions for student and industry projects to be produced on-site, achieving production readiness from inception. An example of set extensions was demonstrated by AIE Students at the Mallee Pavilion at EPIC throughout October/November 2022.

## Integration of solar energy and EV charging at AIE's Watson Campus

There is an opportunity for the creation of an environmentally sustainable campus. The new AIE campus buildings could become a leading example of the ACT Government's Climate Strategy<sup>14</sup> of a Net Zero Emissions Territory through the incorporation of roof top solar panels and rapid electric vehicle (EV) charging stations. This would off-set the significant power consumption requirements of the

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.theinsightpartners.com/reports/virtual-production-market>

<sup>13</sup> Australian Mens shed association website <https://mensshed.org/>

<sup>14</sup> Climate Change – what the ACT government is doing  
<https://www.climatechoices.act.gov.au/transport-and-travel/cars-and-vehicles/grant-funding-for-public-charging-stations>



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virtual production studio and other campus facilities and encourage the use of clean vehicles in the inner North by providing an accessible fast charging location for Watson, Downer and Hackett residents and visitors.

AIE requests that the ACT Government consider investing in EV infrastructure to be located at the AIE Watson Campus (this could potentially be achieved through grant funding for public charging stations<sup>15</sup>) and through further subsidies for the inclusion of solar energy infrastructure which AIE could apply for through the Community Zero Emissions Grants Program<sup>16</sup>.

### Increased tree canopies

AIE committed to a sustainability target of achieving 30% canopy coverage in its Future Intentions Plan<sup>17</sup>.

AIE invites and encourages the ACT Government to include AIE's Watson Campus as a location in its broader Tree Planting Program under the Urban Forest Strategy<sup>18</sup> and to contribute towards new landscaping to integrate with existing landscaping that will provide amenity for future students, visitors and surrounding neighborhoods. This will also contribute to the ACT Governments goals under the Climate Change Strategy 2019–2025<sup>19</sup> and Canberra's Living Infrastructure Plan<sup>20</sup>.

### Surface level shared parking for the AIE Watson Campus and Inner North destination play space

Through a minor adjustment to its Future Intentions Plan and a co-contribution from the ACT Government, AIE can increase the volume of surface level parking included in Stage 1 works to provide a location that services onsite visitor parking for the inner north destination play space. This would enable free parking at weekends and enable the ACT Government to create a recreation area that could support community events, markets, performances and festivals without overcrowding of street parking on Windeyer, Burton and A'Beckett Streets.

Additionally, connecting landscaped pedestrian linkages from the car park will create a more porous boundary, will further enhance the connectivity between the campus and adjacent park, and will contribute to the wellbeing of locals and visitors through the seamless integration of the two sites.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.climatechoices.act.gov.au/transport-and-travel/cars-and-vehicles/grant-funding-for-public-charging-stations>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.climatechoices.act.gov.au/policy-programs/community-zero-emissions-grants>

<sup>17</sup> See page 7 of AIE's Future Intentions Plan [https://community.aie.edu.au/document-library/Academy%20of%20Interactive%20Entertainment%20Future%20Intentions%20Plan\\_condensed.pdf](https://community.aie.edu.au/document-library/Academy%20of%20Interactive%20Entertainment%20Future%20Intentions%20Plan_condensed.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Urban Forest Strategy <https://www.cityservices.act.gov.au/trees-and-nature/trees/urban-forest-strategy>

<sup>19</sup> ACT Climate Strategy 2019-2025 [https://www.environment.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/1414641/ACT-Climate-Change-Strategy-2019-2025.pdf](https://www.environment.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1414641/ACT-Climate-Change-Strategy-2019-2025.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Canberra's Living Infrastructure Plan: Cooling the City [https://www.environment.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/1413770/Canberras-Living-Infrastructure-Plan.pdf](https://www.environment.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1413770/Canberras-Living-Infrastructure-Plan.pdf)



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## Conclusion

I would like the opportunity to expand further on the points I have made above, and I can be contacted via email at [jdm@aie.edu.au](mailto:jdm@aie.edu.au). I also consent to this submission being made public.

Yours Sincerely,

**John De Margheriti**  
Chairman and CEO