

BOARD OF DIRECTORS PRESENTATION

Creative Industries Hub

Continuance and Path Forward

Economic Development Lethbridge

May 2026

About the Feasibility Study

Commissioned by EDL · Conducted by Nordicity · Completed April 2026

What we set out to determine

- Whether a Creative Industries Hub — physical or virtual — is financially sustainable and effective as an economic development instrument for Southwest Alberta
- What structure and scale of Hub best suits current sector readiness
- What a phased development path looks like, including operating models and capital requirements
- How a Hub could advance job creation, talent retention, SME growth, and inclusive participation in the creative economy

How the research was conducted

- In-depth interviews with project partners across post-secondary, industry, and economic development
- Hybrid industry roundtable events in Lethbridge
- Online survey — 35 responses representing approximately 28% of the identified potential user base
- Environmental scan and inventory of ~125 operators across Southwest Alberta
- 16 community partners engaged — including Indigenous organizations, post-secondary institutions, and regional networks

What We Found: Southwest Alberta's Creative Sector Strengths

~125

Operators inventoried
across SW Alberta

35

Survey responses
(~28% of est. user base)

16

Community partners
engaged

\$5.55B

Alberta creative industries
GDP contribution (2023)

Key regional strengths identified

- **Post-secondary pipeline:**
 - University of Lethbridge and Lethbridge Polytechnic offer programs in film production, media arts, digital design, and game development — producing a consistent regional talent base
- **Indigenous and BIPOC creative leadership:**
 - Location within Treaty 7 territory and the Blackfoot Confederacy's proximity is a distinct regional asset. Organizations such as Blood Tribe Economic Development, Indigitech Destiny and BIPOC Foundation are active contributors
- **Existing sector organizations:**
 - Screen Lethbridge, Lethbridge Game Developer Guild, and RINSA provide early convening infrastructure and sector momentum
- **Cost-competitive environment:**
 - Lower cost of living relative to Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, and Toronto positions the region as an attractive base for independent creators and digital-first productions

What We Found: Gaps and Opportunities

Five structural gaps — each a rationale for the Hub

Industry Coordination	Market Scale and Depth	Skills and Talent Retention	Access to Funding	Shared Infrastructure
• Sector is fragmented across sub-sectors with no shared coordination layer. Programs and expertise go underutilized due to limited visibility.	• A thin middle layer: few companies large enough to offer stable employment or mentorship. Constrained opportunities limit sector maturation.	• Graduates leave for Calgary and Edmonton. Limited structured pathways into professional work prevent local talent retention.	• Public funding is increasingly competitive; private investment inaccessible without track records. Funding access is the sector's top stated need.	• No shared, accessible production space or professional equipment in the region. Workers source across multiple providers or travel to Calgary.

Survey top three needs of Southwest Alberta creative industries professionals: (1) securing funding (2) finding work and business development (3) networking and collaboration

"The consultations highlight demand for greater alignment, collaboration, knowledge exchange, access to funding, and specialized resources. The phased approach proposed outlines a pragmatic and evidence-based pathway to establishing a Hub to help meet these needs."

A Four-Phase Path Forward

Each phase is a viable model — progression is evidence-based, not automatic

Phase 1 Convene the Sector	NOW	Phase 2 Member Organization	12–24 Mo	Phase 3 Basic Physical Space	3–5 Yr	Phase 4 Purpose-Built Hub	5–10 Yr
• Establish ad hoc steering committee • Host networking and professional development events • Sector mapping and relationship-building • Annual operating: ~\$27K • Capital outlay: ~\$170		• Formal industry association established • Executive Director hired full-time • Membership and programming fees introduced • Annual operating: ~\$105K • Capital: ~\$7.2K		• Rented production-ready space opened • Equipment access and shared workspace • Full program staff team in place • Annual operating: ~\$394K • Capital: ~\$59.2K		• Owned specialized facility • Film studio, audio, XR/immersive spaces • Full commercial operations • Annual operating: ~\$463K • Capital: ~\$3.8M	

NOTE: Progression between phases is triggered by demonstrated sector demand, organizational stability, and financial readiness — not a fixed timeline.

Where We Stand Now

The study is complete. The foundation for Phase 1 is in place.

What has been accomplished

- Rigorous feasibility study completed by Nordicity — a nationally recognized creative industries consultancy
- Evidence base established through primary and secondary research across the Southwest Alberta creative sector
- 16 community partners mobilized and engaged across post-secondary, Indigenous organizations, industry, and economic development
- Government of Alberta NRED final report submitted — satisfying all grant reporting obligations
- Phase 1 activity informally underway: sector relationships activated through the consultation process itself

Signals of sector readiness

- Survey respondents identified securing funding, business development, and networking as their top three needs — all addressable through Phase 1
- 28% of the estimated user base participated in the survey, demonstrating meaningful sector engagement
- Partners including BIPOC Foundation, Indigitech Destiny, University of Lethbridge, and Lethbridge Polytechnic have signalled ongoing interest
- The City of Lethbridge streamlined its film permitting process in 2025 — signalling strong municipal alignment
- Alberta's creative industries contributed \$5.55B to provincial GDP in 2023, providing a credible provincial policy context for continued investment

Proposed Next Steps

Four interconnected workstreams to advance Phase 1

Sector Engagement

- Formalize an ad hoc steering committee drawn from existing sector partners
- Host a minimum of 4 convenings in Year 1 — networking, professional development, and community-building
- Develop a sector mapping and communication strategy to improve visibility across Southwest Alberta
- Ensure inclusive design: culturally safe programming and outreach to rural, Indigenous, and underrepresented creatives

Partnership Development

- Confirm formal commitments from the 16 community partners engaged through the study
- Define roles, responsibilities, and contribution expectations within the steering committee structure
- Explore partnership with the City of Lethbridge, given their aligned film policy work
- Establish connections to the Government of Alberta and Calgary Economic Development to ensure regional alignment

Funding Pursuit

- Identify grant opportunities aligned with Phase 1 operating costs (~\$27K annually)
- Explore federal and provincial cultural and economic development funding streams
- Target in-kind contributions from partners to reduce early-stage cash requirements
- Develop a funding strategy that bridges to Phase 2 requirements (~\$70K in grants annually)

Hub Establishment

- Develop a governance framework for the eventual member-led organization (Phase 2)
- Define KPIs and measurement framework to track readiness for phase progression
- Engage a part-time coordinator or ad hoc lead to manage Phase 1 activities
- Explore brand and identity development to build sector awareness and regional positioning

Board Decision: Approval to Proceed

Three areas of Board endorsement are sought

1 Authorize Phase 1 Implementation

- Formally approve EDL's advancement of Phase 1 of the Creative Industries Hub, as outlined in the Nordicity feasibility study
- Confirm EDL's role as the lead convenor and coordinating organization for Phase 1 activities
- Support establishment of an ad hoc steering committee to guide sector engagement
- Affirm EDL's commitment to evidence-based progression through the four-phase model

2 Endorse Funding Pursuit

- Authorize EDL to pursue provincial, federal, and foundation funding to support Phase 1 and bridge to Phase 2 operations
- Support development of a formal funding strategy, including government grants and in-kind contributions from sector partners
- Note the annual operating requirement of ~\$27K in Year 1, with a path to ~\$105K by Phase 2
- Recognize that establishing the Hub will signal strategic coordination and may attract increased investment to the region

3 Direct Reporting and Accountability

- Confirm reporting structure and accountability expectations for Phase 1
- Establish clear KPIs and milestones that will inform Board decisions on phase transitions
- Authorize staff to present a formal Phase 1 progress report to the Board at 12 months post-approval
- Receive written updates on funding applications and partner commitments as material developments occur

The case for Southwest Alberta's creative economy is clear.

The study is done. The partners are ready. The next step is ours to take.

Questions and Discussion

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Reference: Creative Industries Hub Feasibility Study, Economic Development Lethbridge & Nordicity, April 2026