



## Your opportunity to be involved for 2026 is here!

The Ballarat Winter Festival is back again, from 27 June- 19 July.

The festival features multiple winter-themed activations and events that are affordable and convenient for the community. With a strong focus on local families, the festival offers a range of engaging activities within Ballarat's CBD. These activities bring people together and showcase Ballarat as a vibrant winter destination.

As part of the festival, Ballarat's Hot Chocolate Showdown (running for the duration of the festival) endeavors to capitalise on festival attendance for local venues. With marketing across metro and regional areas, this is great opportunity to expose your venue to wider markets, and be part of the fun! Customers are encouraged to try multiple hot chocolates across the city and submit ratings for each one they try, to go into the draw to win prizes. A People's Choice winner is announced for both the alcoholic and non-alcoholic category.

Businesses are also invited to get involved and leverage this opportunity by participating in the ice rink discount program and/ or creating their own activations.

These opportunities are provided by the City of Ballarat events team, and administrated by Commerce Ballarat. For any questions, please reach out to the Commerce Ballarat team: [info@commerceballarat.com.au](mailto:info@commerceballarat.com.au) or 5333 3233





## How to Get Involved

### 1. Expressions of Interest

26 March to 14 April

- Read the Selection Criteria

On page 3 of this document

- Craft your Hot Chocolate concept- only 1 entry per venue

Alcoholic and non-alcoholic versions of the same concept are considered 1 entry

- Make sure you can maintain availability and quality at scale

Consider equipment, serving ware and preparation required

Please note that some venues last year sold over 700 units

- Consider your options

E.g. alcoholic and non-alcoholic versions, takeaway/ dine-in availability

- Submit your Expression of Interest

### 2. Entry Selections

14 April to 21 April

- Selections will be made by a panel based on the selection criteria

### 3. Confirmation & Acceptance

21 April- 28 April

- Both successful and unsuccessful entries will be informed
- Successful venues will be required to provide any outstanding details and sign an agreement to confirm their place in the showdown

### 4. Professional Photos

Early May

- Professional photos will be taken of your Hot Chocolate, a time will be booked during the confirmation process

Please ensure these look realistic as to what will be served throughout the showdown

### 5. Provision of Marketing Materials

Prior to Ballarat Winter Festival beginning

- Each venue will be provided with digital and physical marketing collateral prior to the launch of the showdown.
- As part of your agreement, refrain from promoting your hot chocolate prior to the City of Ballarat official marketing

### 6. Post Event Survey

Post Ballarat Winter Festival

Each venue will be required to provide feedback on their experience, including units sold



## Selection Criteria

Entries will be assessed by a panel of the City of Ballarat Events Team and the Sector Engagement Coordinator, against the Selection Criteria below. If more than 35 Expressions of Interest are received, the top 35 scoring hot chocolates will be selected to participate.

Scoring scale (0 -5)

0 - Does not meet criteria

1 - Meets criteria minimally

2 - Meets criteria adequately

3 - Meets criteria well

4 - Meets criteria strongly

5 - Outstanding alignment

Criteria	Description	Weighting
Exclusivity	Hot chocolate is new, and is created exclusively for the 2026 Hot Choc Showdown. May not be a repeat of an entry from last year.	Pass / Fail
Appeal	The entry is a creative and exciting hot chocolate that is unique to other entries. It has visual appeal and is appropriate for the family audience of the festival (both children and adults/caregivers).	40%
Chocolate Focus	Chocolate is the hero of the entry (this is a hot <u>chocolate</u> showdown after all!)	20%
Local Components	Includes use of local ingredients and/ or collaboration with other local businesses.	10%
Operational Capacity	Ability of the venue to produce consistently, manage demand and promote hot chocolate. Opening hours of the venue/ hot chocolate availability are accessible to the festival audience.	20%
Details Provided	Application is complete, detailed, and requires only minor information to be confirmed if accepted.	10%

## Key Dates

- EOIs Open 26 March
- EOIs Close 14 April
- Panel Selections 14- 21 April
- Confirmation of Entry 21 April
- Signing of Agreements 21-28 April
- Professional Photography Early May
- Distribution of Marketing Materials 1- 12 June
- Festival Dates 27 June- 19 July

## Program Benefits

- Leverage opportunities from the City of Ballarat's marketing campaign: the marketing for the Ballarat Winter Festival across the region and Melbourne targets young families. Your inclusion in the program lists you on the Ballarat Winter Festival website, which is the source of information pointed to in the marketing. More customers through the door, without having to spend marketing dollars.
- Opportunity for further promotion with People's Choice voting, and announcement of winners.
- Build community: be part of a collaborative effort between local hospitality businesses.

## FAQs and Things to Consider

- Looking for inspiration?

Check out [the map](#) with last year's Showdown entries and [this list](#) of what pairs well with chocolate.

- Can I do the same thing as I did last year?

To ensure interest and excitement around the Showdown, we ask that you do something new and fresh for this year!

- When will I find out if my entry is accepted?

A panel will decide on the successful entries between the 14th- 21st of April, and you will be notified of the outcome from the 21st April.

- This isn't the right opportunity for us, is there other ways we can participate?

Yes! All hospitality and tourism venues are invited to participate in the [Discount Program](#), or [craft their own event/ special/ experience with a winter theme](#).

- I have more questions, who can I talk to?

Please reach out to the Commerce Ballarat team: [info@commerceballarat.com.au](mailto:info@commerceballarat.com.au) or 5333 3233



**Ready to go?**

**Submit your hot chocolate [HERE](#) or scan to submit**