



Mapping the Western Australian First Nations Startup Support Ecosystem

Supported by



FINAL REPORT

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Acknowledgment

We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples maintain a unique, unsevered and strong spiritual and cultural connection to land and waters, and practice language, lore and culture which enrich our lives and identity as a nation.



Support from Meshpoints

First Nations X would like to acknowledge the generous support of Meshpoints which has enabled the First Nations Startup Support Systems Mapping initiative.

As a collaborative network dedicated to building a stronger, more inclusive innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem in Western Australia, Meshpoints has provided not only funding for this work, but also a platform for connection and learning. Their backing has allowed us to take a whole of ecosystem view of First Nations startup support aligning with Meshpoints' mission to increase accessibility, inclusivity and belonging for underrepresented communities, and to develop new knowledge that strengthens the State's innovation culture for the long term

About First Nations X

First Nations X (FNX) is a not-for-profit organisation focused on empowering First Nations startup businesses by bridging critical gaps in ecosystem support. Our mission is to foster economic and social impact within First Nations communities through strategic connections to capital funding providers, potential corporate clients, and collaborators.

First Nations businesses provide significant benefits for individuals, communities and economies. Our goal is to facilitate a thriving First Nations startup sector across Australia that contributes to broad economic prosperity and cultural wellbeing.



The Scale of First Nations Business

The latest Indigenous Business Snapshot published by the Dilin Duwa Centre estimates Indigenous businesses and organisations generate approximately \$16.1 billion in annual revenue, employ around 116,000 people, and pay over \$4 billion in wages, demonstrating the substantial and growing contribution to the Australian economy.

\$16.1B

Annual Revenue

Generated by Indigenous businesses and organisations

116K

People Employed

Across Indigenous businesses nationally

\$4B+

Wages Paid

Demonstrating substantial economic contribution

100x

More Likely

To employ First Nations Australians

From arts to accounting, bush foods to building services, cleaning to consulting, and telecommunications to technology, First Nations businesses that are rapidly diversifying and growing at an exponential rate. They are up to 100x more likely to employ First Nations Australians, and they diversify economic outcomes and contribute towards social and cultural wellbeing.

Entrepreneurship is a viable pathway to employment and has high flow-on benefits to customers, staff, suppliers and the local community.

First Nations X helps these ventures to start, grow and expand through investment readiness, connecting to capital and leveraging collaboration. Expanding the First Nations startup ecosystem, showcasing successful First Nations businesses, plus connect other organisations who are also supporting these economic pathways.

Executive Summary

The Mapping the Western Australian First Nations Startup Support Ecosystem initiative provides a consolidated, ecosystem-level view of how First Nations startup founders in Western Australia access capital, capability and connections, and where current systems enable or constrain their ability to start, grow and scale.

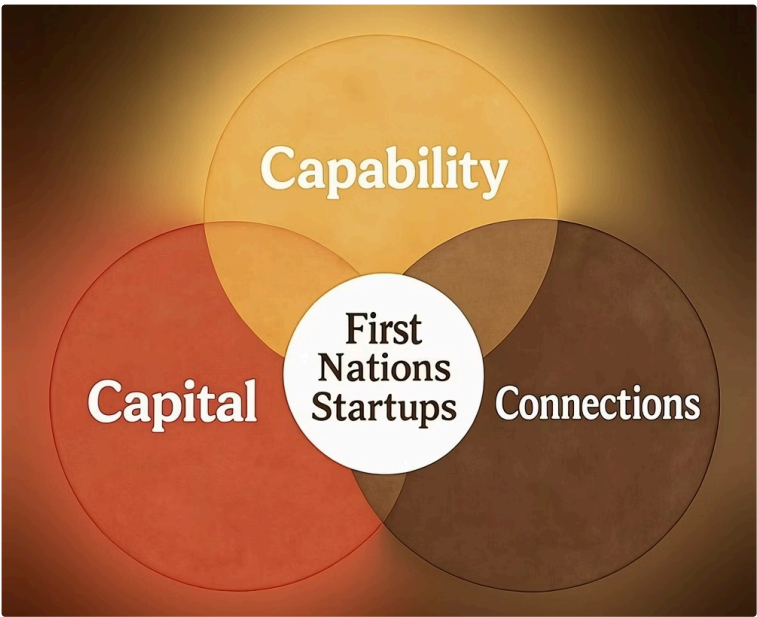
This report draws primarily on qualitative insights from a First Nations-led ecosystem workshop held in October 2024, supported by survey responses and review of existing research.

While First Nations businesses make a substantial and growing contribution to the Australian economy, this initiative found that First Nations startups remain largely invisible within mainstream data and investment frameworks. Existing research, procurement reporting and business directories primarily capture established or trade-based enterprises, not early-stage, innovation-driven startups that are pre-revenue, pre-procurement or seeking equity investment. As a result, First Nations startup founders often operate within systems that were not designed with their realities, ownership structures or definitions of success in mind.

This initiative was undertaken to explore this gap. Drawing on ecosystem research, a First Nations-led workshop, a founder survey, and analysis of existing supports to present a grounded picture of the Western Australian First Nations startup ecosystem and identifies practical opportunities to strengthen it.

Why this matters

First Nations startup founders do not operate in isolation. Their ability to succeed depends on how effectively capital, capability supports and networks work together across the startup lifecycle. When these elements are fragmented or misaligned, founders face compounding barriers that slow progress, increase risk and limit long-term sustainability.





Key Insights: Access to Capital

BARRIER 1 OF 3

Capital constraints emerge well before founders reach traditional "investment readiness". Many struggle to access small amounts of early funding to cover foundational costs such as company set-up, product development, equipment or time away from other work and caring responsibilities. Mainstream finance settings, rigid eligibility criteria and limited Indigenous-led investment pathways contribute to persistent under-capitalisation.

- ⚠ Survey respondents unanimously identified access to capital as a major challenge, with limited awareness of equity and angel investment options and heavy reliance on grants, loans or personal networks.

Procurement was consistently identified not only as a revenue pathway but as a mechanism to unlock capital. Secured contracts can underpin asset finance, working capital and even equity participation. Current systems, however, rarely convert procurement policy commitments into structured financial pathways for early-stage First Nations startups.

Key Insights: Capability and Business Readiness

BARRIER 2 OF 3

While First Nations entrepreneurship is growing, startup capability-building supports have not kept pace. Founders consistently highlighted the need for practical, culturally safe capability support in areas such as financial literacy, governance, cashflow management, investment readiness and scaling.

- ❗ One-off workshops and short programs were seen as insufficient compared to trusted, long-term mentoring relationships that evolve as ventures grow.



Key Insights: Connections and Networks

BARRIER 3 OF 3

Access to opportunity-bearing networks remains a critical constraint. Startup growth depends heavily on informal relationships with investors, corporates and intermediaries, yet First Nations founders are less likely to inherit these networks. Fragmentation across programs and a lack of clear "front doors" into the ecosystem mean founders often rely on chance introductions rather than structured pathways.

⚠️ This challenge is intensified for regional and remote founders, who face additional geographic and connectivity barriers.

Limited inherited networks

First Nations founders are less likely to have access to finance, investment networks and intergenerational wealth.

No clear "front door"

Fragmentation across programs means founders rely on chance introductions rather than structured pathways.

Regional isolation

Geographic and connectivity barriers compound challenges for founders outside metropolitan centres.

Strengths Within the Ecosystem

Despite these challenges, this initiative identifies important strengths to build upon. Western Australia has seen increased attention on First Nations founders in recent years, supported by goodwill across the broader startup ecosystem.

Dedicated First Nations Hubs

Provide culturally grounded entry points into entrepreneurship.

Pre-Accelerator Programs

Play a crucial role in validating ideas, building confidence and connecting founders to peers and mentors.

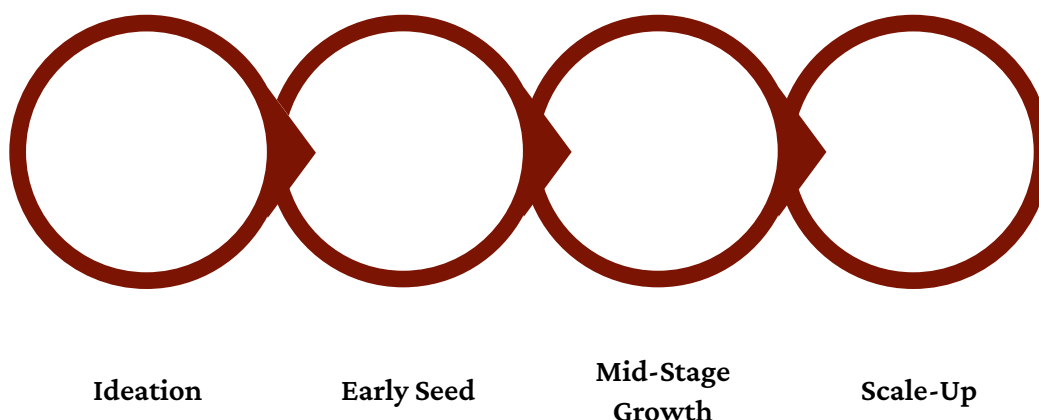
Ecosystem Goodwill

Increased attention on First Nations founders supported by the broader startup ecosystem.

Gaps and Opportunities

This initiative highlighted that while there is a lot of positive work being undertaken by First Nations founders, the ecosystem as a whole remains fragmented. Support is often concentrated at ideation or early seed stages, with limited continuity into mid-stage growth, commercialisation and scale-up. Many initiatives are short-term or pilot-based, weakening long-term outcomes.

- ⊗ There is also a significant data gap. The absence of consistent information on the number, stage and diversity of First Nations startups limits effective support design, investment decision-making and ecosystem coordination.



Support is concentrated at early stages, with major gaps emerging at mid-stage growth, commercialisation and scale-up — precisely where sustained investment and mentoring are most needed.

Who Defines Success?

Mainstream Startup Metrics

- Rapid scale
- Equity growth
- Exit pathways
- Conventional commercial measures

First Nations Definitions of Thriving

- Community impact
- Cultural continuity
- On-Country outcomes
- Dual economic and community mandates

Workshop participants highlighted tension between these two frameworks. When success is defined solely through conventional commercial measures, First Nations startups risk being assessed against narrow templates that overlook their dual economic and community mandates.



Recommendations Overview

Strengthening the First Nations startup ecosystem requires a shift away from isolated programs toward coordinated, founder-centred pathways that integrate capital, capability and connections across the full startup lifecycle.

- ❏ • Increasing visibility of the diversity of First Nations startups through registers, storytelling and case studies grounded in lived experience.
- Designing capital frameworks that reward progress and capability development, not just short-term outputs.
- Embedding long-term, culturally grounded mentoring and financial capability as core components of funding and support.
- Creating clearer entry points and navigation pathways across the ecosystem.
- Recognising and valuing both financial and community impact as legitimate measures of startup success.

What Comes Next

This mapping initiative provides a starting point, not an endpoint and aims to make the startup support ecosystem for First Nations founders more visible. Further work is required to enhance data collection and explore approaches that align supports more closely with First Nations founder experience.

Why did we do this report?

Understanding the First Nations startup support ecosystem matters because founders don't operate in isolation, they rely on capital, capability supports, trusted networks, and an enabling environment that must work in parallel. Understanding the landscape of support for First Nations startups in Western Australia enables better access to resources, networking opportunities, and capital.

The Mapping the Western Australian First Nations Startup Support Ecosystem initiative aims to foster a more inclusive and dynamic entrepreneurial environment, driving innovation and economic growth within First Nations communities in Western Australia.

The ultimate goal is to enable First Nations entrepreneurs to access necessary resources more efficiently, effectively and to navigate the ecosystem with greater ease, and connect with potential partners and investors.

Drawing on insights from leading organisations and engagement with the First Nations ecosystem, this initiative aims to present a clear and current view of the First Nations startup support landscape in Western Australia and identify gaps and opportunities to better support First Nations innovators and entrepreneurs.

Methodology

The initiative involved engagement with the First Nations ecosystem via a workshop and survey. It also drew on insights from reports and research both from Western Australia and nationally to understand the strengths of the current supports and identify gaps or future opportunities to support First Nations innovators and entrepreneurs.

Workshop discussions were structured around four core questions (see Appendix), using facilitated dialogue methods to surface lived experience and system-level recommendations

Data sources used to inform this initiative:

- Mapping, analysis and review of existing information, research and structures related to the WA First Nations ecosystem and supports, and
- Stakeholder and ecosystem engagement.

③ A community engagement workshop was held in October 2024 to explore a central question:

How might we foster a thriving First Nations startup ecosystem in Western Australia, and ensure that capital, capability and support structures work for First Nations founders, not against?

Participants included approximately 25 First Nations founders and business owners, ecosystem partners, intermediaries and allies. The session used open yarning, small-group discussions and "How might we..." prompts to surface lived experience, practical ideas and system-level levers.



Workshop Questions

The facilitated workshop explored four questions, collecting participant feedback and discussion insights through Mentimeter, butchers paper and Miro Board:

Direct Capital How might we direct capital to First Nations startups?	Foster Ecosystem How might we foster a thriving First Nations ecosystem?
Grow and Retain How might we grow and retain First Nations startups in WA?	Reimagine Funding How might we reimagine funding and overcome financial barriers for First Nations startups?

The workshop was featured in the Indigenous Business Review - *First Nations Ecosystem Workshop sees Indigenous businesses learn from each other's skills and experience* on 26 November 2024. A copy of feedback and notes from the workshop are attached as an Appendix.

A survey was also distributed to over 100 individuals, shared via FNX social media channels and promoted at First Nations House events. Despite extensive circulation, responses were limited with seven survey responses received. While not statistically representative, responses reinforced themes emerging from workshop discussions, particularly regarding access to capital and network visibility.



Terminology – Use of the Term Startup

For the purposes of this initiative the following definition of a startup has been applied:

A startup is an early stage innovative, technology-based business that can scale rapidly and capture mass markets.

This definition enables a clear focus for this initiative, given that Western Australia operates with multiple, context-specific definitions of a startup. These definitions are often implicit and are typically embedded in program guidelines.

Key characteristics of a startup that are commonly used across WA and have been applied for the purposes of this initiative include:

Early-Stage Often less than 5 years old	Innovation-Led Or technology-enabled	Scalable Scalable business model
High Growth Intent Ambitious growth trajectory	Pre-Profit Often pre-profit and sometimes pre-revenue	

Understanding the WA First Nations Support Ecosystem

Through the process of researching and drafting this initiative, it was found that in Western Australia there is significantly less research and documentation of First Nations startups compared to First Nations businesses more broadly. There is no single, up-to-date figure to quantify the size of the WA First Nations startup ecosystem or number of First Nations startups.

While First Nations business activity is captured and documented through procurement data, finance programs and directories, this largely reflects established or trade-oriented enterprises rather than innovation-led, high-growth startups. First Nations startups often sit outside traditional business classifications in their early stages, particularly prior to revenue, procurement readiness, or formal capital raising, making them less visible in data and broader ecosystem reporting.

 The absence of robust data on First Nations startups in Western Australia represents a structural visibility gap, limiting effective policy design, capital allocation and ecosystem coordination.

Research Landscape

Similarly, research and reports tend to focus on First Nations business and the broader economy, such as:

Minderoo Foundation Backing Black Business Report (2021)	ANZ and Deloitte Access Economics Australia's \$50 Billion Opportunity (2025)	Dilin Duwa Indigenous Economic Power Project Snapshots (2025)
Indigenous Business Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Pathways Through Business (2024)	Supply Nation State of Indigenous Business research and reports	

These reports capture valuable insights and understanding of the broader First Nations business sector and economy, however they don't identify First Nations startup founders as a distinct cohort with unique pathways, barriers, and capital needs.

Ecosystem Strengths Identified

It was possible to gather insights into the ecosystem through the engagement and research undertaken for this initiative. Workshop participants talked about the strengths of the WA First Nations startup ecosystem, highlighting that:

Increased effort to highlight First Nations startups in WA

There has been a recent increased effort to highlight First Nations startups in WA.

Backed by goodwill

The First Nations startup ecosystem is backed by goodwill stemming from the broader startup ecosystem.

Acknowledgment and drive for improvement

There is both an acknowledgment of the opportunity and a drive for improvement in First Nations ecosystems support.

Positive initial support

Another key strength of the First Nations ecosystem highlighted was the positive initial support for WA First Nations startups.

StartupWA Summit Series

KEY INSIGHT

The most recent insight into the WA First Nations ecosystem was led by StartupWA in 2021 and provides a starting point for broader support systems mapping. The Summit Series engaged with First Nations founders, finding that they face a layered set of challenges that go beyond individual motivation or readiness.

Participants in the Indigenous Founders Summit series spoke about struggling to access trusted networks, mentors and early champions who understand both startup dynamics and community obligations, and about the emotional and cultural load of navigating mainstream startup spaces as First Nations founders.

- ❑ Capital barriers showed up at a very practical level, for example for many the issue was not raising \$100,000 of seed funding but finding a few thousand dollars to register a company at ideation stage, purchase basic equipment or take time away from other work and caring responsibilities to focus on their venture.

These challenges are compounded for regional and remote founders, who face higher travel costs, digital connectivity issues and fewer opportunities to build relationships with investors, accelerators and corporate partners based in Perth.

Impact of Covid-19

COVID-19 created changes in the operating environment for First Nations startups. From 2020 onward, policy and procurement settings shifted, new First Nations enterprise programs were launched, capital availability and investor risk appetites changed, and support models (such as hubs, accelerators, mentoring) moved to digital and hybrid delivery, particularly affecting founders in regional and remote communities. COVID-19 led to changes in how business is undertaken, and how support is provided and accessed with many shifting online or to a providing a digital solution.

The Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre report (2024) also highlights a slowdown in broader ecosystem startup funding post-2021. After a period of strong growth in startup numbers up to around 2021, funding momentum weakened often described as a VC winter. Funding growth stalled and the mix of capital shifted, with less early-stage investment than in prior year. While no data is available about the impact of this on First Nations startups, there is little doubt that these factors would have added to the challenges many First Nations founders face in securing investment and funding.

Barriers for First Nations Entrepreneurs and Startups

The barriers that First Nations business founders face are well documented. Understanding these barriers and the factors influencing the ecosystem are crucial to designing support system that are responsive over time. These barriers have been grouped into three high level and interconnected barriers - access to capital, capability and connections.



Capital Barrier — In Depth

Accessing capital is a challenge for First Nations founders long before pitching to investors or funders. Mainstream finance relies on collateral, credit histories, trading records and ownership structures that often don't reflect First Nations startups or community-based forms of value.

Early-stage founders frequently don't have clear visibility of what funding options exist, which ones fit their stage, or how to navigate complex first steps in banking, grants or equity.

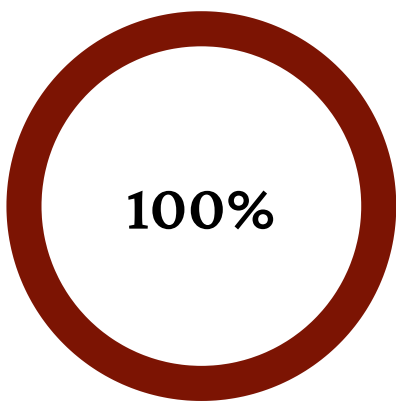
⊗ The result is a capital gap where First Nations founders are more likely to be under-capitalised, reliant on personal savings or grants, and less likely to secure the patient, equity finance needed to grow and scale their ventures. This capital gap is structural rather than capability based.

The challenges of accessing capital are multifaceted, extending to:

- Difficulty finding appropriate funding that fits and aligns with First Nation ownership structures and impact-oriented models.
- Confusion and fatigue around grants and application complexity.
- Limited relationships with mainstream banks, investors and intermediaries, and perceived and real bias in investment decisions.
- Balancing social impact - where many First Nations founders design ventures around cultural, community, and environmental outcomes, these can be misunderstood or undervalued by investors seeking faster ways to scale by using conventional financial metrics.

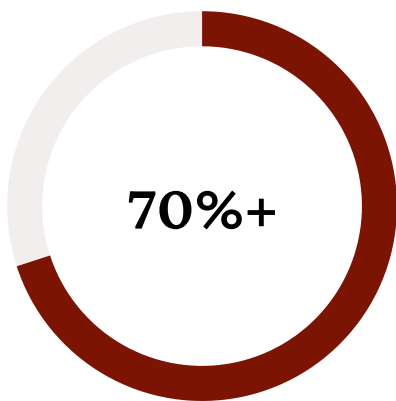
Capital: Survey Findings

ANZ / Deloitte Access Economics' (2025) report, Australia's \$50 billion opportunity, supports this, highlighting that access to major economic institutions still depends heavily on business networks, commercial relationships and financial literacy. The challenges faced by First Nations founders are compounded by the need to navigate unfamiliar institutional systems while balancing community, cultural and family obligations, often without access to trusted intermediaries who can translate expectations and open doors.



Capital Challenge

Of survey respondents said that accessing capital was a challenge as a First Nations founder.



Sought Funding

Had sought funding and cited lack of information and lack of formal networks as main challenges.

Grants, bank loans and family friends were the most commonly known forms of capital, while angel and seed funding and private grants were the least known.



Capability Barrier — In Depth

Growing a viable, investment-ready venture demands specific skills. These capabilities are more easily built through careers and networks already connected to business and capital, pathways that First Nations entrepreneurs have historically been excluded from. Even when First Nations founders bring deep sector expertise and strong ideas, the lack of targeted, culturally safe capability-building support can slow or stall the journey from concept to scalable venture.

Evidence from 2020 onwards shows that capability remains a barrier for many First Nations startup founders, even as the sector grows rapidly. Indigenous Business Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Pathways Through Business (2024) report found that the number of First Nations business owners grew by more than 50% between 2016 and 2021, but that capacity-building and support have not kept pace, with emerging and growth-stage ventures struggling to access the skills, advisory support and networks needed to move from startup into stabilisation and maturity.

Capability: Workshop Voices

- ❏ "Without proper training and support - especially in business fundamentals like financial management and understanding balance sheets - funding alone won't lead to success. It's essential that we provide our people with the knowledge and skills to run businesses effectively and manage their finances wisely." – **First Nations Ecosystem Workshop participant**

It is not entrepreneurial drive that is hampering First Nations entrepreneurship, but the availability of fit-for-purpose capability support covering topics from financial literacy and governance to scaling, procurement readiness and investment knowledge and skills that matches the speed and ambition of First Nations startup founders. Workshop participants feedback supported this, identifying capacity building and education identified as common themes for improvement, with financial literacy, corporate skills and business training listed as areas that would benefit First Nations founders.

- ❏ Minderoo Foundation's Backing Black Business (2021) report found that almost 40% of First Nations business owners surveyed found finance application processes "overwhelmingly complex", nearly half had at least one unsuccessful application, and many described the landscape of products and services as confusing and difficult to navigate without high-quality advice.

Connections Barrier — In Depth

CONNECTIONS

For First Nations founders, the challenges are not only capital or capability, but also who will connect them into opportunity-bearing networks. Limited networks were identified as the second most common challenge facing survey respondents, after accessing capital. Startup growth often depends on informal networks, First Nations founders are less likely to have inherited access to finance, investment networks and intergenerational wealth.

Even when First Nations entrepreneurs have strong ideas and proven capability, they face barriers getting access to networks where deals are shaped, partnerships are formed, and opportunities are shared long before they are advertised. StartupWA's Summit Series Report (2021) identifies access to the right networks and relations as a key constraint and a core theme for action.

 A recurring theme was the need for "translators", individuals and organisations capable of interpreting First Nations value propositions for mainstream capital providers without diluting cultural intent.

The Backing Black Business (2021) report, while framed around financial inclusion, repeatedly points to a lack of access to connections, networks, trusted relationships and navigators to help move through complex finance and support systems, as a missing piece in the ecosystem. Backing Black Business found that trusted advisors are critical because they connect entrepreneurs into networks of financiers, experts and programs they potentially otherwise can't reach. A small pool of First Nations investors and uneven access to networking opportunities, reinforces that who you know and who is willing to open doors, is a barrier for First Nations entrepreneurs and startups.

Mapping Support Systems for First Nations Startups in WA

Mapping support systems for the First Nations ecosystem is important because you can't strengthen what you can't see. A clearer picture of the programs, funding opportunities, networks and policies that specifically focus on supporting First Nations startups provides an evidence base for strengthening the ecosystem with supports that are targeted, coordinated and culturally grounded.

The ecosystem is made up of multiple and interconnected components, including:

Entrepreneurship Education

Innovation Hubs and Incubators

Venture Capital and Angel Investing

Community Organisations

Entrepreneurship Education

A review of entrepreneurial education and training programs offered by academic institutions in Western Australia was undertaken. While this exercise had value, feedback from the workshop, survey and literature pointed to a greater need for opportunities for First Nations founders to learn practical and foundational business skills.

If a First Nations founder was to turn to Google to look for education and learning opportunities available to them in Western Australia, they would find them to be less visible than they might expect. While academic institutions in WA (universities and TAFEWA) offer entrepreneurship and innovation specialisations (either as a Graduate Certificate, certificate or undergraduate major), they generally do not highlight a specific focus on First Nations entrepreneurship. See Appendix for more information about entrepreneurship education and training.

Curtin University has a strong focus on entrepreneurship and innovation and plays a significant role in Western Australia's entrepreneurship and startup ecosystem through a suite of education, incubation and commercialisation initiatives. Curtin offers qualifications, student and alumni startup programs, industry engagement, competitions and access to innovation spaces, supporting founders from early idea development through to venture creation. One unique offering of Curtin is the Indigenous enabling courses which are culturally informed pathway to university study. Available to students aged 17 or over who don't have an ATAR or didn't finish Year 12, these courses are designed to build confidence, develop skills and take the next step towards uni.

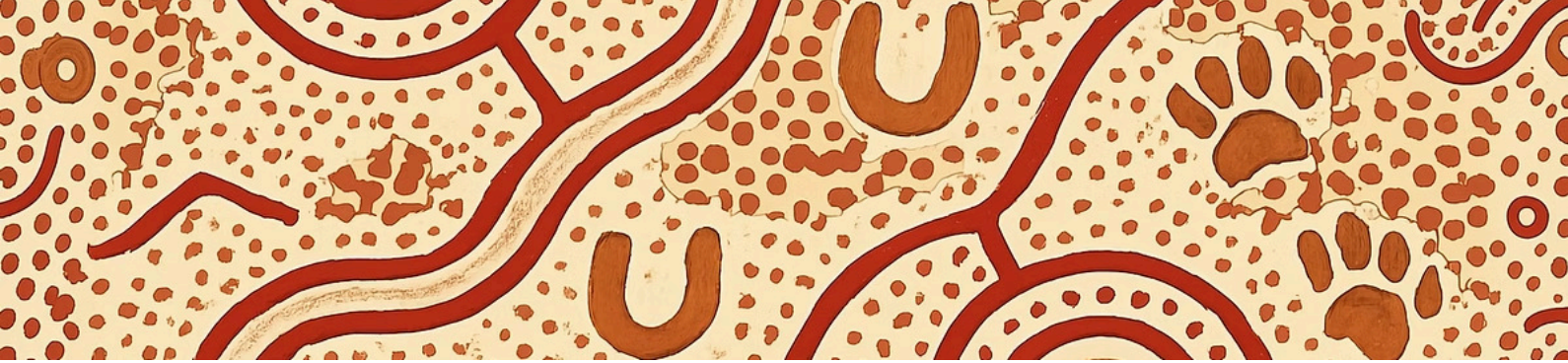
Key Education Programs

Dream Venture Masterclass (Minderoo Foundation)

Targeted First Nations entrepreneurial education was offered through Minderoo Foundation's Dream Venture Masterclass Program with a number of participants raising this historical program as a strength at the ecosystem workshop. The program, which is no longer offered, was a national pre-accelerator and masterclass program to equip First Nations entrepreneurs with the connections, capabilities and access to capital needed to become investor ready. The program supported both youth and all-ages cohorts to refine their business models, build investment cases, and connected founders with mentors, investors and corporate partners.

Murra Indigenous Business Masterclass (Dilin Duwa Centre)

One of the leading National education programs for First Nations founders is the Murra Indigenous Business Masterclass delivered by the Dilin Duwa Centre at Melbourne Business School. The program is designed to strengthen the strategic and commercial capability of First Nations founders. It helps to build capability in engaging with corporate and government customers, navigating procurement and partnership environments, and strengthening board and leadership maturity. Participants gain practical tools to refine business models, manage risk, improve margins, and position their startups for sustainable growth. The cohort model also fosters an alumni network and peer learning that expands access to a trusted national network of First Nations entrepreneurs and leaders. Content is grounded in the realities of First Nations enterprise, including balancing community obligations, cultural governance, and commercial growth within dual economic contexts.



Accelerator Programs and Pipeline Initiatives

Indigenous Business Accelerator — First Innovators

A 12-week free online growth program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entrepreneurs across Australia. It combines structured learning with tailored business coaching, digital marketing and sales capability, and peer networking to help participants strengthen their business models and growth plans. The program is designed to support First Nations founders to overcome common barriers such as isolation, limited access to specialist advice and uncertainty about next growth steps, providing tools and frameworks to build sustainable, competitive businesses and clearer pathways to markets and procurement opportunities.

National Indigenous Business Summer School (WA)

For First Nations high-school students in years 11 and 12, the National Indigenous Business Summer School (WA) provides a one-week pipeline program introducing business and entrepreneurship as potential career pathways.

i The Bank West Curtin Economic Centre Dare to Venture Report (2024) found that only 33% of working-age adults in WA hold a bachelor level degree or above. Additionally, a recommendation arising from the ecosystem workshop was to create opportunities for learning based on real experience, such as through storytelling, case studies and peer learning. This suggests there may be more of an opportunity for entrepreneurial education / capability building to be offered outside of tertiary institutions to create pathways for practical business skills.

Implications for Future Education Design

The review identifies clear opportunities to strengthen entrepreneurship education for First Nations founders in Western Australia:

First Nations-Designed Pathways

Developing First Nations-designed startup education pathways grounded in First Nations knowledge systems and founder realities.

Integrated Learning

Integrating culturally grounded learning with capital-readiness, commercialisation and scaling capability.

Expand Non-Tertiary Programs

Expanding non-tertiary and practice-based programs delivered on-Country and regionally to improve accessibility and relevance.

Improve Visibility

Improving the visibility, coordination and navigation of existing programs so First Nations founders can more easily identify and access appropriate support.

Spotlight: First Nations Tertiary Education Across Australia

First Nations specific entrepreneurial education is offered in other States, including in Queensland by Central Queensland University and in Victoria through a partnership between Monash University and Indigenous Business Australia.

Central Queensland University

Diploma of Indigenous Entrepreneurship and Innovation

The Diploma of Indigenous Entrepreneurship and Innovation is explicitly designed for First Nations learners, with a strong emphasis on culturally grounded entrepreneurship, innovation, and self-determination. Designed for maximum flexibility, this course is entirely self-paced and 100% online.

The program's strengths lie in its flexible delivery options, and its positioning as an entry-to-mid level qualification that supports learners who may be returning to education or balancing family, community, and work commitments. Importantly, it recognises First Nations knowledge systems alongside contemporary business and innovation practices, which is a point of differentiation from mainstream entrepreneurship programs.

Monash University — Delivered in partnership with Indigenous Business Australia

Master of Indigenous Business Leadership

The Master of Indigenous Business Leadership is an executive-level qualification aimed at strengthening governance, leadership, and strategic capability among First Nations leaders. Its core focus is on enterprise leadership, policy, governance, and decision-making within complex organisational and economic contexts. The strategic partnership between Monash University and Indigenous Business Australia aligns academic learning with real-world Indigenous economic development.

Innovation Hubs and Incubators

A catalogue of hubs and incubators that specifically promote support for First Nations founders can be found in the Appendix. These include:

Waalitj Business Hub

The Waalitj Business Hub contributes to the First Nations support systems through startup targeted services including office space and computer access, business incubation, growth and capital support, tendering and contract advice, governance and compliance support, marketing and joint venture advice.

The Waalitj Hub also delivers the Aboriginal Business Capability Building Program. The State Government Program seeks to empower First Nations businesses to contract with the WA Government to provide goods, services, community services and works by providing support for tendering, business development, governance and contractual compliance requirements.

Make it Happen HQ

The Make it Happen HQ (MIHHQ) is designed to support First Nations entrepreneurs in remote Australia and works to empower Indigenous entrepreneurs in isolated communities by fusing country wisdom with cutting-edge digital support. The Broome based innovative hub aims to foster an environment where First Nations entrepreneurship can thrive.

Noongar Chamber of Commerce & Industry (NCCI) / Subiaco Aboriginal Business Hub

The Noongar Chamber of Commerce & Industry is a business advocacy group for Aboriginal owned businesses in Western Australia. It's mission is to build the economic capacity and wealth of Aboriginal people. NCCI supports contact between Aboriginal owned businesses and the broader WA business community and offers advocacy, mentoring and training, capacity building, business coaching, networking – events, expos and training, and international trade.

□ While Western Australia offers multiple entrepreneurship programs, very few are explicitly designed for First Nations startup founders. Even fewer integrate culturally grounded learning with startup-specific commercialisation and capital-readiness skills. This suggests opportunity for purpose-built First Nations founder pathways.

Assessment of Hub and Incubator Effectiveness

Western Australia has several hubs and organisations that explicitly support First Nations entrepreneurs. Their impact varies across the startup lifecycle. Most provide strong early-stage validation, mentoring and procurement-readiness support. These culturally grounded entry points are a key strength of the ecosystem, building founder confidence, capability and peer connection.

Few hubs offer integrated capital pathways or structured progression from ideation through to scale-up. Support remains concentrated at early stages, with limited continuity into mid-stage commercialisation, investor engagement and sustained growth. Capital is typically referenced in an advisory capacity rather than embedded within clear pathways to debt, equity or blended finance.

Regional and remote delivery is uneven. Place-based hubs in the Kimberley and other regional areas provide critical on-Country support. The broader ecosystem remains Perth-centric. Founders outside metropolitan centres often rely on digital delivery models, which can constrain relationship depth and network integration.

Emerging strengths include culturally safe environments, wraparound advisory support, procurement capability-building and founder-centred mentoring. These foundations are strong. Greater coordination and lifecycle integration are required to translate early-stage momentum into sustained First Nations-led growth.

Opportunities to Strengthen Hub and Incubator Models

Opportunities to enhance the effectiveness, uptake and cultural alignment of innovation hubs and incubators for First Nations founders include:

- **Embed capital-readiness pathways**
Embedding capital-readiness and structured investor introduction pathways within hub programming, ensuring First Nations founders are supported from validation through to equity and growth capital, rather than treating capital access as a separate ecosystem function.
- **Formalise referral systems**
Formalising referral systems between hubs, First Nations organisations and mainstream programs to prevent founders from falling through gaps as they transition between stages of the startup lifecycle.
- **Expand regional delivery**
Expanding regionally delivered and on-Country capability programs to reduce geographic concentration and ensure First Nations founders outside metropolitan centres have equitable access to support.
- **Increase targeted support**
Increasing targeted, culturally safe support for early-stage founders, women founders and sole traders whose business models or growth pathways may not align with traditional accelerator frameworks.
- **Measure founder progression**
Measuring hub success by First Nations founder progression, revenue growth, capital access and long-term sustainability outcomes, not participation metrics alone.

Strengthening these areas would move the ecosystem beyond well-intentioned programs toward an integrated, First Nations-informed and founder-centred support system aligned with the full startup lifecycle.

Venture Capital and Angel Investing

Research identified limited First Nations focussed venture and angel investing in Australia. However there are some key players in the market that are working to promote the value and opportunities of First Nations startup investment.



Ochre Ventures

Ochre Ventures is a specialist venture capital fund dedicated to investing in and growing First Nations businesses in Australia. Ochre Ventures invest in First Nations scalable companies, from gaming and AI to construction and clean tech, with a focus strong leadership, early traction, and potential for sustainable growth. Typical investments are between \$250K and \$2M per company, with reserve capital for follow-on investments. Ochre recognises the value and importance of tangible outcomes for First Nations communities such as First Nations employment, leadership, supply chain participation, or community programs. The venture also provides mentorship, strategic guidance, help with hiring, customer introductions, and access to the Ochre ecosystem of First Nations leaders and VC advisors.

Indigenous Capital Limited (ICL)

A not-for-profit organisation advancing Indigenous economic development through funding, advisory and impact investing.

Yajillara Foundation

The Yajilarra Trust is a charitable foundation supporting First Nations people, climate change initiatives, and disability-related causes. Activities include investing and grant making to environmental projects Indigenous startups in impact investing and is a member of the First Nations Funders Network.

First Nations Capital Providers

First Australians Capital

Indigenous-owned and led, First Australians Capital (FAC) provides tailored funding and hands-on business support to First Nations entrepreneurs across Australia. Its goal is to accelerate the growth and sustainability of the Indigenous business sector and ultimately triple its size by 2031, leveraging around \$1 billion in aligned mainstream capital. FAC operates as both a fund manager and advisory partner, offering "right capital, right support" through catalytic and impact funds, patient debt finance and investment-readiness support designed specifically around Indigenous businesses, sectors and community aspirations.

Blak Excellence Fund

The fund's vision is to promote socioeconomic empowerment, build economic growth, and foster self-determination for Indigenous entrepreneurs and the communities they serve. It achieves this through investment in Indigenous startups.

Blak Angels Investment Network

The Blak Angels Investment Network seeks to enable intergenerational wealth creation by increasing First Nations participation in angel investing. First Nations led, the Network aims to empower and equip Investors by providing accessible opportunities and targeted capability-building support for aspiring and active First Nations angel investors.

The mapping exercise also identified other funding opportunities such as funding and grants, while these were not specifically in scope, they have also been listed in the Appendix for reference.

Assessment of Venture and Angel Investment Landscape

While several First Nations-led and First Nations-focused funds operate nationally, the venture and angel investment landscape for First Nations startups remains small and concentrated. Most identified funds operate nationally rather than being WA specific, and capital pools remain modest relative to mainstream venture markets.

Investment models tend to emphasise patient, catalytic and impact-aligned capital rather than traditional high-growth venture structures. While this aligns with community centred definitions of success, it limits access to scale stage venture funding and structured follow-on pathways for First Nations founders.

- ⊗ Accessibility challenges persist, with founders facing limited awareness of available equity pathways, minimal direct relationships with investors, structural bias within mainstream venture capital criteria, and a lack of intermediaries able to bridge cultural and commercial expectations.

In Western Australia specifically, there is no coordinated First Nations venture pipeline linking early-stage validation programs to structured angel, seed and Series A capital.



Community Organisations

Community organisations are an important support mechanism for First Nations entrepreneurs. These organisations are often the first point of contact for a First Nations founder and can provide idea validation, build founder confidence and referrals and introductions across the ecosystem. A number of community organisations provide support for First Nations entrepreneurs within the startup ecosystem. These include:

First Australians Capital (National)

First Australians Capital provides founder-aligned investment and capability support to First Nations founders building growth-oriented ventures. Its model seeks to directly addresses structural barriers such as limited access to early capital, networks, and intergenerational business experience by combining long-term capital with governance uplift, leadership development, and national network access. FAC's role is critical in bridging the gap between early-stage First Nations entrepreneurship and mainstream investment markets.

First Nations X

First Nations X is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to empowering Indigenous startups by bridging critical gaps in the entrepreneurship ecosystem. It focusses on strengthening the First Nations startup sector by connecting founders to capital, corporate customers, and collaborators, and by making pathways into the startup and investment world more visible and accessible. Through masterclasses, investor-readiness programs, international entrepreneurship missions, showcase events and thought leadership, First Nations X supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander founders at early and growth stages across Australia.

Morrugul (WA)

Morrugul is a Kimberley based not-for-profit offering procurement support to Aboriginal people in regional Western Australia. Programs include Aboriginal Business Capability Building Program for the Kimberley, Pilbara and Central Regions, Procurement Advisory Services, Fitzroy Valley Aboriginal Business Program and Community Grants Coordinator Program.

Community Organisations (Continued)

National Indigenous Business Chambers Alliance (National)

The National Indigenous Business Chambers Alliance (NIBCA) is the emerging national peak body that brings together Indigenous chambers of commerce and business networks from across Australia into a single, coordinated voice. It represents and connects a growing network of state, territory and regional Indigenous business chambers, which in turn support thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned businesses across sectors and regions. NIBCA's role is to provide an Indigenous-controlled focal point for governments, corporates and institutions seeking to partner with Indigenous business, particularly around procurement, policy design and ecosystem investment.

Noongar Chamber of Commerce & Industry (WA)

The Noongar Chamber of Commerce & Industry (NCCI) is a business advocacy organisation established to build the economic capacity and wealth of Noongar and other Aboriginal people in Western Australia. It exists primarily for its members – the owners and operators of Noongar and Aboriginal-owned businesses – helping them to grow, win work and participate more fully in the broader WA economy. The NCCI also helps by facilitating connections with government and private contractors, providing business coaching and advice, and assisting with procurement, employment, training and project engagement on Noongar Country.

Supply Nation (National)

Supply Nation is Australia's leading supplier diversity organisation and maintains the largest national directory of verified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, Indigenous Business Direct. It supports Indigenous-owned enterprises by connecting them with more than 800 corporate, government and not-for-profit members seeking to diversify their supply chains and meet Indigenous procurement targets.

❏ While important Indigenous-led funds and networks exist, they remain limited relative to the broader venture ecosystem. There is no coordinated WA-based First Nations venture pathway linking early-stage validation through to follow-on equity and scale capital.

Waalitj Foundation

The Waalitj Foundation is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation that focuses on empowering First Nations peoples through education, employment, justice and business programs.

The Foundation is a leading First Nations led organisation designing programs with communities, not just for them, so that support can be tailored to local needs and strengths. The Foundation provides education projects, employment and justice programs and business support via the Waalitj Business Hub, which helps First Nations people to start, grow or sustain their businesses through coaching, mentoring, access to professional advisors, workshops, and use of office/meeting space.

Policy Alignment

WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S INNOVATION STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

This ecosystem mapping initiative aligns with the WA Innovation Action Plan, the Western Australian Government's overarching framework to strengthen the State's innovation system by improving coordination, capability, and commercial outcomes across industry, research, startups, and government. Specifically, this ecosystem mapping initiative provides insights which contribute to the Diversity and Inclusion Action – *Targeted support for regional, Aboriginal and female entrepreneurs, innovators and programs.*

The Action Plan outlines the State Government's initial agenda to Western Australia's Innovation Strategy. The strategy sets out a whole-of-system approach to strengthening WA's innovation ecosystem by improving coordination between government, industry, research and startups, with a focus on commercialisation, talent, and economic diversification.

 This mapping highlights opportunity for deeper operational alignment between diversity policy commitments and structured capital pathways for First Nations startups.

Procurement Policy Frameworks

Aboriginal Procurement Policy (APP) – WA

The Aboriginal Procurement Policy sets mandatory targets for Western Australian Government agencies to award a proportion of contracts to registered Aboriginal businesses and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, and to embed Aboriginal participation (employment and subcontracting) in larger contracts.

Western Australia's Aboriginal Procurement Policy reported a record **383 contracts worth \$442 million** in 2024-25.

Commonwealth Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP)

The Commonwealth Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP) is a national framework that sets annual targets for the number and value of contracts awarded to Indigenous businesses.

The Policy introduces a Mandatory Set Aside for many contracts between \$80,000 and \$200,000 where Indigenous suppliers must be considered first and applies Mandatory Minimum Requirements for Indigenous employment and/or Indigenous supplier use on major contracts (>\$7.5 million) in specified industries. Recent reforms are lifting procurement targets toward **4% of total Commonwealth contract value by 2030.**

Case Study: Sync WA

SYNC (WA) is a First Nations founded mobile app addressing loneliness and social isolation among FIFO and shift workers in Western Australia. Founded by First Nations entrepreneur Percy Ryder, the venture emerged from lived experience of FIFO work and the mental health impacts of extended time away from family, culture and community.

For First Nations workers the impacts of FIFO work are often compounded by cultural disconnection and limited access to culturally safe supports. SYNC (WA) responds to this gap with a practical, digitally enabled solution designed specifically for remote and shift-based work environments.

What Sync (WA) Can Tell Us About Ecosystem Support

SYNC (WA) entered the startup ecosystem through the Dream Venture Masterclass, a pre-accelerator tailored for early-stage First Nations founders. Early-stage programs play a crucial role in the First Nations Startup Support ecosystem by providing culturally safe entry points into entrepreneurship, supporting idea validation before capital is required and building confidence, capability and networks.

Support Accessed

SYNC (WA) has accessed support from the Waalitj Hub and is registered with Supply Nation and the Noongar Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Capital Challenges

SYNC (WA) progressed without access to friends-and-family capital, personal savings, or intergenerational wealth. This made early product development and validation slower and riskier.

Network Reliance

Like many First Nations founders, progress relied heavily on formal programs rather than informal networks. Sync (WA) has experienced limited access to investors, corporate customers, and mentors which slowed momentum.

Founder Burden

The Founder carried responsibility not only for product development, but also for advocacy, education and cultural representation. Ecosystem supports that reduce this burden such as embedded mentors, founder services, and wraparound support are crucial for sustainability.



Sync WA: Founder's Voice

The most valuable support would be from the Waalitj Hub who have not only provided our website and capability statement but also the support from the Business Coaches I've had along the way who have provided priceless advice.

Mike Hill from Amazon Australia, a proud First Nations man, working in the technology space, has provided support throughout my journey. His guidance, encouragement, and willingness to share knowledge have been invaluable, particularly in navigating areas of tech and product development where I had limited experience. Having someone who understands both the cultural and technical landscape has made a meaningful difference, reinforcing the importance of representation and mentorship in the technology sector.

Having a small, dedicated team of three people has been critical to our progress. While I bring an idea and lived experience, I had no prior background in technology, so ongoing support and advice from our experienced team members has been essential. Their technical guidance, problem-solving expertise, and steady mentorship have been invaluable.

With our prototype expected to be user ready around mid-February 2026, we are extremely excited to have user tests, gain feedback, validation and hope to get our first client by mid 2026.

Having more First Nations founders in the technology space is vital because it creates a shared understanding built on lived experience, culture, and community values. We are able to relate to one another's challenges, support each other through complex systems, and share knowledge in a way that strengthens every founder coming through. This collective support helps build confidence, resilience, and long-term success across the ecosystem." — **Percy Ryder, Founder, Sync WA** | More information is available at www.syncwa.com.au

Ecosystem Implications from Sync WA

- ✓ SYNC (WA) shows that First Nations startups are particularly in need of early-stage support, capital, networks, and procurement access. When culturally informed programs, targeted funding, and enabling government mechanisms are present, First Nations led ventures are well positioned to deliver both economic and social impact.

Culturally Safe Entry Points

Early-stage entry points that are culturally safe and founder aligned are essential.

Long-Term Mentoring

Mentoring relationships that extend beyond short program cycles are critical.

Structural Disadvantage

The structural disadvantage faced by founders without access to intergenerational capital must be addressed.

First Nations Representation

Critical role of First Nations representation within technology, investment and advisory networks in building confidence and accelerating ecosystem integration.

Gaps and Analysis

Gaps across capital, capability and connections do not operate independently. Weakness in one domain amplifies pressure in the others. For example, limited networks reduce capital access; insufficient capital restricts capability-building; fragmented capability slows network integration.

While Western Australia has pockets of strength within the First Nations startup support ecosystem particularly through dedicated hubs and targeted support services, feedback indicates that the system remains fragmented.

Analysis of the feedback received from the ecosystem workshop and mapping provides valuable insights into the gaps and opportunities within the First Nations startup support ecosystem. The ecosystem workshop made it clear that First Nations founders and startups are already generating value, innovation and impact, but are operating in systems that were not designed with them in mind.

There is limited integration across the pipeline that connects early-stage ideation, incubation, acceleration, capital access and scale-up support specifically for First Nations founders. Many existing initiatives are short-term, one-off or pilot-based, which constrains continuity, weakens long-term mentoring relationships, and limits sustainable post-program growth and retention of First Nations startups in WA.

- ⊗ Through this initiative, a key challenge has been a lack of data on the number of First Nations startups in WA. The emphasis placed on ecosystem mapping in WA reflects this gap, highlighting that the First Nations startup landscape is under-documented and would benefit from more targeted, longitudinal research to inform policy, investment, and support design. This report can potentially establish a starting point for future data collection and initiatives.

Gaps: Capital

CAPITAL GAPS

Key themes - Access to finance, procurement, and cashflow across the full business journey

1

Capital is stage-misaligned

Most funding is concentrated at idea or seed stage, with major gaps at mid-stage, pivot points, and startup-to-scaleup transition.

2

Success metrics are poorly designed

Funders focus on dollars spent or short-term outputs rather than progress toward commercial viability.

3

Translating policy into opportunity

Policy commitments exist, but founders struggle to convert them into real contracts or growth opportunities.

4

Structural exclusion from finance

Collateral requirements, risk settings and rigid criteria systematically disadvantage First Nations startups.

5

Transparency in funding

Founders said they had difficulty understanding where money goes and whether it reaches people on the ground.

Gaps: Capability and Connections

CAPABILITY GAPS

Key themes - Skills, confidence, mentoring, and long-term business readiness

- **Support is not founder-centred** - Programs are often designed around desired organisational outcomes rather than the lived realities of founders.
- **One-size-fits-all models** - Generic programs fail to reflect different starting points, aspirations, cultural contexts, or definitions of success.
- **Mentoring is too short-term and transactional** - Founders value trusted, long-term relationships over one-off workshops or advice.
- **Women and sole traders are under-resourced** - Early-stage founders, especially women, are often invisible to mainstream capability programs.
- **Regional and remote founders are underserved** - Capability-building remains Perth-centric.

CONNECTIONS GAPS

Key themes - Visibility, relationships, trust, and navigation of the ecosystem

- **Low visibility of diversity** - There is little visibility that a large portion of First Nations founders are sole traders, micro-businesses, or early-stage startups.
- **Fragmented networks** - Founders struggle to find peers, mentors, investors, corporates, and decision-makers, relying heavily on informal or chance connections.
- **Translation of value** - There is a gap between how First Nations founders articulate value (community, Country, culture) and how corporates, investors, and government interpret value.
- **Limited trust-based spaces** - There are few specific First Nations hubs and peer-based environments to connect with like-minded founders walking a similar path.
- **Centralisation in Perth** - While there are some strong regional hubs, regional and on-Country founders experience additional isolation from networks and opportunities.

Recommendations

To continue building a strong and thriving First Nations startup ecosystem, there is an opportunity to move beyond one-off initiatives and work towards a coordinated pipeline of support for First Nations founders across the full startup lifecycle.

Through this initiative a consistent message emerged, that when systems are intentionally designed around First Nations knowledge, leadership and definitions of success, the benefits extend well beyond First Nations entrepreneurs to strengthen the broader innovation ecosystem.

Participants of the ecosystem workshop articulated a clear and shared vision for a thriving, First Nations-defined startup ecosystem, one underpinned by trusted relationships, reimagined approaches to capital, and capability-building that reflects lived experience and cultural context.

- ❑ The recommendations that follow are intended as a practical starting point and warrant further exploration to understand their implementation pathways, feasibility and potential impact.

Primary Recommendations

The following recommendations are staged across ecosystem visibility, capital reform, capability building and network integration. Some are system level reforms requiring coordination across government and capital providers; others can be piloted through ecosystem convening and collaboration.

❑ Increase visibility of the diversity of First Nations startups

Establish and maintain a register of First Nations startups seeking funding so investors, lenders and philanthropists can identify opportunities and present a clearer picture of the sector to corporates, investors and government. Establishing and maintaining a register would also enable founders to identify others like them, to collaborate and learn from each other.

Invest in storytelling and truth-telling - Fund ongoing case studies, media and learning grounded in lived experience including failures and pivots where founders can share their experience, to normalise diverse pathways. Increasing the visibility of the diversity of First Nations startups (size, sector, stage, location, ownership), will help to show that thriving can look different for sole traders, micro-businesses and high-growth startups.

❑ Create opportunities for learning based on real experience

Use storytelling, case studies and peer recommendations grounded in real experiences of what works for First Nations entrepreneurs including lessons from failure so others can see relatable pathways and choose support options that have genuinely helped people move toward their goals.

❑ Greater awareness of financial and social impact

Design a funding framework or guideline that identifies both financial and social impact through a community lens, rather than treating community or social impact as an add-on. This was a strong theme and recommendation that emerged through the First Nations ecosystem workshop. Founders told us that success needed to be grounded in what 'real thriving' looks like including community impact and on-Country outcomes.

Implementation Priorities

Implementation can begin by convening a cross-sector working group to design and test a pilot First Nations startup register that strengthens visibility and investor readiness. Engagement with procurement, finance and policy stakeholders can support the development of contract-backed capital models that translate procurement commitments into structured finance pathways. Establishing a coordinated referral and navigation framework would improve clarity and accessibility across the First Nations startup ecosystem. In parallel, assessing the feasibility of a WA-based First Nations incubator pathway would support stronger integration of capital, capability and network progression across the startup lifecycle.

Comprehensive List of Recommendations

The following is a full list of practical recommendations made by ecosystem workshop participations, grouped to align with the identified three broad barriers First Nations founders face. All recommendations arising from the ecosystem workshop have been included to ensure that the voices of participants and their thoughtful contributions are captured and can be potentially developed further in the future.

CAPITAL

- **Design capital around progression, not perfection** - Shift funding frameworks to measure success by movement along the commercial pathway (e.g. capability gained, revenue milestones, contracts secured), not just success/failure.
- **Explicitly link capital with capability** - Require that grants, loans and investments are paired with tailored capability-building (financial literacy, governance, strategy), rather than treating funding as a standalone intervention.
- **Translate procurement into step-by-step pathways** - Turn procurement policy into practical tools that: enable entry-level contracting for startups, support progression into higher-value or scaled contracts, and simplify onboarding, vendor registration and payment terms.
- **Use guarantees and government backing to de-risk lending** - Expand guarantee schemes and government-backed innovation funds to unlock working capital, asset finance and early-stage risk that mainstream lenders will not carry alone.
- **Replicate Indigenous finance models at scale** - Adapt IBA-style grants, loans and blended finance products through mainstream lenders, impact funds and corporate capital pools.
- **Improve transparency and accountability of funding flows** - By implementing systems to track who receives funding, where it goes, and what changes, ensuring dollars reach founders on the ground, not just intermediaries.

CAPABILITY

- **Apply genuine human-centred, culturally grounded design** such as yarning, deep listening and co-design to ensure programs respond to real founder problems rather than assumed needs.
- **Provide long-term, expert mentoring that walks alongside founders** such as through bespoke mentoring packages (e.g. 40-50 hours over time) that adapt as founders move from idea to startup to scale-up.
- **Build financial capability as a core foundation** through practical, tailored support in cashflow management, forecasting, budgeting, grant writing and impact measurement designed specifically for startup realities.
- **Create multiple, visible entry points to support** - Develop a clear, trusted 'front door' or directory with warm referrals between organisations so founders can easily find help without relying on insider knowledge.
- **Invest in on-Country and regional delivery** - Fund mentoring, advisory and capability-building that is delivered in regional and remote communities, not only in metropolitan hubs.
- **Legitimise diverse definitions of success** - Ensure capability programs support culturally grounded business models that prioritise community outcomes, Country and truth-telling, not just narrow commercial templates.



CONNECTIONS

- **Establish a register of First Nations startups** - Create and maintain an opt-in register of First Nations startups that enables connection, collaboration, visibility to funders and corporates, and ecosystem intelligence.
- **Invest in storytelling and truth-telling** - Fund ongoing case studies, media and learning grounded in lived experience including failures and pivots where founders will share their experience, to normalise diverse pathways and reduce reliance on hero narratives.
- **Create structured connection pathways, not ad hoc networking** - Build formal referral systems that help founders: find the right person inside organisations, access warm introductions to investors and buyers, and move between programs without falling through gaps.
- **Support culturally safe peer networks, especially for women** - Resource First Nations-led, peer-based spaces where women founders can connect, collaborate and problem-solve alongside (not instead of) formal mentoring.
- **Embed translators and ecosystem navigators** - Support individuals and organisations who can listen deeply to founders and translate cultural, social and community value into language and measures understood by capital providers and procurement decision-makers without dilution.

What's next?

Strong outcomes for First Nations startups are built on how well the ecosystem functions as a whole. Founders are seeking more than isolated programs, they are seeking coherent pathways that bring together capital, skills and networks and relationships in a way that supports progress over time. Mapping the Western Australian First Nations startup support ecosystem helps make visible where these pathways are clear, where they break down, and where they would benefit from greater integration and coordination.

Through insights gathered from First Nations founders, ecosystem organisations and support providers, this work seeks to establish a clearer picture of the current landscape and the opportunities for improvement. Many strengths were identified including a recent increased focus on First Nations founders and the foundational support of the broader startup ecosystem.

The feedback received through this mapping initiative reflected a strong desire for greater visibility of First Nations founders and how success and thriving are defined for both financial and social impact and learning that is based on real experiences.

This report is intended as a foundation for coordinated action. Strengthening the First Nations startup ecosystem in Western Australia will require deliberate collaboration across government, capital providers, community organisations and founders themselves. FNX will continue engaging ecosystem partners to explore practical implementation pathways arising from this work.

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Appendix

Entrepreneurship Education Audit

An overview of formal and non-formal entrepreneurship education programs available to First Nations founders across Western Australia and nationally, assessed for accessibility and relevance.

UWA — Graduate Certificate in Entrepreneurship & Innovation

Focus Areas: Postgrad theory and applied methods for innovation, uncertainty management, new product development

Accessibility: UWA supports; Launchpad credit pathway can complement trimester intakes. *Not specifically targeted to First Nations founders.*

uwa.edu.au

ECU — MBA, Entrepreneurship & Innovation Specialisation

Focus Areas: MBA with formal specialisation (ECU City); design thinking and innovation lens

Accessibility: Flexible MBA modes including online. Targeted to graduates and experienced professionals. *Not specifically targeted to First Nations founders.*

ecu.edu.au

Murdoch University — Entrepreneurship & Innovation (Undergrad major) + Launchpad Hub

Focus Areas: Undergraduate major plus co-curricular Launchpad workshops and pitch events

Accessibility: Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre scholarships and supports (including laptops/childcare) improve access and retention. *Not specifically targeted to First Nations founders.*

murdoch.edu.au

Curtin University — Master of Innovation & Entrepreneurship

Focus Areas: General postgraduate qualification focused on innovation, entrepreneurship, commercialisation and venture creation

Accessibility: Six- and 12-month Indigenous enabling courses offer a culturally informed pathway to university study. Available to students aged 17+ without ATAR or Year 12 completion.

curtin.edu.au

TAFE WA — Cert IV in Entrepreneurship & New Business (BSB40320)

Focus Areas: Practical small-business startup skills; state-wide delivery including some regional centres

Accessibility: Jobs & Skills Centres provide Aboriginal-specific support across 19 centres statewide. VET units are small-business oriented; less coverage of startup finance, IP, or procurement to APP/IPP standards.

tafe.wa.edu.au

Notre Dame (Broome/Fremantle) + Nulungu

Focus Areas: Place-based learning; Kimberley presence valuable for on-Country cohorts

Accessibility: Scholarships and postgraduate pathways available. Lacks a structured entrepreneurship track. *Not specifically targeted to First Nations founders.*

notredame.edu.au

③ All mainstream university programs listed above offer general entrepreneurship education. While some provide Indigenous-specific support services, none are designed exclusively for First Nations founders. Targeted programs are listed separately below.

Targeted First Nations Programs

These programs are specifically designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entrepreneurs, offering culturally grounded delivery, peer cohort learning, and tailored business development support.

National Indigenous Business Summer School (WA)

Target: Year 11–12 students

One-week pipeline program introducing business and entrepreneurship to First Nations high-school students. Costs are covered; the program rotates host university, providing strong early-pipeline equity.

Note: No guaranteed bridge into credit-bearing founder programs or paid internships; risk of attrition post-school.

nibss.com.au

Make it Happen HQ — Full Throttle First Nation Accelerator

Focus: Sales, marketing, communication strategies with innovation and tech emphasis

Flexible remote learning, virtual expert workshops, personalised mentoring, and online/face-to-face learning developed by First Nation and development experts. Active support community included.

Tailored specifically for First Nation individuals and businesses, offering ongoing development, support, mentoring, and tools to nurture ideas and grow businesses into successful enterprises.

makeithappenhq.com.au

First Innovators — Indigenous Business Accelerator

Format: 12-week free online growth program

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entrepreneurs across Australia. Combines structured learning with tailored business coaching, digital marketing and sales capability, and peer networking to strengthen business models and growth plans.

Designed to overcome common barriers such as isolation, limited access to specialist advice, and uncertainty about next growth steps — providing tools and frameworks to build sustainable, competitive businesses and clearer pathways to markets and procurement opportunities.

firstinnovators.org

University of Melbourne — Murra Indigenous Business Program

Provider: Melbourne Business School

Supports First Nations founders to strengthen the commercial foundations of their startups. Covers growth strategy, financial management, governance, negotiation and market positioning, with a focus on moving from early-stage traction to sustainable scale.

Designed specifically for First Nations entrepreneurs with culturally grounded delivery and peer cohort learning. Scholarships and sponsorship pathways reduce cost barriers; block format accommodates founders actively building and scaling startups.

mbs.edu

-  The Minderoo Foundation's **Dream Venture Masterclass** was a first-of-its-kind First Nations accelerator offering training, mentorship and seed funding opportunities at a national gala showcase. **This program ended in 2023 and is no longer offered.**

First Nations Innovation Hubs & Incubators

A directory of physical and virtual innovation hubs, incubators, and support organisations serving First Nations entrepreneurs across Western Australia and nationally.

📄 Waalitj Hub — Waalitj Foundation

Location: 42 Bishopsgate Street, Lathlain, Perth

Comprehensive business incubation and startup support including: business growth and capital requirements, tendering and contract execution, prequalification and project compliance, marketing and communications, joint venture and M&A advice, import/export and foreign investment, land-based enterprises, HR and industrial relations, governance and risk, legal advice, back-office systems, bookkeeping, business coaching and mentoring, and office space with computer access.

☎ (08) 9242 6700 | admin@wf.org.au | wf.org.au

📄 Make it Happen HQ — First Nation Innovation Hub

Location: 3C/15 Dampier Terrace, Broome (+ digital)

Flexible workspace and office facilities. Connect with fellow First Nation entrepreneurs, share insights, and thrive together. Broome-based facilities with both physical and digital support services and programs. Coaching, masterclasses, and Accomplish collaborative network.

✉ hello@makeithappenhq.com.au | makeithappenhq.com.au

📄 Noongar Chamber of Commerce & Industry (NCCI) / Subiaco Aboriginal Business Hub

Location: QV1 Building, Level 25, 250 St Georges Terrace, Perth | **Hub:** Godfrey House, 1 Roberts Road, Subiaco

Business advocacy group for Aboriginal-owned businesses in WA. Mission: build economic capacity and wealth of Aboriginal people. Services: advocacy, mentoring and training, capacity building, business coaching throughout the business lifecycle, networking events and expos, international trade. Membership-based organisation.

✉ membership@ncci.com.au | ncci.com.au

📄 Morrgul

Location: 13 Herbert Street, Broome, WA

Kimberley-based not-for-profit offering procurement support to Aboriginal people in regional WA. Programs: Aboriginal Business Capability Building Program (Kimberley, Pilbara, Central Regions), Procurement Advisory Services, Fitzroy Valley Aboriginal Business Program, and Community Grants Coordinator Program. Capacity building includes marketing, procurement support, tender preparation, business directory registration, joint venture formation, and free online modules.

☎ (08) 9193 5570 | ✉ info@morrgul.com.au | morrgul.com.au

📄 Aboriginal Business Capability Building Program — Department of Finance, WA Government

Location: WA-wide program delivered through Waalitj Hub and Morrgul

Empowers Aboriginal businesses to contract with the WA Government for goods, services, community services and works. Offers individualised support: tendering skills, business development, internal governance, and contractual compliance. Delivered through Waalitj Hub and Morrgul.

Kimberley, Pilbara, Mid West, Gascoyne, Wheatbelt & Goldfields-Esperance: Morrgul — info@morrgul.com.au

South West & Great Southern: Waalitj Hub — waalitjhub@wf.org.au
wa.gov.au

📄 Supply Nation — Indigenous Business Direct & Virtual Learning Hub

Location: Suite 6.03, Level 6/55 Clarence St, Sydney NSW (national reach)

Directory of verified Indigenous businesses searchable by name, product, service, area, or category. Programs include:

- **KickStart** — For all registered and certified Indigenous businesses; helps optimise profiles on Indigenous Business Direct and understand available resources.
- **JumpStart** — Certified Suppliers access skilled Member Volunteers to solve business issues. Self-paced, internet-based training for both Suppliers and Members.
- **Drive** — Four modules focused on procurement and contracting capability for Supply Nation Registered or Certified suppliers.
- **Indigenous Business Learning Program** — Online platform with on-demand video resources on key success factors for Indigenous businesses, featuring voices and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business owners.

supplynation.org.au | [Virtual Learning Hub](#)