

# Indigenous entrepreneurship may well be the driver of social innovation

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[Research](#) has found Indigenous start-up businesses could improve the welfare and well-being of First Nations individuals and communities.

This has the potential to reduce many economic and social setbacks experienced by Indigenous people.

Australia has [outperformed](#) other developed economies in the quality and economic impact of [business](#) start-ups. This includes both mainstream entrepreneurs and Indigenous startups.

The number of Indigenous startups in Australia [grew by 30%](#) in the last decade. Women Indigenous entrepreneurs and participation in successful Indigenous startups are also becoming more common.

The [top 500](#) Indigenous corporations in Australia alone contribute \$1.6 billion to the Australian economy.

Yet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia still face incredible [challenges](#) when it comes to unemployment, self-employment, and [entrepreneurship](#). Compared to the US and Canada, Australia has a [significantly smaller](#) amount of Indigenous people engaged in [small businesses](#).

Our [research](#) shows Indigenous businesses can be essential for First Nations communities in Australia. These businesses can create jobs for these communities and increase workforce participation. This brings great benefits for health and quality of life in Indigenous populations as well as a positive impact on the Australian economy.

## **Indigenous entrepreneurship is a driver of social innovation**

Entrepreneurship is an enabler of social, economic, and technological progress, and can be an avenue to support [cultural foundations](#) of Indigenous communities.

Indigenous entrepreneurs and their businesses are drivers of social innovation because they are often embedded in family, social values and networks. This can assist with employment opportunities and business promotion.

In our research we have found much potential for Indigenous businesses to embed their respective cultures and creativity into their work and further grow the Indigenous start-up sector. Which could be of [great benefit](#) to Indigenous communities.

For example, Keira Birrani expanded a grassroots painting start-up and now has nine Aboriginal painters sharing their creativity and culture in the local Aboriginal community in Wodonga. With the help of elders and the local community, Jedda Monaro launched a [startup](#) in glass-blowing. Jedda now exports his sculptures internationally, and redistributes his gains to the local community.

## **Indigenous entrepreneurs**

Some Indigenous entrepreneurs prioritize serving their local communities as opposed to purely financial motives. However there are still significant obstacles and challenges to overcome.

The growth in Indigenous entrepreneurship is still lagging compared to non-Indigenous entrepreneurship. Our research finds this may be due to barriers such as lack of business experience, education or training, racial discrimination and lack of access to resources.

However there are factors that can influence successful Indigenous entrepreneurship. This includes access to business mentorship and partners, tertiary education and training in entrepreneurship. These have proven to be [drivers](#) for success.

Examples of successful Indigenous businesses embracing community engagement and making real change in communities include:

- [The Gumatji Corporation](#) who provide sustainable economic development for the community through integrating Yolgnu clan's social laws
- [MoneyMob Talkabout](#) provide Indigenous communities with better ways to manage money, resulting in financial literature and basic financial skills in local communities
- [MPower](#) helps Indigenous families meet their [basic needs](#), by integrating with Indigenous coaches and mentors
- [Maali Minjarra](#) started a regional tourism venture three years ago and today employs 20 full-time Aboriginal staff who assist as tour guides.

## How to better support Indigenous businesses:

There have been recent government approaches to support new [Indigenous businesses](#), including dedicated Indigenous startup education and training. This has been intermittently applied in Australia, with marginal success to date. However, further courses of actions are required.

Our research proposes three main types of intervention:

1. better ways to encourage Indigenous communities to be involved in business. This would involve improving entrepreneurial and startup culture to be more inclusive for Indigenous people
2. direct support for Indigenous people such as education, training, and mentoring by organizations dedicated to Indigenous businesses. A good example is the [YARPA and iAccelerate](#) initiative in NSW
3. developing [entrepreneurial ecosystems](#) to embrace cultural,

economic and institutional needs of Indigenous businesses. See, for example, [a map](#) of a proposed entrepreneurship ecosystem for Indigenous businesses.

To facilitate Indigenous entrepreneurship, we need interventions on improved education in business and self-employment. However existing government policies and collaboration with Indigenous networks and communities need to better facilitate this.

Community participation is [essential](#) for Indigenous businesses to flourish. Indigenous entrepreneurship has the potential to be a way for communities, governments and non-for-profits to address social issues, such as poverty, unemployment and social injustice.

Government business initiatives working with Indigenous communities would better facilitate and promote Indigenous voices in business.

Through this, Indigenous peoples would have a direct say on national business laws, policies and programs effecting them.

This will bring great benefit to all Australian entrepreneurs, by providing inclusive networks and entrepreneurial ecosystems.

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