

# Evaluation of The Indigenous Business and Employment Hubs Program

*Nous Group acknowledges the work, input and contributions that First Nations people, businesses and communities across Australia have made to the hubs program by supporting this evaluation.*

## *Evaluation background*

From August 2023 to November 2024, Nous Group conducted an evaluation of the Indigenous Business and Employment Hubs Program to understand how successful it is in meeting the needs of First Nations businesspeople.

## *About the hubs program*

The hubs program was introduced by the Australian Government in 2018 under the Indigenous Business Sector Strategy, and was developed based on consultations the Government conducted with First Nations businesspeople.

The hubs were intended to fill a gap in business support services for First Nations people by acting as 'one-stop-shops' that provide a single place for hub clients to access appropriate business advice and be connected with existing business support services. Three of the hubs were established in cities to take advantage of opportunities presented by City Deals.

Total committed  
program funding:

**\$54.3m**

between July 2018 and  
January 2026

Which has supported  
the establishment of

**4 HUBS**

Operated by

**40 staff  
members,**

78% First Nations

Who have  
supported

**1931**

Hub clients

## To date hub offices have been established in Perth, Western Sydney, Adelaide and Darwin and Alice Springs in the Northern Territory.

*The hubs are working to increase their regional presence to support more First Nations people based in regional areas.*

### Northern Territory Indigenous Business and Employment Hub sites

- Located in Darwin on Larrakia Country and Alice Springs on Arrernte Country
- Operated by the Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network
- Launched in 2023
- 128 total hub clients as at November 2024

### Yarpa Hub

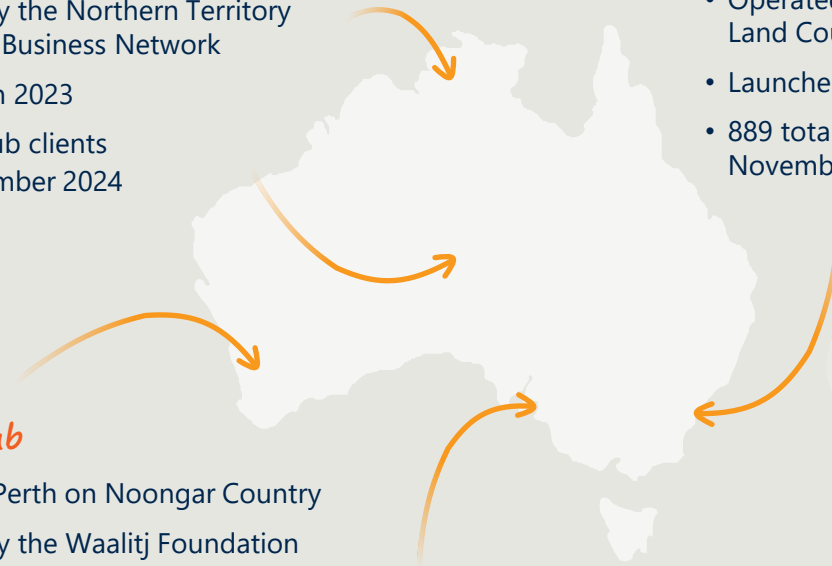
- Located in Western Sydney on Darug and Tharawal Country
- Operated by the NSW Aboriginal Land Council
- Launched in 2018
- 889 total hub clients as at November 2024

### Waalitj Hub

- Located in Perth on Noongar Country
- Operated by the Waalitj Foundation
- Launched in 2020
- 571 total hub clients as at November 2024

### The Circle

- Located in Adelaide, on Kaurna Country
- Operated by the South Australian Government and co-funded by the Australian Government
- Launched in 2021
- 343 total hub clients as at November 2024



The evaluation team conducted **115 interviews** with **124 individuals**, including:

41

First Nations business owners

18

Hub partners

Hub partners are organisations or businesses who work with the hubs to provide services to hub clients or receive support from the hubs to better engage with First Nations people.

33

Hub staff members

24

State, territory and Australian Government representatives

7

Community stakeholders who work with First Nations businesses

13

Stakeholders from QLD, to understand the needs of First Nations business owners who do not have access to a hub

The evaluation team used Queensland as a case study to understand the needs of First Nations businesses in a state where there is not a hub.

Interviews with stakeholders from Queensland showed that a 'one-stop-shop' hub model, where everything businesses need can be found through one place, is important in coordinating support for First Nations businesses.

## The evaluation found that the hubs program is providing valuable support to First Nations businesses

### Key findings

The hubs are:

- > delivering appropriate support that meets the needs of individual First Nations entrepreneurs and business owners, especially those with new businesses.
- > collaborating well with their industry and government partners to deliver services to clients
- > supporting networking between First Nations businesses.
- > delivering services in a culturally safe way and in a way that recognises First Nations business owner's strengths.
- > meeting most of the expected outcomes of the program, particularly by providing a single place for First Nations people to access business supports, including assistance to connect with First Nations specific and mainstream services.
- > supporting many of their clients to grow their businesses through capability building support and connection to buyers looking to purchase First Nations businesses' goods and services.
- > making progress in increasing their support of businesses in regional areas, but more can be done to reach and assist these businesses.
- > providing support to the First Nations business sector that is needed and valued by First Nations business owners

There are opportunities for the hubs to strengthen:

- > support for clients with more established businesses to grow and scale their business sustainably
- > relationships with some services and government agencies, including financial services that provide loans to businesses
- > services delivered to First Nations people in regional areas
- > communication and collaboration between hubs

## What interviewees said

*"Everything we've needed we've been able to reach out to the [hub staff] and they've really helped with everything."*

*– hub client*

*"I would dearly, dearly love for them to come out on Country. They are stuck in the city."*

*– hub client*

*"If we stopped funding [the hub], there would be a huge void in the service delivery across [the region]. They run a really good operation across just about everything they do."*

*– government stakeholder*

*"The coaches need more high-level business experience for mature business operators to scale and grow."*

*– hub client*

*"They actually want to get to know you properly. As mob we need that cultural safety to move forward. [...] They have a clear strong vision about how they operate and what they want for community."*

*– hub partner*

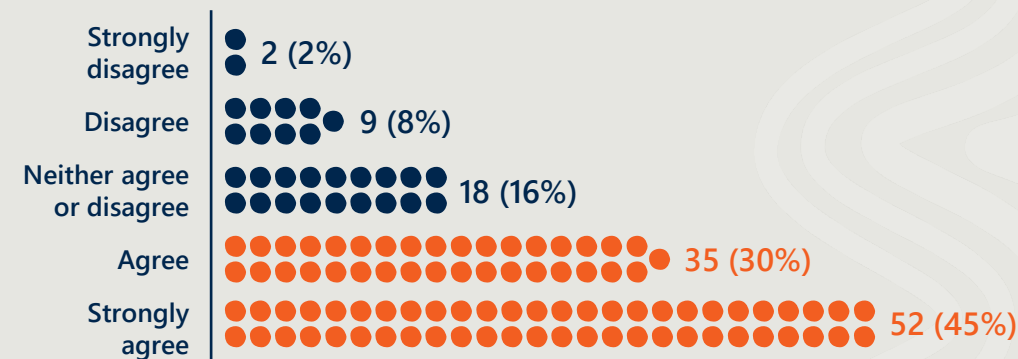
*"I think [the hub] leads with heart. They are people first and I think that's why they have that magnetic effect on people – because they feel safe."*

*– hub client*

## Survey results

The evaluation involved a survey of hub clients. Across the four hubs, 116 clients completed the survey.

### The hub's services meet my needs as a business owner



Source: Evaluation of the Indigenous Business and Employment Hubs, Survey of hub clients, July 2024

**75%** of survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their hub's services were meeting their needs as a business owner.

Clients found the most valuable services to be: mentoring and advice; having someone to speak to about their challenges; practical information provided; referrals to other services; networking opportunities / connecting their business to buyers; and access to a working space

**25%** of survey respondents did not agree that the hub's services were meeting their needs as a business owner

Clients who felt that the hubs' services do not meet their needs suggested this was because:

- the hubs do not provide direct access to capital / business finance
- business support staff were sometimes unavailable or slow to respond
- the perception among some clients that business support staff did not have the skills to support more established business owners
- Some clients based in regional areas found the hubs hard to access

# Recommendations

The evaluation has identified 10 recommendations for the NIAA to support the ongoing improvement of the hubs program.



## Program continuation

- 1 Continue to fund the hubs program while exploring options to increase the program's financial sustainability



## Service delivery

- 2 Strengthen the capability and increase the capacity of business support staff at hubs
- 3 Ensure the hubs develop capabilities and resources to better support more mature businesses
- 4 Increase education for hub clients and government partners about opportunities, including Indigenous procurement policies
- 5 Explore opportunities to increase in-person support in regional areas



## Monitoring and Reporting

- 6 Enhance and streamline the hubs' key performance indicators
  - 6.1 Develop outcome indicators to better measure impact
  - 6.2 Streamline hub staff's reporting requirements



## Governance and sustainability

- 7 Establish mechanisms for regular collaboration and communication across hubs
- 8 Ensure each hub's governance model maximises opportunities for First Nations leadership and self-determination



## Ecosystem Collaboration

- 9 Explore opportunities to enhance referrals for hub clients
  - 9.1 Develop an updated, system-wide understanding of business support services for First Nations businesses
  - 9.2 Increase clients' access to specialist expertise
- 10 Strengthen partnerships to increase First Nations businesses' access to flexible capital

➤ The full Evaluation Report contains further detail on these recommendations. The full report can be found on the NIAA's website at: <https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/evaluation-indigenous-business-and-employment-hubs-program-final-report>