



Aboriginal
Affairs

Aboriginal Business Roundtable

Local Connections: Connecting Aboriginal Businesses with
Local Councils

June 2023





Roadmap Artwork

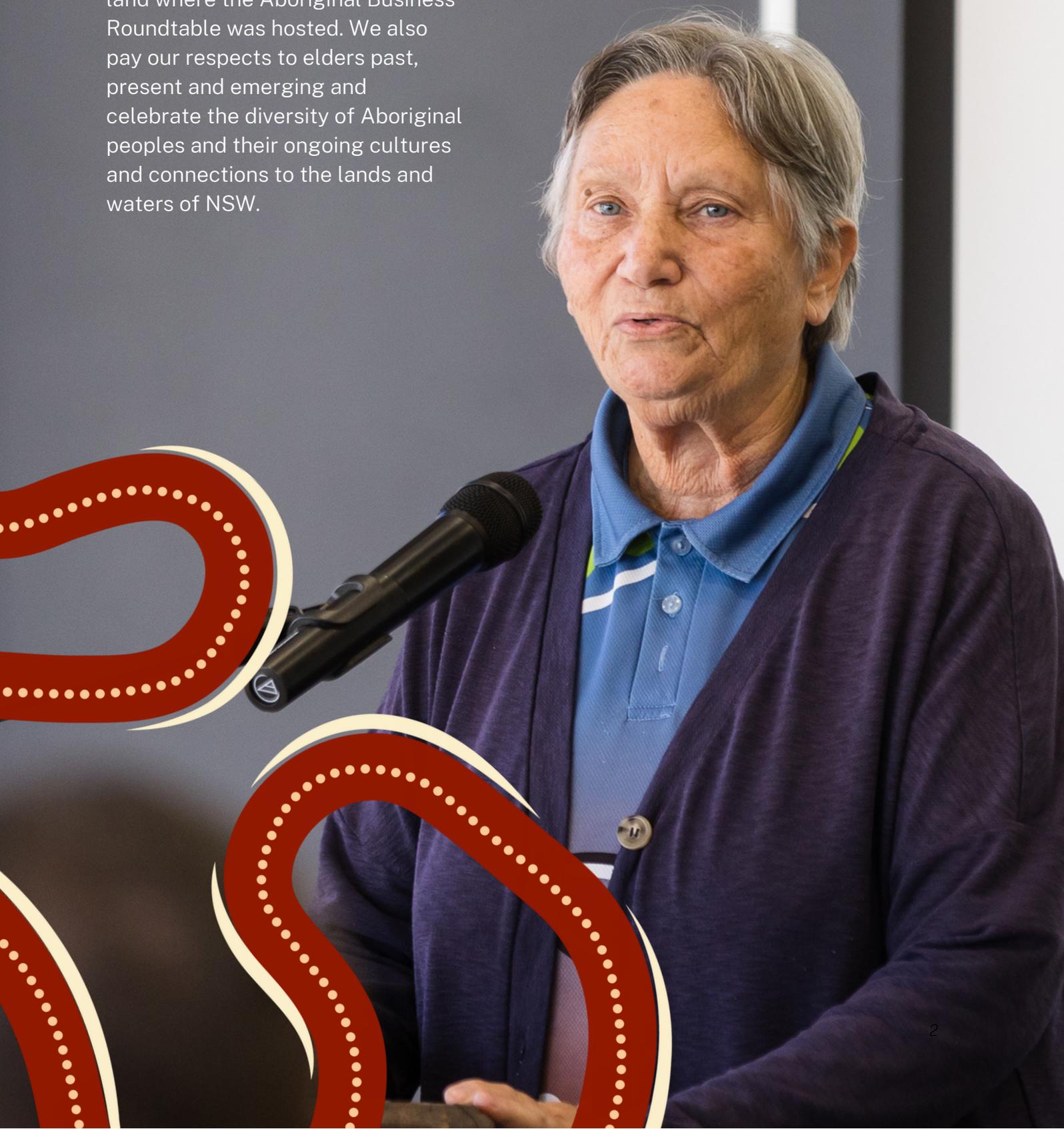
The artwork was designed for the NSW Government's work with the Aboriginal business sector under Priority Reform 5. The right side of the artwork represents the business roundtable and everyone coming together in a meeting place. The pathways leading in with footprints represent our journey towards making change from the roundtable. The dots around the roundtable represent the Aboriginal stakeholders and NSW Government. The Roadmap is represented by the brown dotted pathways leading from the roundtable up to circles depicting the 3 key themes: strengthening accountability, supporting businesses, and recognising talent. The land and the waters are represented throughout the rest of the artwork. The artist, Lani Balzan, is a proud Aboriginal woman from the Wiradjuri people of the three-river tribe. One of her biggest goals and inspirations in creating her artwork is to develop a better connection to her culture and to continue to work towards reconciliation, bringing people and communities together to learn about the amazing culture we have here in Australia.

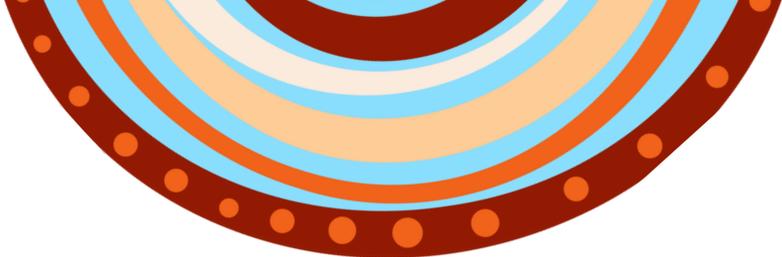
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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Wiradjuri people as the custodians of the land where the Aboriginal Business Roundtable was hosted. We also pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.





Introduction

As part of the NSW-specific work on Closing the Gap Priority Reform 5, the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO) and Aboriginal Affairs NSW (AANSW) held extensive community consultations in April 2021.

Through this process, feedback strongly indicated that the NSW Government needed to do more for Aboriginal businesses. This started with developing a better understanding of the obstacles confronting them.

In response, the NSW Government took proactive measures by organising two Aboriginal Business Roundtables in October 2021 and April 2022. These roundtables were integral to the NSW Government's Closing the Gap initiative, aiming to foster collaboration and develop networks and insight into Aboriginal employment, business growth, and economic prosperity.

Roundtable discussions focus on key issues, aiming to understand both the causes and impacts of each area. These insights and perspectives are instrumental in shaping the strategies and actions outlined in the government's approach to Aboriginal businesses, which ensures an effective means of addressing the identified challenges and opportunities.

These roundtables were recognised as valuable forums for facilitating in-depth discussions on vital matters and forging connections between Aboriginal businesses and key government stakeholders. The government included a commitment in the NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2022-2024 to hosting Aboriginal Business Roundtables biannually.

In December 2022, the former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs unveiled a preliminary version of the NSW Roadmap for Aboriginal Business Growth and announced a consultative phase to allow for public feedback.

The final Roadmap, released in March 2023, presents a range of initiatives strategically developed to address primary concerns identified in earlier roundtable discussions.



A new perspective: Local Connections

Following the release of the NSW Roadmap for Aboriginal Business Growth, the business roundtables responded to feedback heard previously by extending its reach to regional NSW, hosting the event on Wiradjuri Country in Dubbo.

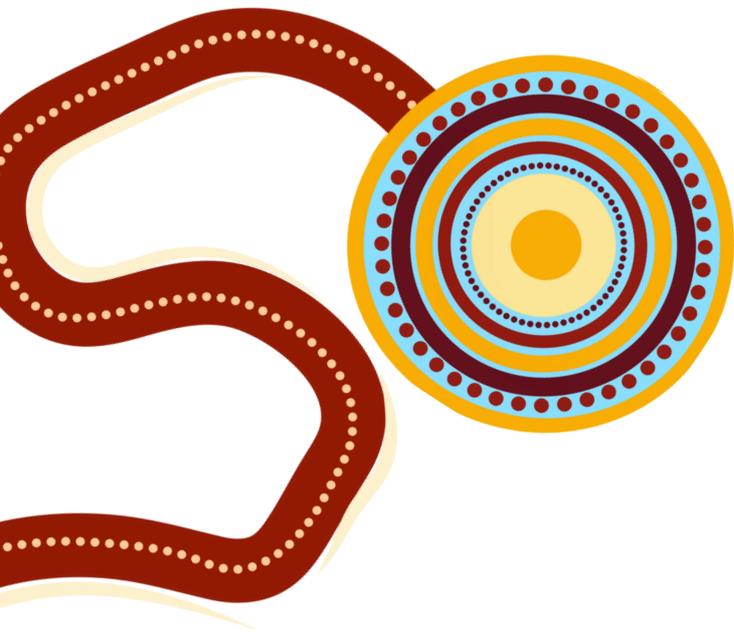
The focus of the June 2023 roundtable was on establishing connections between Aboriginal businesses and local councils under the theme Local Connections: Connecting Aboriginal Businesses with Local Councils. This theme emerged from previous roundtable discussions, which recognised the importance of local government in supporting Aboriginal businesses, particularly in the procurement space.

By centering the discussion on the role of local government in the Aboriginal business sector, the aim was to foster crucial connections, enhance stakeholder understanding, and unpack barriers that hindered businesses from engaging with local government.

To facilitate discussion, Local Government NSW and their procurement arm, Local Government Procurement were invited to participate. Additionally, representatives from various local government areas across the state were invited to participate in and attend the June 2023 Roundtable.

Unlike previous events held in Sydney, hosting a regional roundtable demonstrated the NSW government's commitment to addressing issues faced by Aboriginal businesses and communities in regional areas. These businesses encounter unique challenges, such as limited networking and growth opportunities, barriers to scaling up due to remoteness and limited access to supporting resources.

However, when Aboriginal businesses succeed, they have a positive impact on local communities by providing employment and training opportunities and serving as advocates for the Aboriginal business community.



Roundtable Attendees

The Roundtable involved 51 participants, including 21 Aboriginal businesses from various industries and sectors including: food services, consulting, construction, photography and more.

Roundtable participants submitted questions via Slido and questions were also taken from the floor for the panel.

Australian Indigenous Business Services
Alicia May Photography
Wambinya Enterprise
Local Government Procurement
Yarpa NSW Indigenous Business and
Employment Hub
Castlereagh Hire Pty Ltd
WO Services Pty Ltd
Dark Eye Photography
Blayney Shire Council
Investment NSW
Winya Indigenous Furniture Pty Ltd
DREAMTIME TUKA
Jarín Street & Trading Blak
Native Secrets
NSW Treasury

ICAN Nursery
Boomalli consulting
NSW Aboriginal Land Council
Gyros Consultancy Group
Trangie Local Aboriginal Land Council
Nyngan Local Aboriginal Land Council
Wright Way Building & Construction Pty Ltd
Regional NSW
Wirriyn Communications & Media
Warren Shire Council
NSW Indigenous Chamber of Commerce
Local Government Procurement
Kapata Dreaming
Banksia House Dubbo Binjang tea
Three Rivers Regional Assembly
Dubbo Regional Council





On the day in Dubbo

On a beautiful morning in Dubbo, the roundtable commenced with a special Welcome to Country led by local Wiradjuri elder, Aunty Margaret Walker.

Following this, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty, The Honourable David Harris MP, delivered an address, setting the stage for the roundtable discussions.

Discussions were facilitated by MC for the day, Hannah Hollis, journalist and proud Jawun woman. Panel members and keynote speakers included: Luke Kenny from Local Government Procurement, Uncle Herb Smith from Dreamtime Tuka, and Phil Thompson from Native Secrets.

The panel members included prominent figures from various organisations, including:



Debbie Barwick

*Chairperson of
the NSW
Indigenous
Chamber of
Commerce*



Luke Kenny

*CEO of Local
Government
Procurement*



Phil Munro

*Manager of
Procurement at
Dubbo Regional
Council*



Brinae Smith

*Aboriginal
business owner
of Darkeye
Photography*

The panel discussed the importance of building relationships at a local level and what a strong business relationship looks like.

Further discussion centred on the importance of trust, mutual respect and understanding in building business relationships. Further, the need for open communication, collaboration and shared goals resulting in positive outcomes, was also highlighted.

The panel also cited examples of successful partnerships between local government and Aboriginal businesses.

One significant challenge identified was the difficulty experienced by smaller and emerging businesses in winning larger government or council contracts, as these are generally awarded to more established businesses. Panel members addressed this issue and offered advice on ways that smaller businesses can secure their first government procurement contract. The panel emphasised the importance of persistence, continuous improvement, seeking feedback, and leveraging networking opportunities within the Aboriginal business community.

During discussions, Brinae Smith from Darkeye Photography shared her personal experience working with a local council. She highlighted the importance of open communication, understanding cultural sensitivities, and building trust between Aboriginal businesses and local councils. Her advice to other Aboriginal businesses seeking to work with local councils was to actively seek information and support, engage in open dialogue and leverage networks and partnerships to navigate the complexities of the procurement process.



Throughout the roundtable discussions, questions were raised from the floor, addressing various aspects of the relationship between local government and Aboriginal businesses. These questions touched on issues such as recognising and working in the Indigenous marketplace, ensuring the authenticity of Aboriginal businesses, accountability of local government, building trust, cultural safety after winning tenders, addressing biases and awareness, and the role of the NSW Indigenous Chamber of Commerce in supporting Aboriginal businesses.

The roundtable setting provided a platform for meaningful conversations, knowledge sharing, and the identification of opportunities for improvement. The panel members and attendees alike expressed their commitment to working towards a more inclusive and mutually beneficial relationship between local government and Aboriginal businesses.

“I think it’s important for mob to get the opportunity to come here and talk to discuss the barriers that we face not only as Aboriginal people, but as Aboriginal businesses.”

The discussions highlighted the significant benefits that can be achieved through strong, effective relationships between local Aboriginal businesses and local councils. These include:

- **Economic Empowerment:** Supporting Aboriginal entrepreneurship through improved procurement processes and opportunities can lead to increased economic empowerment in Aboriginal communities. It enables Aboriginal businesses to compete on a level playing field and contribute to economic growth and self-sustainability.
- **Job Creation and Community Development:** The growth of Aboriginal businesses stimulates job creation, with Aboriginal businesses more likely to employ Aboriginal people. As a result of these employment opportunities in communities, self-determination, community development, and economic prosperity is advanced.
- **Cultural Preservation and Celebration:** Supporting Aboriginal entrepreneurship preserves and celebrates Aboriginal culture and traditions. Aboriginal businesses often incorporate cultural elements into their products and services, to express cultural pride and promote understanding and appreciation.







What we heard:

Issues and Opportunities

The roundtable discussions highlighted opportunities and ways to enhance the relationship between local government and Aboriginal businesses. Panel members discussed practical strategies and initiatives that can be implemented to address barriers to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for Aboriginal businesses.

Some key opportunities and solutions that emerged from discussions were:

Building Local Connections

The discussions emphasised the importance of building relationships on a local level. Establishing meaningful connections between local government and Aboriginal businesses can lead to better understanding, collaboration and trust.

Encouraging Equal Access

It was recognised that smaller and emerging Aboriginal businesses often face challenges in securing government contracts, as these tend to be awarded to more established businesses. To address this, panel members advised providing support and resources to help smaller businesses navigate the tendering process.



Enhancing Procurement Processes

Discussions highlighted the need to review and improve procurement processes to ensure they are more accessible and inclusive for Aboriginal businesses.

Cultural Safety and Awareness

Recognising the importance of cultural safety, the panel discussed the need for local councils to prioritise cultural awareness training and education for staff.

Collaboration and Partnership

Discussions also highlighted the importance of strong partnerships between local government, Aboriginal businesses, the NSW Indigenous Chamber of Commerce, and other key stakeholders. Through partnership, councils are better equipped to understand the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal businesses, while Aboriginal businesses can access guidance, support, and networking opportunities.

Accountability and Continuous Improvement

Ensuring accountability was highlighted as a crucial element in driving positive change. Local Government Procurement (LGP) was encouraged to implement measures to hold local councils accountable.

Next Steps

The June 2023 roundtable brought together Aboriginal businesses, local government representatives, and other key stakeholders, to share insights and discuss solutions to a range of issues impacting Aboriginal businesses.

Discussions also centred on the immense potential for Aboriginal business growth, and the importance of partnerships between local government, Aboriginal businesses and key stakeholders.

The Aboriginal Business Roundtables have always been responsive to the needs of the Aboriginal business sector. In this spirit, they will continue to be an important forum for dialogue between Aboriginal businesses, the NSW government and other key stakeholders.

By recognising and supporting Aboriginal entrepreneurship, the NSW Government has an opportunity to promote economic development and empower local communities in the regions. This involves creating an environment where Aboriginal businesses can thrive, contribute to job creation, cultural preservation, and social cohesion.

Moving forward, the NSW Government is committed to hosting roundtables across the state to further enhance and promote dialogue between the Aboriginal business sector, local governments and other key stakeholders.

The next Aboriginal Business Roundtable will be hosted in October 2023. This will further progress work under the Roadmap, in addition to building on the ideas discussed at the June roundtable.

Embracing the value of Aboriginal businesses and their numerous contributions, will not only yield positive outcomes in the short-term, but will also have long-term benefits for individuals, Aboriginal communities, and the broader Australian community.

It is through these partnerships that Aboriginal culture can be celebrated, local communities can be further strengthened, and economic sustainability can be promoted.

Acknowledgements

We begin by again thanking Aunty Margaret Walker for her warm Welcome to Country. We also express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to all the participants, and individuals who contributed to the success of the roundtable discussion.

Their insights and expertise have been instrumental in addressing the challenges experienced by Aboriginal businesses. We also extend our appreciation to the wider community for their ongoing support and commitment to promoting Aboriginal business growth and economic development.

