STARTUPWA

PROMOTIONS & STORY TELLING ROUNDTABLE REPORT
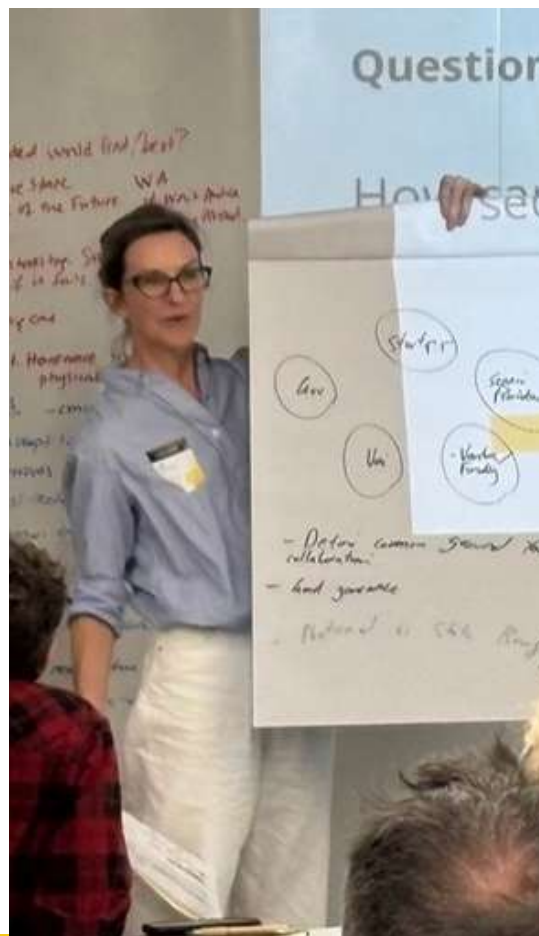
November 2025

Thanks to generous support from

CERI   meetpoints

1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures and to elders, past and present.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While there have been many success stories emanating from Western Australia's startup and innovative ecosystem, the awareness of these - among the general public, investor community, students at school or university - is low.

StartupWA's pre-event survey found that 98% of the sector believe their stories are 'rarely' or only 'somewhat' recognised. In a recent review of national startup media, only 2% (Startup Daily) or 7% (InnovationAus) of stories even mentioned our state or Western Australian startups.

This lack of visibility can dampen investment, public understanding, the talent pipeline and government support. It holds innovation back, and yet it is innovation that we need to help diversify the local economy, create new jobs and solve some of the world's major problems.

On 4 November 2025, StartupWA hosted a roundtable with 42 participants to discuss these issues, and to propose solutions.

10 recommendations have been made:

1. Establish a 'Storytelling Advocacy' group
2. Be clear on the audiences
3. Have a clear, targeted message for each audience
4. Develop assets
5. Design campaigns
6. Ongoing collaboration from across the ecosystem
7. Educate startups on messaging
8. Educate investors on investing
9. Promote West Tech Fest
10. Measure and publish impact

We hope you enjoy reading this report, in full, and - more importantly - help us advocate for real and lasting action to address the issues raised.

3. CONTEXT ('THE WHY')

Western Australia has always been an innovative state. It has had to be. For sixty thousand years or more, humans have managed to live, thrive and survive in its harsh, remote environment. How well do we tell these innovator stories?

How many students at school or university understand that they can innovate here? That they could be supported, 'find their tribe' and build successful startups?

They need to be able to see it, to believe they can do it too. Investors also need to see real returns from exits in order to be persuaded that investing in startups and innovative companies may pay off.

Western Australia has spawned Canva, Virtual Gaming Worlds (both worth multi-billions) as well as HealthEngine, DUG, Qoria and Moodle. Why are these - and many other stories - not widely known?

In the local and national press, on digital platforms and by word of mouth, stories of innovative Western Australians need to be seen and heard. To inspire the next generation, encourage existing innovators, more investment, government support and general public understanding.

Innovation is not to be feared ('*it'll take my job!*'), it is where outsized job and wealth creation abounds. It's how we will create whole new industries, diversify the local economy and solve many of the world's major problems.

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5. ABOUT STARTUPWA

Established in 2015, **StartupWA** is a not-for-profit, peak body for the startup sector in Western Australia.

It seeks to promote and advocate for the growth of the Western Australian startup ecosystem so that it is an internationally recognised, leading hub for early-stage technology and innovation companies.

StartupWA operates with a 'hands-on' 9-person board of directors, drawn from all sections of the startup community.

2025 Board members

Charlie Gunningham (Chair)
Dr Jo Hawkins (Secretary)
Patrick Jodas (Treasurer)
Kate Spencer
Josh van Ross
Lacey Filipich
Paul Robinson
Matthew Larner
Wilson Tucker

For more: www.startupwa.org
Contact: info@startupwa.org

6. METHODOLOGY

This roundtable followed the World Cafe Methodology, a proven framework used by previous StartupWA roundtables.

The discussions were held under the '*Chatham House rules*' convention, meaning that nothing said or proposed could be attributed to any individual. While the aggregate of the discussion points would be published, this would be general in nature.

International Creative Commons Attribution4 Design, 2022
http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/design-principles

7. MEETING DESIGN

The event, held at the Centre for Entrepreneurial Research Institute (CERI) in Nedlands, was structured into three parts:

Part 1: Welcome, Introduce the theme, Perspectives
After the StartupWA Chair set the context, the group heard from **Lisa O'Malley MLA** (WA government), **Toby Swingler** (CERI), **Danelle Cross** (West Tech Fest, Curtin University), and **Isabel Kasten and Britney Victor** (Meshpoints).

Part 2: Breakout groups discuss 3 main questions
42 participants split into groups to discuss the unique qualities of WA startups, the messaging that could be developed, why and how.

Part 3: Report back, Collect the ideas
The general discussions were captured on the day by note-takers, AI recordings, and then summarised on the day by a participant in each group.

8. PARTICIPANTS

Participation in the roundtable was 'invite-only', so as to ensure there was a good cross section from relevant, interested parties.

The mix of attendees included startup founders and employees, investors, marketing and media specialists, government leaders, corporate managers and executives, current and former politicians and ecosystem supporters encompassing a broad spectrum. 42 stakeholders attended in person.

Each attendee was provided with a 12-page workbook, which included a list of media and marketing outlets that were already publishing startup stories, as well as summarised research from a pre-roundtable survey.

Thanks also must go to our presenters on the day:

- **Lisa O'Malley MLA**, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Innovation
- **Toby Swingler**, CERI
- **Danelle Cross,** West Tech Fest, Curtin University
- **Isabel Kasten** and **Britney Victor**, Meshpoints

9. PRE-EVENT SURVEY

A pre-roundtable survey was conducted prior to the roundtable.

Q. How **well recognised** do you think WA's startup success stories are?

Not sure
2%

Somewhat recognised
28%

Rarely recognised
70%
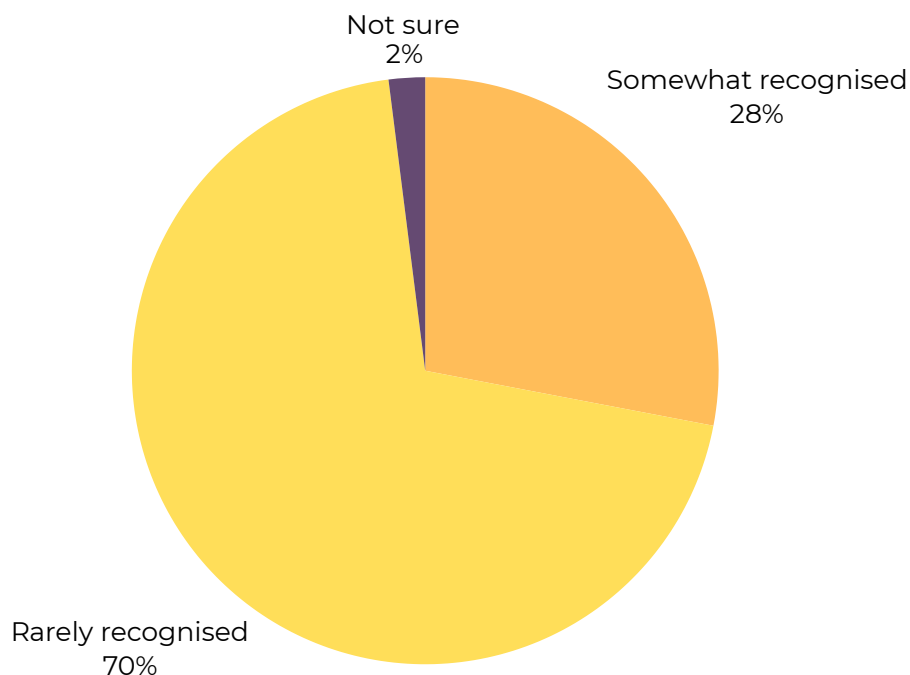
The main points from the survey were:

Challenges/Barriers

- WA a small, remote, mining city
- Over dominance of mining
- Parochial mindset
- Fragmented Communications
- Lack of national media interest
- Limited international visibility
- Overly technical messaging
- Removed from broader society
- Perception that "tech destroys jobs"
- Risk averse culture
- Too much 'innovation theatre'

Suggested Improvements

- Be clear on 'Brand WA'
- Decide the audience(s)
- More founder-focussed narratives
- Consistent, clear messaging
- Collaboration, not competition
- Connect stories to what public cares about (climate, jobs, health...)
- Register of startups, successes
- 'Flood the end zone' with great stories
- Visible startup champions
- Invite successful founders to talk

10. QUESTIONS

The following three questions were crafted based on insights gained from the survey:

1 *What are, and where are, the strengths and unique differences of our local innovators/startup successes?*

2 *What media/marketing channels are already working well? How can we leverage these? Where are the gaps, and how can we fill them?*

3 *How can we better collaborate as an ecosystem/sector to better tell the WA startup success stories?*

The cohort split into groups to discuss these questions, for 60 minutes.

Following this, everyone reconvened to hear from a spokesperson from each group reporting back on the main themes and recommendations.

11. DISCUSSION CAPTURE

Question 1 — What are, and where are, the strengths and unique differences of our local innovators/startup successes?

Area	Discussion capture
Strengths:	
Small is beautiful	• WA startup ecosystem is small, but that's also its strength - connected, collegiate and collaborative. Authentic. Grounded.
Growing	• WA has a 'can do' attitude. It always has. It's had to, for 65,000+ years. Resourceful.
Sandbox mentality	• From 'sand gropers' to 'sandbox': WA's a great place to test a solution, scale a company.
Abundance of Capital	• Western Australia has plenty of capital funds to finance our home grown startups • $1B in cash in family offices alone • Investors just need to turn their attention to the innovation and tech sector more
We do spin off unicorns	• WA can do it. Canva and VGW are testament. There's also a dozen $100M+ WA companies scaling, and many more coming along…
If you can make it here…	• WA is a microcosm; if it works here, maybe it can work anywhere?
Time Zone	• 650M consumers on our doorstep, in the same time zone, in ASEAN region. Why not use Perth as a stepping stone?
Great Lifestyle	• WA is a fantastic place to live. We attract talent from all over the world.

Question 2 - What media/marketing channels are already working well? How can we leverage these? Where are the messaging gaps, and how can we fill them?

Area	Discussion capture
Messaging:	
Mining as strength	• Attracts and retains talent • Provides good salaries, capital, customers • "Innovation built on resources" - mining tech, nature tech and related tech (defence, space, …)
West Tech Fest	• Longest running tech festival in Australia • Becoming well known, and easier to program • Market this all year around, internationally • Major focus point every December, and beyond?
Local media	• There are various existing channels that do publish startup stories: Startup News, Meshpoints, Business News, LinkedIn, podcasts… • Parochial nature of local media can be used for advantage ('local tech taking on the world')
Events space	• Events are where the 'brand meets the people' • What events are missing? • How can we tell our stories better at these events? And make story telling stronger? • Promote the WA Innovation Calendar
Promote WA's success sectors	• Health, medtech and life sciences; mining tech; agtech; space; defence …*whatever they be* - we can't win in everything, so what can WA be best at, and emphasise? • Hammer those messages, while being open to any and all startups • Bring messages back to what matters to people: prices, health, housing, crime, safety, climate change, energy, future jobs, …

Startup clarity	• Startups are not just small businesses struggling to survive and find clients; they are '**_scalable_**', that's what makes them attractive • Have a clear definitional message/campaign
Tech and Job Creation	• Half the world hear '_redundancy_' when someone says '_tech_' or '_innovation_' or '_startups_' • Need to educate these sections of the community that tech has **always** created more jobs than it has displaced; safer, well paid jobs. • Startups and innovators are also the ones that might solve our big problems in healthcare, climate and energy • Politicians need to be braver in this space; speaking positively about the sector, promoting the success stories, celebrating the wins
Educate Investors	• Investors have most likely made their money in mining or property or ASX stocks, not tech • Need ongoing education of (potential) investors, on how to invest in startups, how to get involved, on ESIC tax advantages • Workshops, training sessions • Build understanding and literacy in this area
Media Stats	• Perth has dropped 9 places in the latest Startup Blink ecosystem rating (to 192nd) • Of the last 100 stories on Startup Daily, only 7 mentioned Western Australia (28 NSW, 18 Vic, 9 Qld) • Of the last 100 stories on InnovationAus, only 2 mentioned WA (45 NSW, 25 Vic)
Who is promoting WA innovators?	• West Tech Fest • WA Innovator of the Year Awards • Startup News, Business News, Meshpoints • _Startup West_ and _Weird Growth_ podcasts

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**Western Australia's startup ecosystem already has the ingredients - trust, talent, lifestyle, authenticity and resource strength - but lacks a unifying story and consistent delivery**

Question 3 - How can we better collaborate as an ecosystem/sector to better tell the WA startup success stories?

Area	Discussion capture
Ideas:	

Be clear who the audience(s) are	- There are several, each requires a different message:
	  ◦ Startups, founders and teams
	  ◦ Investors (existing and potential)
	  ◦ Students (at school or university)
	  ◦ General public
	  ◦ Government

Have a clear message for each audience	- Inspiration for startups on the journey - Education for investors on ESIC and other advantages of investing in the sector - Showcasing young/local startups that prove you can do it in WA (for students) - Explain how startups and technology have always been the best job-creating engine (general public) - Advocate for more government action, explaining how startups help diversify the economy; showing examples from other States and countries (e.g. Singapore); plus the cost of inaction
Have Campaigns	- Time capped promotional drives, hammering these messages, one at a time
Lessons from Singapore	- Enterprise Singapore, A*Star, ACE and SGInnovate all speak the same language - Plenty of support for the ecosystem, consistent messaging, promoting high value sectors, speaking to local and international audiences - Not 'picking winners', but providing an encouraging environment to 'have a go'

Lessons from Switzerland	• A clear 'Deeptech Nation' brand • What Switzerland is known for: quality, reliability and precision • Leverages university strengths and industry links • Philanthropy mixed with corporate support • Dashboards and metrics to measure progress • Global promotions, visibility always on
Collaborate	• Among ourselves, across the various sections of the ecosystem • But also with Tech Council & Tech Advocates
Speak with one voice	• Align messaging with WA tourism campaigns ("walking on a dream", "like no other") • Be clear, jargon free and bold
Build on what makes WA unique	• WA's industrial base, research strengths, and proximity to Asia create a unique launchpad for deep-tech and applied innovation. • There's an opportunity to own niches as the '*testing grounds for the future*'.

Develop video assets	• Short form 'clip farm' segments
	• Annual short film competition
	    ○ *The journey of the startup founder*
	    ○ *How investors find investible startups*
	    ○ *The success stories*
	• It's not just about making money, tell the stories about impact, solving problems, making the world a better place, having fun places to work

Story base	• Need a central repository of startup stories • These can be spun out to media, local, national and international (rather than every startup having to do this themselves) • Look how other lobby groups do it (e.g. mining, real estate…)

"

We need to rebrand 'WA' away from 'wait awhile' to 'way ahead'

WA Innovators...	• Embody humility, practicality and grounded ambition • The identity blends local authenticity with global aspiration - approachable yet sophisticated
Diversity is strength	• Promote the various different forms of startups, in multiple categories • Celebrate the new migrant giving it a go, the female founders, those in the regions, indigenous, all types • The sector can accommodate anyone, there is more than enough room
Relatable advocates	• Students will need relatable younger role models as tech success stories • Successful business people need to publicly back startups, invest in them, sit on their boards, and talk about their successes • Politicians need to talk positively about innovation, innovators and how startups can help solve our big problems
Innovation Scorecard	• Track & measure progress, and successes • Investors need proof of returns • Focus on exits, global wins and returns on investments • Use Dealroom, Meshpoints' Innovation database
Missions and reach out	• Annual trips to all the main tech festivals: ○ March: Southstart (Adelaide) ○ May: Panathenea (Greece) ○ June: Tropical Innovation Festival (Cairns) ○ August: Something Fest (Brisbane) ○ August: SXSW Sydney ○ Oct: SWITCH (Singapore) ○ Dec: West Tech Fest (Perth) • Take startups, founders, ecosystem builders, investors, government • Be seen, make connections

" *The task ahead is to speak with one voice, tell relatable stories, and measure what matters*

Concept Idea for StartupWA T-shirt

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

If we are to move the needle, and have the local innovation sector promoted and understood better, then several things will need to happen. There is no single silver bullet. Collaboration will be key.

With this in mind, StartupWA makes the following recommendations to the State Government and ecosystem at large, many of which feed into each other:

1 | Establish a 'Story-telling advocacy' group

Create a temporary, state-funded WA Startup Working Group to boost national visibility, attract investment, and work alongside the existing advocacy body (StartupWA) with extra capacity to deploy targeted funding to coordinate WA's presence at major events, run investor roadshows and storytelling campaigns.

The group should have oversight over these 10 recommendations. Without such a group - or similar body - it is unlikely the rest of the recommendations can be implemented in a sufficient manner.

- State government initiated (and sponsored)
- StartupWA to lead, and report on progress

2 | Be clear on the audience(s)

There are five distinct audiences, and a targeted message will need to be delivered to each over time across the appropriate channels:

i)   Startups, founders and teams
ii) Investors (existing and potential)
iii) Students (at school or university)
iv) General public
v) Government

3 Have a clear, targeted message for each audience

Each audience needs to see, hear and believe a clear, distinct and separate message. For example:

i) For startups, the message might be: *"Keep going! Look at these amazing WA innovators, you are one of them!"*

ii) Investors: *"Are you missing out on startup and tech investing? Should they be an asset class you are investing in? Do you know you can get ESIC (Early Stage Innovation Company) tax advantages?"*

iii) Students: *"Yes you can work in a startup in WA, or even start one yourself! You will be supported, and it can be done from here."*

iv) General public: *"No, startups and tech do not destroy jobs; they are the best job-creating engine ever known."*

v) Government: *"Does WA want to import all its tech, or create whole new industries in WA? Is WA serious about diversifying its economy?"*

4 Develop assets

Once the messaging to various audiences is clear and agreed, various video (and other) assets need to be created.

'Clip farms' of relevant content needs creating and delivering to its various audiences. Consistently. Stories, blog posts, media articles.

5 Design campaign(s)

Develop 5 campaigns - one for each audience - which are then targeted and properly resourced.

Have clear goals for each campaign; measure their effectiveness (see Recommendation 10).

6

Ongoing collaboration activities to address issues, and promote innovators, startups and sectors

Rather than every startup trying to get its own message out, every program, ecosystem builder, corporate, university and investor trying to get their messages out... develop a means of collaborating and coordinating messages, using the elements of the ecosystem to broadcast and narrowcast.

Consistent, collaborative messaging, in set, agreed campaigns.

7

Educate startups on how to get their message out

Specific programs for startups on how to message effectively, leveraging traditional and new media.

How to identify the target audience, shape the message, use founder-driven LinkedIn storytelling, attending events, pitching, partnering with industry bodies, content marketing.

8 Educate investors as to the opportunities

Develop, promote and support angel investor training workshops, education for family offices, covering topics such as ESIC qualifications, startup valuation, how to add value, term sheets, risk assessment, due diligence and portfolio strategy.

Case studies of successes, returns to investors. Form groups of first-time angels. Centralised WA 'investor onboarding' resources.

9 Promote West Tech Fest regionally and internationally

Build on West Tech Fest's 14 years of hard work. Help support and boost this annual festival week well into the future.

For example, this annual event series could be pitched as '*Australia's premier summer tech festival*'. Unique strengths include global investors visiting WA, beachside events, investors meet founders.

10 Measure & publish impact

Choose platform(s) - such as Dealroom, Meshpoints' Innovation Database - and ensure raises, exits, returns and valuations are accurate. Publish the statistics. Create stories from the statistics.

Measure media coverage, social reach, business events and sector engagement... of all the campaigns and promotional activities, and their impact on the number of startups, new startup formation, startup longevity and investment, exits and successes.

"
We've got so many great startups and innovators in WA.
We just need to tell their stories well … again, again and again

13. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

StartupWA would like to thank CERI for hosting the event, as well as Meshpoints for its funding of the 2025/26 roundtables (there will be one more to follow in early 2026). We would also like to acknowledge the StartupWA board and all who attended, presented and contributed, as well as those that provided input into the survey and workbook.

We are grateful to the following individuals for volunteering their time to organise and run the event, and deliver this report:

- Wilson Tucker
- Charlie Gunningham
- Jo Hawkins
- Kate Spencer
- Shivani Kartik
- Paul Robinson
- Lacey Filipich
- Matthew Larner

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