



STARTUP **WA**

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2025-26

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.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



While there have been many success stories emanating from Western Australia's startup and innovation 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.

To explore these challenges and potential solutions, StartupWA hosted a roundtable on 4 November 2025, bringing together 42 participants from across the startup ecosystem. The discussion focused on barriers to recognition and the actions required to strengthen the profile of WA innovation domestically and nationally.

In addition, StartupWA hosted a roundtable on 23 July 2025, attended by 57 participants, to examine the long-standing challenges faced by WA startups in securing contracts with state government and large corporate customers. Participants represented a broad cross-section of the ecosystem, including startup founders and staff, investors, government managers, procurement specialists, Parliamentarians, corporates, universities, SMEs, and large enterprises.

The findings from both roundtables have been consolidated into separate reports and incorporated into the recommendations of this pre-budget submission, ensuring they are evidence-based and reflect the feedback from the WA startup ecosystem.

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3. 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' 10-person board of directors, drawn from all sections of the startup community.

2026 Board members

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

For more: www.startupwa.org
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4. FOREWORD

If we are to grasp the opportunities of the emerging economy, then we will only do so by attracting and retaining the best talent, creating the right conditions for these people and their organisations to thrive.

It is motivated, hard-working, creative thinking, high performing teams we will need to solve the many problems we face in the world. We live in an incredible time zone, in a state abundant in natural resources which can offer a wonderful lifestyle. Get this right, and amazing people will flock (and stay) here.

There are massive challenges lining up: the threat of cyber, the advance of AI, energy transition, climate change threats, geo political and economic uncertainties, and fracturing social inequality and cohesion.

An emerging workforce is wondering if and how they can afford to live, and what jobs are going to be around for them and their children. Meanwhile, we are faced with minimal movement in growth, productivity and real wages.

The Answer - Entrepreneurs

It is government's job to lay the foundations for entrepreneurialism to flourish (and ensure it behaves properly). It is not the government's job to do everything. Thank goodness.

Other states and countries bend over themselves backwards to boost their own emerging tech, startup and entrepreneurial sectors. They don't have the lifestyle, fresh air, space, beaches or the money. WA has all this and more.

This submission offers **real solutions**, borne from deep discussion from within the sector, and written by representatives with real, practical experience.

I commend the document to you.



Charlie Gunningham
Chair, StartupWA

5. OUR VISION

We want Western Australia to be recognised as a global hub for entrepreneurial and tech talent. We envision a future in which the value that startups bring to our economy and society is widely embraced, and where innovation, diversity and opportunity thrive.

6. OUR MISSION

To advance the startup industry in Western Australia by:

1. Increasing the visibility and understanding of the WA startup industry globally; and
2. Working with government and others, at all levels, to ensure that the interests of the startup industry are represented.

7. WHAT WE DO

- **Advocacy & Policy Influence** - Acting as a unified voice for the WA startup community: engaging with government, industry and institutions to influence both state and national policy around innovation, funding, research commercialisation and more.
- **We connect stakeholders** - startups, investors, research institutions, accelerators and more to foster collaboration and opportunity.
- **We highlight and support** promising ventures, especially those underrepresented or operating in regional and emerging domains.
- **We disseminate insights and priorities**, including our [Top 10 Priorities](#) and [published reports](#), to guide the ecosystem's direction.

8. WHY IT MATTERS

Startups are engines of innovation, jobs and resilience. By strengthening WA's startup sector, we help diversify the economy, capture new opportunities and build a future in which all Western Australians can benefit from technological progress and entrepreneurship.

9. 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 WA State Government

Storytelling

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

Procurement

11

Challenge models

The WA Government has already trialled 'Challenge' models, whereby a problem is posed that might be solved by local innovators. The \$5M Pilbara Health Challenge was one example, as are the Challenges that are being run by the newly established Greentech Innovation Hub.

CivVic Labs is the best current Australian example of this in practice, and ***our first recommendation is to fund an annual round of equivalent 'WA Lab' government challenges.***

The newly re-funded \$40M New Industries and Innovation Fund (NIIF) has additional funds that could be set aside for this.

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Target startups in procurement

Government procurement processes are, by design, risk averse and not encouraged to go for innovative, new solutions.

It is not enough to give staff 'permission' or 'encourage' them to use local solutions. Procurement operatives inside government, and corporations, need to be incentivised to seek out, and use, local innovators that could solve problems.

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Procurement Champion

As an enabler for recommendations 1 and 2, the state government should **appoint, possibly also funded from the NIIF, a 'Procurement Champion', who can work with state agencies to open up more procurement opportunities for local innovators.**

Their job will be to liaise with agencies, set up and work on Challenges, and connect local startups to opportunities. This person (or office) will report back on results achieved.

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Procurement roadshows

The government to hold **regular, accessible events, that startups can attend, where appropriate procurement processes are explained, and current opportunities are highlighted.**

These should be targeted at, and for, WA-based innovative companies. This should include opportunities that are open now, that even under current rules WA-based startups could apply for.

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Simplify material; hire more staff

One of the 2024 Parliamentary Innovation Inquiry's own recommendations was for the Western Australian Government to **"investigate ways to simplify procurement processes, including documentation and guidance material."**

This recommendation was supported by the WA government's response, and so we restate it here. In addition, hiring more procurement staff would speed up processes within government.

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Staged approach / Fast Track pathways

Raise the three tiers of procurement opportunities: a sub \$100,000 tier, then a \$100,000 to \$1M middle tier, and a \$1M+ tier.

Each tier has increasing governance: the sub \$100K is for 'direct procurement'; \$100K to \$1M (at least three quotations) and full tender governance for the \$1M+ top tier. Note: Procurement systems within the WA Government are not fully uniform. Some agencies such as Health and Police operate under distinct frameworks, while others align more closely with Treasury-led arrangements (particularly following machinery-of-government changes). Recommendations should be interpreted with this variation in mind.

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Innovation platform

Create an online innovation platform, a centralised problem register, where multiple businesses and government agencies can engage with startups, to help fund the development of new solutions.

Examples exist within the Commonwealth Bank, and the Singapore and New Zealand governments.

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Outcome-based procurement

Rather than prescribing a problem to be solved, with neat guardrails, as per the Challenges Model, here the **government would state its desired outcomes without over-prescribing specifications, reducing automatic rejection of non-conforming bids.**

This allows the government to focus on results, and innovators can be more creative as to their solution.

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Open Innovation

Another recommended model: with no recourse to any specific problem or issue, the **government invites unsolicited ideas and provides small rolling grants, assessed biannually. It is up to startups to come forward with their solutions for identified problems.**

This allows for a continuous submission of innovative proposals, rapid prototyping of promising solutions, taking the pressure off government having to identify scope-specific solutions.

Strategic approach to procurement

The WA public sector **should shift procurement from a narrow, transactional focus to a strategic, portfolio-based approach that maximises value for money, manages risk, and supports economic diversification, innovation, and local industry.**

This can be achieved by building internal capability, developing shared knowledge and market intelligence, and empowering skilled public servants to lead procurement, coordinating all elements for better performance without relying on external consultants.

“ *These initiatives don't replace traditional procurement. They add new streams, giving government space to explore different ways of engaging the market while retaining full control.*

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