



## Australia's APEC Support Program (AASP)

## CASE STUDY

### GROWING INDIGENOUS BUSINESS THROUGH TRADE (GRIT)



#### KEY POINTS

- Australia's APEC Support Project Fund (AASP) project, Growing Indigenous Business Through Trade, successfully enhanced Indigenous entrepreneurs' ability to engage in international trade through capacity-building, knowledge sharing, networking, and practical support.
- The strong focus on Indigenous women entrepreneurs ensured that diverse perspectives were incorporated throughout the project.
- Beyond building international trade capabilities in developing APEC economies, the project strengthened domestic Indigenous business networks and helped Export Council of Australia develop better relationships with Indigenous chambers while gathering market intelligence.

#### TIMELINE

The first two phases of the *Growing Indigenous Through Trade* project ran from April 2021 until March 2023, with the third phase currently underway (it began in May 2024 and is expected to be completed by December 2025). This case study focuses on the first two phases.

#### PROJECT RATIONALE

The first two phases of the project aimed to contribute to the commitment embodied in the [APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040](#) and the [APEC Aotearoa Plan of Action](#) to foster quality growth that brings palpable benefits and greater health and well-being to all, including Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs), women, and others with unrealised economic potential.

The project responded to the priorities of APEC Ministers responsible for Small and Medium Enterprises to create pathways

to growth for MSMEs, including empowering them in regional and global markets through access to global value chains and digital tools and technologies.

The project acknowledged the many benefits of Indigenous businesses engaging in international trade. By exporting their goods and services to foreign markets, Indigenous businesses can tap into new revenue streams and expand their customer base. International trade can help Indigenous businesses build resilience and adaptability in the face of changing market conditions. By engaging and networking with Indigenous business leaders from across the APEC region, Indigenous entrepreneurs can gain valuable insights that will help them grow and develop businesses.

The project provided Indigenous entrepreneurs from APEC developing economies with the resources and

support necessary to navigate the complexities of international trade, facilitating a greater contribution to the development of their communities and the growth of their economies.

## OBJECTIVES

The long-term objectives of the project were to:

1. Enhance the growth and resilience of Indigenous businesses, including increased sales, revenue, trade volumes, export readiness and market access, and improved reputation.
2. Recognise the value of policies and programs that support Indigenous businesses.
3. Strengthen the contribution of Indigenous businesses to their respective communities and economies.

## APPROACH

The project built on an initial pilot project in 2021, leading to the design of a comprehensive approach that included online training sessions, networking opportunities, and one-on-one coaching. The training sessions focused on practical elements of trading across borders, including regulations (e.g., tariffs and intellectual property rights), terminologies used in cross-border finance and logistics, and strategies for marketing internationally. Separate sessions were conducted on how to deliver a business pitch, along with peer-to-peer dialogues aimed at building new business networks.

## OUTCOMES

### Increased knowledge of global approaches to entrepreneurship

Participants noted a significant improvement in their knowledge

on topics including branding, e-commerce, logistics, financial management, intellectual property (IP) protection, and business pitching. They remarked that the information provided during group sessions and one-on-one discussions was particularly instructive.

*“I have found – through the program – that we are not alone in this journey of exporting; there is so much willingness to open up international trade in the Pacific for Indigenous businesses. It was also so wonderful to see so many amazing Indigenous-owned businesses and the diversity of what we all offer. It was an enriching experience.”*

(Anonymous Participant, Post-project survey 2023)

### Increased confidence to enact learnings

The enhanced knowledge gained from the project significantly boosted the participants' confidence. This newfound confidence was evident in their follow-up actions, including the pursuit of new ventures. For instance, some participants reported that they began developing new product offerings and targeting new customer segments. Others started exploring sustainability initiatives, such as carbon offset investments.

*“It has been interesting to be part of this group. I am discovering valuable information about our common issues and ideas, even though we are oceans apart. Now that I am with this food and beverage company, I am eager to learn how to export this type of product.”*

(Anonymous Participant, Post-project survey 2023)

### Increased access to resources and mentorship

The networking opportunities provided a platform for

## BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS

- Increased access to financing by Indigenous businesses through connections made with investors during events.
- Improved marketing skills.
- Enhanced efficiency in their supply chains.
- Increased visibility for SMEs with a presence on the Export Council of Australia's website.
- Fostered peer-to-peer networking.
- Raised the profile of Indigenous Chambers of Commerce.
- Raised the profile of databases of Indigenous suppliers and partners.

entrepreneurs to connect with fellow business owners and industry experts. Discussions among these like-minded individuals motivated them to contribute more to their communities and emphasised the importance of crafting a compelling narrative about their efforts. The exchanges offered valuable insights and opened doors for future collaboration and mentorship.

*“Apart from the new knowledge gained from speakers, what I find particularly valuable is the interaction with fellow entrepreneurs. It's inspiring to hear their stories and understand their similar experiences. I believe that the connections made with fellow participants and organisers will be beneficial for us in the future. I also look forward to exploring more topics.”*

(Anonymous Participant, Post-project survey 2023)

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## GENDER

The project achieved an excellent gender balance, with 74% of Indigenous participants being women, who were able to share common challenges and successes and help integrate gender considerations into the project. Monitoring and evaluation processes revealed that women entrepreneurs developed a strong network of support for one another. There was also evidence that many of these female entrepreneurs developed ongoing partnerships.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The selection process was sometimes delayed due to challenges in identifying candidates who spoke English or showed sufficient interest in international trade. This issue was addressed in the design of Phase III by providing economy-specific training in a range of languages and by implementing more direct domestic efforts within APEC developing economies to nurture a pool of Indigenous entrepreneurs interested in engaging in international trade.

Future iterations of this project should also assist relevant APEC economies in developing domestic initiatives that encourage and build the capacity of Indigenous entrepreneurs to conduct business on a global scale.

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## LINKS:

1. <http://www.chocolateonpurpose.com.au>
2. <https://uncle-charlies-shopfront.myshopify.com/>
3. <https://www.instagram.com/indigenousbox/p/DAPEXsHMyEJ/?hl=en>
4. <https://www.indigenousbox.ca/blogs/news?srsIid=AfmBOrcieVeyxrlwbBXbL0oWdCn13P8-fbtP-04ucrKFz8zzYug-GX>
5. <https://abrelineaincorporated.weebly.com/>

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