

Pathways to Partnership

A framework for stronger Indigenous procurement outcomes

Indigenous procurement in Australia has matured significantly over the past decade, with increasing Indigenous business participation marking an important achievement.

The next stage is not simply about engaging more Indigenous businesses but also creating the conditions for them to succeed through stronger, more enduring partnerships.

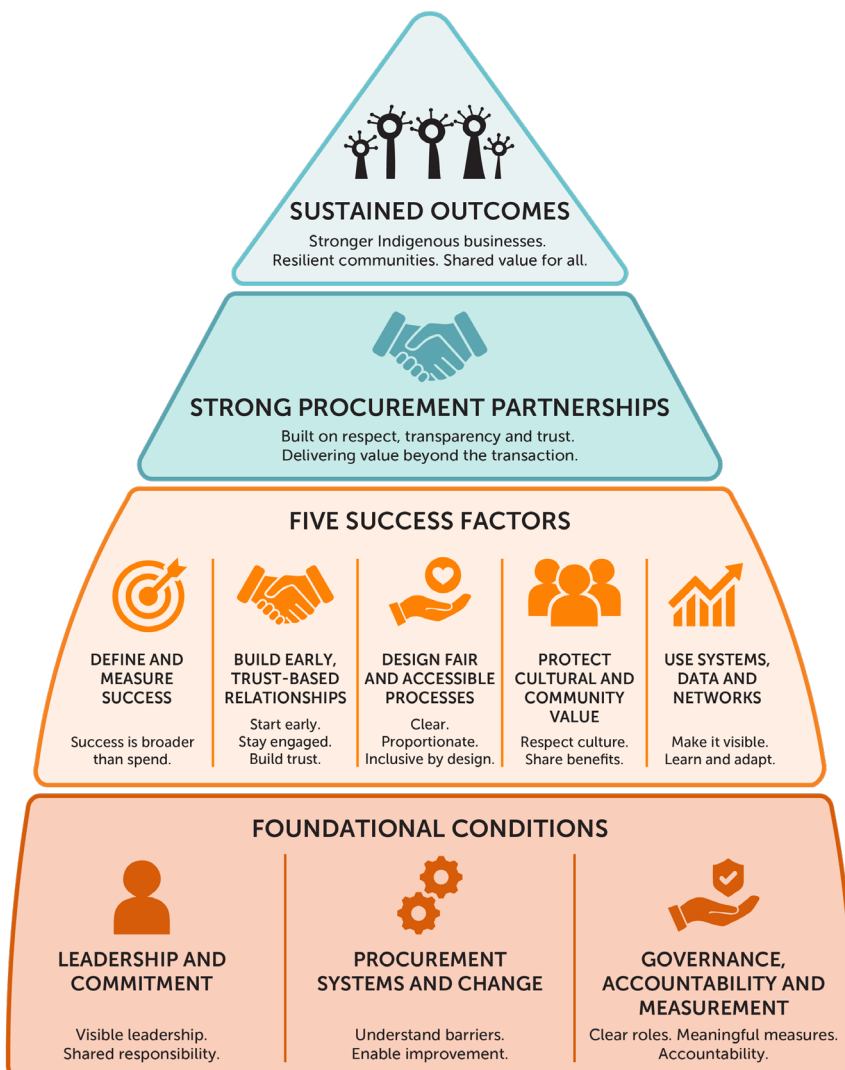
Despite this progress, policy intent, organisational commitment, support systems and day-to-day procurement practices do not always align. The Pathways to Partnership report explores how members and suppliers can bridge this gap to strengthen partnerships and create lasting value.

Drawing on research undertaken by the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education

and Research at UTS and commissioned by Supply Nation, the Pathways to Partnership report identifies the factors that underpin successful Indigenous procurement partnerships.

These findings form the basis of the Pathways to Partnership framework and supporting tools designed to help members and suppliers build stronger, more sustainable procurement partnerships.

Pathways to Partnership framework



Foundational conditions



Leadership and organisational commitment

Make Indigenous procurement a shared organisational responsibility through actionable measures that ensure capable Indigenous businesses are actively considered.



Understanding procurement systems and enabling change

Embed Indigenous participation in tenders, simplify procurement, adopt more flexible commercial approaches, support joint ventures and collaboration, strengthen buyer and supplier capability and remove barriers.



Governance, accountability and measuring success

Establish clear Indigenous procurement objectives, accountability and reporting. Require engagement of new Indigenous suppliers and embed their participation in tenders, bids and contracts.

Five success factors

Research-informed practices that suppliers and members can apply to strengthen partnerships and create lasting economic, cultural and community value.



1. Defining and measuring success

Why it matters: measures shape organisational priorities and behaviour, while quantitative data alone cannot capture the full value created.

Best practice: define success together, review it regularly and combine quantitative and qualitative measures to understand progress and outcomes.

"Quant only tells you so much of the story ... It's not the passion driver or trigger. It doesn't win the hearts and minds."

– Supply Nation member



2. Building early, trust-based relationships

Why it matters: trust enables open communication and supports collaborative problem-solving.

Best practice: build strong partnerships through early engagement, transparent communication and commitment to learning together over time.

"A majority of industry have got a certain mindset on Indigenous businesses ... it's like they nearly don't believe that you've done it."

– Supply Nation member



3. Designing fair and accessible procurement processes

Why it matters: smaller or growing Indigenous businesses can face administrative barriers that are unrelated to their ability to deliver the work.

Best practice: balance governance requirements with accessibility, transparency and supplier support.

"The government gives you this tender and it's due seven days later."

– Supply Nation member



4. Protecting cultural and community value

Why it matters: Cultural and community value is fundamental to the purpose, identity and long-term sustainability of many Indigenous businesses.

Best practice: find opportunities to help Indigenous suppliers maintain cultural integrity, strengthen communities and create lasting value.

"Building the relationships with those Elders ... that's taken a long time ... making sure that we're authentic and ... do the right thing."

– Supply Nation supplier



5. Using systems, data and networks to improve visibility

Why it matters: Indigenous businesses can lack visibility because members often rely on personal networks, referrals and existing contracts to identify suppliers.

Best practice: embed Indigenous procurement into systems and processes that support visibility, consistency and continuous improvement.

"We couldn't actually measure in our supply chain which are Aboriginal businesses or not."

– Supply Nation member

To read the full report, scan the QR code or visit supplynation.com.au

