Department of
Energy and Economic
Diversification

GOVERNMENT OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

# Expressions of Interest

## Operator for a State-Funded Innovation Hub

## - WA Digital Futures Innovation Hub

Opens - 11 September 2026

Closes – 5 November 1700 (AWST)

# Contents

On the 11 September 2026 the Hon Stephen Dawson MLC, Minister for Science and Innovation, announced the opening of an Expression of Interest (EOI) for an Operator of the WA Digital Futures Innovation Hub.

The WA Digital Futures Innovation Hub requires an Operator from 1 July 2027.

Suitably qualified and experienced Operator organisations are sought to undertake the establishment and management of, and service delivery through, the Hub over three years from commencement date via a Funding Agreement between the State Government, through the Department of Energy and Economic Diversification (DEED), and the Operator.

Respondents to the EOI should provide a clearly stated interest in operating the WA Digital Futures Innovation Hub.

# 1. WA Government's New Industries and Innovation Fund

Innovation is a key cross-sector enabler to accelerate growth of priority sectors in the State's *Made in WA* plan and *Diversify WA* economic development frameworks.

Since 2017, the State Government has made significant investment in leveraging local innovative opportunities to diversify the economy and create new jobs.

As part of the State Government's *Made in WA* plan $40 million has been committed for 2025/26 – 2028/29 to foster innovation and support the development of emerging industries in Western Australia through the New Industries and Innovation Fund (NIIF). The NIIF supports the growth of startups, emerging businesses and scaleups and the commercialisation of local innovation to strengthen the innovation ecosystem. The NIIF creates new industries to advance the development of WA's knowledge economy and to drive growth and resilience in the WA economy.

The NIIF provides support for innovation focused on areas of competitiveness and job creation, and aims to maximise leverage and co-investment opportunities in areas of strength and competitive advantage for WA.

The NIIF supports the Government's delivery of the *Western Australian Innovation Strategy*. The Strategy provides a vision for Western Australia that sets out clear goals from which to steer and prioritise efforts and benchmark performance. It provides a holistic approach to innovation that recognises the many parts that make up the innovation ecosystem.

Examples of NIIF programs include:

- Innovation Booster Grant
- Commercialisation Bridge Grant
- Innovation Pathways Program
- Sponsorships including for West Tech Fest, and
- Current innovation Hubs which focus on cyber security, data science and AI, and creative technologies.
- The new WA Digital Futures Innovation Hub

The implementation of State-funded innovation Hubs supports and assists startups, emerging businesses, and SMEs by delivering programs, services, and tailored initiatives that:

- foster collaboration to build statewide cross-sectoral capability and capacity
- develop local skills and capability
- support the development of new ideas into services and products
- accelerate the development of local innovation

The Hubs' success demonstrates how rapidly WA's thriving innovation ecosystem is evolving and demand highlights the need for future strategic refresh of existing innovation Hubs.

The new WA Digital Futures Innovation Hub, which will be funded through the NIIF, demonstrates the State Government's commitment to supporting WA's innovative startup sector. The Digital Futures Hub will be funded at $1.5 million over three years, commencing 1 July 2027.

For the purposes of this process startups:

- are engaged in deliberate activities to generate new knowledge, develop new or improved products, services, or processes, and often leverage technology to disrupt existing markets
- are usually younger than 10 years and include early-stage innovative and growth-orientated companies including deep tech ventures with longer development cycles
- are generally small in terms of employees, allowing for multidisciplinary teams during early growth
- focussing less on formal operations and more on agility, experimenting with products, markets, and business models until a scalable approach is found

## 2. WA State-Funded Innovation Hubs

A critical component of growing statewide innovation has been the service delivery through the collaborative, sector-specific state and partner-funded innovation Hubs. Hubs assist startups, emerging businesses and SMEs, including from the university sector, and are key factors in promoting innovation and resulting commercialisation across industry sectors.

The introduction of the State Government's New Industries Fund in 2017, enabled establishing State co-funded innovation Hubs in creative technologies, cyber security, data science and life sciences.

Support services delivered through innovation and/or commercialisation Hubs enable access to the latest knowledge, expertise, and technology for developing innovations relevant to their products, processes, or business models. They provide mentoring, connections with investors, assistance with applying for finance or grants, connecting researchers, users, and suppliers of innovations across the value chain, and fostering synergies between key enabling technologies. (such as AI, cybersecurity, creative technologies, biotech, advanced materials and relevant others)

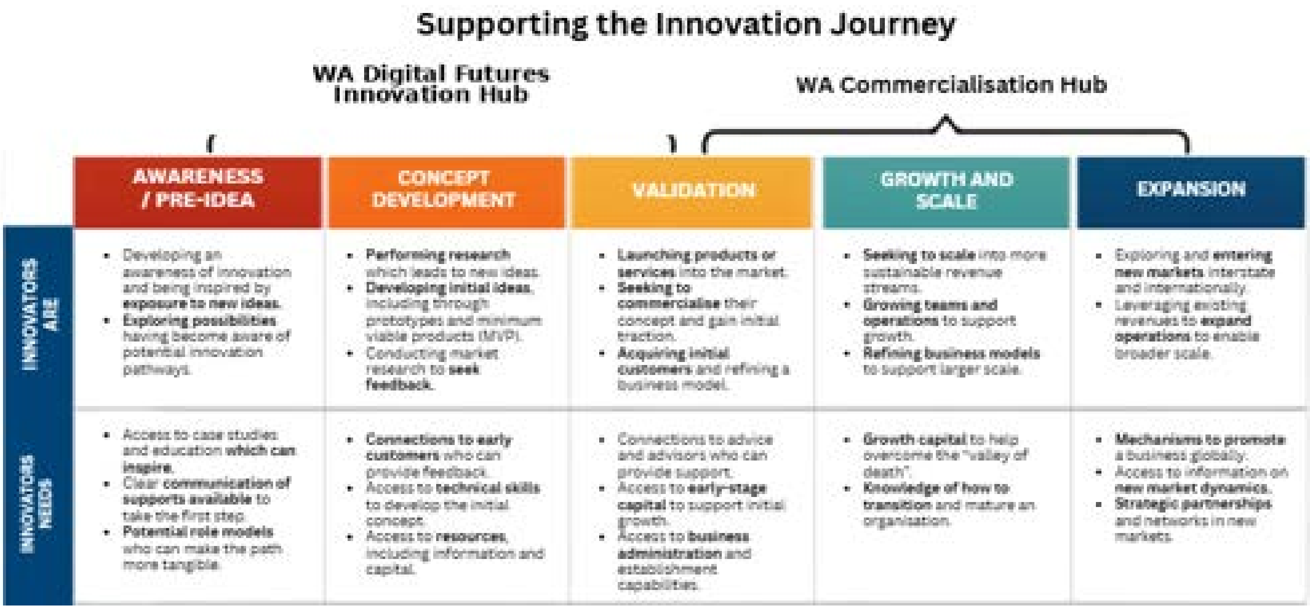
Innovation Hubs:

- Are highly client-focused, with collaboration and networking as defining characteristics
- Instil entrepreneurial thinking while remaining firmly rooted in practical business solutions
- Maintain a strong, active and accessible presence
- Have flexible business models that can adapt and evolve as circumstances, technologies, and funding regimes change
- Deliver services and support relevant to their clients' stage of business growth and scale

Mobilising investment tools and funding programmes that are available can be a challenge. Specific attention is required to the roles of industry, universities, the Commonwealth, and other funding mechanisms for combining and scaling different funding sources and investment approaches.

The Operator of the WA Digital Futures Innovation Hub will support proven early-stage innovative startups to create new scalable products, develop services, and/or business models and provide expert guidance for progression to the scaleup phase.

*Figure 1. Supporting Western Australian Innovators*




## 2.1. Innovation Hubs' Services

Innovation Hubs are accessible through multiple entry points and can offer a varied range of core services, programs and other initiatives. Specific events or services may involve a third party or platform. As such, Hub staff would not be required to provide all proposed services.

Hub services can include but are not limited to:

- Supporting startups to research, develop and test prototypes, and leverage outcomes
- Identifying and supporting repeatable and scalable business models
- Assist with validating business models' growth potential
- Testing market need/readiness
- Raising awareness of improved technologies for business
- Translating research into product development and operational improvements
- Identifying and promoting sector-specific opportunities and networks
- Strategic planning and direction setting, visioning, and strategy development
- Working with companies to assess their maturity and IP (intellectual property) awareness
- Brokering relationships with service providers and engaging stakeholders
- Providing expertise, mentoring and training
- Organising targeted events and forums, including pitch nights, educational seminars, workshops, and knowledge-exchange sessions
- Connecting with universities and other research organisations
- Assisting with successful grant and award applications (e.g., Federal programs, WA Innovators of the Year Program, Innovation Booster Grants, Commercialisation Bridge Grants, etc.)
- Enhancing educational opportunities that build cross-sectoral capability
- Enhancing awareness of and access to, existing digital infrastructure, platforms and piloting facilities.

- Contributing to statewide skills and knowledge development and foster collaboration, partnerships, and projects with other State-funded innovation Hubs, as well as with industry, researchers and government to grow potential commercialisation opportunities in WA
- Supporting businesses applying innovations at the intersection of new technologies and business processes in local markets to attract partner investment and support growth, financial viability, and sustainability.

# 3. Hub Operations

An Operator is being sought for the following State-funded innovation Hub.

## 3.1. WA Digital Futures Innovation Hub

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and related digital technologies are reshaping economies, offering major opportunities for innovation and growth, but also creating risks, such as skills gaps, data vulnerabilities, and cybersecurity threats that require coordinated, ethical, statewide responses. These challenges cannot be addressed in isolation, highlighting the need for an innovation Hub to coordinate collaboration, strengthen education and accelerate skills development across Western Australia.

The convergence of AI, data, and cybersecurity is transforming how digital systems are developed, deployed, and protected. AI-driven tools can enhance automation, threat detection, and decision-making, while robust cybersecurity frameworks ensure the integrity and trustworthiness of these systems. Together, these technologies will underpin more productive, secure, and competitive businesses across the State.

The WA Digital Futures Innovation Hub will focus on strengthening Western Australia's business capability in AI, data science, cybersecurity, and emerging technologies. By uniting the innovation ecosystem, industry, government and research partners, the Hub will support accelerated technology adoption, enhance digital resilience, and prioritise skills development, applied research, and knowledge exchange.

As digital systems take on more routine and analytical tasks, human expertise remains essential for strategic direction, ethical oversight and innovation. The Hub will also focus on skills development, applied research and knowledge exchange, offering access to tools, training and expert guidance.

By building capability and confidence across WA businesses, the Hub will support the safe, ethical, and effective use of digital technologies—strengthening and contributing to long-term economic growth.

The WA Digital Futures Innovation Hub will build capability and capacity across WA by:
- Ensuring the State remains at the forefront of the digital revolution by increasing the uptake, education, training, and awareness of AI, data science, cybersecurity and other evolving digital technologies
- Bringing together stakeholders engaged in advancing local and regional digital development
- Accelerating the adoption and development of digital capabilities across Western Australia for long-term state advantage
- Offering access to tools, frameworks, and data for developing, training, and managing AI and data science models

- Optimising the transformative potential of digital technologies to build a future-ready workforce
- Strengthening the strategic alignment of digital technologies and leverage their combined impact on the growth of other sectors
- Addressing the legal, privacy, security and ethical issues arising from the increased use of digital technologies
- Attracting investment into Western Australia to support the research, development, and commercialisation of digital technologies and services
- The Hub director attending the State-funded innovation Hubs' directors bi-monthly meetings to promote statewide cross-sectoral networks for their Hub's startups, emerging businesses, SMEs, and others.
- Delivering Statewide outreach and access pathways for supporting regional innovators and First Nations businesses

Specific events or services may involve a third party or platform. As such, Hub staff would not need to provide all proposed services.

State Government funding for the Hub is **capped at $1.5 million over a three-year period** from date of commencement**.**

# 4. Preparing an Expression of Interest

## 4.1. General Guidance

When preparing an EOI respondents should:

- Refer to Sections 1, 2 and 3 above for important information about the State's expectations and the Operator's role.
- Provide key information about the proponent organisation and its ability to support the growth of entrepreneurship and innovation across Western Australia, especially driving the startup and emerging stages of business growth.
- Describe the framework or model, including the management, operations, technical and financial capability that would ensure timely and appropriate service delivery through the Hub.
- Describe the organisation's experience, proven capability and capacity to operate an innovation Hub.
- Describe how the Hub's services, activities, outcomes and impact would be measured, evaluated and reported on, for example, propose key performance indicators for consideration.
- Describe how the Operator would collaborate with other innovation Hubs, and the broader innovation ecosystem, to identify, optimise and leverage synergies.
- Provide an outline of the personnel proposed to deliver the Hub's work.
- See Frequently Asked Questions which will be updated with new questions and answers until the EOI's closing time and date.

In developing EOIs, respondents should:

- Ensure they understand the State Government's goals and priorities in driving the WA economy and how WA entrepreneurs, innovators and innovation can and will assist.
- Include how the proposal is aligned with the State Government's objectives for the State's growth, resilience and sustainability.

The Hub's activities are to be aligned with the relevant State policies, see additional resources including:

- Diversify WA
- Future State – Accelerating Diversify WA
- Western Australia's Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Industry Information Pack
- Western Australia's Innovation Strategy
- WA's 10 Year Science Plan
- WA's Digital Industries Acceleration Strategy
- Digital Strategy for the Western Australian Government 2026-2030

## 4.2. Operator Organisational Requirements

In addition to the requirements outlined above the Operator organisation will:

- Aim to commence Hub operations at a date negotiated with DEED
- Be registered, or be eligible to register, for an Australian Business Number (ABN)
- Be a legal and solvent entity, or partnered with a legal and solvent entity, with a proven trading history for the past three financial years as accepted in their domicile (as a minimum)
- Be an established organisation with a proven track record in the service delivery of relevant business expertise
- Be an entity associated with or engaged in digital technologies
- Be an innovative provider or holder of relevant intellectual property and/or other who has a proven track record in relevant service delivery
- Be an organisation that successfully runs, or has successfully run, innovation Hubs (or similar entities) in Western Australia, or in other jurisdictions nationally or internationally
- Use an operations model that enables the Hub to function as an independent business unit, for example, as an unincorporated joint venture aligned with the Operator's organisation. The proposed model would include the Operators co-contribution/investment in Hub operations
- Locate the Hub and its director in Western Australia and ensure its State-funded budget is spent in WA (unless otherwise agreed by DEED)
- Recruit and manage an experienced Hub Director who has the demonstrated expertise and ability to deliver on the Hub's requirements
  Note: In addition to the Director, the Operator organisation will engage employees to support the director and delivery of Hub activities and services. Proposed staffing arrangements should be outlined in the EOI.

## 4.3. Funding

State Government funding for the Digital Futures Hub is capped at $1.5 million over three years. The three-year period, or term of the Funding Agreement, is from the date of commencement.

The proposed operator model should include the operator's **co-contribution or investment** in the operation of the Hub. In addition, the Hub operator is expected to actively pursue additional cash and in-kind contributions (through grants and joint ventures) and to expand partnerships in order to optimise impact and positive outcomes for the State as well as for the businesses using the Hubs services. The Operator can also attain services from separately identified fee-for-service providers.

It is expected the operator will offer entry level services and engagements free to participating businesses, but that a tiered structure of cost recovery is used for more bespoke services.

## 4.4. Assessment

The selection process, undertaken by a panel, will consider factors such as expertise, experience, capabilities, the operating model proposed and strategic alignment with State goals, with additional information sought if required.

The Assessment Criteria have been assigned a weighting (expressed in percentage terms in the table below) which indicates the relative importance of each criterion in the qualitative assessment of the Proposals.

All Proposals will be assessed against the following assessment criteria.

| Assessment Criteria | Description | Weighting |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Strategic alignment** | Ability of the Operator and any proposed partners to deliver positive outcomes, via the WA Digital Futures Innovation Hub, that align with WA Government priorities | 30% |
| **2. Demonstrated ability to grow digital technologies' capabilities and opportunities** | Extent to which the submission delivers a compelling offer to identify and grow digital futures opportunities for Western Australians through supporting:<br>a) Accelerated innovation and market opportunities<br>b) Enhanced collaboration and networking<br>c) Economic diversification, growth and job creation<br>d) Access to funding sources and investment attraction<br>e) Collaboration that enables enhanced economic impact and benefits | 30% |
| **3. Key personnel** | Capability, expertise and experience of the Key Personnel who will be involved in developing and delivering the Hub's initiatives and programs | 20% |
| **4. Implementation risk** | Demonstrated ability of the Operator to establish the WA Digital Futures Innovation Hub, and successfully deliver its services over the three-year term, describing the approach to:<br>a) Establishing the Hub/s in WA<br>b) Delivering support services for startups, emerging businesses and SMEs, and<br>c) Measuring and evaluating service delivery and outcomes<br>d) Leveraging the State's contribution<br>e) Attracting additional resources | 20% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | f) Managing free entry-level services alongside bespoke cost-recovery services<br>g) Sustaining service delivery | |

# 5. Important Information

## 5.1. Timelines

| Activity | Timeframe (Proposed) |
|---|---|
| EOI process opens for submissions | 11 Sept 2026 |
| EOI submitted, in PDF format, to | Online form |
| EOI submission deadline<br>**NOTE** - Allow sufficient time to lodge the EOI as late submissions will not be considered | 1700 (AWST) 5 Nov 2026 |
| EOI panel assessment period | Nov – Dec 2026 |
| Applicants informed of EOI outcome | January 2027 |

## 5.1. Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently asked questions are also available online on our website: New Industries Fund: WA Creative Technologies Innovation Hub - Guidelines and will be updated as relevant new questions are answered.

## 5.2. For more information

For more information, please contact innovation@deed.wa.gov.au