



**"You can't be what you  
can't see."**

**Marian Wright Edelman**

**Social Enterprise  
From security toward  
Womens' economic empowerment and recognition**

**2023- 2027**



## Queensland Social Enterprise Council

QSEC is the peak body responsible for developing a thriving social enterprise ecosystem in Queensland. We have established networks across 12 regional areas in Queensland with more than 130 women led social enterprises as members, and access to and extended network of more than 2000 enterprises and stakeholders throughout the state.

We work in concert with social entrepreneurs (individuals), social enterprise organisations, peak bodies from community services, business and industry groups, and a range of stakeholders from outside the sector, to unlock the economic and social value that is uniquely available to financially sustainable, mission-driven organisations.

We advocate for policy change at local, state, and federal levels that unlock potential for regenerative systems change, aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We are dedicated to nurturing a diverse, vibrant, innovative, and capable social enterprise sector in Queensland that is sufficiently resourced and supported to achieve quantifiable social, cultural, and environmental impact.

## Social Enterprise

Social enterprises exist to explicitly address social, cultural, or environmental problems using trading activities as a source of financial stability. Uniquely, they reinvest their profit and resourcing back into the issue they have been established to address, and strive to create lasting systems change.

## Size and scale

The Queensland social enterprise sector represents a diverse range of business models and structures including B-corps, sole traders, co-operatives, small businesses, charitable not-for-profit organisations, indigenous and cultural businesses, and placed-based organisations which provide critical localised social services.

According to the Social Enterprise Australia's latest data, there are 410 social enterprises per one million people (n Q:5.3M), therefore approximately 2,174 social enterprises in Queensland.

This equates to an estimated \$3.84 billion in total annual economic output and provides roughly 37,000 Queensland jobs. Defining the potential returns provided to communities through social enterprise activity is complex, as each social enterprise provides a wide and variable social, environmental, and cultural outcome, depending on their specific activity.

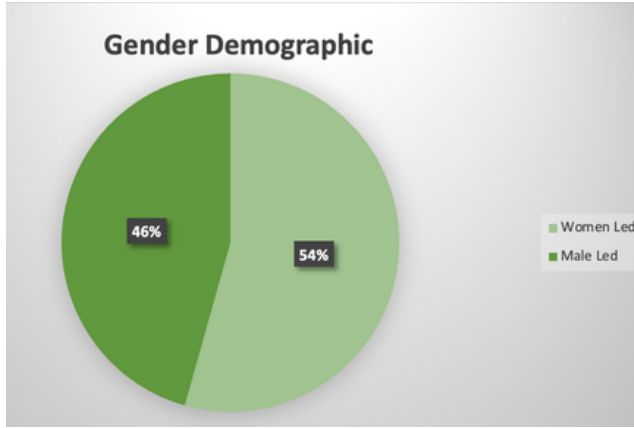
When we apply the universal 1: 3 multiplier for baseline impact returns on investment in local contexts, this equates to almost \$10 billion in economic benefit back to communities.

## Social Enterprise Australia Summary



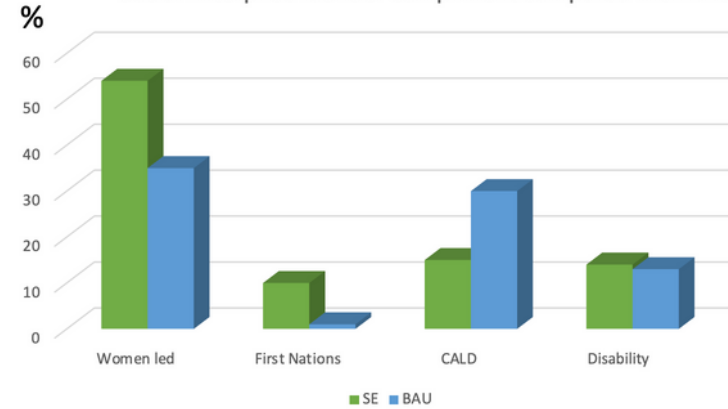
# Social Enterprise is women led

## Demographic of QSEC Founders

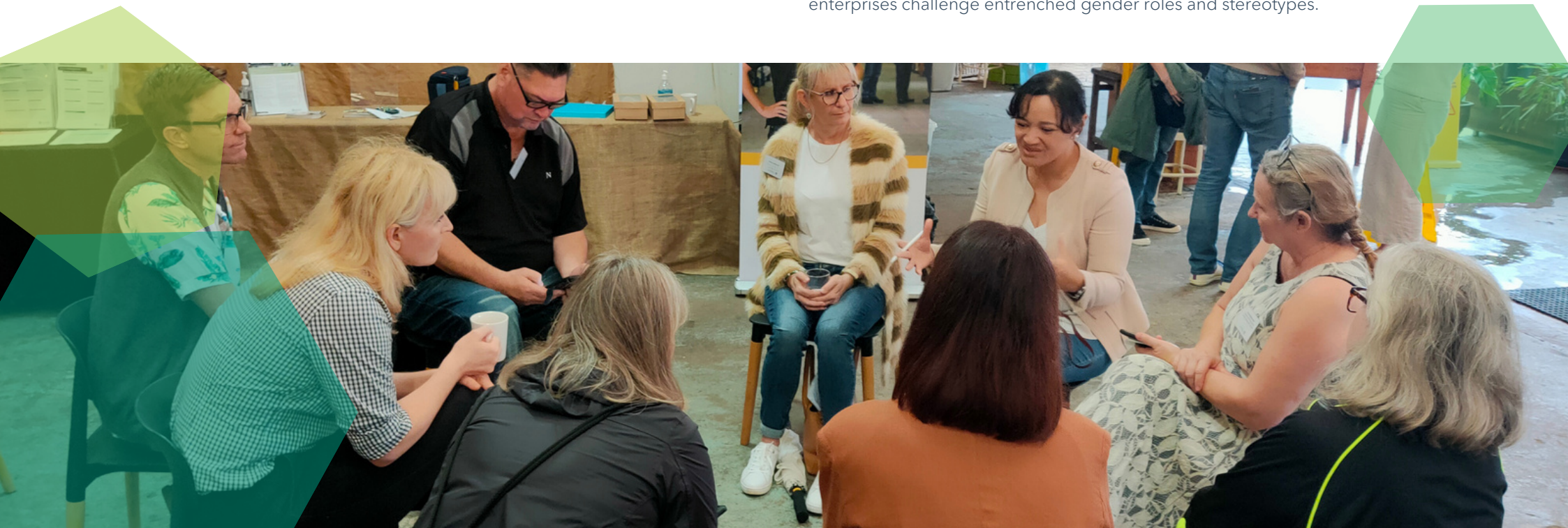


More than 54% of our members identify as female founders. Significantly, this is the reverse in the small business ecosystem (35% of female owned or led business in the business-as-usual sectors). With the recent release of Queensland's Women's Strategy, we know that the SE sector has a lot to contribute and are taking real action in creating equity, positive leadership and economic empowerment for marginalised groups.

## Social Enterprise founder compliment compared with BAU



Moreover, the social enterprise sector does its fair share of the heavy lifting when it comes to supporting an environment to promote and support economic independence of entrepreneurs from marginalised cohorts across the spectrum. Based on the QSEC member database information when compared to industry entrepreneurship data (BAU), social enterprise demonstrates a consistently diverse founder compliment. Social enterprises challenge entrenched gender roles and stereotypes.



## Women as Leaders

Findings reported in *Frontiers in Sustainability* (2022), suggest that women in leadership contributes to better outcomes in environmental and social practices. It is indicated that women have a predisposition for sharing and collaboration. In addition, women leaders exhibit complex systems thinking and have an inclusive approach to leadership. Social enterprise women leaders have the added resource of a business model through which they make change for their extended communities.



*CASE STUDY Saba Abraham: MU'OOZ restaurant is a Brisbane-based not-for-profit social enterprise and registered charity, established by Eritrean refugee women through their Eritrean Australian Women and Family Support Network (EAWFSN). Located in West End, the social enterprise serves traditional Eritrean and African cuisine and trades with the primary goal of providing employment, training and work experience opportunities for disadvantaged refugee and migrant women from new and emerging communities. Saba was recently recognised as one of Queensland's Australian of the Year Local Hero 2022*



*CASE STUDY Alana Kennedy: Ochre Sun is an Indigenous founded sunscreen manufacturer, whose products are infused with sustainably and ethically harvested Indigenous botanicals. The award winning social enterprise showcases Indigenous culture and donates a majority of profits into supporting programs such as Indigenous Social Housing, and support for victims of domestic violence, with the aim to provide employment and housing support for victims of DV.*



*CASE STUDY Yas Grigaliunas: Circonomy is innovating a new economy - one where circularity is the norm. And we do it in a way that provides life-changing opportunities for our youth and people with all abilities. We bring together leading retailers, resource recovery partners, resale channels and everyday Australians, to together give new life to still-useful things. Circonomy has recently secured \$4M through an equity raise. Yas is the current QSEC President.*



## Economic empowerment

Despite the challenges involved in starting a business, women start their own businesses to gain more flexibility, greater financial independence and do more meaningful work according to Salesforce (2021).

Shifting the narrative from economic security (provision of income, housing and jobs across social and industry areas, at increasingly higher levels of expertise and commensurate pay) to economic empowerment (developing and profiling women leaders, and reducing barriers to independence and autonomy) will require women to see role models achieving, growing, and sharing their knowledge and experience.

Despite well intentioned policies and strategies, women, however, are often left out of investment conversations and often face significant barriers to gain economic security.

Using QSEC's significant reach into women-led impact businesses, our intention is to run a series of network events alongside University Partners to unpack the multitude of issues, barriers and forge realistic solutions. This will draft an action plan to guide the future levers for systemic change in the social investment ecosystem in Queensland and unlock capital to build better impact business opportunities for women led impact business.



## Social Finance

In November 2022, a group of influential women investors and social finance experts met with the support of the Office of the Chief Entrepreneur and the Attorney General's Office for a Women's Investment Summit. The leading themes and findings addressed areas of gendered funding and support gaps, and highlighted programs and initiatives to support women's economic participation and empowerment.

*"The size of the Economic Opportunity in the Asset Class of women led businesses is unknown. This needs to be defined: additional measures include gender-based reporting of procurement, financing, grants, capital, impact, budgets and all government programs is required."*

*Monica Bradley 2022.*

With women leading the way in the impact economy, social enterprises represent a major contributing force in this asset class. Access to capital is still a significant barrier to growth for women-led small businesses, according to research conducted by the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman's (ASBFEO) office in 2022. We are mindful that gendered support is required, particularly in gaining access to social finance.



## Research

Entrepreneurship is a very powerful tool for women to gain independence and economic empowerment. However, with only 35% of women occupying leadership and business roles we know that BAU systems are failing women from all backgrounds. Social enterprise is leading the way with entrepreneurial systems which support women from a cross section of society.

There is a paucity of nuanced evidence base to support an argument for the types, scale and conditions and locations of the support for women entrepreneurs in Australia, let alone Queensland.

Specific data capture is required to understand what barriers women from a variety of backgrounds face when entering the business and social enterprise sector. Information should also be qualified to fully understand the additional barriers women from marginalised backgrounds are facing. The research should target identifying what are the levers and priority areas to progress and what timeframe is required to achieve best results.

## Proposed programs and interventions

Women's Strategy economic security commitment	Social Enterprise lever	Key target activity	Cost of Program
Using government's purchasing power to drive increased gender equality in the private sector, and encourage businesses and community organisations to do the same.	SECTOR FUNDING Social Procurement partnership	Partner with Social Traders to develop 6 x women-led social procurement network events in key industry locations. The events will be preceded by targeted activations in each of the identified areas with the aim to unlock women focused peer to peer networks, challenging gender norms and stereotypes in corporate and industry forums, and introducing women in leadership roles on both buyer and supply sides.	\$120,000 pa
Collaborating with stakeholders to address structural barriers that may impede women's success as entrepreneurs, business women and small business owners, with a particular focus on remote, rural and regional women.	SECTOR FUNDING Training and development	Partner with place-based and culturally appropriate providers to deliver 2 x "full suite face to face" accelerator programs (\$90,000 each) and 3 x mixed modal (online and in person) accelerators (\$ 50,000 each) per year targeting a total of 120 women entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds. Programs include training in building, growing and developing social enterprise models and financial literacy.  NB A particular focus will be provided to women from CALD and First Nations backgrounds, and in particular women in regional and remote communities.	\$350,000 pa
Collaborating with stakeholders to address structural barriers that may impede women's success as entrepreneurs, business women and small business owners, with a particular focus on remote, rural and regional women.	SECTOR FUNDING Research and development	a) Partner with Universities to collate the evidence required to identify structural barriers and direct priority areas for women in social enterprise, and benchmark women's leadership in social enterprise and impact sector. b) Partner with Universities to track and measure outcomes of program delivery across the life of the strategy	\$250,000 per project
Exploring ways to work in partnership with employers to increase employment opportunities for diverse women.	POTENTIAL EXTERNAL FUNDING Workforce Diversity partnerships	QSEC has tendered for the Workforce Connect Fund, and should we be successful in gaining this, QSEC will report to the Qld Govt on specific numbers of places for women from diverse backgrounds.	Dependant on results from DESBT Workforce Connect Funding

## Proposed programs and interventions

Women's Strategy economic empowerment and recognition	Social Enterprise lever	Key target activity	Cost of Program
Encouraging non-government sectors to follow the Queensland Government's lead by setting targets for women in leadership positions and women on boards.	SECTOR FUNDING Training and development	Partner with Universities to develop safe standards of practice, values and culture to support the advancement of women in the workplace and a Board/ELT training program to provide organisations with a publicly recognisable Safe Space branding asset and internal rigorous assessment for accountability. The pilot would target 9 Boards (3 x social enterprise, 3 x corporate and 3 x NFP Boards) and track their progress as as Safe Space and measure their transition to women in leadership over a two year period. The process will be documented and evaluated as case studies and business development for future advancement for broader adoption.	\$250,000 pa
Improving diversity of leadership through support, training and pathways for women to achieve in their chosen career.	SECTOR FUNDING Training and development	Partner with Universities to develop a multi modal (face to face and on online) social impact leadership program with micro credentials offered to 100 women from diverse backgrounds. Proposed products "for purpose" enterprises include: Business Planning, Strategic Comms and Marketing and Program Evaluation and Reporting (\$75,000 for each unit). Products will aim to be able to be replicated and scaled for future development as a train the trainer model and alumni, which provides longer term mentorship and access to role models and networks.	\$225,000 pa
Ensuring women's achievements are recognised and women's contributions across a range of fields are celebrated, including through award categories which recognise women's professional and unpaid contributions in organisations and the community.	EXTERNAL FUNDING Communications	Should the Government decide to commit to an awards program of this nature, with QSECs vast reach into women-led social enterprise organisations, we will commit to supporting the communications strategy, reviewing or assessment of applicants to support women in social enterprise leadership roles.	No additional cost to government
Establishing new ways of connecting Queensland women and enabling them to share experiences, learn from each other, and build support for collective action to achieve change.	QSEC FUNDING Network Development	Women's Economic Empowerment Network Strategy: Identify and establish 12 networks for women-led social and impact businesses across the state to build mentoring and network support for women in the impact sector. Provide connection, support, training and mentorship to develop the confidence and capability to a diverse range of women and in particular Indigenous and CALD communities in regional and remote areas. Regionally based women social enterprise leaders will be remunerated for their facilitation of 2 key events per year (\$120,000 pa) and \$80,000 pa for QSEC to coordinate.	\$200,000 pa

# Grant programs for consideration

Programs listed below are intended for consideration of a broader development of women in the social enterprise and impact business movement. Social enterprises often fall through the gaps in funding on both business and NFP sides, as many are a hybrid of both, and either deemed ineligible because of their trade in the NFP sector or dismissed because of their impact models as not serious businesses, by their very nature of providing profit for good. Grants which identify social enterprise in the criteria enable both business and NFP models to comfortably apply, as long as they have evidence of profit being returned to the cause they are set up to address, have Social Traders Certification and/or membership with QSEC as a social enterprise.

## Grants

*"Grants are most effective at the start-up stage. Requiring a matching contribution can be difficult for social enterprises to achieve. Grant funding should be allocated to enterprises with reasonable prospects of success. Small funding allocations to a large number of recipients is likely to be inefficient, with a likelihood of funding organisations and projects which will fail and because ideas that are likely to succeed may be underfunded. This does not mean only funding one or two organisations but establishing a cohesive filtering and selection process to allocate funds to organisations that are most likely to achieve their social and commercial goals."*  
Queensland Treasury Report 2020

## Business coaching & mentoring

Paid coaches and mentors, selected by the social entrepreneur and delivering project specific outcomes will allow women either in start up, stand up or who are ready to scale for finance the catalyst for ongoing support beyond a voluntary capacity. This mechanism would sustain both the mentor and mentee through transition times for their social enterprise business.

## FAQ development areas

- Grant writing support
- Business planning
- Theory of Change development
- Social enterprise resilience training
- Financial and legal support
- HR and legislative support
- Marketing and strategy development
- Professional Development
- Leadership training
- Cultural training
- Wellbeing support

## Social Finance Growth

1. Access to training and information re specific social finance options:
  - Micro Finance
  - Peer 2 Peer Funding
  - Govt Backed loans (i.e. QRIDA)
  - Quasi Finance
  - Crowdsourced funding
2. Support for organisations (particularly women-led) operating micro finance, social finance and capital raising platforms to support other women.
3. Support for networks emerging to connect women in impact businesses.

## Procurement

Better linkages, access and promotion for social procurement and readiness programs specifically for women in impact business and across industry. Commentary has suggested that access to procurement sources will increase reliability of income, and also enable businesses to secure investment to scale operations, and in turn increase impact delivery.

Some social enterprises have reported difficulty in managing large scale project requirements, and women face additional barriers when applying for projects in male dominated industries like construction and trades. There is genuine frustration at not being able to build capacity to address this, especially when there is no requirement for the tender body or lead contractors to adopt social procurement attributes.

A grant which provides specific training for women in social enterprises wanting to either prepare their capability statements or write the tender document will support those women aiming for economic security through procurement.



## Summary

In March 2022, the head of the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman's (ASBFEO) Bruce Bilson lamented at the barriers still facing women entrepreneurs. He mentioned in particular the lack of access to capital as one of the major drivers behind the lack of economic empowerment for women in business.

An ASBFEO survey of more than 600 Australian women-owned, women-led small businesses revealed 43% of respondents identified access to capital as a central barrier to growth.

*"By reducing headwinds and energising female enterprise there is a significant economic upside. Research by Asialink suggests boosting the number of female business owners to equal that of men, could add between \$70 billion and \$135 billion to our economy.*

*"Women's economic empowerment is key to our national recovery after an incredibly challenging couple of years." Bruce Bilson 2022*

We reiterate; with women leading the way in social enterprise, we know that the social enterprise sector has a lot to contribute and are taking real action in creating equity, positive leadership and economic empowerment for marginalised groups.

With climate action on the agenda by 2030 and the Olympics and Paralympics aiming to have real and tangible outcomes for a socially inclusive and climate positive Games by 2032, funding the social enterprise movement has never been more timely or urgent.

# Resources

Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman 2022, [Access to capital still a barrier for women-led small businesses](#)

Centre for Social Impact, 2021, Australia's Social Venture Ecosystem

New Economics Foundation, 2002, [The Money Trail: Local Multiplier \(LM3\)](#), NEF Consulting & The Countryside Agency, ISBN: 1 899407 60 X,

NIAA [Indigenous Business Factsheet 2017](#),  
[https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/ibss\\_factsheet.pdf](https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/ibss_factsheet.pdf)

Pierli G, Mumura F, Palazzi F, 2022, [Women and Leadership: How Do Women Leaders Contribute to Companies' Sustainable Choices?](#)  
Frontiers , 05 July 2022 Sustainable Organisations  
Volume 3 - 2022

Pilay D, 2021 [The \\$25 billion reason to create more opportunity for female CALD SME owners](#), Inside Small Business, 7 March 2021,

Social Enterprise Australia, 2022, [Business for Good Report](#), Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation and Impact

Queensland Government [State of Small Business Report 2019- 2020](#),

Queensland Government's [Queensland Women's Strategy 2022 - 2027](#)

Sandberg D, 2019, [When Women Lead, Firms Win](#), S&P Global, October 2019

[Women in Small Business, 2021](#), Sales Force, Marie Claire

World Economic Forum <https://www.weforum.org/>