

# EMPOWERING FIRST NATIONS-LED MUSIC BUSINESSES

## OVERVIEW

This document outlines recommendations for empowering First Nations music business leaders and supporting the development of First Nations-led music businesses, drawing from in-depth consultation with First Nations artists and industry leaders and literature review led by MusicNSW First Nations Development Coordinator Kaleena Smith. It emphasises the need for tailored, culturally safe, and sustainable initiatives that empower First Nations-led businesses, foster autonomy, and strengthen First Nations representation across the broader music ecosystem.

## COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Consultation with First Nations artists and music business leaders provided a wealth of insight into their experiences, challenges and opportunities. Key challenges raised in consultation included difficulty in building a First Nations team, securing consistent funding, tokenism in First Nations programming, a lack of cultural awareness and protocols, and barriers to participation in the mainstream music industry. Key findings revealed a clear appetite for mentorship, professional development, and financial support to address systemic barriers and enable First Nations businesses to thrive. These insights reinforce the critical role of self-determination and culturally relevant support in achieving long-term success for First Nations artists and industry professionals.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From this research, seven recommendations have been developed. These recommendations aim to address critical gaps while supporting the self-determined growth of First Nations-led music businesses. They prioritise feasibility, cultural safety, and sustainability, with a focus on long-term impact. By fostering collaboration, investing in capacity building, and amplifying the voices of First Nations artists and businesses, these recommendations provide a foundation for meaningful and enduring change within the music industry. These insights, along with continued consultation and partnerships, can assist in the development and delivery of culturally relevant, actionable programs to empower First Nations creatives and industry leaders.

The seven recommendations developed from this research are:

## **1. EXTENDED MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS**

Establish and support extended mentorship initiatives to connect emerging First Nations business leaders with experienced professionals—both First Nations and non-Indigenous—focused on holistic skills development. These programs should provide ongoing support and foster collaboration across the industry, while also addressing specific gaps, such as the representation of First Nations women in leadership roles.

## **2. TAILORED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & RESOURCES**

Deliver tailored workshops, training, and resources for First Nations business leaders, covering areas such as financial management, marketing and artist management. Initiatives like residencies for First Nations creatives, digital tools for business growth, and dedicated financial advisory services will equip First Nations entrepreneurs with the tools to succeed.

## **3. INCREASED FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES**

Implement more equitable and accessible funding programs to support First Nations-led music businesses, emphasising core operational funding in addition to project-based grants. Streamlined processes and multi-year funding options are critical to fostering sustainable growth.

## **4. IMPROVED ACCESS AND EXPOSURE FOR FIRST NATIONS-LED BUSINESSES**

Promote greater inclusion of First Nations-led businesses in mainstream spaces while challenging perceptions and biases that undervalue their contributions. Initiatives to support international market access, diverse music genres, and representation in festivals will expand opportunities for First Nations artists and businesses.

## **5. EXPAND THE POOL AND INVOLVEMENT OF FIRST NATIONS ARTISTS IN NON-INDIGENOUS SPACES**

Foster engagement and inclusion of a larger pool of diverse First Nations artists and industry workers in main arenas and non-Indigenous spaces, including First Nations music writers and photographers.

## **6. STRENGTHENED FIRST NATIONS-LED INDUSTRY NETWORKS**

Support the establishment of platforms offering centralised resources, directories, mentorship opportunities, and collaborative spaces for First Nations artists and business leaders.

## **7. CULTURAL SAFETY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

Ensure the broader music industry commits to cultural safety through comprehensive training, equitable practices, and safe spaces for First Nations artists and industry workers. Programs should prioritise long-term, outcomes-focused engagement, led by First Nations facilitators and rooted in genuine partnerships with First Nations communities.

# A VISION FOR A THRIVING SELF-DETERMINED FIRST NATIONS MUSIC SECTOR

Through this consultation, a picture of what a thriving music sector looks like for First Nations artists and business leaders began to emerge. In a world where First Nations-led music businesses flourish, participants share that they would like to see:

More First Nations-owned music businesses and First Nations people in executive leadership roles in the music industry

There are growing audiences for First Nations artists and music

Greater financial stability and support available through long-term investment in First Nations artists and music businesses

First Nations cultures are strong, visible, and respected across generations

First Nations artists and industry workers feel safe and respected within the music industry

There are high levels of collaboration across genres, platforms and artforms, and between First Nations and non-Indigenous artists and music businesses

Diverse First Nations artists and industry professionals are empowered with the skills needed to build their careers and businesses

Media and growing mainstream audiences recognise and celebrate Australia's First Nations talent, both nationally and globally

There are more First Nations artists on main stages at festivals and mainstream events

Diverse voices and genres represented in the industry and there is strong support amongst mob