

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of tree bark, showing various textures, colors (grey, brown, orange), and small holes. A solid teal rectangular block is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the title and logo.

Grant Impact Report 2025

mannifera



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Mannifera is a collective of Australian funders working together to invest in civil society organisations advocating for the systems change we need to strengthen our democracy and build an economy that works for everyone.

Mannifera members acknowledge that a history of colonisation, dispossession and disempowerment of First Nations peoples is woven into the fabric of our political and economic systems. We recognise that Australia cannot achieve a complete democracy or a fair economy without addressing this history, instating the rights and respecting the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Mannifera is committed to listening to and learning from First Nations perspectives on the state of our democracy and economy, and for these perspectives to inform our funding decisions. We are also committed to dedicating at least 20% of our grantmaking budget to First Nations-led initiatives.

Executive summary



Mannifera has been fortunate to support more than fifty organisations since we started in 2019, many with core, multi-year funding that enables them to stay the course on complex long-term advocacy strategies in rapidly changing contexts. This report shares some of the markers of change we've seen over the past year as a result of that ongoing, collaborative work.

As a collective we fund organisations working on the many layers and levers of systems-change for a fairer democracy and economy. Progress is seldom linear. In any one year some grant partners might see new opportunities coalesce and previous work bear fruit, while others may be called to fend off emerging risks, or to reorient to secure future gains.

While the positive influence of many of our partners will be clear in this report, what is shared is only part of the story. For every tangible marker of success, countless hours are spent laying the groundwork for the next step toward progress. I am delighted that part of the groundwork laid this year has been the deepening of relationships between Mannifera partners. We see them collaborating more often and more closely, and they tell us there is an increasing sense of a 'democracy sector' in Australia.

One of the things I most admire about our civil society partners is their ability to combine strategic foresight and nimbleness. They have done that in spades this last year, navigating changing Government agendas, unexpected alliances and the rapidly increasing potency of dis and misinformation in public debate. Their collective ambition has also been frustrated by the stark reality that their resourcing is far outstripped by anti-democratic actors seeking to have influence on the policy process.

Despite these challenges they've continued their tireless advocacy; building and strengthening relationships with lawmakers across the aisle, publishing original research, securing national media attention, drafting bills and amendments, convening policy forums, making submissions to government inquiries, galvanising civil society campaigns, and much more besides!

Our First Nations practice continues to grow and evolve. We share highlights of the work of our First Nations-led economic inclusion partners in the pages to follow. We are especially proud that, in the words of Mannifera advisor Adrian Appo, *'Mannifera is in many aspects implementing nation leading practice. First Nations are the centre of grant decision making and control and power has been relinquished for First Nations self-determination.'*

I want to acknowledge and thank all of our grant partners for their commitment to a fairer democracy and economy. The work you do is the reason Mannifera exists.

My deepest gratitude to every member, advisor and supporter of Mannifera for your commitment to and trust in our shared philanthropic endeavour. Mannifera is possible because of you.

Please get in touch with us if you would like more detail about the work of our partners and the ever evolving context in which they are advocating, or Mannifera's collective practice.

With best wishes,
Harriet

Harriet McCallum
Executive Officer, Mannifera





First Nations economic inclusion

In 2024, Mannifera's First Nations practice, led by our expert advisors Adrian Appo (Goreng Goreng), Liandra Gaykamanŋu (Yolŋu), Craig North (Bidjara) and Kezia Jacobs-Smith (Whadjuk Noonga), awarded grants to five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations focused on levers of economic inclusion, and enabling the enterprise networks driving the Indigenous economy.

As with previous years, there was an emphasis on resourcing First Nations women-led solutions for communities and business networks, as well as funding organisations in geographic areas overlooked by philanthropy. Highlights of the work achieved by our First Nations-led partners over the last year are as follows:

- Galiwink'u Women's Space, with a focus on empowering women on remote Elcho Island, built the capacity of their teams and developed the business case to expand their service model to other areas in East Arnhem.

- Maganda Makers Business Club brought women business-leaders from across the Kimberley region together, with a focus on the systems change needed for First Nations women to access capital and business support. Galiwinku Women's Space was invited to this business leaders camp as Maganda Makers works to develop their sector building work across Northern Australia.
- The Cape York Grassroots Corporation is responding to the needs and building the capacity of local Aboriginal Corporations, providing training and generating jobs in local Aboriginal-led tourism and cultural organisations.
- Welcome to Country has transitioned to being a First Nations-led and operated enterprise, providing a national online market place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, and developing ways to build a strong, national network of First Nations-led business supports.



Maganda Makers Goombaragin Camp



Speaking at the Philanthropy Australia conference



Cape York Grassroots Corporation

'The wheels of change are moving... we have moved from a few small one year grants to multi-year level grants. Over the four years we have deployed \$615,000 to 17 First Nations-led organisations with 6 receiving renewed or multi-year funding from Mannifera. Of these, 10 received their first ever philanthropic funding from Mannifera. These organisations are not only still in existence, but many have had significant growth.'

Adrian Appo OAM
Mannifera First Nations Adviser



Building fair tax and economic systems

The Mannifera partners leading work on fairer tax and economic systems have been working individually and collectively over the past year to build the case for key reforms. In doing so they've gained significant traction with lawmakers and in the public debate, helping to elevate intergenerational fairness and the need for a wellbeing economy from niche areas of concern to the mainstream.

The work has involved conducting research and publishing reports, drafting legislation, giving evidence to parliamentary inquiries and convening stakeholder events including the Intergenerational Fairness Summit and regular convenings of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance. They have been effectively leveraging this work to build trusted relationships with members of parliament, senior bureaucrats, members of the press and fellow civil society leaders.



Think Forward at the launch of Allegra Spender's Tax Green Paper

Markers of progress

- The Federal Aged Care Taskforce rejected the recommendation of income tax levy following Think Forward's recommendation to the Taskforce. Think Forward was also referenced 23 times in the Senate Inquiry Report on the Rental Crisis, and their tax policy recommendations were strongly reflected in Allegra Spender's Tax Green Paper.
- *The Wellbeing of Future Generations Private Members Bill* drafted by Foundations for Tomorrow was introduced to Parliament by Dr Sophie Scamps MP in February 2025 and received bipartisan support with co-sponsorship from Bridget Archer MP.
- A NSW Government report on a state wellbeing framework was strongly aligned with recommendations from the Centre for Policy Development (CPD), citing them over 60 times.



Parliamentary Group for Future Generations



Taylor Hawkins from Foundations for Tomorrow, celebrating the introduction of the Future Generations Bill to the federal parliament.

Enablers and barriers

Although the Government's appetite for major reform was dampened following the defeat of the Voice Referendum, the enthusiasm for meaningful reform among the crossbench has helped partners gain traction. All partners agreed that having a long-term, bi-partisan approach to relationship building with MPs and policymakers was essential to their successes, and that regardless of the makeup of the next Parliament the strong relationships they have built through their work will hold them in good stead to continue to make progress toward their goals.

That said, the composition of the next Parliament will matter, with some scenarios expected to be extremely favourable, and others requiring a strategic pivot to focus more strongly on levers like state-based reform and outside track campaign execution.

What expansive thinking can do for bureaucrats and budget costing processes

Department of Finance and Treasury are encouraged to lift their gaze beyond short-term costings to deliver the wellbeing of its citizens.

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Cressida Gaukroger (Image: Supplied)

Researchers from the Centre for Policy Development (CPD) are encouraging public servants within the Department of Finance and Treasury to lift their gaze beyond short-term costings to adopt more holistic perspectives to enable the wellbeing of Australians.

The big picture approach was outlined in *'Banking the benefits: Better aligning budget rules with measuring what matters'*, published last month.

Co-authored by Cressida Gaukroger and Toby Phillips, the paper invites mandarins who make decisions about policy proposals to think about how giving so-called 'second round fiscal effects' (SRFEs) more weight can lead to better wellbeing outcomes.

Image courtesy of Centre for Policy Development

Partners





Improving quality public debate



Ray Yoshida from Australian Democracy Network at Australian Parliament House

While misleading and false information has been a feature of politics for a long time, technology and social media has made dissemination at scale cheap, easy and profitable; undermining people's ability to make sense of the world, and eroding trust and social cohesion. In the wake of the 2023 referendum on a Voice to Parliament it became especially clear that dis and mis-information was undermining the ability of voters to make informed decisions about their collective future.

Mannifera responded with a dedicated grant round on dis and mis information, with funding awarded to seven organisations in 2024. Much of this funding was to resource partners to advocate for new regulation for online platforms, including advocacy on a suite of privacy reforms (Digital Rights Watch [DRW]) and the Government's dis and misinformation bill (Human Rights Law Centre [HRLC], Australian Democracy Network [ADN], Reset.Tech).

While that bill did not ultimately progress, our partners were successful in securing key amendments and feel confident that, as a result of their collective advocacy, they've increased literacy on the issues and support for reform among members of parliament across all parties.

In separate efforts, grant partners have been working to strengthen the information ecosystem through raising journalistic standards and protections (Australians for Journalists' Freedom [AJF]), holding poor practice to account (Australians for a Murdoch Royal Commission), conducting research on the drivers of dis and misinformation (ADN) and building capacity among civil society organisations, who are increasingly operating on spaces rife with misinformation (Australian Progress and ADN).

Markers of progress

- A 'parliament ready' version of the Media Freedom Bill was finalised after extensive consultation with senior figures across the law, government and media industries (AJF).
- Alice Dawkins (Reset.Tech Australia) joined the Communications Minister in some advocacy and media around the technical elements of the disinformation bill.
- Strong interest was seen from MPs from all parties in more online safety reform, including a digital duty of care following advocacy from partners including HRLC, ADN and Reset.Tech.
- A first tranche of privacy reform, including a mandate for a Children's Online Privacy Code, passed the parliament in December 2024 following advocacy from DRW.

Enablers and barriers

Through their advocacy on the misinformation bill, partners have identified significant learnings, and built relationships with members across parties who are eager for action in this space. They see potential opportunities for platform reform emerging from the independent statutory review of the Online Safety Act, with a number of recommendations aligning with their priorities, including the idea of a digital duty of care. Partners have also identified that there will be limited success if reforms are co-opted into debates about free speech.

At the same time, there are powerful countervailing forces to any efforts to combat a corrupted information environment, as dis and misinformation serve powerful interests that are highly committed to protecting and growing their influence on the public debate. A commensurate response from civil society will require significant additional resourcing in order to mobilise the electorate and give politicians the courage to push for meaningful reform.



Digital Rights Watch with the Attorney General



Alice Dawkins from Reset.Tech on Q&A

Partners





Ensuring accountable and open government

With some big wins on transparency and accountability in the early days of the 47th Parliament, progress over the past year has been mixed. Despite tireless efforts from Mannifera grant partners, a number of federal reforms were passed that did not meet the gold standard they advocated for, in most cases due to the major parties cooperating to protect their shared interests.

Two primary examples of this were the Electoral Reform Bill and the establishment of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Commission (IPSC). While there were some positive inclusions in the electoral bill, like lowering the threshold amount for declaring donations, the legislation advantages major party candidates and curtails the ability of charities to advocate. Similarly, while instituting the IPSC is in theory a positive development, the way the commission has been constructed means it is unlikely that MPs will be meaningfully sanctioned for poor behaviour, limiting its efficacy.

Despite these setbacks, there have been some significant positive developments. A number of partners also remain focused on longer-term capacity building work, like convening conversations among policy makers about the role of the public service (Australia ReMade).



Saffron Zomer (ADN) and Renee Carr (Fair Agenda)

Markers of progress

- Helen Haines MP tabled the End Pork Barrelling Bill following advocacy and support from the Centre for Public Integrity (CPI).
- The Whistleblower Protection Authority Bill was tabled with co-sponsorship from multiple members of the crossbench, following advocacy from Mannifera partners including Transparency International Australia (TIA), CPI and HRLC.
- Grata Fund assisted with two successful cases that closed major loopholes in the Federal FOI system (Cabinet exemption and Change of Minister exemption).
- A new Administrative Review Tribunal with merit based appointments was established after extensive consultation with and advocacy from CPI.
- South Australia turned a seriously deficient draft political finance bill into a country-leading example of reform, following advocacy and support from CPI and ADN.
- The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) launched the Influence Engine, which enables journalists and the public to easily search Members' Register of Interests.



TIA with Elizabeth Watson Brown MP



Rex Patrick outside the Federal Court in Adelaide, with his legal team and Grata Fund

Enablers and barriers

All partners agreed that working together strengthened their influence and efficacy, with partners coordinating strategy and dividing responsibilities on key reforms. TIA also highlighted the positive impact of their lived experience advocates, with decision makers becoming strongly aligned with TIA reform objectives after hearing from whistleblowers about their experiences.

The lack of process transparency on some bills (with the reviews happening behind closed doors or at short notice) frustrated grant partner efforts to secure critical amendments in some cases. This occurred mostly on issues where the Government and Opposition were working together to pass a reform (like the IPSC and final version of the Electoral Reform Bill).



The Centre for Public Integrity celebrates five years of advocacy

Partners



Grata Fund



Human Rights Law Centre

The Centre for Public Integrity





Fostering inclusive political participation

The advocacy of Mannifera partners has endeavoured to ‘hold the dam’ on the introduction of antidemocratic laws and practices, while also building the capacity for greater political participation among traditionally underrepresented and underresourced groups, including charities. Partners have drafted bills, brought cases, convened civil society responses to government reviews and formed national working groups to progress key reform priorities.

In the protest rights space, partners developed thought leadership and secured media coverage making the case for protest as an integral part of our democratic history and future and spotlighting the risk of proposed reforms curbing protest rights.

Markers of progress

- The Australian Human Rights Commission Amendment (Costs Protection) Bill passed the Federal Parliament (making it easier for strategic litigation to be brought) following advocacy from Grata Fund.
- A public review of the NSW anti-protest laws was secured following advocacy from grant partners including ADN and HRLC.
- Following advocacy from Equality Australia and partners, the last two remaining states – WA and NSW - passed laws to provide pathways to gender recognition, including the “Equality Act” that also reformed discriminatory laws in NSW.
- The Stronger Charities Alliance (ADN) secured key inclusions on the role of public-interest advocacy in both the Productivity Commission’s Inquiry into Philanthropy report and the Blueprint Expert Reference Group report.
- Four First Nations women were elected in the latest local government elections in Queensland.



Equality Australia advocates outside the NSW Parliament

Enablers and barriers

Leveling the playing field for political participation is challenging, long-term work. The barriers and enablers are as diverse as our partners’ advocacy approaches, many of which have been mentioned in other areas of this report. One consideration our partners must balance is when to defer to government processes in train, versus pushing hard to have their issues elevated through public advocacy. Another is balancing proactive campaigning and relationship building with defensive responses in reaction to emerging risks.

Like in other areas, a persistent challenge through all of this is resourcing; with very small teams doing their best to galvanise advocacy coalitions, yet regularly being outspent and outmaneuvered by interest groups with opposing agendas.



The Australian Progress team



ADN event with Minister Leigh



Women for Election and Turnstone Collective

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Mannifera contribution

For many of our partners, Mannifera's support has been the first or primary funding they receive for their work on the democratic and economic systems reforms they are working on.

Mannifera's civil society partners regularly describe our contribution as 'essential' or 'transformative,' noting that this goes beyond the funding we provide. This is because our support comes in many forms; leveraging our networks to help partners connect with funders, amplifying our partners' effort and expertise in our strategic communications, convening forums for our partners to connect and learn from each other, and providing counsel on fundraising approaches or collaboration opportunities.

This commitment to their success has helped us to build strong and trusting relationships with our grant partners. Mannifera staff are regularly called on to be thought partners and critical friends, helping to build a faculty for learning that informs the work of our partners alongside the evolution of Mannifera's practice and focus. As one of our grant partners recently reflected:

'The most helpful intervention from Mannifera has been the access to partners and the consequent infrastructure of collaboration that emerges.'

Mannifera also seeks to influence the broader philanthropic community, making the case for why funding democracy is so important to the many issues philanthropy funds, and sharing learnings from our practice that we hope will lift the impact of the philanthropic sector.

The more success our partners have and the more we see them collaborate, it really does feel like a 'democracy sector' is emerging in Australia. And yet their vision and capability isn't yet matched with commensurate funding. As another of our grant partners shared with us recently:


'As our national profile and reputation has grown, so has the demand for our expertise. We receive multiple calls per day from journalists, parliamentarians and their staff, but increasingly find ourselves unable to meet the demand.'

It is wonderful to see our partners gain traction and influence, and we'd like to see them resourced to make the most of this growing interest.

That's why a big focus for Mannifera over the coming year will be to bring more funders along on the journey with us, whether that's through membership, or making it easier for them to fund alongside us.

If you know anyone who may be interested in supporting these incredible leaders and their organisations, please share this report with them or encourage them to get in touch with us.

Together we can continue to build a democracy and economy that works for everyone.



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