

# National Indigenous Environmental Research Network (NIERN): Business Case Report

Resilient Landscapes Hub  
National Environmental Science Program

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Independent  
insight.



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# Executive summary

This business case explores the logic, costs and benefits of establishing and operating the National Indigenous Environmental Research Network (NIERN). The business case is confined to western reporting standards and does not intend, or claim, to capture the full impact of NIERN with respect to its benefit for Indigenous peoples nationwide.

## A note on language

Throughout this report, the term 'Indigenous' is used to refer more broadly to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia and when considering theoretical frameworks concerning colonised people globally.

This business case is not grounded in the geography of a specific place and traditional placenames have not been used. Indigenous Country is a proper noun: When referring to Indigenous relationship to Country, it is capitalised; when referring to settler relationships to country as land, it is not.

## Problem

There currently exists a gap between western and Indigenous approaches to environmental research and information across land and sea Country within Australia. NIERN is seen as a means by which this difference between western orthodox approaches to environmental research and information and Indigenous people's world views can be bridged.

NIERN will be a peak Indigenous-led organisation, connected and responsive to the Indigenous community, while also being well-positioned to engage nationally with the Australian government, State & Territory governments, independent research providers, private sector corporations and small businesses and international organisations to coordinate, integrate and amplify Indigenous environmental research needs, and act as a conduit to the broader environmental research community.

Specifically, NIERN will address:

1. The under-representation of Indigenous Australian's rights and interests in decision-making in the environmental research agenda.
2. The lack of cultural safety for Indigenous Australians in environmental scientific research; in relation to both protocols and practices.
3. The lack of two-way capacity in right-way science and Indigenous-led environmental research.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>'Two-way capacity' and 'right-way science' refers to the collaborative approaches in education and research that integrate Indigenous and Western knowledge and practices.

## Actions

NIERN's primary objectives are to a) drive the establishment and adoption of best practice principles, b) ensure environmental research is user focused, relevant, innovative and measurable, and c) deliver research outcomes that have enduring economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits for Indigenous Australians and the wider community.

To achieve this NIERN's proposed activities are summarised below; grouped into three thematic areas.

**Table 1: NIERN's proposed activities**

Leadership	Accountability	Capacity Building
Establish relationships with Indigenous peoples to determine national Indigenous environmental research priorities in relation to national / funded research priorities.	Establish authentic relationships with universities and Indigenous peoples.	Support agreement making with mutual benefits.
Conduct Australia wide engagement to inform national/ funded Indigenous environmental research priorities.	Create protocols and resources for Indigenous-led environmental research and methodologies.	Provide best practice recommendations for co-design of environmental research and method development to ensure research outputs are fit for purpose.
Champion recognition of Indigenous Knowledge as formal learning in research.	Develop evaluation frameworks for research to inform accreditation process of environmental researchers.	Provide training to improve the impact of Indigenous environmental research.
Set standards for Indigenous participation and leadership in environmental research.	Assess environmental research outcomes and provide recommendations on how to improve mutual benefit.	Foster a pipeline of talent to support succession planning in the Indigenous environmental research space.

Source: Adapted by SGS Economics and Planning from NIERN Role and Functions Overview.

## Budget estimates

Forecast costs and revenues for NIERN reflect its proposed staffing structure as an Indigenous-owned and controlled organisation. To support this analysis, costings from the operations of the Lowitja Institute in its establishment period were used as indicative administrative costs for NIERN.

It is forecasted that NIERN will cost approximately \$23.96 million to establish and operate in the first five-years, or approximately \$4.79 million per annum (Table 2).

**Table 2: Estimated costs, first 5-years.**

Costs	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Wages	\$1,290,000	\$1,330,000	\$1,360,000	\$1,390,000	\$1,430,000	<b>\$6,800,000</b>
Operating	\$3,250,000	\$3,130,000	\$3,200,000	\$3,280,000	\$3,370,000	<b>\$16,230,000</b>
Administrative	\$170,000	\$180,000	\$180,000	\$190,000	\$190,000	<b>\$910,000</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,720,000</b>	<b>\$4,630,000</b>	<b>\$4,750,000</b>	<b>\$4,870,000</b>	<b>\$4,990,000</b>	<b>\$23,960,000</b>

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

Consequently, NIERN will need to generate sufficient revenues to cover the above costs. Revenue sources will be a combination of grant funding and philanthropy (external), and self-generated revenues (internal). Two revenue scenarios have been tested, exploring different shares of external and internal revenue sources.

- **Scenario one** considers NIERN's current budget bid for \$15 million in grant funding over a five-year period. If NIERN is successful in its budget bid, this grant would represent approximately 63 per cent of the required revenue, suggesting NIERN would need to generate 37 per cent from its own sources.
- **Scenario two** considers Lowitja's revenue structure, recognising that it was funded as a CRC receiving over \$25 million in grant funding in its first five years of operation. As such, the Lowitja Institute had a much larger share of grant funding, with only 17 per cent of its revenue generated from its own sources.

In scenario one, NIERN would need to generate \$8.94 million in own source revenues to cover its costs, whereas in scenario two NIERN would need to generate \$3.98 million (Table 3).

**Table 3: Own source revenue, 5-year operation**

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Scenario one	\$1,760,000	\$1,730,000	\$1,770,000	\$1,820,000	\$1,860,000	<b>\$8,940,000</b>
Scenario two	\$780,000	\$770,000	\$790,000	\$810,000	\$830,000	<b>\$3,980,000</b>
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Scenario one	\$1,760,000	\$1,730,000	\$1,770,000	\$1,820,000	\$1,860,000	<b>\$8,940,000</b>
Scenario two	\$780,000	\$770,000	\$790,000	\$810,000	\$830,000	<b>\$3,980,000</b>

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

The estimated annual fee required per membership organisation to generate this level of internal revenue is shown in (Table 4).

It is recognised that NIERN may generate internal revenues from other sources (i.e. fee for service), but for the sake of this analysis, only membership costs have been considered.

**Table 4: Membership fees**

Number of partner organisations	Membership cost per annum, per organisation (\$)	
	Scenario one: NIERN budget bid	Scenario two: Lowitja grant structure
5	\$360,000	\$160,000
7	\$260,000	\$110,000
10	\$180,000	\$80,000

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

This information can be interpreted as:

- If NIERN is successful in its budget bid and receives \$15 million in grant funding, the organisation would need to generate over \$8.94 million in revenue over 5 years to operate sustainably.
- If NIERN only has 5 member organisations, to generate \$8.94 million in revenue it would need to charge each member \$360,000 per annum in membership fees.
- If NIERN is successful in attracting more funding, either through grant funding or philanthropy, it would not need to generate as much revenue from member organisations. The higher the external financial support, the lower the required own source revenues.
- If NIERN is able to achieve approximately 80 per cent external funding, and has 5 membership organisations initially, it would need to charge each member \$160,000 per annum to operate sustainably.
- As the number of members increases, membership fees per member reduce.

## Benefits

The suite of benefits generated by NIERN are overlapping and difficult to quantify. **At the heart of NIERN is the strengthening of Countries, Cultures, Laws, Knowledge and Wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. These benefits are central to all NIERN's activities.** This business case recognises that these core activities cannot be precisely quantified. Consequently, they have been described qualitatively, with suggestions about how some benefits may be measured or reported by NIERN.

A summary of the benefits generated by NIERN's activities are shown in Table 5.



**Table 5: Benefits generated by NIERN's activities**

Benefits	Leader-ship	Account-ability	Capacity Building
Protect and strengthen Indigenous Knowledge, Culture and Country			
Improve Indigenous people's health and wellbeing			
Align funding to priority research areas			
Resource savings			
Greater self-determination and Indigenous participation			
Innovation improvements from two-way learning and collaboration			
Reduced cultural load and increased cultural safety			
Higher quality research outcomes			
Re-affirming of Indigenous rights and data sovereignty			
Upskilling of environmental research participants			

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

NIERN's actions will generate positive benefits across a wide group of stakeholders including Indigenous research participants, non-Indigenous research participants, the wider scientific research community, the private sector, funding bodies and the wider community more generally.

## Policy alignment

From a strategic perspective, the establishment of NIERN and its envisaged benefits align with an array of policy objectives of the Commonwealth government (Table 6).

**Table 6: NIERN contribution to policy objectives**

Policy	NIERN contribution
National Environmental Science Program	<p>NIERN will contribute to delivering applied science, supporting informed decision making.</p> <p>NIERN will set the standard of the involvement of Indigenous participation fostering strong user involvement, multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional approaches to research.</p>
Indigenous Partnership in Environmental Science	<p>NIERN will be an Indigenous led and governed entity involved in the co-design of research. This will uphold and strengthen all seven principles of this policy, ensuring mutual benefit and respect, advancing implementation of ICIP and FPIC, and upskilling industry to ensure cultural safety and security.</p>
Right to Self-determination	<p>NIERN's involvement in Indigenous environmental research will lead to greater self-determination, increased opportunities for Indigenous participation and re-affirm Indigenous rights and data sovereignty. This will be an ongoing contribution ensuring that Indigenous communities are able to meet their social, cultural and economic needs.</p>
National Agreement on Closing the Gap	<p>NIERN will advance a multitude of the outcomes defined in the Agreement. This includes shared decision-making from establishing Indigenous research priorities, improving of mainstream institutions from NIERNs capacity building and knowledge brokering, and promoting Indigenous led-data from appropriate agreement making. NIERN's ongoing operations will also contribute to bridging of socio-economic outcomes by increasing employment opportunities for Indigenous people and improving social, cultural and emotional wellbeing.</p>
Indigenous Procurement Policy	<p>NIERN would be an Indigenous-led business and organisations that partner with it will be directly supporting Indigenous entrepreneurship and business and economic development.</p> <p>NIERN will also work to upskill Indigenous participants in the environmental research space, leading to greater Indigenous participation in the economy.</p>

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

## Performance monitoring

NIERN will need to monitor its ongoing performance to demonstrate to internal and external funders and stakeholder communities that it is delivering its activities and achieving its anticipated benefits.

Table 7 outlines potential performance and reporting targets for NIERN in its initial establishment and operational period. Importantly, NIERN and its Steering Committee will need to refine its performance monitoring as NIERN evolves throughout its establishment period.

**Table 7: Output performance monitoring**

Output	Metric	Example performance target
Quantity of national engagements led by NIERN	Number of engagement events/activities (#)	5 engagements per annum – one per Indigenous Knowledge broker.
Value of environmental research funding directed to Indigenous participants	Value of funding (\$)	Current level of funding grows 10% annually
Quantity of Indigenous people paid to participate in environmental research	Number of paid participants (#)	Currently level of participation grows 10% annually
Quantity of Indigenous Knowledge shared on NIERN's platform	Number of published research papers with Indigenous Knowledge (#)	4 research papers per annum – one per quarter.
Value of environmental research NIERN supports	Number of research projects NIERN is involved in (#)	10 projects per annum – two projects per Indigenous Knowledge broker.
Quantity of researchers that complete NIERN's accreditation process	Number of accredited researchers (#)	30 per annum, scaling as NIERN builds reputation.
Quantity of agreements NIERN supports in environmental research arena	Number of agreements NIERN supports (#)	10 projects per annum – all NIERN projects should have agreement making.
Number of researchers who complete NIERN's training programs	Number of training participants (#)	30 per annum, scaling as NIERN builds reputation

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Project background

Indigenous Australians have long been lobbying for greater involvement in the life cycle of environmental scientific research projects, from the design phase through to the delivery of research outputs, especially when that research occurs on land and waters, or sea Country owned or managed by Indigenous Australians.

A fundamentally important mechanism to achieving improved solutions and ultimately redressing health, economic, social, and environmental disparity is to improve the alignment, participation, and collaboration of Indigenous Australians in Australia's national environmental scientific research agenda. The impetus to act is reinforced by the importance and value of the Indigenous Estate, not only because of its spatial extent and place-based context, but also because of the untapped opportunity to bolster economic development, environmental outcomes, and social and cultural wellbeing.<sup>2</sup>

The momentum for establishing a formal network stem from a recognition of the need for stronger input and engagement by Indigenous peoples in environmental research following a series of reviews across existing national programs, significantly:

- The second decadal review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999) (EPBC)
- The desktop review of Indigenous engagement in the National Environmental Science Program (NESP)
- The establishment by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) of the Independent Reference Group for the Indigenous Rangers Program; and most significantly
- The call for proponents of the next round of the National Environmental Science Program (NESP2).

Off the back of these events, a coalition of Indigenous leaders, influencers, academics, land and sea managers and Indigenous-led organisations made a proposal to establish the National Indigenous Environmental Research Network (NIERN).

NIERN will be a peak Indigenous-led organisation, connected and responsive to the Indigenous community, while also being well-positioned to engage nationally with the Australian Government, State/Territory Governments, independent research providers and international organisations to coordinate, integrate and amplify Indigenous environmental research needs and to act as a conduit with the broader environmental research community.

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<sup>2</sup> Shields, T. & Talbot, L. et al, (2024), *Creating an Authorizing Environment to Care for Country*, Conservation Letters, <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/conl.13075>

NIERN's potential development is a National Environmental Science Program (NESP) Hub research project (Project 3.15) of the Resilient Landscape Hub, with strong alignment to project 3.2 of the Marine and Coastal Hub. As part of the NESP project funding requirement, SGS was engaged by the project lead organisation, Curtin University, to establish an early business case to assist in the advocacy for the establishment and the early operational years of NIERN.

## **1.2 Role of the business case**

The role of the business case is to identify:

- NIERN's objectives and the activities it will deliver in pursuit of these objectives
- The resources required by NIERN and estimate their annual costs over the first 5 years
- The envisaged benefits that NIERN's activities, and
- Potential monitoring metrics for NIERN's performance.

The business case helps establish an appropriate framework for sustaining an entity that serves the environmental research needs of Indigenous Australians.

The business case rests on assumptions about the structure of the entity and estimates of the costs involved, based on similar experiences in other contexts and research undertaken for other clients.

**Importantly, the business case is confined to western reporting standards and does not intend or claim to capture the full impact of NIERN with respect to its benefit for Indigenous Australians nationwide.**



## 2. Objectives, activities & resourcing

### 2.1 Problems

Given the growth of the Indigenous estate and the greater recognition of Indigenous peoples' land and water rights and interests through various mechanisms, including statutory land rights grants/transfers, native title determinations, Indigenous land use agreements and the declaration of Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs), Indigenous Australians are increasingly involved in the ownership and/or management of large tracts of lands and waters, including offshore marine estates. However, this ownership and management has not translated into influence over aspirations or research priorities on that land or sea Country.

Western orthodox approaches to environmental scientific research breaks complex systems down into independent silos, treating them as separate components. Indigenous peoples take a far more holistic approach that embraces all aspects of life, especially the relationship between people, Country and the spiritual world. Indigenous Australians are keen therefore to bridge the gap between Western and Indigenous approaches to environmental research across their land and sea Country to improve land and sea management outcomes, with NIERN seen as a means by which this difference between Western orthodox approaches to environmental research and Indigenous People's world views can be bridged.

Specifically, NIERN will address:

1. The under-representation of Indigenous Australian's rights and interests in decision-making in the environmental research agenda.
2. The lack of cultural safety in environmental scientific research; in relation to both protocols and practices.
3. The lack of two-way capacity in right-way science and Indigenous-led environmental research.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.2 Objectives

It is still the case that for the most part, national environmental research priorities are devoid of Indigenous-led aspirations and place-based research priorities. The establishment of NIERN is envisaged as a nationally based entity to facilitate the centralisation of Indigenous-led environmental research priorities, research protocols and policy settings for environmental research.<sup>4</sup>

NIERN's primary objectives are to:

- Drive the establishment and adoption of best practice principles

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<sup>3</sup>Two-way capacity' and 'right-way science' refers to the collaborative approaches in education and research that integrate Indigenous and Western knowledge and practices.

<sup>4</sup>Resilient Landscapes Hub, Research Plan 2023: Project Plans.

- Ensure environmental research is user focused, relevant, innovative and measurable, and
- Deliver outcomes that have enduring economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits for Indigenous Australians and the wider community.

NIERN's vision and objectives are set out in Table 8.

**Table 8: NIERN Strategic Plan, 2025-2028**

	Leadership	Accountability	Capacity Building
<b>Vision</b>	Indigenous knowledge and perspectives determine the direction and priorities of the environmental research agenda.	Culturally safe environmental research policies and practices protect and strengthen Indigenous rights.	Building two-way capacity in right-way science and Indigenous-led environmental research.
<b>Strategies</b>	Engage with Indigenous groups to establish national Indigenous environmental research priorities.	Create protocols and resources for Indigenous led environmental research and methodologies.	Ensure there is equal footing for both parties when entering into agreement making.
	Actively participate in national dialogues to set environmental research agenda.	Provide relationship and knowledge brokerage services between Indigenous groups, environmental researchers and private sector.	Foster a pipeline of talent to support succession planning in the Indigenous environmental research space.
	Set standards for Indigenous-led environmental research.	Develop evaluation frameworks for environmental research to inform accreditation processes of researchers.	Provide training to improve the impact of Indigenous environmental research.
			Champion recognition of Indigenous Knowledge as formal learning in environmental research.

Source: NIERN, 2024

## 2.3 Activities

NIERN's proposed activities are set out in Table 9.

In particular, NIERN will:

- Drive the establishment and adoption of best practice principles (UNDRIP/ FPIC) to ensure environmental research is user focused, relevant, innovative and measurable, and delivers outcomes that have enduring economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits.
- Ensure the environmental research paradigm is compatible with, and does not undermine, customary decision-making systems, supports collective consensus decision making processes, enhances ethical environmental research approaches and recognises the ownership of natural

resources, including land, water, biota, knowledge and Indigenous cultural and intellectual property (ICIP).

- Create efficient governance models reflecting local and regional input into environmental research needs, program design, research approaches and implementation, while supporting the subsequent evaluation of outcomes including knowledge transfer and brokerage.
- Achieve greater impact by developing environmental research priorities, approaches and partnerships that build resilience and prosperity in the Indigenous and broader community which will promote equitable benefit sharing and generate transformational opportunities that are currently being overlooked.
- Amplify the recognition, use and value of Indigenous Traditional Knowledge, traditions, customs and practice while increasing the prospects for intergeneration knowledge transfer within the Indigenous community.
- Create pathways for succession and leadership opportunities for the Indigenous environmental research sector that generates enduring employment, economic, social and cultural outcomes at a national level.

In the short to medium term, it is not intended that NIERN will undertake environmental research, but it will enable better environmental research questions, processes and outcomes across the environmental research agenda.

**Table 9: NIERN's activities**

Leadership	Accountability	Capacity Building
Establish relationships with Indigenous groups to determine national Indigenous environmental research priorities in relation to national/funded research priorities (relationship brokerage).	Establish authentic relationships with universities and Indigenous groups (relationship brokerage).	Support agreement making with mutual benefits.
Conduct Australia wide engagement to inform national/funded Indigenous environmental research priorities. (relationship brokerage).	Create protocols and resources for Indigenous-led environmental research and methodologies (knowledge brokers).	Provide best practice recommendations for co-design of research and method development to ensure research outputs are fit for purpose (knowledge brokers).
Champion recognition of Indigenous Knowledge as formal learning in research.	Develop evaluation frameworks for research to inform accreditation process of environmental researchers.	Provide training to improve the impact of environmental research.
Set standards for Indigenous participation and leadership in environmental research.	Assess environmental research outcomes and provide recommendations on how to improve mutual benefit.	Foster a pipeline of talent to support succession planning in the Indigenous environmental research space.

Source: Adapted by SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

## 2.4 Resourcing

NIERN's provisional organisational and operational structure is shown in Table 10.

The organisational structure is based on the volume of work anticipated from having 5-10 partner organisations. Suggested partner organisations come from peak entities that have contributed to establishing NIERN to date and ensure geographic coverage across Australia, including:

- Indigenous Desert Alliance (IDA)
- Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC)
- North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA)
- South Australia First Nations Sea-Country Research Alliance
- Great Barrier Reef Traditional Owner Taskforce (ReefTO)
- Aboriginal Sea Company
- National Native Title Council (NNTC)
- Sea County Alliance (SCA)
- Indigenous Salt Water Advisory Group (ISWAG)
- Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations (FVTOC)
- Martuwarra Council

**Table 10: NIERN organisational structure**

Position	Strategic function	Activities
<b>Executive officer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Deliver the Strategic Plan</li> <li>– Secure funding</li> <li>– Develop business plan to create self-sustaining organisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Active promotion of NIERN</li> <li>– Create profile and improving influence</li> <li>– Liaising with board, members and partners</li> </ul>
<b>Business manager (EA)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Business support and HR functions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Assist CEO as required</li> <li>– Provide business administration services – contract management</li> <li>– Payroll</li> </ul>
<b>Indigenous scientist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Actively participate in national dialogues to set environmental research agenda</li> <li>– Set Standards for Indigenous-led environmental research</li> <li>– Create protocols and resources for Indigenous-led research and methodologies</li> <li>– Develop evaluation frameworks for research to inform accreditation processes of researchers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Oversees Knowledge brokers</li> <li>– Develops best practice policy and processes (International, national alignment)</li> <li>– Develops prospectus of Indigenous research</li> <li>– Supports the development of Indigenous-led methods/research</li> <li>– Develops evaluations frameworks</li> </ul>
<b>Indigenous Knowledge brokers (5-10)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Engage with Indigenous groups to establish national Indigenous research priorities</li> <li>– Provide relationship and knowledge brokerage services for Indigenous groups and researchers</li> <li>– Implement evaluation frameworks for research to inform accreditation processes of researchers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Conducts on ground engagement from within member organisations to prioritise Indigenous-led research needs</li> <li>– Offers support to researchers and Indigenous practitioners</li> <li>– Conducts evaluation of research outcomes and process and shares findings</li> <li>– Inputs in national Indigenous research agenda/priorities</li> </ul>
<b>Partnerships and membership coordinator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Champion recognition of Indigenous Knowledge as formal learning in research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Recruitment of members/partners</li> <li>– Main contact for membership/partners</li> <li>– Joins up universities and members organisations</li> <li>– Influence University policies to increase per cent of Indigenous participation in research</li> </ul>



Position	Strategic function	Activities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Secures funding/grant writing</li> <li>– Oversees Comms/engagement led</li> </ul>
<b>Communications and engagement lead</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Provide training to improve the impact of research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Develops and delivers Comms and media functions</li> <li>– Manages network development</li> <li>– Develops member/ network services and products</li> <li>– Manages website content – including links to training opportunities</li> <li>– Develops bespoke training programs for members and partners</li> <li>– Webinars</li> </ul>
<b>Legal council</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Create protocols and resources for Indigenous-led research and methodologies</li> <li>– Ensure there is equal footing in agreement making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Development of best practice resources for researchers and Indigenous groups</li> <li>– Data sharing agreements</li> <li>– Research agreements</li> <li>– ICIP agreements and benefits sharing</li> <li>– Provides legal advice on agreement making</li> </ul>
<b>Project manager</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– NIERN brand and website</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Website build</li> <li>– Data management</li> <li>– Exchange platform management</li> </ul>

Source: NIERN, 2025

## 3. Budget

### 3.1 Cost estimates

Budget estimates for establishment and operation are based on the NIERN's budget submission and proposed structure as an Indigenous owned and controlled organisation. To support estimates of administrative costs, the Lowitja Institute costs, were used as indicative estimates. Appendix A provides further details on the Lowitja Institute financial analysis adopted.

NIERN's estimated costs based on the proposed organisation structure is outlined in Table 11. This structure reflects NIERN operating as an Indigenous-owned and controlled organisation, and the volume of work expected from having 5 to 10 partner organisations (as defined in Section 2.4).

**Table 11: Organisation structure and costs: Indigenous-owned and controlled organisation**

	Number of staff	Annual salary	Operating annal budget
Executive officer	1	\$220,000	\$250,000 \$100,000 for team's professional development
Business manager/ Executive Assistant	1	\$100,000	\$100,000
Indigenous Scientist	1	\$180,000	\$200,000 \$500,000 for collective engagement
Indigenous Knowledge Brokers*	5	\$90,000	\$300,000 engagement budget per position
Partnerships/ Membership Coordinator	1	\$180,000	\$150,000 travel and printing budget
Communications/ Engagement lead	1	\$85,000	\$50,000 online branding focus \$100,000 establishment cost for initial branding (not recurrent)
Legal Council	1	\$180,000	NA
Project manager	1	\$120,000	\$100,000 establishment cost for initial build (not recurrent)

Source: NIERN, 2025 \*Note: Based on NIERN's proposed structure this is the lower bound of Indigenous Knowledge Brokers.

This information has been used to estimate annual operating costs and establishing costs. The establishment costs are estimated at \$200,000 for branding and website build. Wages have been increased by 12 per cent to reflect minimum superannuation contribution as July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025. The majority of NIERN's operating costs will be allocated to wages.

Estimated administrative costs are based on the annual reports of the Lowitja Institute. In the first five years of operation, the Lowitja Institute spent on average \$200,000 on administrative costs. This equated to approximately 4.0 per cent of operating expenditures. This percentage was used to estimate administrative costs for NIERN; \$170,000 per annum.

The final budget for the first five years of operation is shown in Table 12. All costs are shown in nominal values, escalated at 2.5 per cent per annum. This assumes only 5 Indigenous Knowledge Brokers.

**Table 12: Estimated costs, 5-year operations.**

Costs	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Wages	\$1,290,000	\$1,330,000	\$1,360,000	\$1,390,000	\$1,430,000	\$6,800,000
Operating	\$3,250,000	\$3,130,000	\$3,200,000	\$3,280,000	\$3,370,000	\$16,230,000
Administrative	\$170,000	\$180,000	\$180,000	\$190,000	\$190,000	\$910,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,720,000</b>	<b>\$4,630,000</b>	<b>\$4,750,000</b>	<b>\$4,870,000</b>	<b>\$4,990,000</b>	<b>\$23,960,000</b>

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

The total estimated cost for establishing and operating NIERN as an Indigenous-owned and controlled organisation is \$23.96 million across the 5-year period. This amounts to approximately \$4.79 million per annum.

## 3.2 Cost recovery/ revenue options

Expenditure is tied to revenue and therefore it is important to consider NIERN's revenue generation, including external funding and own-source revenues, needed to cover costs.

Under the Indigenous-owned and controlled organisation structure, if NIERN is to recover its costs it needs to generate revenues of \$23.96 million in its first five years of operation (Table 13).

To understand how this revenue may be sourced, an analysis of own source revenue and grant revenue has been undertaken. This analysis can provide indicative information about NIERN's membership fees.

- **Scenario one** considers NIERN's current budget bid for \$15 million in grant funding over a five-year period. If NIERN is successful in its budget bid, this amount of funding would represent approximately 63 per cent of the estimated revenue. This suggests that NIERN would need to achieve 37 per cent of own source revenue.
- **Scenario two** considers Lowitja Institute's revenue structure recognising that it was funded as a CRC, receiving over \$25 million in grant funding in its first five years of operation. As such, the Lowitja Institute had a much larger share of grant funding, with only 17 per cent of its revenue generated from own-source revenue streams.

**Table 13: Own source revenue, 5-year operation**

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Scenario one	\$1,760,000	\$1,730,000	\$1,770,000	\$1,820,000	\$1,860,000	<b>\$8,940,000</b>
Scenario two	\$780,000	\$770,000	\$790,000	\$810,000	\$830,000	<b>\$3,980,000</b>

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

Membership fees will play a crucial role in NIERN's generation of own source revenue. As such, own-source revenue scenarios were explored against changing membership numbers. The results in Table 14 outline the estimated annual fee required per membership organisation to generate sufficient own-source revenues. It is recognised that NIERN may obtain internal revenue from other sources (i.e. fee for services), but for the sake of analysis, only membership fees have been considered.

**Table 14: Membership fees**

Number of partner organisations	Membership cost per annum, per organisation (\$)	
	Scenario one: NIERN budget bid	Scenario two: Lowitja grant structure
5	\$360,000	\$160,000
7	\$260,000	\$110,000
10	\$180,000	\$80,000

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

This information can be interpreted as:

- If NIERN is successful in its budget bid and receives \$15 million in grant funding, the organisation would need to generate over \$8.94 million in revenue over 5 years to operate sustainably.
- If NIERN only has 5 member organisations, to generate \$8.94 million in revenue it would need to charge each member \$360,000 per annum in membership fees.
- If NIERN is successful in attracting more funding, either through grant funding or philanthropy, it would not need to generate as much revenue from member organisations. The higher the external financial support, the lower the required own source revenues.
- If NIERN is able to achieve approximately 80 per cent external funding, and has 5 membership organisations initially, it would need to charge each member \$160,000 per annum to operate sustainably.

As the number of members increases, membership fees per member reduce.

## 4. Benefit generation

The suite of benefits generated by NIERN are overlapping and difficult to quantify. Consequently, they have been described qualitatively, with suggestions about how some benefits may be measured or reported by NIERN. These are suggestions that align with western reporting standards and do not intend to capture the full suite or depth of benefits NIERN's actions may bring about.

**At the heart of NIERN is the strengthening of Countries, Cultures, Laws, Knowledge and Wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. These benefits are central to all NIERN's activities.**

### 4.1 Leadership benefits

#### **Align funding to priority areas**

NIERN will establish Indigenous environmental research priorities improving the clarity and consistency of research efforts. By working with Indigenous groups and communities to clearly define Indigenous research priorities, this will ensure funding is directed to the highest priorities. This will streamline funding processes and begin to correct the lack of funding for Indigenous research priorities and processes.

This benefit can be monitored through the value of research funding directed to Indigenous research priorities.

#### **Resource savings**

Through NIERN's leadership actions, resource savings to researchers, funders and participants across the environmental research network will be generated. This benefit will be driven by reduced duplication of efforts and fast tracking of environmental research.

The benefit may be tracked by the value of research directed to Indigenous research priorities as well as financial savings from streamlined research activity.

#### **Greater self-determination and Indigenous participation**

A key component of NIERN's leadership role is to set the standards and champion the recognition of Indigenous Knowledge in the national dialogue, advancing the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in formal learning research. This will raise the platform of existing and future Indigenous researchers and rangers in the environmental research agenda, enabling greater self-determination and potentially increasing participation and/or skills/career advancement.

These benefits may be tracked through the quantity of Indigenous researchers and the quantity of Indigenous Knowledge shared through partnership agreements with NIERN.



## 4.2 Accountability benefits

### Innovation improvements from two-way learning and collaboration

Indigenous Australians have been carefully acquiring Knowledge and effectively communicating it to develop sustainable practices in every part of Australia for over 70,000 years. This is compared to non-Indigenous naturalists who have studied Australia for roughly 400 years. There is a wealth of innovative practices and improvements that western knowledge systems can learn from Indigenous Australians. NIERN's role as a relationship and knowledge broker across research projects will ensure authentic two-way collaboration and right-way learning is incorporated, generating innovative approaches to research.

These benefits will not only be realised by Indigenous peoples but also the broader community through the sharing of knowledge outside of western knowledge streams. An examples of this is research co-led with Martu elders from Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa and Dr Fiona Walsh, which:

- Combined Knowledge streams and uncovered the mystery of 'fairy circles' and their relationships with *linyji* (termites)
- Was recognised by the Australian Academy of Technological Science, receiving the Traditional Knowledge Innovation Award, demonstrating that when Indigenous knowledge is listened to, Australian and international environmental research can produce better outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

This benefit can be tracked through the value of research that NIERN supports in applying two-learning and right-way science.

### Reduced cultural load and increased cultural safety

NIERN will establish protocols and resources to certify culturally safe research practices and inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge specifically for environmental research practice. To guarantee researchers and research processes maintain these practices, NIERN will develop evaluation frameworks that will be used to accredit researchers and improve their standard of research practice.

These activities work to address the current lack of a culturally safe research environments, while also strengthening and protecting Indigenous rights. A survey conducted in 2020 of more than 1,000 Indigenous peoples found that:

- Two-thirds of respondents reported high levels of identity strain within workplaces. This was interpreted as feeling different to or not meeting expectations of the dominant culture in the workplace
- 39 per cent of respondents said they carried a burden of 'high cultural load' which increased the risk of inducing vicarious trauma.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> ATSE, (2024), *Winners of the Traditional Knowledge Innovation Award*, ATSE Awards, <https://www.atse.org.au/what-we-do/atse-awards/traditional-knowledge-innovation-award/winners-of-the-traditional-knowledge-innovation-award/>

<sup>6</sup> Siversten, N., Ryder, C & Johnson, T., (2023), *First Nations people often take on 'cultural load' in their workplaces. Employers need to ease this burden*, The Conversation, <https://theconversation.com/first-nations-people-often-take-on-the-cultural-load-in-their-workplaces-employers-need-to-ease-this-burden-193858>

NIERN's brokerage role in environmental research will ensure Indigenous peoples participating in or entering the environmental research network, experience higher personal safety and wellbeing from culturally safe spaces. This can generate economic benefits of reduced mental health costs, lower staff turnover and higher productivity.

### **Higher quality research outcomes**

As a whole, it is expected that the environmental research outcomes associated with NIERN will be of higher quality and more fit for purpose, stemming from increased innovation and safer research environments.

NIERN may monitor the impact of its accountability actions through the number of researchers that are accredited through NIERN as well as the value of research that NIERN supports in its brokerage capacity.

## **4.3 Capacity building benefits**

### **Re-affirm Indigenous rights and data sovereignty**

NIERN will support agreement making processes to ensure there is mutual benefit for all involved in the research process. Appropriate agreement making processes will guarantee there is fundamental recognition, inclusion and economic opportunity for Indigenous peoples in research projects. This will work to re-affirm Indigenous rights as advanced through the Nagoya Protocol and via the FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable) and CARE (collective benefits, authority to control, responsibility, ethics) principles of Indigenous data sovereignty. This is also recognised as a crucial principle in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Appropriate agreement making will also work to advance the implementation of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), and Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). Advancing ICIP will reduce the legal misappropriation, economic loss and cultural harm to Indigenous peoples. The Australian Government recently acknowledged the potential of improvements to ICIP as a pathway for economic self-determination ensuring that Cultural and Traditional Knowledge are legally and adequately protected.<sup>7</sup>

NIERN can track its contribution in this space through the quantity of agreements supported.

### **Upskilling of environmental research participants**

Within NIERN's capacity building role it will provide training and best practice advice on research co-design and methods, working to upskill the environmental research industry as a whole while also

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<sup>7</sup> Parliament of Australia, (2024), *Inquiry into economic self-determination and opportunities for First Nation Australians*, [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Joint/Aboriginal\\_and\\_Torres\\_Strait\\_Islander\\_Affairs/Economicself-determinati/Report/Chapter\\_5\\_-\\_The\\_commercial\\_opportunity\\_of\\_protecting\\_Indigenous\\_Cultural\\_and\\_Intellectual\\_Prope](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Aboriginal_and_Torres_Strait_Islander_Affairs/Economicself-determinati/Report/Chapter_5_-_The_commercial_opportunity_of_protecting_Indigenous_Cultural_and_Intellectual_Prope)

supporting a pipeline of talent. This will build the capacity of all involved in environmental research leading to higher quality research outputs and environmental outcomes in the long term.

NIERN can track this benefit through the quantity of training graduates involved with NIERN.

## 4.4 Benefits aligned with activities

A summary list of benefits against NIERN's activities is shown in Table 15. This recognises that NIERN's work is multifaceted and that benefits will be generated from a range of activities.

**Table 15: Benefit summary**

Benefits	Leader-ship	Account-ability	Capacity Building
(A) Protect and strengthen Indigenous Knowledge, Culture and Country			
(B) Improve Indigenous people's health and wellbeing			
(C) Align funding to priority areas			
(D) Resource savings			
(E) Greater self-determination and Indigenous participation			
(F) Innovation improvements from two-way learning and collaboration			
(G) Reduced cultural load and increased cultural safety			
(H) Higher quality research outcomes			
(I) Re-affirm Indigenous rights and data sovereignty			
(J) Upskilling of environmental research participants			

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

## 4.5 Benefit realisation

The benefits generated by NIERN will be experienced by a range of beneficiaries.

Table 16 maps benefits generated by NIERN to beneficiaries. Colour shading represents the level of benefit for each group of beneficiaries, with darker boxes indicating that the benefit is most significant for that group. Lighter boxes represent a benefit that still applies, but to a lesser extent, showing that while the benefit is present it is not as pronounced or critical for the beneficiary.

An example of how to interpret this work is as follows: the improvement of Indigenous people's health and wellbeing will primarily be realised by the Indigenous research community and broader indigenous community. However, non-Indigenous researchers and community members will also recognise this as a benefit, even though they are not the primary beneficiary.

**Table 16: Benefit realisation**

Benefit	Indigenous research community	Non-Indigenous research community	Indigenous community	Non-Indigenous community
(A) Protect and strengthen Indigenous Knowledge, Culture and Country				
(B) Improve Indigenous people's health and wellbeing				
(C) Align funding to priority areas				
(D) Resource savings				
(E) Greater self-determination and Indigenous participation				
(F) Innovation improvements from two-way learning and collaboration				
(G) Reduced cultural load and increased cultural safety				
(H) Higher quality research outcomes				
(I) Re-affirm Indigenous rights and data sovereignty				
(J) Upskilling of environmental research participants				

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

## 5. Policy alignment

The Commonwealth Government has a long-term commitment to the funding of environment and climate research dating back to 1989 with the Australian Climate Change Science Program (ACCSP) which ran until 2016, and the National Environmental Research Program which ran from 2010 to 2014 and was the precursor to the first iteration of the National Environmental Science Program (NESP) which ran from 2014 to 2020. Established in 2014, the scope of NESP is to deliver applied environment science, particularly focused on biodiversity and climate systems research to inform Australian decision makers.

As the first iteration of NESP was drawing to a close a review of Indigenous engagement in the program was undertaken. It was found that project involvement of Indigenous peoples was not a requirement of NESP 1, nor that the NESP Hubs were specifically required to identify Indigenous environmental or climate science research priorities. Most of the NESP Hub research projects that involved Indigenous peoples, and their Countries were not necessarily initiated by Indigenous peoples as a reflection of their needs per se, but rather were initiated by other end-users or the research project arose from NESP Hub or end-user priorities. Only a handful of projects were led by Indigenous people and less than 30 projects were genuinely co-designed and co-produced from start to finish.<sup>8</sup> This review was instrumental in the design of NESP 2, which has an enhanced focus on Indigenous engagement in environmental science and research capability amongst researchers, end-users and Indigenous Australians.

This resulted in the establishment of the Indigenous Partnerships Principles as an integral part of the National Environmental Science Program.<sup>9</sup> The seven principles must be applied across all NESP research and are based on the AIATSIS code for ethical research, with which all NESP research must comply. The principles include:

- Respect and mutual benefit
- Right to Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property
- Cultural Security & Cultural Safety
- Co-designed Research
- Indigenous-led governance
- Relationships-focused
- Individual approach

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<sup>8</sup> SGS Economics and Planning, (2020), *Desk-top review of Indigenous Engagement in the National Environmental Science Program*, <https://sgsep.com.au/projects/desk-top-review-of-indigenous-engagement-in-the-national-environmental-science-program>

<sup>9</sup> Australian Government, (2021), *Indigenous Partnership Principles: National Environmental Science Program*, <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/nesp-indigenous-partnerships-principles.pdf>



The Commonwealth has also committed to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the National Agreement). The objective of this Agreement is to overcome the entrenched inequality faced by too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people so that their life outcomes are equal to all Australians.<sup>10</sup> The outcomes of the policy are:

- Shared decision-making
- Building the community-controlled sector
- Improving mainstream institutions
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led data
- Socio-economic outcomes.

While there are no specific socio-economic targets in the National Agreement in relation to Indigenous environmental research, benefits generated by NIERN are consistent with the overall objectives and outcomes of the National Agreement. This includes key socio-economic outcomes of increasing the proportion of Indigenous people who are in employment, education or training as well as improvements to social and emotional wellbeing.

Self-determination is an integral component to the National Agreement. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) enshrines the principles of self-determination and free, prior and informed consent as fundamental human rights which are inextricably linked.<sup>11</sup> Article 3 provides that: *Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.* UNDRIP was endorsed by Australia in 2009 and while the Declaration is not a direct source of law, it nevertheless carries considerable normative weight and legitimacy for several reasons: it was adopted by the UN General Assembly; it was compiled in consultation with, and with the support of, Indigenous peoples worldwide; and it reflects an important level of consensus at the global level about the content of Indigenous peoples' rights.<sup>12</sup>

The Commonwealth has also maintained a longstanding commitment to increasing Indigenous participation through its Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP), established in 2015. The primary purpose of the IPP is to stimulate Indigenous entrepreneurship, business and economic development and provide more opportunities to participate in the economy.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Australian Government, (n.d.), *Closing the Gap: Objectives and outcomes*, <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/national-agreement-closing-the-gap/3-objective-and-outcomes>

<sup>11</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, (n.d.), *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-people>

<sup>12</sup> Wensing, E. (2021) 'Indigenous peoples' human rights, self-determination and local governance' – Part 1. *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance*. 24: 98-123, <https://doi.org/10.5130/cjlg.vi24.7779>

<sup>13</sup> National Indigenous Australian Agency, (n.d.), *Indigenous Procurement Policy*, Australian Government, <https://www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/employment-and-economic-development/indigenous-procurement-policy-ipp>

The table overleaf summarises how NIERN's activities and benefits align with stated policy objectives of the Commonwealth Government.

The benefits are coded as follows:

- (A) Protect and strengthen Indigenous Knowledge, Culture and Country
- (B) Improve Indigenous people's health and wellbeing
- (C) Align funding to priorities areas
- (D) Resource savings
- (E) Greater self-determination and Indigenous participation
- (F) Innovation improvements form two-way learning and collaboration
- (G) Reduced cultural load and increased cultural safety
- (H) Higher quality research outcomes
- (I) Re-affirm Indigenous rights and data sovereignty
- (J) Upskilling of environmental research participants.

**Table 17: NIERN's contribution to policy objectives**

Strategy	Key policy objectives	Project benefits									
		(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)	(H)	(I)	(J)
National Environmental Science Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deliver applied science to support environment decision making</li> <li>- Strong user involvement, multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional approach to research</li> <li>- Increased focus on Indigenous participation</li> </ul>										
Indigenous Partnerships in Environmental Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ICIP, FPIC</li> <li>- Cultural safety and security</li> <li>- Co-designed research with respect and mutual benefit</li> <li>- Indigenous-led governance</li> </ul>										
Right to Self-determination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All peoples have the right of self-determination</li> <li>- All peoples have the right to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development</li> </ul>										
National Agreement on Closing the Gap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shared decision-making</li> <li>- Building the community-controlled sector</li> <li>- Improving mainstream institutions</li> <li>- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led data</li> <li>- Equal socio-economic outcomes</li> </ul>										
Indigenous Procurement Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stimulate Indigenous entrepreneurship, business and economic development</li> <li>- Provide more opportunities for Indigenous peoples to participate in the economy</li> </ul>										

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

## 6. Performance monitoring

NIERN will need to monitor its performance in line with traditional business case requirements. Table 18 outlines potential performance and reporting targets for NIERN over its short to medium operating period. These are not proposed to capture the full benefit or suite of actions NIERN is involved in. Instead, they are reporting metrics recognised within western reporting frameworks.

Importantly, NIERN and its Steering Committee will need to refine its performance monitoring as NIERN evolves over time.

**Table 18: Output performance monitoring**

Output	Metric	Example performance target
Quantity of national engagements led by NIERN	Number of engagement events/activities (#)	5 engagements per annum – one per Indigenous Knowledge broker.
Value of environmental research funding directed to Indigenous participants	Value of funding (\$)	Current level of funding grows 10% annually
Quantity of Indigenous people paid to participate in environmental research	Number of paid participants (#)	Currently level of participation grows 10% annually
Quantity of Indigenous Knowledge shared on NIERN's platform	Number of published research papers with Indigenous Knowledge (#)	4 research papers per annum – one per quarter.
Value of environmental research NIERN supports	Number of research projects NIERN is involved in (#)	10 projects per annum – two projects per Indigenous Knowledge broker.
Quantity of researchers that complete NIERN's accreditation process	Number of accredited researchers (#)	30 per annum, scaling as NIERN builds reputation.
Quantity of agreements NIERN supports in environmental research arena	Number of agreements NIERN supports (#)	10 projects per annum – all NIERN projects should have agreement making.
Number of researchers who complete NIERN's training programs	Number of training participants (#)	30 per annum, scaling as NIERN builds reputation

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

# Appendix A: Lowitja Cost estimates

Table 19 breaks down the financial analysis around the Lowitja Institute. Values highlighted with blue cells are key assumptions used for the budget estimates of NIERN.

**Table 19: Lowitja Institute Financial Statement**

Expenditure						
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Average
Operating incl. wages	\$6,060,000	\$5,730,000	\$7,110,000	\$3,300,000	\$3,870,000	\$5,214,000
Administration	\$230,000	\$220,000	\$280,000	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$206,000
Other expenses	\$30,000	\$40,000	\$20,000	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$34,000
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>\$6,320,000</b>	<b>\$5,990,000</b>	<b>\$7,410,000</b>	<b>\$3,490,000</b>	<b>\$4,060,000</b>	<b>\$5,454,000</b>
Operating expense ratio	85%	88%	169%	81%	94%	90%
Administrative expenditure as share of opex. (%)	3.85%	3.82%	3.87%	4.60%	3.90%	4.01%
Revenue						
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Average
Grant revenue	\$6,030,000	\$5,340,000	\$3,330,000	\$3,230,000	\$3,250,000	\$4,236,000
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>\$6,980,000</b>	<b>\$6,300,000</b>	<b>\$4,050,000</b>	<b>\$3,950,000</b>	<b>\$3,960,000</b>	<b>\$5,048,000</b>
Percentage grant revenue (%)	86%	85%	82%	82%	82%	87%

Source: Lowitja Institute Financial Reports, 2013-2017

# Appendix B: NIERN hosted by another organisation

NIERN under a scaled back structure and hosted by another organisation, rather than an Aboriginal owned and controlled organisation, has been modelled to illustrate potential cost reductions. How NIERN would be resourced under these arrangements is shown in Table 20.

**Table 20: Organisation structure and costs, hosted and scaled back organisation**

	Number of staff	Annual salary	Operating annal budget
Executive officer	1	\$180,000	\$250,000
Indigenous Scientist	1	\$120,000	
Indigenous Knowledge Brokers*	3	\$90,000	\$150,000 engagement budget per position
Legal Council	0	NA	\$100,000

Source: NIERN, 2025

Please refer to the NIERN Governance Report (SGS Economics and Planning, April 2025) for additional information on these different Governance structure arrangements.

Estimated operating costs over the first 5 years of NIERN being scaled back and hosted by another organisation are shown in Table 21.

**Table 21: Estimated costs, 5-year operations, hosted and scaled back organisation**

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Wages	\$440,000	\$450,000	\$460,000	\$470,000	\$480,000	\$2,300,000
Operating	\$1,000,000	\$820,000	\$840,000	\$860,000	\$880,000	\$4,400,000
Administrative	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$250,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,490,000</b>	<b>\$1,320,000</b>	<b>\$1,350,000</b>	<b>\$1,390,000</b>	<b>\$1,420,000</b>	<b>\$6,970,000</b>

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

# Appendix C: Revenue generating scenarios

Analysis was undertaken to understand how memberships fees would vary if NIERN is to achieve an operating surplus. Estimates are based on information provided by NIERN through the recent budget bid and from the Lowitja Institute.

To calculate the total estimated revenue required, the average operating expense ratio (OER) of Lowitja Institute was applied. OER compares total operating expenses with gross revenues. For the Lowitja Institute the OER averaged 90 per cent for its first five years.

If NIERN was to achieve an OER of 90 per cent it would need to generate gross revenues of \$25.67 million in its first five years of operation (Table 22). This is approximately \$1.7 million above its forecasted costs, which are outlined in Section 3.1.

**Table 22: Estimated revenue, first 5-years**

Revenue estimate	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Gross revenue	\$5,060,000	\$4,960,000	\$5,090,000	\$5,210,000	\$5,340,000	<b>\$25,670,000</b>

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

To understand how this revenue may be generated, an analysis of own source revenue and grant revenue was undertaken. This analysis can provide indicative information about pricing of NIERN's membership fees.

- **Scenario one** considers NIERN's current budget bid for \$15 million in grant funding over a five-year period. If NIERN is successful in its budget bid, this amount of funding would represent approximately 60 per cent of the estimated revenue. This suggests that NIERN would need to achieve 40 per cent of own source revenue.
- **Scenario two** considers Lowitja Institute's revenue structure recognising that it was funded as a CRC, receiving over \$25 million in grant funding in its first five years of operation. As such, the Lowitja Institute had a much larger share of grant funding, with only 17 per cent of its revenue generated from own-source revenue streams.

**Table 23: Own source revenue, 5-year operation**

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Scenario one	\$2,110,000	\$2,060,000	\$2,110,000	\$2,170,000	\$2,220,000	<b>\$10,670,000</b>
Scenario two	\$840,000	\$820,000	\$840,000	\$860,000	\$880,000	<b>\$4,240,000</b>

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

Membership fees will play a crucial role in NIERN's generation of own source revenue. As such, own-source revenue scenarios were explored against changing membership numbers. The results in Table 24 outline the estimated annual fee required per membership organisation to generate sufficient own-source revenues. It is recognised that NIERN may obtain internal revenue from other sources (i.e. fee for services), but for the sake of analysis, only membership fees have been considered.

**Table 24: Membership fees**

Number of partner organisations	Membership cost per annum, per organisation (\$)	
	Scenario one: NIERN budget bid	Scenario two: Lowitja grant structure
5	\$430,000	\$170,000
7	\$300,000	\$120,000
10	\$210,000	\$80,000

Source: SGS Economics and Planning, 2025

This information can be interpreted as:

- If NIERN is successful in its budget bid and receives \$15 million in grant funding, the organisation would need to generate over \$10.67 million in revenue over 5 years to operate sustainably.
- If NIERN only has 5 member organisations, to generate \$10.67 million in revenue it would need to charge each member \$430,000 per annum in membership fees.
- If NIERN is successful in attracting more funding, either through grant funding or philanthropy, it would not need to generate as much revenue from member organisations. The higher the external financial support, the lower the required own source revenues.
- If NIERN is able to achieve approximately 80 per cent external funding, and has 5 membership organisations initially, it would need to charge each member \$170,000 per annum to operate sustainably.

As the number of members increases, membership fees per member reduce.



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