



Media Release

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Education technology, digital publishers and smart farming businesses among the winners of the 2021 Innovate with nbn grants

- **Tassie-based education technology company Bitlink takes out top prize.**

Last night the winners for the 2021 Innovate with **nbn™ Grant** Program were announced, with \$95,000 in funding awarded across the seven winners.

Launceston-based education technology company Bitlink took out the overall award after being named the education category winner. The business, run by co-directors James Riggall and Troy Merritt, has spent two years co-designing an Internet of Things (IoT) education kit with teachers in its local area, which enables them to teach young people about IoT, including coding, electronics, design thinking and how to use sensors.

Delivered in partnership with the Regional Australian Institute, each Innovate with **nbn™ Grant** Program category winner received \$10,000 and the overall winner won a further \$25,000 in prize money.

nbn Chief Development Officer Regional and Remote Gavin Williams said the program, now in its second year, aimed to recognise and celebrate regional businesses overcoming challenges with innovation, connectivity and networking within their communities.

“We are delighted to announce the winners of the Innovate with **nbn** Grants Program, and help their digital projects reach the next milestone. It is exciting to see how our regional pioneers are developing innovative digital tools to drive productivity and outcomes for regional Australians,” he said.

“We had a 50 per cent increase on the number of entries, and the quality, thought, innovation and effort from not just the winners, but all finalists left judges and myself blown away.

“Congratulations to each of the winners and thank you to all those who took the time to apply for the grants program. I will watch with great anticipation and enthusiasm how our winners and their projects continue to grow, evolve, develop and thrive.”

Liz Ritchie, Chief Executive officer of the Innovate with **nbn™ Grants** Program partner Regional Australia Institute said it was great to see the innovation from businesses across regional and remote Australia.

“The Regional Australia Institute was delighted to be involved with the Innovate with **nbn™ Grants** Program again,” she said.

“High quality broadband connectivity is critical to boost the prosperity, creativity and sustainability of regions and the livelihoods of their people.

“The quality of this year’s applicants, finalists and winners was excellent, and a demonstration of what can be achieved in regional Australia with quality connectivity.”

Category winners include:

- **Agriculture:** Stirling to Coast Farmers, from Albany, WA
- **Arts:** Pyrus Event Services, from Wagga Wagga, NSW
- **Education** (and overall winner): Bitlink, from Launceston, Tasmania
- **Health:** Kylie Toynton Speech Pathologist Language For Life, from Gunnedah, NSW
- **Indigenous Business:** Traditional Family, from Barcaldine, QLD
- **Tourism:** The Fold Media, from Borwal, NSW
- **Women in Regional Business:** Gather, from Cairns, QLD

The Innovate with **nbn™ Grants Program** is a part of **nbn's** commitment to lifting the digital capability of people across Australia and helping regional businesses to unlock the benefits of the **nbn** network.

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Education and overall Innovate with nbn™ Champion: Bitlink

Taking out the Education category and also declared the overall Innovate with **nbn™** Champion, [Bitlink](#) is an education technology company based in Launceston, Tasmania, passionate about digital literacy.

The business, run by co-directors James Riggall and Troy Merritt, has spent two years co-designing an Internet of Things (IoT) education kit with teachers in its local area, which enables them to teach young people about IoT, including coding, electronics, design thinking and how to use sensors.

Bitlink will use the grants to get its kits into regional and remote areas, with an initial focus on Flinders, King and Cape Barren Islands, as well as donate classroom sets to schools on these islands to make sure Bitlink's visits have a lasting impact.

Agriculture category winner: Stirling to Coast Farmers

[Stirling to Coast Farmers](#) from Western Australia's southwest helps local growers increase their productivity and profitability through digital technologies and research.

Over the past two years, Stirlings to Coast Farmers has deployed 70 weather and soil moisture monitoring devices throughout its membership zone. It's currently working on creating a much-needed market solution where it can bring all this data, across different sensor types and brands, into one centralised platform. Here data can be visualised, stored and used for machine learning practises, including delivering highly accurate weather forecasts, right down to the farm level.

Stirlings to Coast Farmers will use the \$10,000 grant to bring this solution to life, which could lead to the transformation of digital agriculture nationally by increasing productivity.

Arts category winner: Pyrus Event Services

Pyrus Event Services based in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales (NSW), is a specialised event technology consultancy, whose owner Adam Bannister believes audience diversity and inclusion should be at the heart of all

events.

Its 'Pyrus Connect' product adds in accessibility services to virtual and hybrid events so that everyone can participate. The audience can tailor the experience to suit its own needs and stay together as part of the one group and same conversation – exactly how inclusive events should be.

Health category winner: Kylie Toynton, Speech Pathologist at Language for Life

[Kylie Toynton](#) from Gunnedah, NSW, has been a speech pathologist for more than 20 years. Due to limited availability in the bush, Kylie has seen some parents wait months for an assessment or travel up to 300 kilometres for a session. Not only does this place stress on the family, it means the child isn't receiving the help they need when they need it.

Kylie is building a platform that provides evidence-based information on child development and strategies that parents can use. The packages come in video, audio and written format so all parents can feel capable and competent to help their child.

Kylie will use the Innovate with **nbn**[™] grant to progress the next stage of Language for Life's project. This will include adding other allied health and medical professionals from across regional Australia and offering synchronous online therapy and training packages for parents, teachers and schools.

Indigenous Business category winner: Traditional family

Started by brothers Travis and Dylan Dwyer, Traditional Family from Barcaldine in Queensland works to preserve and protect cultural teachings, heritage and languages.

Using a new digital space, youth and elders digitally create and produce important stories and preserve them. This project has so many opportunities and possibilities.

The Innovate with **nbn**[™] grant will allow Traditional Family to buy new equipment to enable it to collaborate online, work with cloud-based storage, and even outsource rendering for larger projects.

Tourism category winner: The Fold Media

[The Fold Media](#) is a small digital publisher based in Bowral, NSW, which has developed a contactless digital application that gives tourists at regional hotels, motels and holiday accommodation a unique digital concierge service.

Known as Pocket Host, the service allows people to access information about their stay – from amenities and where the TV remote control is located, to great local eateries, attractions and shopping guides.

Pocket Host developer, Rebecca Guest, says it aims to connect visitors with local people, events and attractions, and ultimately drive commerce for regional businesses.

The \$10,000 grant will support the rollout of Pocket Host across regional Australia.

Women in Regional Business category winner: Gathar

[Gathar](#), owned by Cairns local Jodie Milkota, is a catering platform borne from a frustration we can all relate to – the love of having friends and family over for dinner, but not wanting to be stuck in the kitchen all night. Gathar creates unique dining experiences in people's homes, holiday properties and offices by enabling customers to book someone who loves to cook to come over and take over all the hard work for them.

Gathar's innovative tech platform has enabled it to scale rapidly to locations across Australia – 25 locations so far – including a focus on regional areas. It has enabled hundreds of small businesses, independent chefs, cooks, catering companies and accommodation partners in these regional locations to scale their businesses too.

The Innovate with **nbn**[™] grant will help Gathar continue to scale into new locations and bring on more regional businesses.