



Westpac Female Founder Awards 2026 – Application Guidelines

About the Awards

The Westpac Female Founder Awards are a national program recognising and celebrating high-performing, women-led businesses.

They are a key part of Westpac’s commitment to go further for female founders - spotlighting excellence, amplifying stories, and providing the credibility and platform to support continued growth.

The Awards are open to women founders across industries, regions and growth stages, and feature multiple categories that reflect the diverse ways success shows up in business.

Award Categories

Applicants must apply under one or more of the following categories:

Trailblazer Award (for businesses three years or younger)

For early-stage businesses (three years or less) that are:

- Disrupting an industry or market
- Introducing innovative products, services, or business models
- Demonstrating early traction and strong growth potential

Thrive Award (for businesses three years or older)

For established businesses (over three years) that have:

- Achieved sustained financial performance and growth
- Evolved over time to remain competitive
- Built a strong, enduring market position

Greater Good Award (Impact-led)

For businesses and social enterprises whose products or services:

- Drive meaningful social or community impact
- Deliver commercial and measurable outcomes
- Embed impact as a core part of their business model

Female Founder of the Year Award

The Female Founder of the Year is selected from the finalist pool across all categories.

This award recognises an outstanding founder who demonstrates exceptional leadership, business performance and impact.

There is no separate application required for this award.

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible, applicants must:

Business Requirements

- Be at least 50% women-owned and 50% women-led
- Be majority or wholly Australian-owned
- Hold a valid ABN (and ACN, where applicable) and have been registered for a minimum of six (6) months.
- Have a primary place of business in Australia
- Be solvent and not subject to material litigation
- Not be a government agency
- Not be a not-for-profit organisation or registered charity

Applicant Requirements

Applicants must:

- Be an Australian citizen or permanent resident
- Be the owner or part-owner of the business
- Be able to provide accurate financial and operational data if requested
- Be willing to:
 - Undertake a police check
 - Participate in interviews and promotional activity if selected

Category-Specific Requirements

- Trailblazer: Operating for three years or less
- Thrive: Operating for three years or more

Selection Criteria

Applications will be assessed based on category-specific criteria:

Trailblazer Award (Startups)

- **Innovation:** How clearly you define the problem, and how original or distinctive your product, service, or approach is.
- **Impact, Differentiation & Defensibility:** The value your solution creates for customers and the strength of your competitive advantage.
- **Market Validation & Traction:** Evidence of customer demand and traction appropriate to your stage (e.g. usage, revenue, partnerships).
- **Scalability & Market Potential:** Your potential to grow, including the size of the opportunity and the strength of your growth plans.
- **Founder & Execution Capability:** Your ability to deliver, including the capability, adaptability and focus of the founder or team.

Thrive Award (Established)

- **Sustained Financial Performance, Differentiation & Growth:** Your financial performance and growth to date, how you have sustained and managed this performance over time, and what sets your business apart in the market

- **Adaptability & Evolution:** How your business has evolved in response to customer or market needs, and the outcomes delivered through those changes.
- **Innovation & Future Readiness:** How you are investing in and building for the future, including innovation, capability, and long-term competitiveness.
- **Brand Strength & Market Position:** Your reputation and position in the market, including signs of trust, relevance, and leadership.
- **Founder Capability & Leadership:** The leadership strength of the founder(s) and their ability to lead and scale the business, including decision-making, resilience, and team development.

Greater Good (Impact-led)

- **Clear Social Need & Impact:** How clearly you define the problem you're addressing, who it affects, and the scale of meaningful impact achieved or demonstrated to date.
- **Longevity & Sustainability of Impact:** Impact that is ongoing (not one-off), with a model that can continue and grow over time.
- **Integration & Innovation in Approach:** How effectively your approach drives impact, including the strength and originality of your model or delivery.
- **Evidence & Measurement:** A strong focus on tracking, measuring, and demonstrating outcomes.
- **Founder Leadership & Contribution:** The founder's role in driving the impact, including partnerships or collaborations that strengthen delivery.

Selection Process

The Awards process includes the following stages:

Stage 1: Eligibility Screening

Applications are assessed against the eligibility criteria. Only applicants who meet all qualifying requirements will progress.

Stage 2: Assessment & Shortlisting

Eligible applications are reviewed by Westpac judging teams and assessed against the relevant category criteria. Each category will be shortlisted to a small number of finalists.

Stage 3: Interview & Finalist Review

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to participate in a recorded video interview. These interviews are reviewed by the final judging panel.

Stage 4: Final Judging

A judging panel reviews all finalists and select category winners and the Female Founder of the Year.

Finalists and winners are determined at the sole discretion of Westpac, and all judging decisions are final.

Application Process

To apply, complete the online application form, answering all required questions.

Important:

- All qualifying questions must be answered 'Yes' to proceed.
- Applications cannot be amended once submitted.

- Incomplete applications may not be assessed.

Participant Requirements

By applying, applicants agree to:

- Participate in interviews, media, or promotional activity if selected.
- Provide additional information if required.
- Engage with Award-related opportunities and communications.

Privacy and Use of Information

- Application information will be treated as confidential.
- Data may be used in aggregated and de-identified form for reporting or insights.
- Personal information will be handled in accordance with Westpac's Privacy Policy:
<https://www.westpac.com.au/business-banking/female-founder-awards/privacy-policy.html>

Terms & Conditions

By applying, applicants confirm that:

- Information provided is true and correct.
- They agree to the full Terms & Conditions.
- Westpac may verify information and disqualify false or misleading applications.

Link to full Terms & Conditions can be found here: <https://www.westpac.com.au/business-banking/female-founder-awards/terms-and-conditions.html>

Key Dates

- **Applications open:** 20 May 2026 – 30 June 2026
- **Finalists notified:** Between 31 July 2026 and 1 August 2026 (via phone and email)
- **Finalists published online:** 5 August 2026
- **Winners notified:** 10 August 2026
- **Winners Published online:** 24 August 2026

Prize Pool

Finalists (15 in total)

All finalists will receive:

- Award Certificate
- Use of Westpac Award logo for 12 months

Category Winners: Trailblazer, Greater Good, Thrive (three in total)

The three category winners will receive:

- Award Certificate
- Use of Westpac Award logo for 12 months
- \$10,000 to support their business

- Mentorship or coaching, with the choice of one of the options below:
 - A half day media training session with Chris Urquhart: [Home - Immediate Communications](#)
 - 12 months mentoring and education program with Inspiring Rare Birds: [Rare Birds - Creating Diverse and Inclusive Work Cultures](#)
 - Six 70-minute private coaching session with Sonia Bestulic: [Home - Flourish with Sonia](#)

Female Founder of the Year Winner

The Female Founder of the Year will receive:

- Award Certificate
- Use of Westpac Award logo for 12 months
- \$30,000 to support their business
- Mentorship or coaching, with the choice of one of the options below:
 - A half day media training session with Chris Urquhart: [Home - Immediate Communications](#)
 - 12 months mentoring and education program with Inspiring Rare Birds: [Rare Birds - Creating Diverse and Inclusive Work Cultures](#)
 - Six 70-minute private coaching session with Sonia Bestulic: [Home - Flourish with Sonia](#)
- 1 month paid advertising campaign, covering digital and press adverts with News Corp, to the value of \$120,000

Contact

For questions or support, contact: FemaleFounders@westpac.com.au