

GUIDELINES

ATSE Awards 2026

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE INNOVATION AWARD

The ATSE Traditional Knowledge Innovation Award celebrates STEM research and development by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or communities which is based on, or significantly incorporates or builds on, Traditional Knowledge. The Award acknowledges and recognises an individual, team, community, or organisation respectfully and successfully applying Australian Traditional Knowledge in contemporary innovation contexts.

The winning nominee will receive a cash prize and medal.

NOMINATIONS CLOSE**Tuesday 12 May 2026 close of business****AWARD BACKGROUND**

The Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE) recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are custodians of the world's oldest continuous knowledge system. They are Australia's first engineers and applied scientists – and Traditional Knowledge continues to be responsive and applied to today's complex problems.

Traditional Knowledges are dynamic, living and contemporary systems of knowledge that are grounded in many thousands of years of experience and observation. There are multiple and diverse Australian Traditional Knowledge systems that are collectively held, and which continue to develop and connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to Country.

Traditional Knowledge systems incorporate:

“ecological knowledge, medicinal knowledge, environmental management knowledge and cultural and spiritual knowledge. [Traditional Knowledge] includes technical knowledge and know-how, agricultural knowledge, and astronomy” (Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, 2020, p. 42)

The creation of the Traditional Knowledge Innovation Award is an integral part of ATSE's Reconciliation Action Plan, which aims to create opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) and build understanding of and respect for Traditional Knowledge and its continuing relevance today.

The Award celebrates the translational power of research and development done by and in respectful and genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples or communities, applying Traditional Knowledge through the lens of modern innovation. ATSE recognises such application as the final step in the sharing and weaving of Knowledge which delivers co-benefits, as described in the CSIRO's *Our Knowledge, Our Way* guidelines (see for example discussion page 114-115; and diagrams on page 105; 114).

ELIGIBILITY

The award is open to:

- An individual, team (pair or small group), community, organisation (the 'nominee') who are Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- If the work is in collaboration as part of a respectful partnership with another, or non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, individual, team, community or organisation, then that collaborative partner may become a co-applicant. No more than one co-applicant is permitted.
- Who demonstrates excellence, innovation and impact in any STEM field where they have applied Traditional Knowledge in a modern innovation context.
- And demonstrates that they have advanced the understanding and awareness of Traditional Knowledge through modern innovation.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nominees are required to attest to the authenticity of the Traditional Knowledge, including, where possible, identifying the Peoples who are Traditional Custodians, and the moral and intellectual right of the individual, team community, or organisation to build on and apply the Traditional Knowledge.

One award is available per year to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individual, team (pair or small group), community, organisation, for up to one nominee who may or may not have a co-applicant. Co-applicants will be recognised as award winners but will not receive any medal or financial award. No individual, team, community, or organisation can receive more than one ATSE Award in any one year.

AWARD CRITERIA

Traditional Knowledge and Indigenous Innovation (primary criteria, 40% weighting)

The nominee demonstrates achievement of excellence or impact in any STEM field by incorporating, applying or innovating Traditional Knowledge to address a contemporary issue, problem or challenge. This may include (but is not limited to) academic research, applied research or practice.

Application of the Traditional Knowledge Innovation (40% weighting)

The work or innovation of the nominee has achieved or has a clearly articulated a likely path to achieve, success in translation from Traditional Knowledge (knowing) to contemporary practical application (being, doing) within a STEM setting. Contemporary practical application may, but does not have to, include pathways to commercialisation. The work or innovation of the nominee has potential to improve or has improved understanding and awareness of Traditional Knowledge and its modern value

Ways of working (20% weighting)

The nominee builds meaningful, trusting, respectful and equitable relationships, through the process of sharing and weaving Traditional Knowledge with modern knowledge practices. The work or innovation of the nominee has positive impact and actual or anticipated benefit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and/or communities. This may include, but is not limited to, intellectual property ownership, royalties/commissions/other payments, community health and wealth-building, improved opportunities for educational and career advancement.

NOMINATION PROCESS

Nominees for the ATSE Traditional Knowledge Innovation Award may self-nominate or be nominated by an individual Proposer. An individual Secondar who is not materially involved in the innovation itself is also required to provide support to the nomination. The nominee, proposer, secondar or Referees do not need to be Fellows of the Academy.

No ATSE Board member, ATSE professional staff, or member of the Assessment Committee can be a proposer or secondar for any nominee for the Award.

Nominations are to be made using the electronic form/portal provided and be submitted before the closing time and date for the award. Incomplete applications and any received after the closing time and date will not be considered.

NOMINATION REQUIREMENTS

- A written, audio or video response is required against each of the three award criteria. Written responses may be in full prose or dot-point form.
- For audio and video responses, please provide a web-based link to the relevant file(s) (e.g., link to a video or podcast hosting platform). Audio and video length should not be longer than 3-5 minutes.

Videos should be ‘interview’ style, with no additional graphics or features (e.g., just the nominee talking).

- A further up to two additional links or documents (e.g., media coverage, promotional materials, publications) may be supplied to support the overall nomination if you wish.

The Seconder is to provide a statement (written, audio or video) clearly indicating their detailed knowledge of the work for which the nomination has been made. The Seconder should be an industry or technical expert in the nominee’s field/sector who can comment on the nominee’s signature contribution to the field/sector. It is strongly encouraged that Seconders are from outside the nominee’s organisation and are not the nominee’s collaborator, direct supervisor or manager.

Two Referees’ contact details, at least one of whom is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and who can attest to the community benefit / Traditional Knowledge rights.

A statement (written, audio or video) from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individual, team community, or organisation who is nominated is required, attesting to:

- The authenticity of the Traditional Knowledge, including, where possible, identifying the Peoples who are Traditional Custodians
- The right of the individual, community, or organisation to build on and apply the Traditional Knowledge
- If the work has been done in partnership with a non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person, community or organisation: The respectful, collaborative nature of the work.
- Any actual or anticipated benefits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and/or communities. This may include, but is not limited to, intellectual property ownership, royalties/commissions/other payments, community health and wealth-building, improved opportunities for educational and career advancement

Each Nominee will give permission for details contained in the nomination to be released to the members of the Selection Committee (i.e., those listed in the nomination form) for the purposes of the selection process. Whenever such material is considered by the Selection Committee, this information and details of their deliberations and recommendations will remain confidential. The Nominee should note that a description of the work being acclaimed, and images of the winner, will be publicised.

SELECTION COMMITTEE AND PROCESS

The Selection Committee is comprised of individuals prominent in fostering research-industry collaboration and knowledge transfer and includes representation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons and ATSE Fellows. ATSE reserves the right to request additional information from Nominees prior to the final judging process.

OBLIGATIONS

The winner of the Award (nominee, plus any co-applicant) will be expected to:

- Attend the award ceremony. Details of the event to be advised.
- Participate in ATSE’s public and internal communication and event activities (including interviews with the news media) within at least 12 months of receiving the award to promote their own work, the relevance of Traditional Knowledge in the modern context, and the ATSE Traditional Knowledge Innovation Award.

In addition, the winning nominee:

- May be contacted by ATSE for up to five years following the receipt of their award to request feedback on what impact (if any) the award has had on their work
- may be invited to sit on future selection panels for this Award.

NOMINATION FORM PREVIEW

The Proposer must complete and submit the following materials that constitute a complete submission.

Proposer, Nominee and Co-applicant Statement of Consent

Nominee, Proposer, Seconder and Referees details – including contact information. Nominee, whom is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander is individual, team, community, organisation, other (describe). Include a primary contact if nominee is not an individual.

Executive Overview (Maximum 100 words) Provide a brief summary of the Traditional Knowledge Innovation and how its application has or will improve understanding and awareness of Traditional Knowledge and its modern value.

AWARD SELECTION CRITERIA

C.1 Traditional Knowledge Innovation (500 words or 5 minutes audio/video)

Describe how the nominee is demonstrating achievement of excellence and impact in any STEM field by incorporating, applying or innovating Traditional Knowledge to address a contemporary issue, problem or challenge. Consider in your response: What is the story of the Traditional Knowledge? How is this Traditional Knowledge being woven and shared to address a particular problem or issue?

C.2 Application of the Traditional Knowledge Innovation (300 words, or 3 minutes audio/video)

- Describe how the work or innovation of the nominee has achieved, or has a clear and likely path to achieve, success in translation from Traditional Knowledge (knowing) to contemporary practical application (use, doing) within a STEM field. This may include broad public benefit. Contemporary practical application may, but does not have to, include pathways to commercialisation.
- Describe how the work or innovation of the nominee has potential to improve or has improved understanding and awareness of Traditional Knowledge and its modern value (amongst any audience).
- Describe how the prize money will be utilised to further the Traditional Knowledge Innovation work, and/or empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities involved in this project?
- You may wish to consider in your response: How is the work associated with the innovation of Traditional Knowledge being (or could be) applied or used in a practical way? How is the work improving modern understanding of Traditional Knowledge and its value (to whom, and in what way)

C.3 Ways of working (200 words, or 2 minutes audio/video)

- Explain how the nominee builds meaningful, trusting, respectful and equitable relationships, through the process of sharing and weaving Traditional Knowledge with modern (/Western) knowledge practices.
- Identify how the work or innovation of the nominee is positively impacting and any benefit (actual or anticipated) it has for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and/or communities. This may include, but is not limited to, intellectual property ownership, royalties/commissions/other payments, community health and wealth-building, improved opportunities for educational and career advancement.
- Aspects to address in responses
If and how identified best-practice guides have been considered and applied in the work (including, but not limited to e.g. *AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research*; *Our Knowledge, Our Way Guidelines* – CSIRO; *Traditional Knowledge Code of Practice* – QLD Government)

Proposer Statement (Maximum 200 words, or 2 minutes audio or video)

The Proposer statement is an opportunity for the proposer to make a statement in support of the nomination and to provide any additional background regarding why they have put forward the nominee.

Seconder Letter (Maximum 1 page, or 5 minutes audio or video)

The Seconder is to provide a statement clearly indicating their detailed knowledge of the work for which the nomination has been made. The Seconder should be an industry or technical expert in the nominee's field/sector who can comment on the nominee's signature contribution to the field/sector. It is strongly encouraged that Seconders are from outside the nominee's institution and are not the nominee's direct supervisor or manager.

STATEMENT from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individual, community, or organisation who is nominated attesting to:

- The authenticity of the Traditional Knowledge, including, where possible, identifying the Peoples who are Traditional Custodians
- The right of the individual, community, or organisation to build on and apply the Traditional Knowledge
- If the work has been done in partnership with a non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person, community or organisation: the respectful, collaborative nature of the work.
- Any actual or anticipated benefits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and/or communities. This may include, but is not limited to, intellectual property ownership, royalties/commissions/ other payments, community health and wealth-building, improved opportunities for educational and career advancement.

SUPPORT DOCUMENTS – Up to two additional links or documents to support the nomination

[for each element]. Link or document upload function. Free text function - Describe how this additional material supports your nomination (100 words or less)

The nominee is required to attest to the authenticity of the Traditional Knowledge, including, where possible, identifying the Peoples who are Traditional Custodians, and the moral and intellectual right of the individual, community, or organisation to build on and apply the Traditional Knowledge.

The Proposer and Nominee may be called upon by the Selection Panel to provide evidence of claims made within submitted documentation.

REFERENCES

Aboriginal Heritage Council (2020). 'Taking Care of Culture': State of Victoria's Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Report - Discussion paper. https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-01/Taking%20Care%20of%20Culture%20Discussion%20Paper_04012021_2.pdf

AIATSIS (2020). AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research. <https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research/code-ethics>

The State of Queensland. (2021). Traditional Knowledge Code of Practice (Biodiscovery Act 2004). <https://environment.des.qld.gov.au/licences-permits/plants-animals/biodiscovery/traditional-knowledge>

Woodward, E., Hill, R., Harkness, P. and R. Archer (Eds) 2020 Our Knowledge Our Way in caring for Country: Indigenous-led approaches to strengthening and sharing our knowledge for land and sea management. Best Practice Guidelines from Australian experiences. NAILSMA and CSIRO. <https://www.csiro.au/en/research/indigenous-science/Indigenous-knowledge/Our-Knowledge-Our-Way/OKOW-resources>

https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=XXVII-8-b&chapter=27&clang=_en

<https://environment.des.qld.gov.au/licences-permits/plants-animals/biodiscovery/biodiscovery-act-reform>

APPLICATIONS CLOSE

Tuesday 12 May 2026 close of business

The Proposer and Nominee may be called upon by the Selection Panel to provide evidence of claims made within submitted documentation. Only electronic submissions of nominations and attachments will be accepted. Incomplete applications and any received after the closing time and date will not be considered. All decisions taken by the Selection Committee will be final.

ADVICE AND INFORMATION

Elvira Copur – Membership Manager
Australian Academy of Technological Sciences & Engineering
02 6185 3240 (9am–5pm AEST / AEDT)
membership@atse.org.au

In accordance with the Privacy Act, ATSE protects the privacy and security of information provided by you. By completing the form in the Nomination Portal you agree to the use of your personal information by ATSE for purposes related to the ATSE Awards program; that ATSE may contact you about our products and services; and that ATSE may use this information for internal purposes. If you do not wish to receive further information from ATSE, please email info@atse.org.au



Australian Academy of
Technological Sciences
& Engineering
1975-2025