

Startup Ecosystem

Action Plan
2025 – 2027



**Business
Kāpiti**

Purpose

The purpose of the **Kāpiti Startup Ecosystem Action Plan (2025 – 2027)** is to guide the activities needed to support startup businesses as part of Kāpiti's unique business support ecosystem. This plan aims to establish an enduring programme of work based upon the recommendations of The Factory Report and the findings of the startup pilot. The programme is designed to foster startup businesses and innovation in a way that strengthens Kāpiti's overall business support ecosystem tailored to small and emerging businesses.

What is a Startup?

For this Action Plan, Startups are defined as follows:



Lifestyle Startup

Usually a business created as an extension of the owners' hobby or passion. The founder's primary motivation is independence and getting paid to do what they love, on their time and their own terms to create their ideal lifestyle.



Small Business Startup

Usually a business created to provide income for small team or to serve a community. Often based on well-known business models and service-driven markets. Founders motivated by long-term sustainability rather than high-growth.



Impact Startup

Usually a business created to create some positive social, environmental, or societal change, often called a social enterprise. Motivated less about making money, and more about making enough to sustain the impact they desire to make.



Scalable Startup

These high-growth, usually tech startups, and fuelled by venture-capital take some new innovative idea or exploitable intellectual property and aim to grow it fast with the intent to dominate an industry/segment or create a brand-new market.



Buyable Startup

A company born to flip! These startups are not created to be the next unicorns, they're designed usually with a target acquirer or market partner in mind and built to be sold either for the team, the customers, or some intellectual property.



Enterprise Startup

Big companies create startups too, usually while exploring new innovations or via strategic partnerships with others and backed by their own capital & resources. Usually motivated to diversify or enter a new market outside core expertise.

The Value of Startups

Startups play a critical role in a vibrant economy as evidenced in the UpStart Nation report (2023) which states: “It is critical that we catalyse our nascent startup and innovation ecosystem if we are to improve productivity and build a sustainable economy that is good for our people and our planet.”

The NZ Startup Genome Report has identified that despite the importance of a thriving startup ecosystem, that nationally we continue to lag in this field, with Auckland being the only region gaining international recognition. Women founders continue to lag behind their male counterparts, with the economy “missing out on \$32 billion that could be in our economy if women founders were at parity”.¹

The New Zealand government has set an ambitious goal to double the value of exports by 2034 to grow the economy and involves unlocking the potential of startups to drive innovation, enhance connection, and leverage our unique culture. Significant reforms in science, innovation and technology are underway and include the disestablishment of Callaghan Innovation, along with an economic downturn, making it a challenging environment for this broad sector.

While the tech industry offers well known examples of successful startups, other sectors are also notable such as sustainability focused, plastic-free beauty company Ethique which was valued at \$100 million and sold to investment firm, Bansk Group².

Kāpiti is a Great Place for Startups

Kāpiti offers the following advantages for Startups:

- A strategic location with proximity to Wellington, providing easy access to the capital and organisations such as Creative HQ, Victoria University, etc.
- A close-knit, connected, and engaged business community with an active mentoring and diverse business support ecosystem.
- Internationally recognised and engaged leaders within the business community who have links to the global startup ecosystem.
- A coastal lifestyle with new transport links and infrastructure development.
- Strategic commitment to fostering a healthy startup ecosystem from the Economic Development Kotahitanga Board (EDKB), Kāpiti Coast District Council and the business ecosystem in Kāpiti and broader Wellington region.



¹ Marilyn Johnson, Startup Council at Electrify Aotearoa

² <https://www.banskgroup.com/brands-ethique.html>

- Engagement with the Global Entrepreneurship Network (GEN), Creative HQ, Ministry of Awesome, The Factory, NZTech, Food Innovation Network, FoodHQ, and WellingtonNZ.
- Growing clusters such as Tech, Food and Beverage, and Tourism which provide founders connection, capability uplift and community.
- A growing Māori economy supported by mana whenua, a Tech incubator at Te Wānanga o Raukawa, an internationally recognised and award-winning indigenous digital creative hub, Māoriland Hub, and an established Māori business network, Te Rōpū Pakihi.

"I've had the privilege of engaging with a wide range of founders, entrepreneurs, and business leaders across Kāpiti. In that time, each person I've met has been willing to offer their time, insight, and encouragement to support others. Many have successfully exited companies, raised investment, or are operating industry-leading ventures, and they've chosen to call Kāpiti home. To me, this is Kāpiti's point of difference."

– Ella Blake, Startup Pilot Participant and Tech Cluster Coordinator

Kāpiti's Commitment to Startups

In 2023, the EDKB commissioned the Startup Ecosystem report from Manawatu based incubator, The Factory. It provided an approach to *"show what it takes to cultivate a thriving startup ecosystem from the perspective of startup practitioners."* The recommended actions in the report are as follows:

Leadership

1. Establish a unifying vision or common goal for the Kāpiti startup ecosystem.
2. Appoint a leader to pursue the vision or common goal for the Kāpiti startup ecosystem.
3. Provide adequate resource to support startup ecosystem initiatives.

Unity

4. Focus on community-building activities to support the startup ecosystem.
5. Engage and encourage Māori and Pacific communities to participate within the startup ecosystem.
6. Connect the Kāpiti startup ecosystem to national and district activity and initiatives.

Capability

7. Increase accessibility for the local community to participate in the Kāpiti startup ecosystem – develop a 'front door'.
8. Design and implement a capability-building pathway for Kāpiti entrepreneurs and startups.

A startup journey map was detailed in the report and while not reflective of every startup's journey, provided a process for shared understanding.



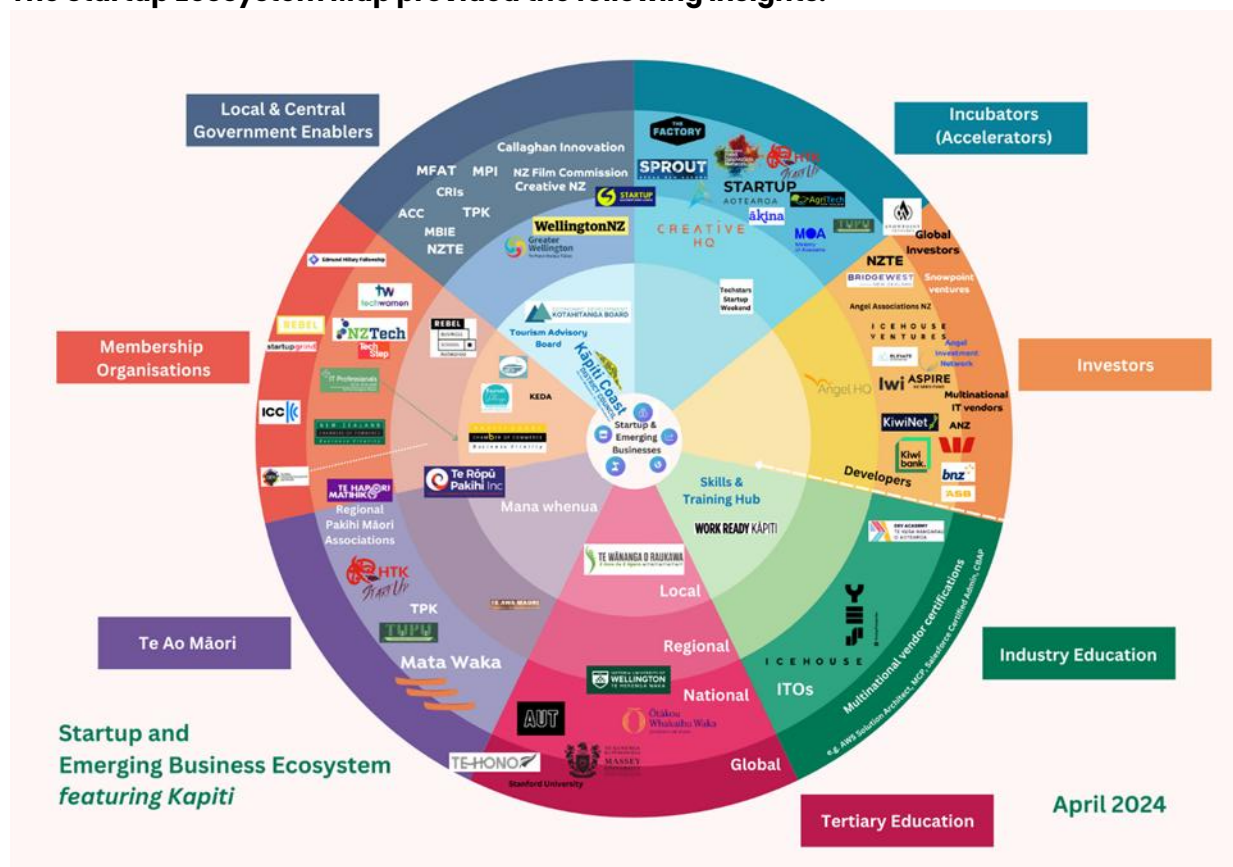
The EDKB has the mandate to lead this work under the Economic Development Strategy in conjunction with stakeholders and support from the ED Team. After engaging with stakeholders from the business community, a smaller group of nominees were set up to discuss and enact the key findings from the report. The group focused on the three foundational themes that the report identified as necessary for fostering a thriving startup ecosystem.

This approach brought together the different parts of the business ecosystem in Kāpiti to understand their complementary role in the ecosystem. It is important to note that all parties reflected that business support beyond the startup phase is essential and that the wider business support ecosystem should be nurtured in parallel.

The Startup Ecosystem

Through the stakeholder meetings, it was agreed that a visual map of the startup ecosystem showing the local, regional, national, and international support available, would be useful for reference as this had not been undertaken previously.

The Startup Ecosystem Map provided the following insights:



The Kāpiti components of this map show the business networks and associations providing connection and support. In addition, the three industry clusters (food and beverage, tourism, and tech) provide collaborative training programmes to build profile, commercial opportunities, and build capability.

- **Lacking local Kāpiti incubators**

While mentoring and coaching services exist in Kāpiti through business services, networks, and associations such as Kāpiti Economic Development Association (KEDA), there are no local incubators. However, in-person and online training from regional providers are available in Wellington and around the country – Creative HQ, Sprout Agritech, etc.

- **Te Ao Māori**

The ecosystem map shows that one of Kāpiti's key strengths is its iwi, hapū, and Māori organisations embodied through the ART confederation which formed the first Kaupapa Māori tertiary provider in Ōtaki, Te Wānanga o Raukawa (TWOR). Additionally, Pakihi Māori are well supported by the local Māori business network, Te Rōpū Pakihi which is connected to the other Māori business networks across the motu as well as other startup programmes such as Tupu, and Te Hono with links to Stanford.

2025 Startup Pilot Dragon's Den



Startup Pilot

The Startup Pilot was endorsed by the startup stakeholder group, led by the EDKB in conjunction with the ED Team, using a startup-style approach. The participants were nominated by the stakeholder group and Tech and Food and Beverage Cluster Coordinators. The pilot was designed to better understand who may participate, what capability there is to support Kāpiti founders and entrepreneurs, and what partnerships the EDKB and Council could leverage.

The Startup Pilot tested the hypothesis:

With support and facilitation from Kāpiti Coast District Council, the EDKB, and key networks, a startup culture will emerge on the Kāpiti Coast and foster economic growth.

The objectives from the Startup Pilot were to provide:

- insights into what resources and financial support are required from Council and the EDKB to enable startups in Kāpiti to contribute to economic growth.
- insights into what support needs to be gained from outside the district to support founders.
- clarity on what capability and networks can be accessed through the broader business network.
- founders with additional knowledge, skills, and connections to grow their business.
- opportunities to promote support for women founders in Kāpiti.
- opportunities for key stakeholders in the district to collaborate, enabling cohesion.
- marketing opportunities to show Kāpiti as a great place to run a business.

The process included:

- Mentoring, workshops, and coaching to help founders develop a cohesive strategy to grow their business.
- monthly in person Startup capability sessions and online to reflect on monthly goals.
- Each founder was required to complete a Lean Canvas.
- The pilot group presented to independent, specialist judges in a supportive Dragon's Den-style setting, receiving positive feedback and tailored recommendations to grow each business.

Strong relationships have been built with our local stakeholder group (e.g. KEDA, Te Rōpū Pakihi, Te Wānanga o Raukawa, and service providers) and other national players in the startup ecosystem. Additionally, it has informed some of the facets needed for business support in Kāpiti more broadly given the majority are small businesses.

Through the pilot, progress was made across the three key pillars identified in the Startup Ecosystem Report: Leadership, Unity, and Capability, bringing together different sectors to learn, connect and grow.

Startup Pilot Findings

Feedback was gathered via surveys, interviews, group discussions, and written updates from participants. These insights informed the structure, content, and delivery of the Startup Ecosystem Action Plan.

Key Findings

- **Value of Peer Connection:** Participants found strong value in networking with other founders, sharing challenges, and learning from each other in a supportive environment. The varied sectors enabled collaboration and knowledge sharing.
- **Tailored Expert Sessions:** High-impact sessions included intellectual property, sales, pricing, and the final pitch event. Guest speakers with real startup experience were particularly appreciated.
- **Facilitation Preferences:** Founders valued facilitators with lived experience in startups, high emotional intelligence, and the ability to challenge and support constructively. Participants favoured a hybrid model with one central coordinator supported by topic-specific experts.
- **Session Structure and Timing:** Most participants preferred short (1–2 hour) sessions over a longer timeframe (6–12 months), with flexibility in timing and frequency to enable participation around business demands.
- **Programme Refinement:** There is a strong preference for startup-stage-specific content and practical tools—especially around funding, systems, legal frameworks, cashflow, and pitching.
- **Alumni and Ongoing Support:** There was a clear call for post-programme engagement through alumni meetups, access to mentors, and shared resources online.
- **Equity of Access:** Most participants agreed that the programme and supplementary mentoring should be free to attend, recognising the limited early-stage capital available to startups. A small charge is usually the way to ensure buy-in.

Ecosystem Progression

A clearer and more connected pathway is emerging through the combined efforts of the Startup Pilot, cluster development, and ecosystem supporters. Early-stage founders can now access the Startup Programme alongside other business and sector-specific clusters. This supports a natural progression—from idea to validation, then growth, commercialisation, export, or investment.

Across industries—from FMCG to tech, wellness to creative—a sense of momentum is building. A growing network of investors, advisors, operators, and experienced founders is forming, committed to supporting others on the journey.

Future programmes should apply lessons from the pilot. The following principles are recommended:

Think Like a Startup: Stay agile. Embrace experimentation, apply an MVP³ approach, and continuously improve based on feedback.

Be Lean: Focus on the essentials. Deliver a targeted, cost-effective programme that evolves over time.

Stay Customer-Centric: Listen closely to founders. Design around their needs, challenges, and goals to maximise relevance and impact.

Leverage the Ecosystem: Tap into the existing network of incubators and accelerators to find the most suitable delivery partner(s) including going to market for specific expertise as required. Work collaboratively with clusters, business networks, and aligned organisations that share the programme's goals.

Supporting Startups into the Future

As businesses grow from startups to small businesses, to medium, to larger, there is an ongoing need to provide a clear pathway to enable sustainable growth. This would include identifying the needs of the businesses and the support that can be offered from the existing ecosystem, such as business networks and clusters. It is acknowledged that many startups do not progress to even the small business stage, and that enduring support is needed to assist with this.



³ MVP – Minimum Viable Product: <https://www.atlassian.com/agile/product-management/minimum-viable-product>

Action Plan

Startup Kāpiti Vision

Kāpiti is recognised for its culture of support and innovation that enables district-wide economic growth by attracting, and nurturing startups and entrepreneurial ventures.

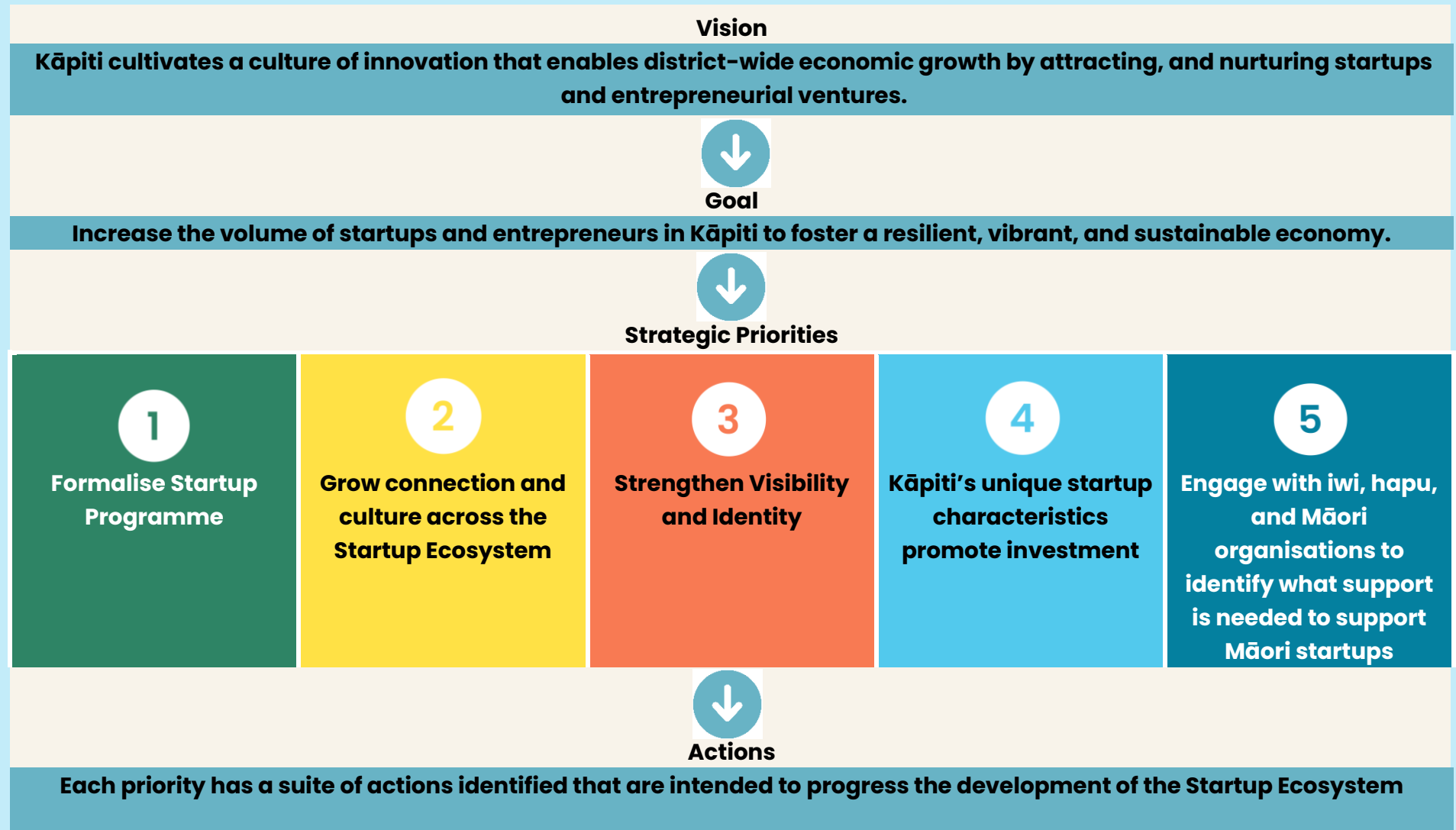
Strategic Objectives

Using the insights from The Factory Report, the survey data, in-person discussions and feedback from the Startup Pilot, five strategic pillars have been developed to expand upon the foundational pillars of Leadership, Unity and Support.

The key strategic pillars are:

1. **Implement a formalised Startup Programme** moving from pilot to Minimum Viable Product, to a structured, scalable programme tailored to Kāpiti-based startups that addresses real-world challenges and opportunities with staged delivery over 6-12 months.
2. **Grow Connection and Culture across the ecosystem** by building an alumni network and mentoring community that supports peer learning, ongoing relationships, and visibility, using shared digital platforms and in-person events to sustain engagement beyond the programme. Support the feeling of a 'team' and culture around the Kāpiti startup ecosystem, working with the broader business support ecosystem beyond the programme.
3. **Strengthen Visibility and Identity** Develop a communications and branding strategy that highlights Kāpiti's startup success stories and connects local founders with regional and national opportunities, including funders, investors, and media.
4. **Kāpiti's unique characteristics promote investment**, linked to pillar 3, leveraging Kāpiti's talent, lifestyle and culture of innovation, to create conditions for startups to scale, attract investment and build confidence in Kāpiti as a launchpad for national and global success.
5. **Engage with Iwi, Hapu, and Māori Organisations to identify what is needed to support Māori startups** working in partnership to ensure a Māori approach is understood and integrated into the Kāpiti startup ecosystem.

Action Plan



This table outlines the actions that will be taken to support the formalisation of the Startup Programme. In conjunction with the EDKB and key stakeholders, the actions will be supported by the ED Lead and the Tech Cluster Coordinator.

Strategic Objective/s	Action	Outputs	Outcomes	Timeline
Implement Formal Startup Programme	Implement the Startup 24 month Action Plan using the learnings from the completed Startup Pilot.	Action Plan approved by the EDKB including this 24 month implementation plan.	An Action Plan is developed and implemented, focusing on key actions that foster innovation, connection, collaboration, and measurable growth in Kāpiti.	July 2025
	Develop and implement an industry engagement and communication plan.	Industry Engagement Plan and Communication Plan	Clear communication and engagement plans are implemented to drive consistent buy-in and participation for the business community to promote the support available.	Aug 2025 – Sept 2025
	Seek out funding opportunities from central government for the Startup Programme.	Startup incubator funds RFP's	Kāpiti accesses external funding to help with the cost of delivering startup incubation in Kāpiti and leverages mentors from inside and outside of the district.	June 2025 – ongoing
	Refine the ongoing Startup Programme based on the findings of the pilot commencing in Q2 2025, 6 months long.	Code of Conduct EDKB Reports List of available mentors Procurement Plan/s as needed	The Startup Programme will implement findings from the pilot and inform the business support needed for participants, drawing on support of the wider ecosystem.	June – Nov 2025
	Implement a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework agreed with the EDKB.	Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, survey data and channel analytics	Performance, feedback, and evaluation metrics are established and clearly understood to measure the growth of Startups.	Aug 2025 – ongoing
Enhance Connection and Collaboration Across the Startup Ecosystem	Startup Programme participants share knowledge and experiences to progress their business, and are introduced to relevant business support providers.	Calendar with regular meetings scheduled	Consistent opportunities are provided for Cluster members to connect, learn, share knowledge, and grow their startup business through the startup programme.	Ongoing 4 – 6 weekly meetings
	Identify key supporters, including mentors, advisors, investors and service providers to build a comprehensive network for startups.	Support network list	Comprehensive support network for startups is established and active collaboration is undertaken (e.g. Startup Awards with Creative HQ)	Oct 2025 – ongoing
	Refine the 'front door' and establish a clear path of referral from external channels.	Referral pathway plan (including Tech, Food and Beverage and Tourism Clusters and other business support channels).	Streamlined entry point for startups to access the startup ecosystem.	June 2025 – ongoing

Increase Startup Programme Visibility	Develop a clear brand identity for the Startup Programme.	Brand kit	Leverages Business Kāpiti branding and is reflected on the Business Kāpiti website to support the formalisation of the programme	June – Oct 2025
	Develop a marketing campaign, leveraging the Business Kāpiti website and local, national and international networks.	Marketing campaign Promotional material Updates to BusinessKāpiti.co.nz Case Studies Profile Articles Newsletters Linkedin networking group updates Updates to stakeholders	Startup collateral showcases district successes, leveraging local and national media, and maintains consistent communication channels to keep members informed, engaged, and aware of opportunities and achievements Connections are established with regional and national entities to enhance the profile and visibility of the Startup Programme.	June 2025 – ongoing
Leverage Kāpiti's unique startup characteristics to promote investment	Intentional relationships are developed with key stakeholders within investment community and funding sources are developed to further understand opportunities.	List of investment channels Relationship map Map of what investors need	Defined funding opportunities and support for Kāpiti startups.	Ongoing
Engage with iwi, hapu, and Māori organisations to identify priorities for startups	Discover what support is needed by iwi, hapu, and Māori organisations to enable new Pakihi Māori	Guidance to inform programme Kotahitanga Whanaungatanga Funding needs identified (if any)	A partnership approach empowers Māori to support Māori and guides the Council and EDKB in providing effective support for the ED and Māori Economic Development strategy.	June 2025 – ongoing
	Determine whether a startup working group would be established to support Te Ao Māori.	Stakeholder engagement provides direction on whether, why, how and who.	A te ao Māori partnership approach is established as part of the formal programme.	Sept 2025 – Feb 2025
	Understand the role Te Wānanga o Raukawa wishes to play to foster innovation in Kāpiti	Inputs for Māori Economic Development Strategy and Cluster Programme.	Support is provided for TWOR Startup Weekends & capability sessions, credentials in a way which works for TWOR.	July 2025 – ongoing

Appendices

[Startup Investment \(Autumn 2024\) \(pwc.co.nz\)](#)

[Startup Genome](#)

[Upstart Nation](#)

[Startup NZ – Ecosystem Guide – NZ Entrepreneur Magazine](#)

[Startup Aotearoa – Where Kiwi innovation comes to life](#)

[Start NZ Up – An action plan for a more entrepreneurial economy in Aotearoa New Zealand](#)

[Accelerating NSW: Insights from startups and startup support organisations – Investment NSW 2023](#)

[Accelerating NSW: the impact of coworking spaces, accelerators, incubators, and startup hubs – Investment NSW](#)

[Modelled Territorial Authority GDP 2024 release | Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment](#)

[Briefing to the incoming minister – NZTE](#)

