

PRE-ACCELERATOR PROGRAMS BENCHMARKING REPORT

Assessing LaunchVic funded pre-accelerator programs



This research was commissioned by LaunchVic and conducted independently by Kat Franks between February and April 2026. The report was prepared in partnership with LaunchVic.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 About startups, startup ecosystem support and pre-accelerator programs

Startups are not your traditional new small business venture or small-to-medium enterprise (SME). They are innovative, technology-based businesses that can scale rapidly and have the potential to capture mass markets. Innovation is central to a startup, which offers a product built on technology or a technology-based service. These ventures are not constrained by bricks and mortar, or borders for that matter. They have mass market or global appeal and the potential to grow fast.

Examples of technology-based businesses include: software and application development (artificial intelligence, big data analytics, e-commerce or marketplaces, augmented or virtual reality, and Software as a Service (SaaS)); hardware; advanced manufacturing; sensor technology; robotics; autonomous vehicles; quantum technology; deep tech; genomics and life sciences, which include biotech and medtech (LaunchVic, 2026).

Startup ecosystems include the resources to assist startups and entrepreneurs on their journey. They can be found in most locations around the world where there are startups. They are typically located within a 100 km radius around a central location and include universities, policymakers, investors, coworking spaces, incubators and

accelerators (Startup Genome, 2025). While accelerator programs are common to most startup ecosystems, **pre-accelerator programs** have emerged more recently.

Merguei and Costa (2022) suggest that pre-accelerators were created to fill a gap in support for very early-stage startup ventures. Although they share several characteristics with accelerators, such as cohort-based delivery over a fixed timeframe and a demo day or pitch event designed to advance entrepreneurial development, pre-accelerators are usually shorter (e.g., 4 to 14 weeks part-time) and targeted at the pre-venture stage, where participants are developing the problem-solution fit. Once the venture concept is more advanced and launching in market, accelerators and incubators become more appropriate forms of support. Refer to Appendix B for a model of the startup support system that outlines the type of services for each stage of development.

LaunchVic defines a pre-accelerator as a structured program that aims to help very early-stage startups refine their ideas, develop prototypes, and prepare for a formal accelerator or seed investment.

1.2 About this benchmarking study

LaunchVic commissioned the development of a publicly accessible benchmarking report to provide startup support service providers with evidence-based data on pre-accelerator program characteristics. This study builds on the limited research on pre-accelerator programs by providing an accessible framework of standards and insights into who is participating in a pre-accelerator, and performance metrics based on pre-accelerator program logic models.

This report enables pre-accelerator programs to benchmark their own program against a sample of Victorian-based programs. However, it does not seek to establish causal effectiveness and therefore should be read as a descriptive benchmarking report which does not identify or recommend 'best practice' in relation to pre-accelerator outcomes. Readers should keep in mind that programs are best designed and structured according to the needs, intended outcomes, and context of their target audience, as well as the resources available to deliver them.

1.3 About LaunchVic

LaunchVic was established by the Victorian Government in March 2016 as an independent agency responsible for growing the State's startup ecosystem. It was setup to support and connect the Victorian startup ecosystem with a particular focus on:

- Fostering a thriving entrepreneurial culture and entrepreneurial economy;
- Strengthening Victoria's entrepreneurial talent and capabilities; and
- Supporting innovative entrepreneurial firms to grow and contribute to the growth of the economy and employment in Victoria.

Since 2020, LaunchVic has funded 26 service providers (grant recipients) through dedicated grant rounds, direct grants, and re-funding to support Victorian-based pre-accelerator programs. These grant rounds have focused on a variety of areas including regional founders, AgTech, women-focused, specific industries (verticals), or technology types (horizontal), underrepresented founders and University-based programs. Since 2022, LaunchVic has also delivered its own challenge-based pre-accelerator program, CivVic Labs.

Pre-accelerators are funded by LaunchVic to primarily support Victorian-based startup entrepreneurs in bringing their ideas to life and creating an MVP, thereby increasing the pipeline of startups being created across Victoria and the number of quality startups entering accelerator programs in Victoria (LaunchVic, 2025).

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Questions

The three main research questions studied were:

1. What are the typical characteristics of a pre-accelerator program?
2. Who is participating in a pre-accelerator?
3. How do pre-accelerators perform against established program-level outputs and outcomes?

2.2 Sampling Approach and Sample Frame

This pre-accelerator benchmarking report primarily draws on data collected by LaunchVic from pre-accelerator service providers funded through various LaunchVic grant programs. Since 2020, LaunchVic has funded 26 external pre-accelerator service providers, in addition to delivering its own pre-accelerator program. These 27 programs make up the sample frame for the study. Programs were selected for inclusion based on their

relevance to the benchmarking research questions and the practical requirement that sufficient data was available for analysis. However, some programs were excluded from particular components of the study where data was unavailable.

All pre-accelerator programs in this report have been de-identified, as the purpose of the study is not to evaluate comparative program performance. Refer to Table 1 for the sample frame, including program identifier, current operating status (at the time the research was conducted in early 2026) and whether the program has produced any graduates to date.

Programs that are categorised in Table 1 as inactive do have a public presence (e.g., website) but are not accepting applications at the time of reporting. Programs that are closed either have no public presence or have a public presence but no active program management or delivery team.

Table 1. Sample Frame

Program Identifier	Status	Graduates
PR01	Active	Yes
PR02	Inactive	Yes
PR03	Active	Yes
PR04	Active	Yes
PR05	Active	Yes
PR06	Active	Yes
PR07	Active	Yes
PR08	Inactive	Yes
PR09	Closed	Yes
PR10	Active	Yes
PR11	Active	Yes
PR12	Active	Yes
PR13	Active	Yes
PR14	Active	Yes
PR15	Active	Yes
PR16	Inactive	Yes
PR17	Closed	Yes
PR18	Active	Yes
PR19	Closed	Yes
PR20	Closed	Yes
PR21	Closed	Yes
PR22	Inactive	Yes
PR23	Closed	Yes
PR24	Closed	Yes
PR25	Active	No
PR26	Active	No
PR27	Active	No

2.3 Data Sources

The study utilised both quantitative and qualitative data gathered by the researcher (primary data) and quantitative and qualitative data collected by LaunchVic (secondary data) from its own pre-accelerator and from grant recipients. See Table 2 for program data and Table 3 for participant data.

Table 2. Program Data

Data	Type	Details
Program Data		
Primary	Programs Survey	A survey was developed to collect data on the program application and assessment processes, as well as levels of program demand. The survey was prepared by the researcher and distributed by LaunchVic to 14 program managers from active or recently inactive programs. All invited program managers completed the survey during the two-week survey period.
	Desktop Research	A desktop review of publicly available information of pre-accelerator programs was undertaken, including a review of 20 program websites. This review collected data on program design, structure, and delivery.
Secondary	Grant Applications and Agreements	Documentation provided to LaunchVic by grant recipients (pre-accelerator service providers) was analysed to identify key program characteristics. All documentation was kept strictly confidential and reviewed only when needed. There is no identifying information contained in this report.
	Grant Milestone Reports	
	Project Plans	
	Sustainability Plans	

Table 3. Participant Data

Data	Type	Details
Participant Data		
Primary	Graduate Survey	The researcher designed a short survey, which LaunchVic distributed to 1,664 graduates across the 27 sample programs where an email address was available. The survey was intended to gather information on participants' stage at the commencement of the program, their motivations for joining a pre-accelerator, whether their expectations were met, and the outcomes they experienced, including the perceived contribution of the pre-accelerator to those outcomes. The survey was open for 11 days. In total, 178 emails bounced back, the majority of which related to participants from programs delivered between 2020 and 2022. Of the 1,486 graduates who successfully received the survey, 175 responded, resulting in a 13% response rate. As 23 respondents (13%) had participated in more than one pre-accelerator, the respondent data represents 197 program participations. Refer to Appendix 3 for details on respondents categorised by pre-accelerator program.
	Secondary	Grant Milestone Reports - Participant Surveys
	LaunchVic CRM	LaunchVic's CRM categorisation data was used throughout this study.

3. WHAT IS A PRE-ACCELERATOR PROGRAM?

Typical characteristics

-
- 3.1 Program objectives
 - 3.2 Content
 - 3.3 Setup, structure and delivery
 - 3.4 Program costs and funding model
 - 3.5 Program demand
 - 3.6 Application and selection process



3. WHAT IS A PRE-ACCELERATOR PROGRAM?

3.1 Program objectives

Pre-accelerator objectives are mostly conveyed on program websites as learning outcomes or broader objectives. In some cases, they are noted in messaging about the intended target audience or inferred from program delivery. However, objectives were not always explicitly stated on websites. Where this information was absent from sites, documents such as grant applications and program guidelines were used as supplementary sources.

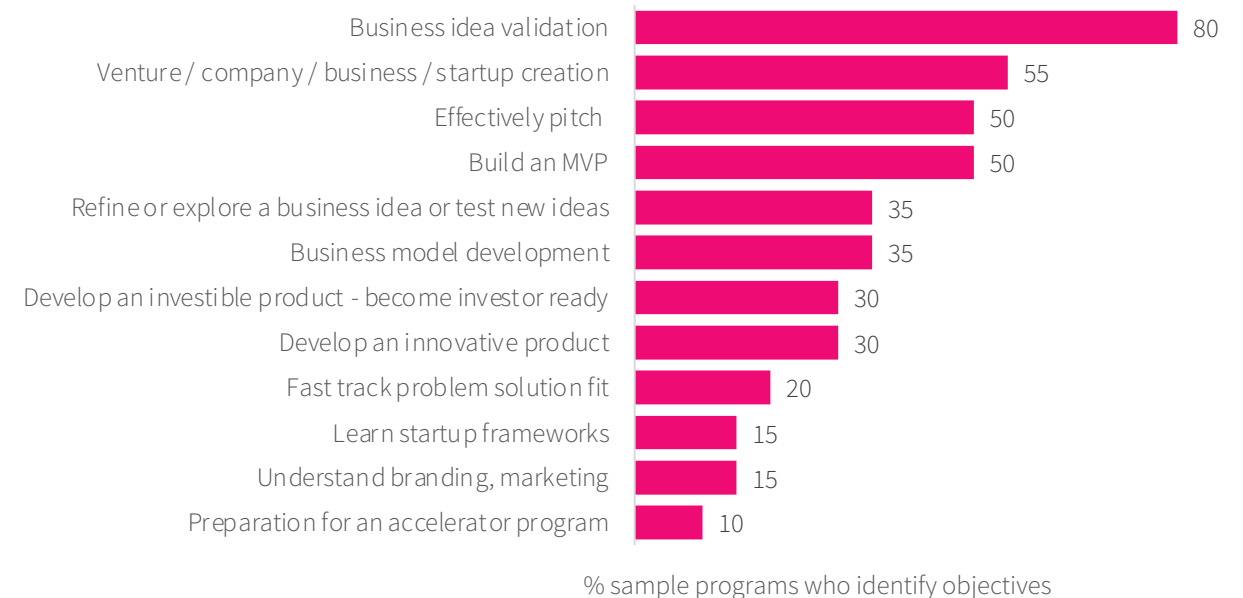
Among the programs reviewed, the most frequently mentioned goal was validating business ideas, appearing in 80% of programs. A ranked list is presented in Figure 1.

3.2 Content

Pre-accelerator programs deliver educational content through structured programming (Merguei & Costa, 2022). The content delivered across 19 pre-accelerator programs was examined as part of this study. The availability of information on program content varied, with **approximately a third of programs providing publicly available information on topics**, while only a small number provided a schedule of topics covered.

An inductively developed heatmap of program topics is presented in Figure 2. In addition, 14 programs covered content beyond the topics included in the heatmap, such as goal setting, key metrics or OKRs, and topics specific to a program's vertical focus (e.g. energytech, AI, and medtech).

Figure 1. Program Objectives



3. WHAT IS A PRE-ACCELERATOR PROGRAM?

Figure 2. Program Content Heatmap¹

Program	Idea Validation, Customer Discovery, Customer Interviews	Pitching / Storytelling	Identifying a Problem / Defining the Problem	Business Models / Business Model Canvas / Business Model Development	MVP Development / Prototyping	Getting Investment / Fundraising	Market Research, Define a Market	Finances / Revenue Models	Go-to-market strategy, Get Your First Customers	Value Proposition	Building Teams, Leadership	Branding, Marketing, Promotion,	Legals, IP, Regulations, Commercialisation	Business Essentials (e.g., Operations, Company structures, Tax)	Startup ecosystem / What is a Startup / Lean	Founder Mindset	
PR05																	11
PR11																	11
PR18																	11
PR02																	11
PR01																	11
PR08																	10
PR27																	10
PR03																	10
PR22																	9
PR16																	9
PR10																	9
PR15																	9
PR04																	8
PR14																	8
PR13																	7
PR26																	7
PR12																	6
PR25																	6
PR06																	6
	19	17	14	14	14	12	11	11	10	9	8	7	7	6	6	4	
	100%	89%	74%	74%	74%	63%	58%	58%	53%	47%	42%	37%	37%	32%	32%	21%	

1. Where this information was not publicly available, data was drawn from grant applications, milestone reports, participant surveys submitted with reports, and direct correspondence with providers. In some cases, topic categorisation relied on the researcher's interpretation when program descriptions did not align exactly with the heatmap's naming conventions.

3. WHAT IS A PRE-ACCELERATOR PROGRAM?

3.2 Content (continued)

Some topics, such as Founder Mindset, might be covered by program providers but may not be explicitly listed as a topic. Some topics may also be considered overarching themes and may overlap with other definitions. For example, programs that list Idea Validation might cover the topics of Identifying a Problem and Defining the Problem; Market Research and Defining a Market; Developing a Value Proposition; and Customer Discovery, including Customer Interviews as Idea Validation.

The top ten topics covered in a pre-accelerator program are ranked in Table 4.

Table 4. Program Topics

Ranking	Topics	Representation
1	Idea Validation, Customer Discovery, Customer Interviews	100%
2	Pitching / Storytelling	89%
3	Identifying a Problem / Defining the Problem	74%
4	Business Models / Business Model Canvas / Business Model Development	74%
5	MVP Development / Prototyping	74%
6	Getting Investment / Fundraising	63%
7	Market Research, Define a Market	58%
8	Finances / Revenue Models	58%
9	Go-to-market strategy, Get Your First Customers	53%
10	Value Proposition	47%

3.3 Setup, structure and delivery

The study examined key program characteristics, including program length, weekly participant time commitment, cohort size, and the level of program support provided (e.g. number of staff). The findings are summarised over pages 12 to 14. The median, or middle value, is the preferred metric for interpreting these results when values vary across the sample. On this basis, **pre-accelerator programs are commonly delivered over 12 weeks, require a weekly time commitment of 4 hours, and have a cohort size of 16 participants.**

The study also explored other delivery characteristics, including format (online, in person, or hybrid), program design features, delivery team arrangements, events, and the availability of post-program support. These findings are presented in Table 5.

Overall, the findings suggest that **pre-accelerator programs are mostly delivered virtually**, with some of these pre-accelerators also offering in-person activities and events, such as a pitch event or showcase. **Workshops and masterclasses are central to program design, reflecting a strong emphasis on structured, cohort-based learning.** Around half of the programs also offered mentoring, coaching, and expert speakers, indicating that many programs combine structured content with more tailored forms of support. External delivery support or delivery partners were relatively common, while post-program support is less frequently offered.

Program setup and structure



Range: 6 to 48 weeks **Average:** 14 weeks
Median: 12 weeks **Sample size:** 20 programs

Four programs delivered over 6 to 8 weeks, with three delivered over 10 weeks and eight programs delivered over 12 weeks. Three programs delivered over several months, the longest being 12 months.

Range: 1.25 to 11 hours **Average:** 4 hours
Median: 4 hours **Sample size:** 13 programs

Several programs provided a range of hours (e.g., 2 to 3 hours a week or 3 to 6 hours). One program required 11 hours a week, including a full day of programming plus additional time. The program delivered over a year required the least amount of time, an estimated 1.25 hours a week on average.

3. WHAT IS A PRE-ACCELERATOR PROGRAM?

Range: 20 to 66 hours **Average:** 48 hours
Median: 40 hours **Sample size:** 13 programs

At the highest end of the scale, the program that required the most time commitment totalled 66 hours over 6 weeks, while at the opposite end, one 8-week program required only 16 to 24 hours in total.

Data sources: PRIMARY DATA: Program websites.
SECONDARY DATA: Application Guidelines; Grant Applications; Grant Agreements; Project Plans

16 INDIVIDUALS

COHORT SIZE

Range: 8 to 45 individual graduates **Average:** 19 individuals
Median: 16 individuals **Sample size:** 20 programs

The program with the least time commitment required from participants supported large cohorts, 45 on average. While a regional-based program averaged 8 participants per cohort.

SUPPORTED BY

3 STAFF

PROGRAM SUPPORT TEAM

Range: 1 to 5 program support staff **Average:** 3 staff
Median: 3 staff **Sample size:** 19 Programs

Program support staff can often include program directors, managers and coordinators, as well as recruitment, engagement/partnerships, and events managers. University programs listed larger support teams compared to startup-ecosystem based programs. Note that roles were not always full-time equivalent.

Data sources: PRIMARY DATA: Program websites.
SECONDARY DATA: Application Guidelines; Grant Applications;
Grant Agreements; Project Plans

3. WHAT IS A PRE-ACCELERATOR PROGRAM?

Program setup and structure

Table 5. Program Delivery Metrics

	FINDING	INSIGHTS	SAMPLE	DATA SOURCES
PROGRAM DELIVERY				
Delivery format	Mostly Virtual	The delivery format varied across programs, with most (11 programs) delivered virtually, although some of these also included in-person activities or events. Four programs (20%) were delivered in a hybrid format, combining in-person and virtual delivery, while a further four were delivered fully in-person. One program offered both in-person and online delivery formats as separate options.	n=20 Programs	PRIMARY DATA Program websites SECONDARY DATA Application Guidelines Grant Applications Grant Agreements Project Plans
Events	Pitch event / Demo Day / Showcase	Almost all programs (80%) include an end-of-program demo day, pitch event, or showcase. Fewer programs hold a launch event at the beginning of the program (20%), and only 10% include a specific networking event as part of program delivery.		
Post-Program Support	Not as Common	Post-program alumni support was less common, and the level of support provided varied across programs. Overall, 20% of active programs reported offering some level of support after program completion.		
Delivery Team	External support or external delivery partners are common	Nearly half of the sample programs (45%) involved an external delivery provider or partner. This included four programs in which an external partner delivered the majority of the program content. This suggests that collaboration with external organisations may be used to strengthen delivery capability and provide specialised expertise, particularly in programs with a vertical focus.		
Program Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops / Masterclasses • Mentorship • Coaching • Expert Speakers 	Around half of programs (55%) explicitly stated that mentoring was provided, most commonly through dedicated sessions. A similar proportion reported offering coaching (55%), while 45% included expert speakers.		

3. WHAT IS A PRE-ACCELERATOR PROGRAM?

3.4 Program costs and funding model

The costs of delivering a pre-accelerator program and funding models were analysed using a range of data sources. See Table 6 for findings.

Firstly, participant incentives were examined. Of the 12 programs that offered an incentive, these took the form of either grant funding or prize money, with all funding provided on an equity-free basis. This is a key point of difference from accelerator programs. **Among graduates who participated in the program which offered the highest available incentive (\$37,500), 82% identified the funding on offer as one of their motivations for participating, alongside a range of other factors.**

Participant fees were also examined as part of the analysis. The research found that **two-thirds of programs did not charge a participant fee.** Where fees were charged, they were most commonly between \$250 and \$550, suggesting that they may have been intended more to signal participant commitment than to recover program costs.

The overall cost per graduate was then analysed by reviewing grant applications and project plan budgets². To calculate this figure, the total delivery cost was divided by the number of graduates, or the proposed number of graduates for programs that had not yet completed delivery. Several programs also reported in-kind contributions as part of their budgets. These amounts were excluded where there was no clear link to direct program delivery and they appeared to represent additional value rather than core delivery costs. **The estimated cost of graduating an individual pre-accelerator participant ranged from \$2,551 to \$21,266, with an average cost of \$9,868.**

In general, programs with larger cohorts may achieve a lower cost per participant. However, this does not necessarily translate to stronger participant satisfaction. For example, one of the most cost-effective programs, which supported a comparatively large number of participants, recorded a somewhat lower NPS than other pre-accelerators, with an average NPS of 63.

Finally, the study examined pre-accelerator funding models and program sustainability beyond LaunchVic (government) funding. Most programs identified a combination of planned sources to support continued operations after LaunchVic funding. **The main sources of funding identified for ongoing operating costs were sponsorship and further government funding.** About one-third of programs also indicated that participant fees would contribute to operational costs after LaunchVic funding. However, given that pre-accelerator programs primarily target aspiring startup entrepreneurs and very early-stage founders from pre-revenue ventures, who are often seeking funding as they establish their business, charging high participant fees to cover program costs may be less feasible.

Given the gap between cost of programs, and typical participant fees charged, pre-accelerator programs face strong challenges in sustaining operations without government funding. Programs which have been able to continue following the completion of their LaunchVic grant have typically been able to do so through embedding within a university environment or securing funding from other government agencies.

² For some programs, providers delivered activities beyond the pre-accelerator itself, such as bootcamps or additional online educational programs. In addition, some reported in-kind contributions may have reflected broader value-adding inputs rather than direct delivery costs. These factors, together with program establishment costs, may affect the accuracy of estimates of the true cost of program delivery.

3. WHAT IS A PRE-ACCELERATOR PROGRAM?

Program costs and funding model

Table 6. Program Costs and Funding Model

	RANGE	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	INSIGHTS	SAMPLE	DATA SOURCES
PROGRAM COSTS						
Participant Incentive estimated	\$0 to \$37,500	\$6,200	\$2,500	60% of programs offer an incentive. Mostly prizes or grants from a pool of funds for a small number of participants. One program offered up to \$37,500 in grants and prizes.	n=20 Programs	PRIMARY DATA Program websites
Participant fee	\$0 to \$8,000	\$793	\$0	Programs were heavily subsidised by LaunchVic funding and as such, two-thirds of programs did not charge a fee. Of the 8 programs that charged a fee, half charged between \$250 and \$550 with one program website noting they charge up to \$8,000.	n=20 Programs	SECONDARY DATA Application Guidelines Grant applications Grant Agreements Project Plans Sustainability Plan
Cost per individual graduate on aggregate	\$2,551 to \$21,266	\$9,868	\$9,431	The programs that cost the most to operate, between approximately \$13k to \$21k per graduate, offered the largest incentives.	n=19 Programs	
FUNDING MODEL						
Sustainability Post LaunchVic Grant	Combination of sources - Sponsorship / Partnerships - Government Grants / Funding - Participant Fees		Two-thirds of programs plan for a combination of funding sources. These are listed below: 60% are seeking sponsorships/partnerships 45% are seeking government grants/government funding 35% will charge a participant fee Other sources included revenue from equity investments, co-working space, and consultancy fees. Philanthropic funding, reduced operating costs, and integration into the lead organisation’s business model were also listed.		n=20 Programs	SECONDARY DATA Sustainability Plan Grant Application

3. WHAT IS A PRE-ACCELERATOR PROGRAM?

3.5 Program demand

The analysis examined the three most recent cohorts (where available) for 14 pre-accelerator programs. Programs offered between 8 and 50 places per cohort, with a median of 16 places, and 29 applications per cohort (see Table 7). Based on this, **there is evidence of steady demand for pre-accelerators, with programs consistently receiving more applications than places.** Delivery format varied across these programs and applications generally increased for each cohort after a pre-accelerator launched. Program acceptance rates ranged from 22% to 92%, with a median of 61%.

3.6 Application and selection process

Programs outlined their application and assessment processes through the program manager survey. Respondents also described their eligibility criteria, assessment criteria, and how assessment outcomes were communicated. Findings are presented in Table 8.

Almost all programs had an application form, with half also requiring an expression of interest as an initial step. Around one-third additionally requested a pitch video, presentation, or applicant video. Applications were then assessed, with around half of programs also conducting applicant interviews.

For programs that specified eligibility criteria, these were typically based on LaunchVic grant requirements, such as being Victorian-based. **Commitment, alignment with the program's industry or sector focus, and applicant capacity were identified as the most important assessment criteria, followed by motivation.** Most programs communicated the outcome of the assessment process through an outcome notification, often accompanied by a letter of offer or contract.

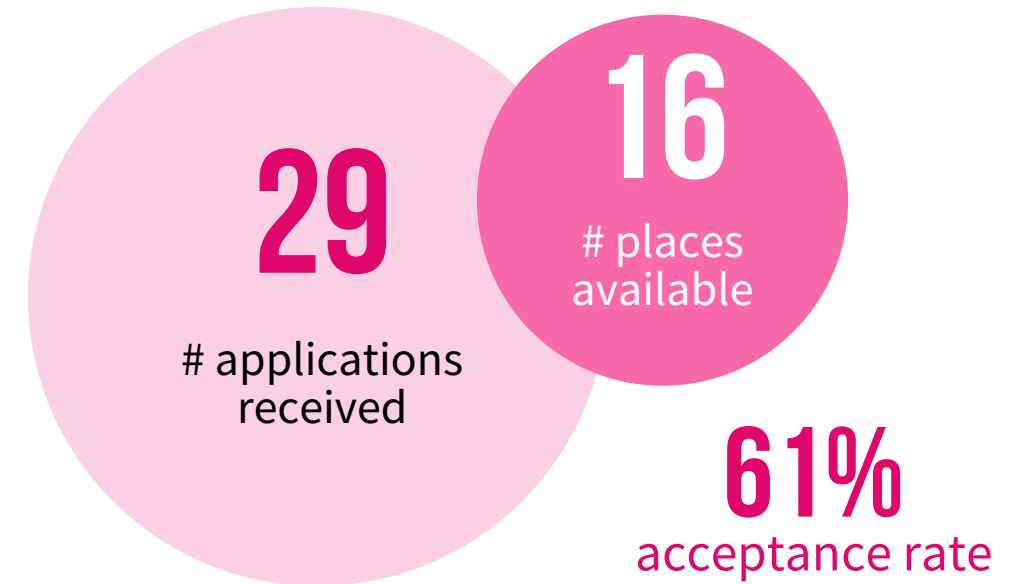


Table 7. Program Demand

	RANGE	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	SAMPLE PROGRAMS
PROGRAM DEMAND³				
Number of places available on aggregate	8 to 50 Places available per cohort	19 Places	16 Places	n=12
Number of applications received on aggregate	8 to 107 applications per cohort	39 Apps	29 apps	n=12
Acceptance rate on aggregate	22% to 92% applications accepted per cohort	55%	61%	n=12

3. One virtually delivered program, which also included in-person events, offered unlimited places and received 163 applications per cohort on average with an acceptance rate of 97% of applications on average. This program is considered an outlier when compared to other programs and was excluded from the analysis.

3. WHAT IS A PRE-ACCELERATOR PROGRAM?

Application and selection process

Table 8. Program Application and Assessment Process

	FINDING	INSIGHTS	SAMPLE	DATA SOURCES
APPLICATION PROCESS				
Application procedure	Programs require an Application Form and an EOI in some instances	93% Application Form (one program only requires an EOI) 50% Expression of Interest (EOI) 36% Pitch Video / Presentation, Applicant Video Over half request more than one document or form from applicants	n=14 Programs	PRIMARY DATA Programs Survey
Assessment process	Application Assessment Eligibility Assessment Applicant Interview	100% perform an application assessment 86% include an eligibility assessment 50% hold an applicant interview	n=14 Programs	
Eligibility Criteria	Mostly based on LaunchVic grant requirements	Based in Victoria (55%); aligned to service provider 55% (e.g., University, Clinician) or participant type (e.g., First Nations); aligned to vertical 36%; and stage or type of business 36% (e.g., tech-based)	n=11 Programs	
Key Assessment Criteria	Commitment, Alignment with program’s industry/sector focus and Capacity	1. Commitment 69% 2. Alignment (e.g., with the program’s industry/sector focus) 62% 3. Capacity 62% 4. Motivation 54% 5. Startup Stage 46% Startup Idea 46% 6. Impact Potential 38% Capability 38% 7. Other – Ability to collaborate / co-design 15%	n=13 Programs	
Post-Application communications provided to applicants	Outcome notification and another document such as a Letter of Offer or contract	64% send an outcome notification and another document 57% provide a Letter of Offer 36% issue a contract 21% send a rejection letter to unsuccessful applicants 14% provide an outcome notification only (CICA Lab, Boab AI)	n=14 Programs	

4. WHO IS PARTICIPATING IN A PRE-ACCELERATOR AND WHAT DO THEY VALUE?

Participants

-
- 4.1 Demographic profile
 - 4.2 Stage of participant
 - 4.3 Motivations for participating
 - 4.4 Program value



4. WHO IS PARTICIPATING IN A PRE-ACCELERATOR?

4.1 Demographic profile

The study assessed participant demographic characteristics (based on data collected by LaunchVic), including location (regional or metropolitan), gender, and participant type (individual or startup team). Findings are presented in Table 9. An analysis of participant location, based on postcodes, found that on average 31% of participants were from regional locations. However, this figure was influenced by four programs funded under a LaunchVic regional strategy to support aspiring entrepreneurs in regional Victoria, as well as three AgTech programs with a high proportion of regional participants.

When considering the median, **regional participants represented 11% of participants across programs.**

A review of individual participant gender across 22 programs found that **47% of participants identified as female, 50% as male, and 3% as other or not recorded.** This result should be interpreted in context, as LaunchVic also funded four female-focused pre-accelerator programs. The analysis also uncovered that four regional programs had high female representation. Nevertheless, the level of female participation is encouraging. Startup Muster’s (2025) report found that 31% of founding teams included women, up from 27% in the previous two years,

while LaunchVic’s Ecosystem Mapping research found that startups with at least one female founder had grown to 45% in 2025 (LaunchVic & dandalopartners, 2026).

Pre-accelerator programs predominantly support individual participants, rather than startup teams or pairs of aspiring founders working on the same startup idea. Across programs, individual participants represented between 50% and 100% of participants. The average proportion was 85%, with a median of 91%.

Table 9. Demographic profile of participants

	RANGE	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	INSIGHTS	SAMPLE	DATA SOURCES
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS						
Metro v Regional Victorian Participants	0% to 100% Regional/Metro	31% Regional	11% Regional	Four regional programs reported 100% to 90% regional Victorian-based participants. Two AgTech programs supported approximately 50% regional.	n=1027 Participants from 19 Programs	SECONDARY DATA LaunchVic Salesforce CRM Identifying metro COVID-19 Melbourne restricted postcodes Vic State Government Designated regional area postcodes (Australian Government)
Gender - Female	14% to 100% Female	51% Female	47% Female	Four female-focused programs with close to 100% female representation. Four regional programs with 63% to 59% female participants on average. Four programs reported between 20% to 14%. Two programs were excluded due to a lack of data.	n=1638 (N=1833) from 22 Programs	
- Male	0% to 86%	46% Male	50% Male			
- Other / Not recorded	0% to 18%	3%	3%			
TYPE OF PARTICIPANT						
% Individual Participants compared to startup teams	50% to 100% individual participants	85%	91%	100% of two program cohorts were all individuals. 62% of participants from PR05 were individuals and 50% for PR10 from their first cohort of 14.	n=24 Programs	SECONDARY DATA LaunchVic Salesforce CRM

4. WHO IS PARTICIPATING IN A PRE-ACCELERATOR?

4.2 Stage of participant

Data on participants' stage at program commencement was collected through the Graduate Survey. Respondents were provided with a list of stages and asked to select the one which most closely reflected where they were before starting the program. If respondents had done more than one pre-accelerator, they selected the stage they were at prior to their first program. Refer to Figure 3 for results.

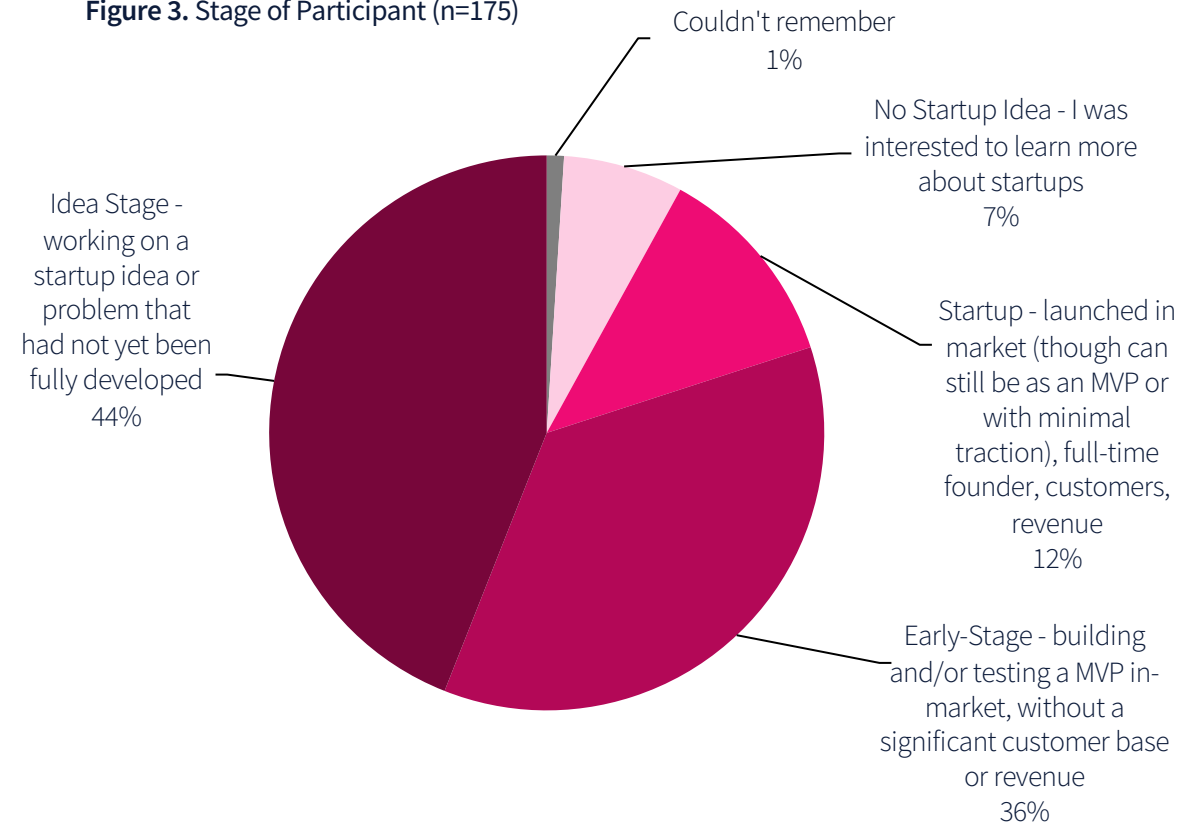
This indicates that **programs are assisting both idea-stage and early-stage participants, each of which may require programming that accommodates different levels of startup development.** Qualitative feedback from the survey suggests that participants may still find value in revisiting content they are already familiar with, provided their expectations for other value drivers are met.

4.3 Motivations for participating

Participants' motivations for joining a pre-accelerator program were explored through the Graduate Survey. Respondents selected from a list of options designed to capture foundational motivations, capability-building and startup idea development drivers, and networking and growth-related motivations. Findings are presented Figure 4.

Participants are primarily seeking support in developing their product or service, enhancing their skills and knowledge to build a scalable startup, and accessing industry experts through a pre-accelerator. About two-thirds focus on validating their product, ensuring problem-solution fit, and establishing a clear value proposition. Additionally, most participants prioritise networking, especially connecting with experts and other entrepreneurs or founders.

Figure 3. Stage of Participant (n=175)



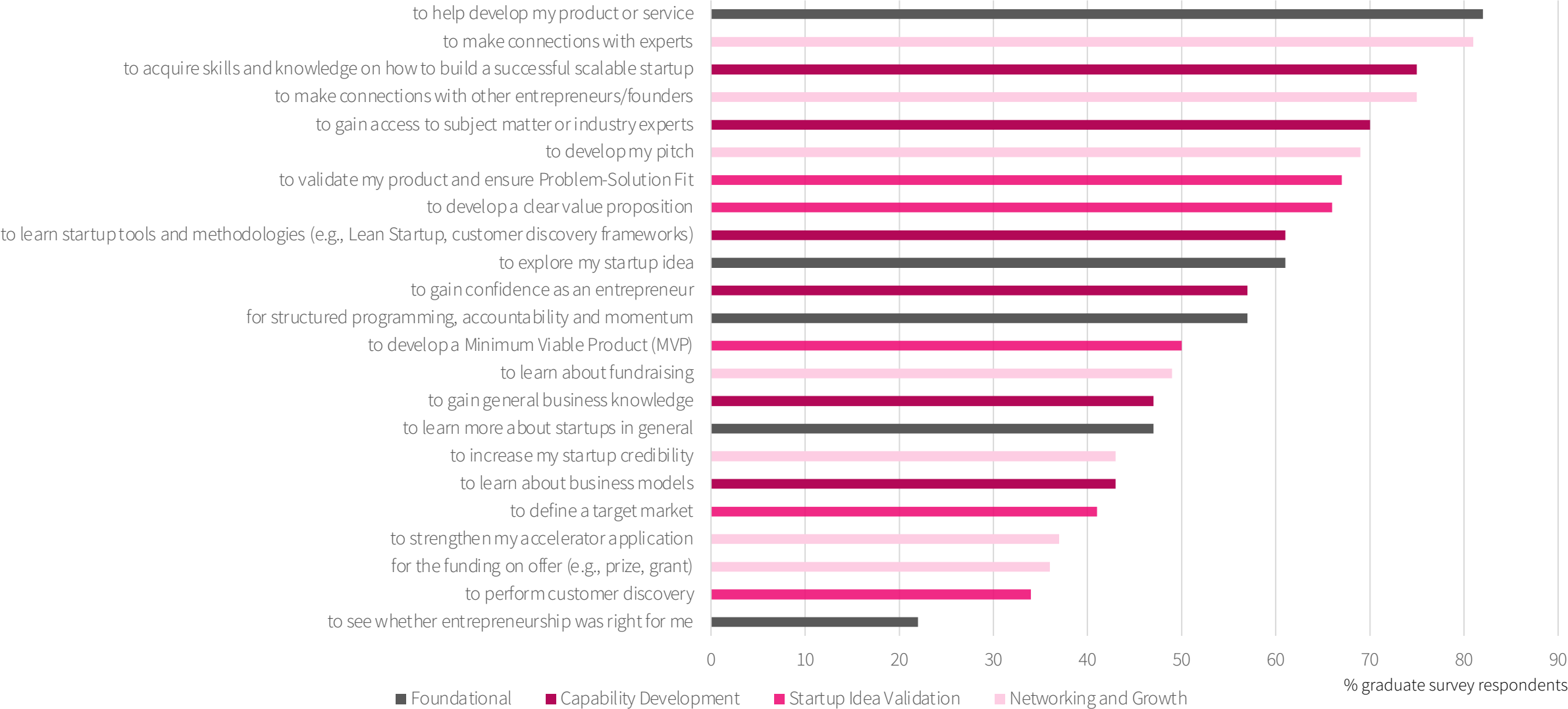
“We did a pre-accelerator PR11 in 2021/22 and then PR05 in 2025. PR11 was super early stage. When participating in PR05, we were already pretty solid when it comes to basic startup knowledge. Reason [for attending the second program] was more for the gov angle, although revisiting some of the basics was useful too.”

(Participant, PR05, PR11)

4. WHO IS PARTICIPATING IN A PRE-ACCELERATOR?

Motivations for participating

Figure 4. Motivations for participating in a pre-accelerator (n=175)



4. WHO IS PARTICIPATING IN A PRE-ACCELERATOR?

4.4 Program value

Nine programs collected insights into what graduates valued or found most impactful from completing the pre-accelerator program. This qualitative survey data was provided to LaunchVic for reporting purposes and analysed in this study, with the sample representing 20% of the population. The most common themes were ranked and presented in Table 10.

Gathering data on what graduates found least valuable was less common. Only five programs investigated this through end of program surveys. When asked, a third of respondents chose not to respond or found everything valuable. The qualitative responses are included in Table 11. These findings should be read knowing the small sample of responses, which represent 6% of the population studied.



Table 10. Most valued aspect of a pre-accelerator

Ranking	Most valued/impactful/useful program aspect (n=365)
1	Community and founder network
2	Mentorship and coaching
3	Practical startup capability development
4	Quality facilitation and program support
5	Accountability, structure and momentum
6	Confidence and mindset shift

Table 11. Least valued aspect of a pre-accelerator

Ranking	Least valued program aspect (n=106)
1	A third of respondents left this blank or found everything valuable
2	A lack of content relevance and stage fit (e.g., content that did not match their stage, needs, or startup context)
3	Activities that lacked engagement or clear value
4	Pace, timing, scheduling issues, and workload
5	Sessions, speakers, or formats that felt less engaging or too generic
6	A lack of follow-on support and external connections

5. HOW ARE PRE-ACCELERATORS PERFORMING AND WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

Program performance

-
- 5.1 Program quality
 - 5.2 Program level outcomes
 - 5.3 Participant level outcomes



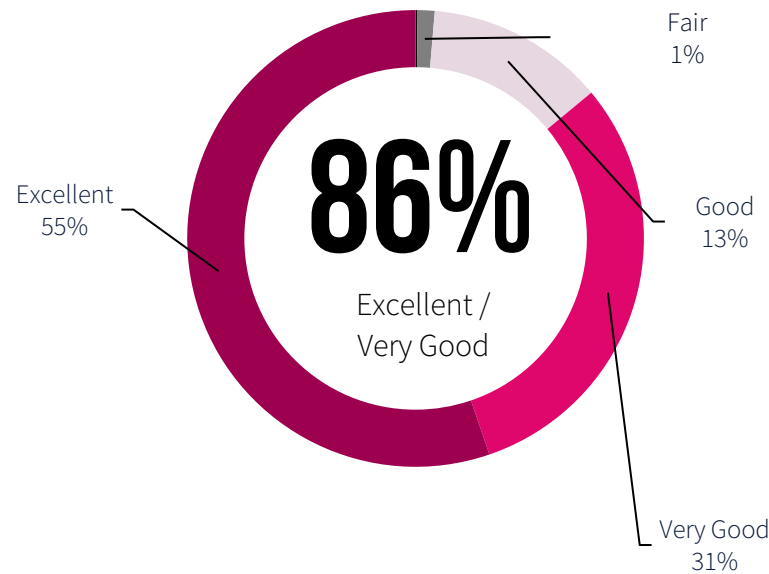
5. HOW ARE PRE-ACCELERATORS PERFORMING AND WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

5.1 Program quality

Pre-accelerator programs typically collect participant program quality ratings through end of program surveys to better understand participant perceptions of delivery quality, relevance, and usefulness. This is an important measure, particularly given that while most programs are provided at no cost to participants (supported by government funding invested through LaunchVic), startup founders invest their time and effort through participation.

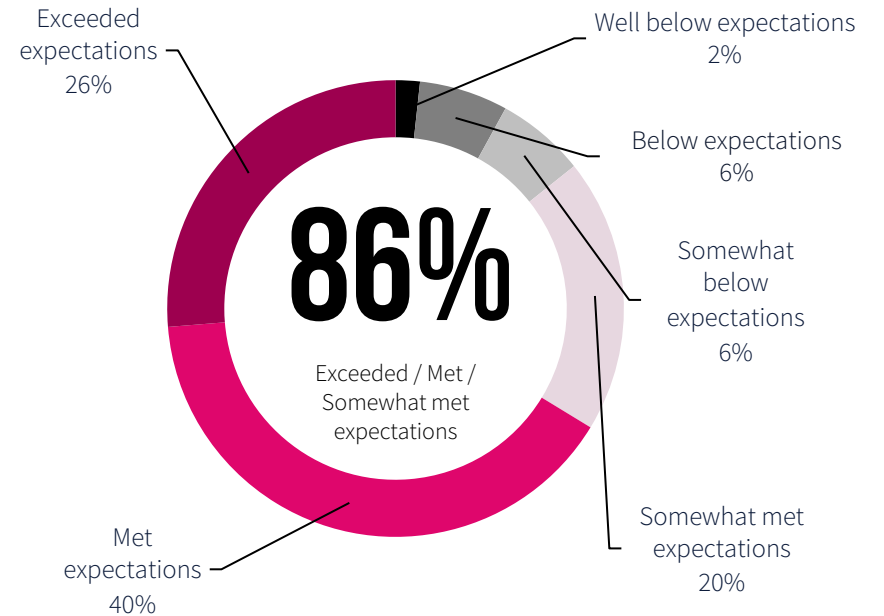
Analysis of survey data submitted to LaunchVic found that over half of participants (55%) rated their pre-accelerator experience as excellent on average, with a further 31% rating it as very good. In total, 86% of **participants reported high levels of satisfaction with their program overall** (see Figure 5). This is consistent with findings from the 2026 Graduate Survey, in which 86% of participants indicated that the program met or somewhat met their expectations (see Figure 6).

Figure 5. Level of participant satisfaction with the standard of program delivery



Sample: n=744 Participants from 17 Programs.
Program Quality Rating.
Data Source: Grant Milestone Reports – Participant Surveys.

Figure 6. Pre-accelerator program(s) meeting participant expectations



Sample: n=175 Participants from 24 Programs.
Survey Question: Did the pre-accelerator program(s) meet your expectations overall?
Data Source: Graduate Survey.

5. HOW ARE PRE-ACCELERATORS PERFORMING AND WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

5.1 Program quality (continued)

Pre-accelerators also collect data on whether graduates would recommend the program to other aspiring or early-stage startup founders. Among the 18 programs that collected and shared this data, average NPS scores ranged from 63 to 100. At the individual cohort level, scores ranged from 39 to 100. The average NPS across programs was 78 (see Figure 7), with a median of 77. For programs that have completed between three or more cohorts, NPS trends over time by cohort are presented in Figure 9.

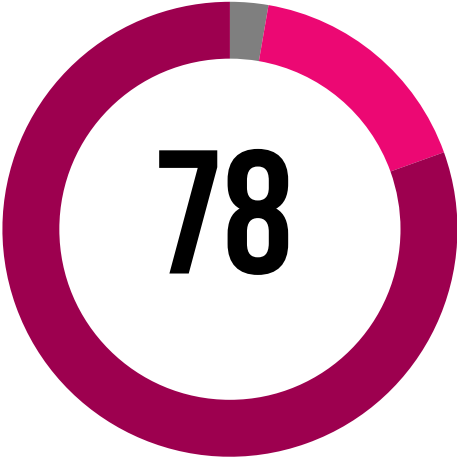
Data from the Graduate Survey however indicates a lower NPS of 39 (see Figure 8). This difference likely reflects changes in participant perceptions over time, as outcomes become clearer and the immediacy of the program experience diminishes. It should also be noted that the survey sample size is smaller for the Graduate Survey and the question was posed more broadly, rather than about one program specifically. As participants may have different motivations or at different stages, a program may suit the needs of one individual but not another.

“Suggesting for others to join these programs is totally dependant on the individual. For us, it was really about validation and networking, for others it is the basics of building a business. I think the value of these programs is dependant on the level of clarity the individual has for joining.”

(PR16 Participant, Graduate Survey)

While quality ratings and NPS scores are an important measure of participant experience and value, they do not provide evidence of participant outcomes or program impact. A program may receive high ratings without necessarily leading to startup success.

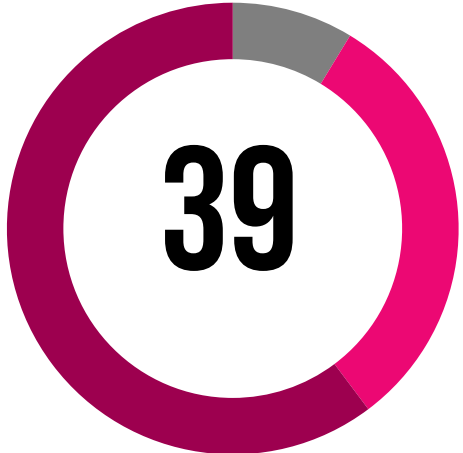
Figure 7. Recommend a specific pre-accelerator immediately after program completion, NPS Score on average



■ Detractors 6 and less ■ Passives 8 to 7 ■ Promoters 10 to 9

Sample: n=810 Participants from 18 Programs.
Date Source: Grant Milestone Reports – Participant Surveys.

Figure 8. Recommend a pre-accelerator NPS Score



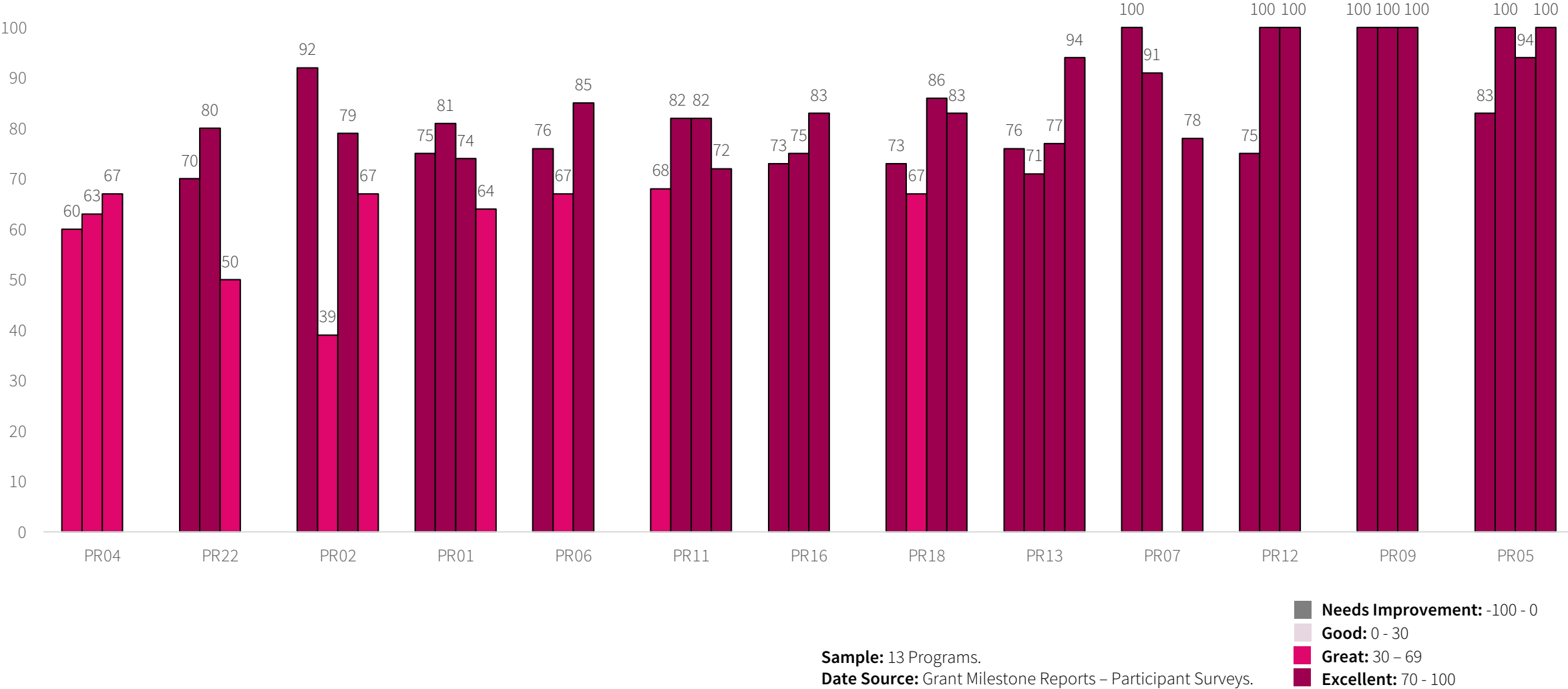
■ Detractors 6 and less ■ Passives 8 to 7 ■ Promoters 10 to 9

Sample: n=175 Participants from 24 Programs.
Survey Question: On a scale of 1-10, how likely is it that you would recommend a pre-accelerator program to other aspiring or early-stage founders?
Date Source: Graduate Survey.

5. HOW ARE PRE-ACCELERATORS PERFORMING AND WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

5.1 Program quality (continued)

Figure 9. NPS scores over time, for programs with 3 to 4 cohorts



5. HOW ARE PRE-ACCELERATORS PERFORMING AND WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

5.2 Program level outcomes

The three primary intended end of program level outcomes that LaunchVic is seeking pre-accelerator programs to achieve are: (1) increasing participant connections and startup network; (2) increasing participant capabilities in building a startup; and (3) supporting the creation of new startups. LaunchVic began collecting data for the first two outcomes from grant recipients from July 2024 onwards. **Overwhelmingly, participants reported making new connections and expanding their networks, as well as increasing their startup skills and knowledge through participation in a pre-accelerator program** (see Table 12).

Increasing the number of startups created across Victoria is a key objective of LaunchVic. However, determining when a new startup is ‘created’ is inherently challenging, particularly in the absence of a universally accepted definition. To measure this outcome, LaunchVic uses participant data collected by pre-accelerator programs, including attendance dates, and looks at the link to the registration of a new Victorian company or business name through the Australian Business Number (ABN) registry. This is used as a key verifiable indicator, alongside the presence of a website. Based on this criteria, 11% of pre-accelerator participants are associated with the creation of new Victorian startups.

It should be noted that findings from the Graduate Survey differ from this measure. In the survey, **29% of respondents reported that they had launched a startup business**, with 68% indicating that participation in a pre-accelerator contributed, to some extent, to this outcome.

The difference between the two measures of startup creation highlights the challenges of defining and measuring when a startup is ‘created’. The ABN measure (11%) captures formally registered and verifiable business activity, while the higher self-reported rate (29%) reflects participant perceptions of having launched a startup. This suggests that many participants may consider their startup to be ‘launched’ based on different criteria.

Table 12. Program level outcomes

	RANGE	AVERAGE	MEDIAN	SAMPLE	DATA SOURCES
ACHIEVEMENT OF OUTCOMES (PROGRAM LEVEL)					
% participants with increased connections and startup network	90% to 100%	95%	96%	n=249 Participants from 7 Programs	SECONDARY DATA Grant Recipient Milestone Reports - Surveys
% participants with increased capabilities (skills and knowledge) in building a startup	78% to 100%	96%	100%	n= 288 Participants from 9 Programs	
% New startups created (Victorian – based on LaunchVic criteria)	0% to 36%	11%	9%	n=1531 Participants from 24 Programs	SECONDARY DATA LaunchVic Salesforce CRM
- Launched startup business (self-identified)	NA	29%	NA	n=175 Participants from 24 Programs	PRIMARY DATA Graduate Survey

5. HOW ARE PRE-ACCELERATORS PERFORMING AND WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

5.3 Participant level outcomes

A framework of participant level outcomes was developed and explored through the Graduate Survey, with outcomes categorised into three areas: (1) Company Creation and Development; (2) Commercial Traction; and (3) Funding and Growth. As outcomes may not be realised immediately, Figure 10 presents a breakdown of the year in which respondents completed a pre-accelerator for context.

The most commonly reported outcomes included starting work on a startup part-time (39%), taking out a loan or using personal funds to support their startup (36%), and securing customers (33%). Results are presented in Figure 11. Qualitative feedback suggests that some graduates experienced meaningful progress following participation:

“It confirmed that creating products and tools for the social and community services is what I want to do. I’m now working part time on my business. But still have a LOT to learn.”

(PR04 Participant, Graduate Survey)

While others reported more significant outcomes following participation in a pre-accelerator:

“...we would not have started without [PR24] and we now have venture capital investors from 4 countries and about to launch into our third market.”

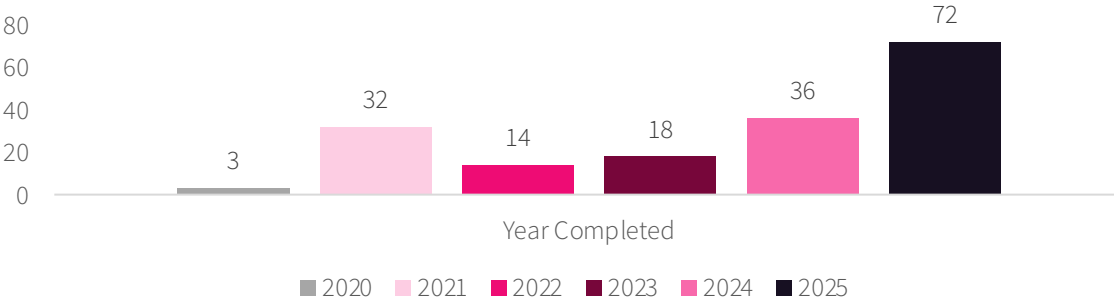
(PR24 Participant, Graduate Survey)

In contrast, 11% reported none of the listed outcomes listed. Feedback from these respondents suggests that, in many cases, this reflected a decision not to proceed with their startup idea following expert feedback received during the program:

“I pivoted away from the idea i started in the [pre]accelerator, based on feedback received during the program from assessors and would be customers. This was in my opinion the right call - might have another go at the problem when I have a better USP in the space, but more likely to take some of the ideas and redeploy them in a different startup in future.”

(PR11 Participant, Graduate Survey)

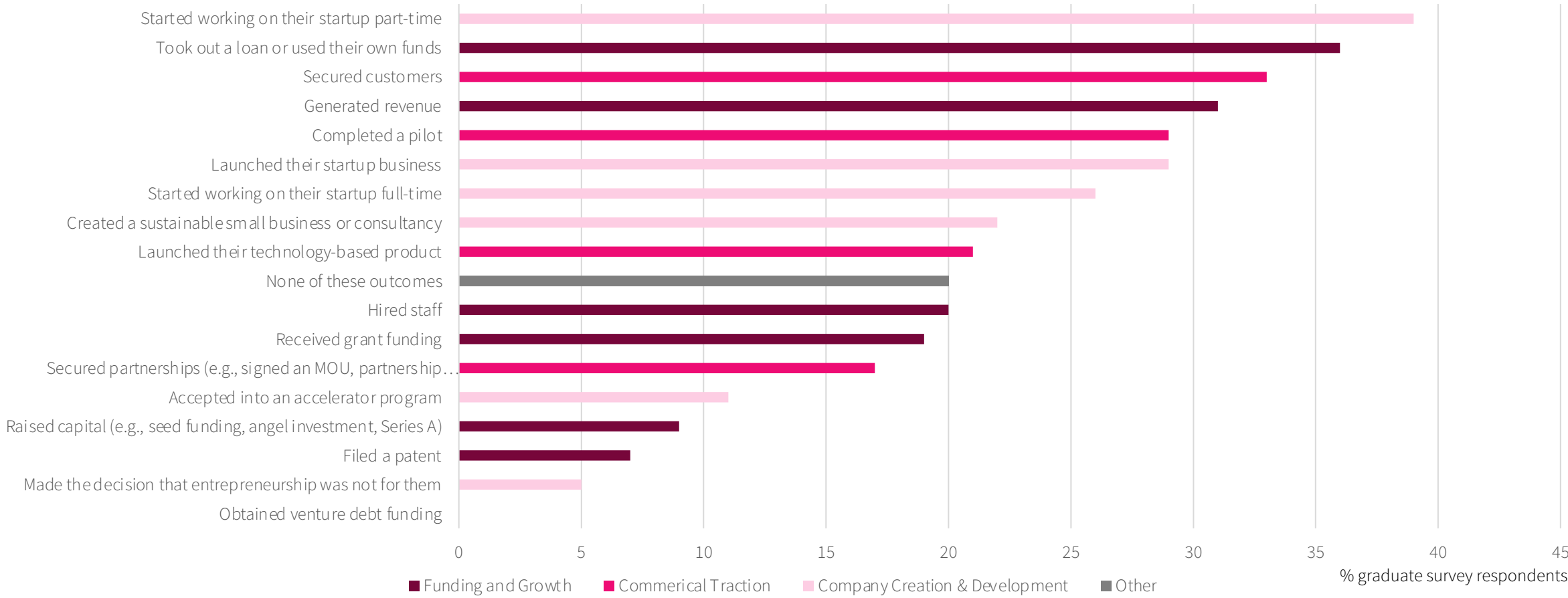
Figure 10. Program Completion Year – Graduate Survey Respondents



5. HOW ARE PRE-ACCELERATORS PERFORMING AND WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

Outcomes from pre-accelerator program(s) self-identified by participants through 2026 Graduate Survey

Figure 11. Participant level outcomes (n=175)



5. HOW ARE PRE-ACCELERATORS PERFORMING AND WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

5.3 Participant level outcomes (continued)

Among respondents, 77% reported that participation in a pre-accelerator contributed to their outcomes to some extent (see Figure 12).

Among participants who reported achieving outcomes, 17% (n=27) indicated that the program did not contribute to those outcomes. Qualitative feedback from these respondents suggests that some did not perceive value in the program, often citing misalignment with their stage of venture development or unmet expectations:

“You need to be further along the journey than 'Idea' because it moves too quickly and became very overwhelming.”

(PR18 Participant, Graduate Survey)

“Didn’t quite get funding opportunities or exposure through the program. It might benefit more to those who are still on idea stage and not specific on their goals.”

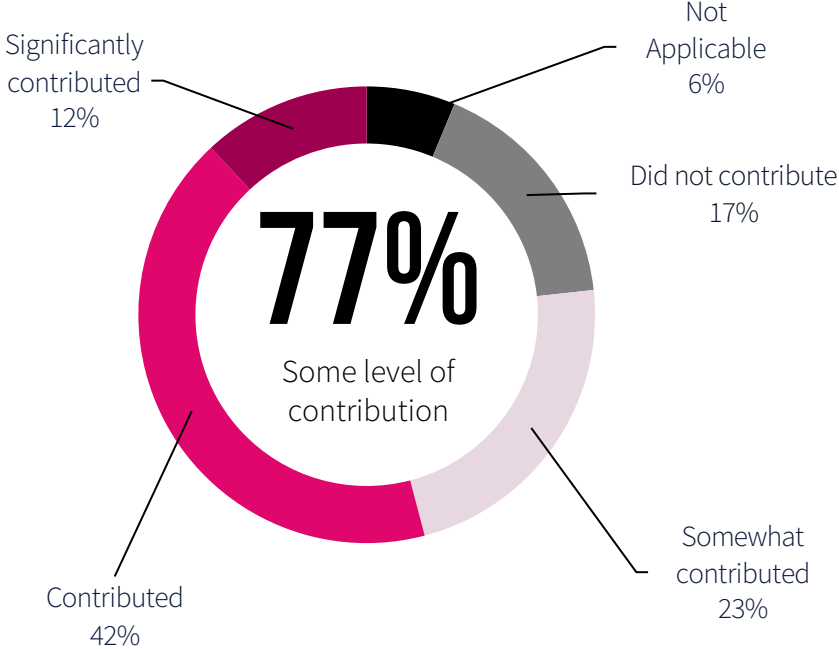
(PR04 Participant, Graduate Survey)

In contrast, 12% of respondents (n=19) reported that the program made a significant contribution to their outcomes. These outcomes included launching a startup, beginning part-time work on their venture, using personal funds, and securing customers. These participants also expressed strong support for pre-accelerator programs, with all providing a Net Promoter Score of 10.

“...programs like this are 123% essential, and I do my due diligence in sharing with other passionate and aspiring founders/entrepreneurs 🌱.”

(PR07 & PR21 Participant, Graduate Survey)

Figure 12. Pre-accelerator program contribution to achievements



Survey Question: To what extent did participating in the pre-accelerator program contribute to any of these achievements?
Data Source: Graduate Survey. (n=159, N=175).

“I am still early days, but my direction and focus is clear - I learned so much in the program and from the team who run it. It was a complete eye-opener, and really took me through from idea to what are the steps needed to move forward. Funding-wise, I don't need funding at this stage, so that question was irrelevant. In terms of partnerships, I have formed agreements with universities to get their students to help in development phases, but I don't have commercial agreements yet.

(PR18 Participant, Graduate Survey)

6. CONCLUSION



6. CONCLUSION

This benchmarking study provides a descriptive overview of LaunchVic funded pre-accelerator programs operating across Victoria. Drawing on program documentation, desktop research, participant surveys, graduate survey responses, CRM data, and program manager insights, the study examined the characteristics of pre-accelerator programs, who participates in them, and the outcomes participants report experiencing following participation.

The findings demonstrate that pre-accelerators occupy a distinct role within the startup support system by supporting aspiring entrepreneurs and very early-stage founders prior to accelerator readiness. Across the sample, programs were typically short-term, cohort-based, and structured around educational programming, startup capability development, idea validation, and founder networks. While many common characteristics were identified, programs also varied in delivery model, target audience, sector focus, and support structures.

Idea validation emerged as a central focus of pre-accelerator programming. Programs commonly supported participants to define problems, explore customer needs, develop value propositions, and test assumptions through customer discovery and MVP development. Participants were primarily motivated to join pre-accelerators to develop their product or service, build startup knowledge and skills, validate their idea, and connect with experts and other founders.

Overall, participant satisfaction with pre-accelerator programs was high, with most participants reporting positive experiences and outcomes following participation.

Commonly reported outcomes included beginning work on a startup, securing customers, launching a startup business, and generating revenue. However, qualitative feedback also highlighted that participant experiences varied, particularly where programs were not aligned with a participant's stage of startup development or expectations for post-program support.

The findings also highlight the challenges associated with measuring startup outcomes in early-stage entrepreneurship programs. Startup creation proved difficult to define and measure consistently, with differences emerging between administrative measures and participant self-reporting. More broadly, participant satisfaction and NPS ratings should not be interpreted as evidence of startup success or long-term impact.

Finally, the study identified ongoing sustainability challenges within the pre-accelerator ecosystem. While LaunchVic funding has supported the growth of a diverse range of programs across Victoria, relatively few programs remained active after grant funding concluded, highlighting the difficulties of sustaining pre-accelerator delivery beyond government support.

Overall, the findings suggest that pre-accelerator programs play an important role within Victoria's startup ecosystem by supporting entrepreneurial capability development, startup exploration, early-stage idea validation, and pathways into further startup activity.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. References
Appendix B. Startup Support System
Appendix C. Graduate Survey Respondents



APPENDIX A. REFERENCES

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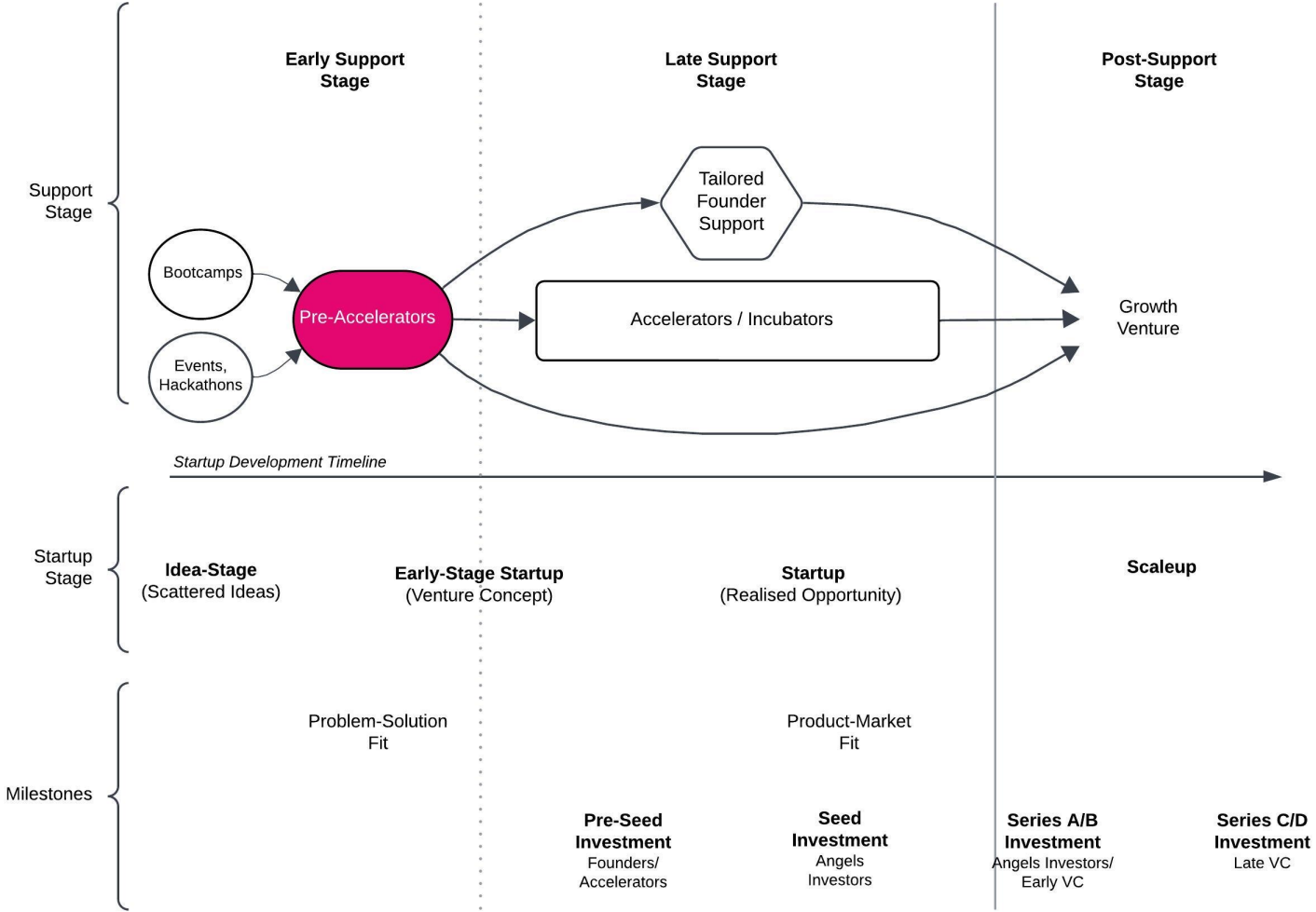
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APPENDIX B. STARTUP SUPPORT SYSTEM



APPENDIX C. GRADUATE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Program ID	Participants (Graduates)	Graduates sent survey	Bouncebacks	Total Received Survey	Startup Survey	General Survey	Total Participants	Total % based on Surveys Received	Total based on Population
PR15	29	28	3	25	10	0	10	40%	34%
PR23	29	26	2	24	3	5	8	33%	28%
PR08	44	38	5	33	6	1	7	21%	16%
PR03	19	19	0	19	3	0	3	16%	16%
PR04	178	170	6	164	26	2	28	17%	16%
PR05	143	111	10	101	22	0	22	22%	15%
PR13	143	134	3	131	19	3	22	17%	15%
PR21	80	75	4	71	7	5	12	17%	15%
PR12	28	26	1	25	2	2	4	16%	14%
PR10	14	14	0	14	2	0	2	14%	14%
PR18	60	57	5	52	5	3	8	15%	13%
PR20	81	64	9	55	7	2	9	16%	11%
PR22	38	32	5	27	3	1	4	15%	11%
PR02	59	53	11	42	3	3	6	14%	10%
PR24	30	29	8	21	2	1	3	14%	10%
PR07	43	16	1	15	4	0	4	27%	9%
PR01	111	110	22	88	5	5	10	11%	9%
PR09	49	47	3	44	1	3	4	9%	8%
PR16	52	46	8	38	4	0	4	11%	8%
PR14	59	37	2	35	3	1	4	11%	7%
PR06	94	93	2	91	2	4	6	7%	6%
PR19	47	41	8	33	2	0	2	6%	4%
PR11	143	137	28	109	6	0	6	6%	4%
PR17	280	261	32	229	4	5	9	4%	3%
	1853	1664	178	1486	151	46	197	13%	11%