



Australian Government

NAIF

Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility

Case Study

CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY

Education and Community Precinct

AUGUST 2025



DARWIN, NT



Find out more at
naif.gov.au

CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY

Community & Education Precinct

Situated in the heart of Darwin's city centre, the Charles Darwin University (CDU) Community and Education Precinct combines state-of-the-art learning facilities with much-needed civic infrastructure designed to reinvigorate the Northern Territory capital's CBD.

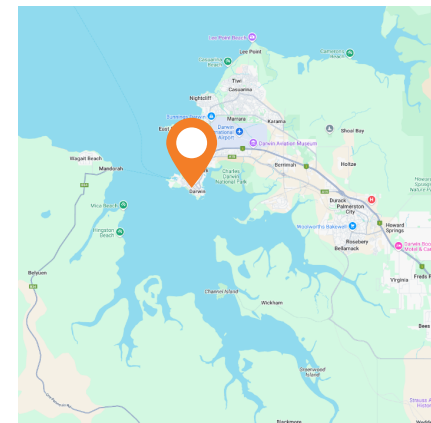
As Australia's northernmost capital city, Darwin is a crucial hub for developing northern Australia's infrastructure and unlocking the region's full investment potential. The development is one of five major projects of the Darwin City Deal, a partnership between Darwin City, the Northern Territory Government and the Commonwealth Government of Australia to support catalyst projects and encourage broader investment in the region.

The Community and Education Precinct was supported by NAIF financing of up to \$126.5 million as well as an additional \$25 million for construction of the Casuarina Campus upgrades which are no longer proceeding.

CDU commenced construction on the Community and Education Centre in October 2020, completing the super-structure by 2023 and launching the precinct to the public in October 2024.

In 2018, when the Darwin City Deal was announced, the city's population growth had declined 0.5% – well below its then 10-year average of 2.5%, with 42% of new arrivals to the city already planning to leave within five years.

By creating a more vibrant and liveable urban environment, the launch of the Education and Community Precinct is hoped to attract more international students, address livability and encourage more people to establish roots in the city.



Reimagining Darwin's city centre

NAIF's role was to support the construction of the CDU Education and Community Precinct, named 'Danala' after the local Larrakia word for the traditional woven dillybags.

The precinct serves two roles, providing a new campus for the university and also offering vibrant shared public areas for the community to enjoy.

The precinct is divided into three distinct sections:

- Two levels for CDU faculty and staff.
- Three levels for students and classes.
- Two levels open to the public.

The new campus features an integrated library, bringing together collections from Library & Archives NT and the CDU Library, which invites the whole community to engage and connect with both the educational and civic parts of the precinct. Danala was designed by local firm MODE to withstand the tropical climate. The precinct also boasts extensive greenery and shaded areas to provide Darwin's citizens with comfortable spaces to meet and relax, as well as a new hub for events and entertainment.

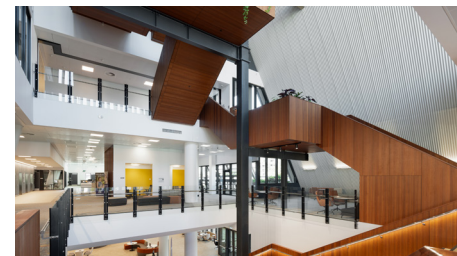
Independent analysis predicts Danala will have a significant positive impact on the region, adding an estimated \$599.5 million to Darwin's economy over 30 years.

“Danala is made for Territorians, by Territorians, and will ensure students are getting the education they deserve in a modern facility that suits Darwin.”

Professor Scott Bowman,
Vice-Chancellor of Charles Darwin University

\$599.5M

**ADDED TO THE REGIONAL
ECONOMY OVER 30 YEARS**



Funding & Development

Developing a major education hub within the city centre required significant investment – the total project value is estimated at \$250 million.

NAIF provided CDU with a loan of up to \$151.5 million to build the precinct and to repurpose its existing campus at Casuarina.

“NAIF are a key partner of Charles Darwin University. The relationship with NAIF was critical to successfully achieving financial close on Danala, our new Darwin CBD campus.

The CBD campus project was complex, with multiple partners, including NAIF. Financing the project was a mix of grant funding, debt finance and CDU cash.

The team at NAIF are highly professional but most importantly they believe in well-managed relationships with all the parties involved in a transaction.

NAIF have been responsive to CDU along the way and the various ongoing requirements of the loan facility are delivered in a collaborative manner.”

Rick Davies,
Vice-President Corporate and Chief Financial Officer,
Charles Darwin University

\$250M

TOTAL
PROJECT VALUE

\$151.5M

NAIF LOAN

27.5yrs

LOAN LENGTH



DELIVERING FOR DARWIN

How we supported successful delivery



With financing approved in 2020, the early stages of the project were slowed by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic caused significant global supply chain disruptions and extended delays in the supply of materials across the building industry.

Notably, the offsite completion and delivery of the precinct's new façade was delayed by six weeks and added to its overall construction cost. Local market labour shortages and difficulties in sourcing subcontractors for specialised skills and finishing trades presented additional challenges during the construction of this project.

As an organisation with a dedicated focus on northern Australian development, we are very familiar with these and other challenges that proponents are likely to face during the construction of infrastructure projects in the north.

Where these risks may prove too high for commercial lenders, our purpose is to step in and fill financing gaps to enable projects moving forward.

Through NAIF's dedicated program, every project is required to incorporate a sustainable and achievable Indigenous Engagement Strategy (IES), which outlines commitments to participation, employment and procurement outcomes for First Nations communities.

A target of 8.8% Indigenous employment during construction was set as part of the IES and we were pleased that the project successfully eclipsed this figure, employing 173 First Nations staff who contributed over 70,725 hours to the success of the project – representing 12.49% of total employment.

The project also had broader impacts on the local community. The construction phase employed 730 workers, and the completed precinct is estimated to provide 54 jobs per year.

How we compare

NAIF differs from traditional lenders in three key ways:

→ Purpose

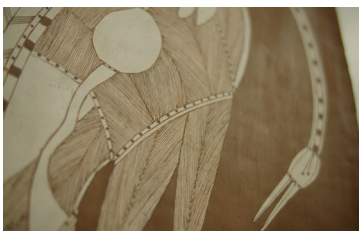
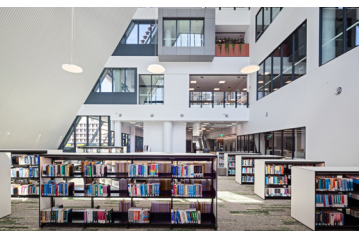
NAIF's primary goal is to benefit the public by supporting projects that will support northern Australia's economic and population growth.

→ Financing terms

We may offer longer loan tenors, deferral of interest and principal repayments, security and/or cash flow subordination, and concessional pricing where necessary for a project to proceed.

→ Higher risk

We can accept a higher risk than commercial lenders, particularly where the risk relates to factors that are unique to investing in northern Australia, such as distance, remoteness, and climate.



INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT

At the heart of the community

Danala is a model of inclusive development, demonstrating that early and genuine Indigenous engagement leads to rich, long-term benefits for all involved.



“There has been a focus on meaningful engagement from the onset with our Larrakia Academic in Residence Dr Aunty Bilawarra Lee, to ensure that the cultural significance of the land and the voices of the Larrakia people were integral to the project’s design and implementation. It’s critically important for the leadership of various organisations or companies to engage meaningfully with First Nations Peoples. If you can co-design a building or a program with Traditional Owners, you ensure cultural appropriateness and it is important that this is embedded in the spirit of the building.”

Professor Reuben Bolt

Former Deputy Vice Chancellor of First Nations Leadership and Engagement,
Charles Darwin University



“There was a large emphasis on Indigenous engagement from the beginning of this project. We had certain targets that we had to meet, but being a local contractor who has well-versed systems built into our standard processes and procedures, we’ve really been able to exceed some of those targets. And we’ve utilised companies who offered work-ready programs and were able to select participants to get job ready and then create employment opportunities with both subcontractors and Halikos directly. I’m really proud to see an iconic building like this to be built in the CBD.”

Lachlan Michell

Construction Manager, Halikos

Building a future for northern Australia

The Charles Darwin University Education and Community Precinct will help to attract additional private investment into the region, creating jobs and economic opportunities for Darwin and its residents.

NAIF plays an important role in driving economic growth and enhancing the quality of life in northern Australia by supporting social infrastructure projects in education, health, housing, and community centers. Key to our success in this sector is a focus on long-term sustainable and scalable financing solutions, tailored to the needs of the project. This is further underpinned by NAIF's collaborative engagement with key government, industry and First Nations stakeholders that ensures social infrastructure projects align with community needs and regional goals.

?

FIND OUT MORE

- Northern Australian Infrastructure Facility
- Charles Darwin University





Australian Government

NAIF

Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility

Investing for impact in northern Australia

Contact Us

✉ naif@naif.gov.au

☎ 1300 466 243

📍 Level 2, 111 Grafton Street, Cairns 4870 QLD

📦 PO Box 4896, Cairns 4870 QLD

