



PRESS RELEASE

NGEN AWARD FINALISTS NAMED AFTER HIGH-STAKES LIVE PRESENTATION TO JUDGES

20 August 2026: Bold ideas. Razor-sharp strategic thinking. And plenty of nerves. The 2026 NGEN Award Day wrapped up yesterday, with 13 emerging media professionals going head-to-head in the live presentation round. Six talented finalists emerged to compete for this year's NGEN Award:

- Pamela Anthony, Strategy Executive & Sarah Barlow, Trading Manager, UM
- Annabelle Harrington, Strategist, This is Flow
- Mackenzie Jones, Senior Communications Executive & Mia Jones, Media Coordinator, Match & Wood
- Zoe Stanek, Strategy Manager, Wavemaker

Now in its 16th year, the NGEN Award – part of the MFA Awards – celebrates media professionals with less than five years' experience, giving emerging talent the chance to showcase their creativity and gain career-defining experience, all while supporting a charity that makes a difference.

This year's candidates responded to a brief from UnLtd charity partner **Down The Track**, which delivers early intervention programs for at-risk young people in regional NSW, helping them build confidence, resilience and the skills they need to make positive choices and pursue their goals.

The top-scoring NGEN entrants had just 24 hours' notice before presenting to judges in Sydney and Melbourne – a true test of their storytelling skills and ability to perform under pressure.

NGEN Award judge Sarah Gallon, General Manager – Brand, Campaign & Media at Tourism Australia, said: "This is my second year judging the NGEN Award, and I've been incredibly impressed once again by the quality of the entries. The calibre of thinking, creativity and strategic insight demonstrated by these emerging professionals is a real testament to the strength of talent coming through our industry. It's exciting to see such a talented new generation bringing fresh perspectives and ambitious ideas to the table."

Larn Masterton, Founder & CEO of Down The Track, added: "Participating in the NGEN Award has been an incredible experience for our charity. The campaign responses from the NGEN shortlisted entrants demonstrated brilliant insights, creativity and passion, providing us with fresh ideas that will help us raise much-needed awareness. It's also incredibly rewarding to be part of an initiative that empowers the next generation of media leaders. That commitment strongly resonates with Down the Track's own mission to invest in young people and back them for life."



Melanie Aslanidis, Head of NGEN and MFA Foundations, said: “The NGEN Award is a unique opportunity for emerging media professionals to stretch themselves, think big and demonstrate our industry purpose of We Are The Changers. This year’s finalists rose to the challenge brilliantly, impressing the judges with astute strategic thinking, bold creativity and confident storytelling skills. We’re excited to watch them supercharge their careers through the NGEN Award and the NGEN program.”

The winners will be announced at the MFA Awards on 24 September at Randwick Racecourse, Sydney. Tickets are now on sale: <https://www.mediafederation.org.au/mfa-events/mfa-awards>

Winning NGEN Award entries have a track record of going on on to become actual campaigns, including 2022 winners Ben Breden and Olivia Coxon for youth mental health charity batyr; 2017 winners Nolan Yu and Max Learmont for Hear for You; and John Dawson and Mark Golafshan in 2014 for Youth off the Streets.

The 2026 MFA Awards sponsors are:

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About the MFA

The Media Federation of Australia (MFA) is the peak body representing media communication companies.

The MFA is a non-for-profit organisation established in 1997 with a current membership base that represents over 90% of all media billings placed by media agencies in Australia. The MFA’s vision is to encourage operational excellence in the field of media communication connections and to define and develop best practice standards to support its members and the role they play in servicing their clients.