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THE PINK ROVER INITIATIVE: LAUNCHING THE NEXT GENERATION OF SPACE INNOVATORS

Abstract

Globally, the space industry remains a male-dominated sector, lacking diversity and representation across various backgrounds including gender, ethnicities, disabilities, LGBTQ+ identities, and religious communities. This lack of diversity in the space industry inhibits innovation, perpetuates inequality and fails to reflect the global nature of space exploration.

Monash Nova Rover (MNR) is a student-led engineering team that designs and builds simulation Lunar and Mars rovers, achieving 2nd place in worldwide competitions. Through the team's 'Pink Rover' initiative, we aim to support diverse identities and self-expression in STEM and space. By choosing to paint our team's flagship rover pink, we aim to spark conversations about the future identity of the space industry. As the only Australian team to compete on the international stage, we have continually proven that pink – and by extension the broader demographics it symbolically represents – belong in STEM, and can achieve excellence.

Within our team, the Pink Rover Initiative has built a culture of inclusivity and opportunity, empowering members to thrive while actively upskilling them as they navigate the field. Beyond our team, the initiative sparks curiosity and engagement in STEM, guiding young students through hands-on mini-rover building workshops that combine technical skills with open conversations about diversity. In 2024, MNR engaged with over 24 schools, 2,000 students, and 16 outreach partners.

With the space industry experiencing rapid expansion in 2025, there is a need to cultivate a workforce that is as diverse as the challenges it seeks to solve. A diverse and inclusive workplace not only advances equity but also enhances research outcomes, driving innovation that benefits both individuals and society. The Pink Rover Initiative serves as an exemplary model for how meaningful change can be successfully implemented in both academia and industry to drive innovation.

We present the key insights of our Pink Rover Initiative, along with comprehensive data on its impact within our team and the wider community. Drawing from our experience in practical implementation of these ideas, we provide actionable recommendations for fostering more inclusive and diverse environments within both academia and industry.