Pyrenees Creative Community Strategy

Contents

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Background

Council committed to support the development of the Creative Community Strategy, at its meeting in Feb 2021. The Goals of the strategy presented included:
- Enhanced community cohesion and connectedness
- Regional collaboration (RAV and other partners)
- Identifying funding and grant opportunities
- Profile raising and promotion
- Identifying issues, gaps and opportunities
- Strengthening creative industries
- Promote and encourage new and diverse creative investment

The purpose of this document

The Creative Community Strategy was commissioned with the intent that it would be 'community driven'. Hence deep community engagement has been carried out with key representatives of the Pyrenees' creative community in order to develop this discussion paper. This paper aims to present an understanding of the current context of the Pyrenees Creative Community, including an understanding of current needs and opportunities. The Appendix also provides vital national, state and strategic contexts.

This exploratory paper is intended to be used to help guide council officers and community to collaboratively workshop the creative community strategy. Workshops will be facilitated by Ashtree Projects. The discussion paper will allow participants to design a strategy through facilitated workshops from an informed position.

Key takeaways

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People Live in their communities as whole people
Creative people are also economically active. They buy and rent houses, shop at local businesses, drive on our roads, relax in our parks. They are parents and children, pensioners and professionals. Their experiences cannot be divided in the same way that Council functions can.

The tone of this Discussion Paper then is about emphasising the ways in which "Community Creativity" can become a key feature of the ways in which we deliver community-centred approaches - rather than Shire-centred approaches.

Community Creativity comes in many forms
Creativity comes in many forms. It is the teenager playing drums in the garage, and the seasoned professional muso playing gigs every weekend. The café that hosts the crochet circle making woollen hats and shawls is just as important to the creative economy as the art gallery exhibiting professional artists. We need an expansive view of creativity so that all our communities can see themselves within it. From here on we refer to "creative communities" in the plural rather than singular, as a more accurate description of who we are working for.

There is an opportunity to maximise and strengthen Council's existing activities that support regional creative communities
It is important that Council avoids duplication while maximising existing efforts and investments in community-based planning. This strategy could be used to complement and build upon a range of existing Council plans and functions, including a wide range of activities in the Council Plan, as well as targeted activities in the Reconciliation Action Plan and Economic Development Strategy.

This approach is not only prudent but helps ensure that creative communities are seen to be and act within the broader contexts of their lives. In a resource-constrained regional environment, including the absence of a dedicated Arts / Community Creativity Officer position, the ability for Council officers to leverage their existing functions into important cultural work, rather than create entirely new roles or responsibilities will be critical.

Put another way, Council staff are already doing work that has positive effects for the Shire's creative communities, but there are opportunities for a Creative Community Strategy to support a more cohesive, well-communicated and purposeful approach to these activities.

Council context

First Nations - Traditional Owners

The Pyrenees Shire LGA ecompasses the lands of four recognised Traditional Owner groups - Dja Dja Wurrung, Wadawurrung, Wotjobaluk Peoples, and Eastern Maar.

Of these, the Dja Dja Wurrung and Wadawurrung make up the majority of the shire. The Pyrenees shire runs near to the Western edge of their extensive traditional lands. At present the Eastern Maar and Wotjobaluk (Barengi Gadjin) territories are minimally represented with the Shire.
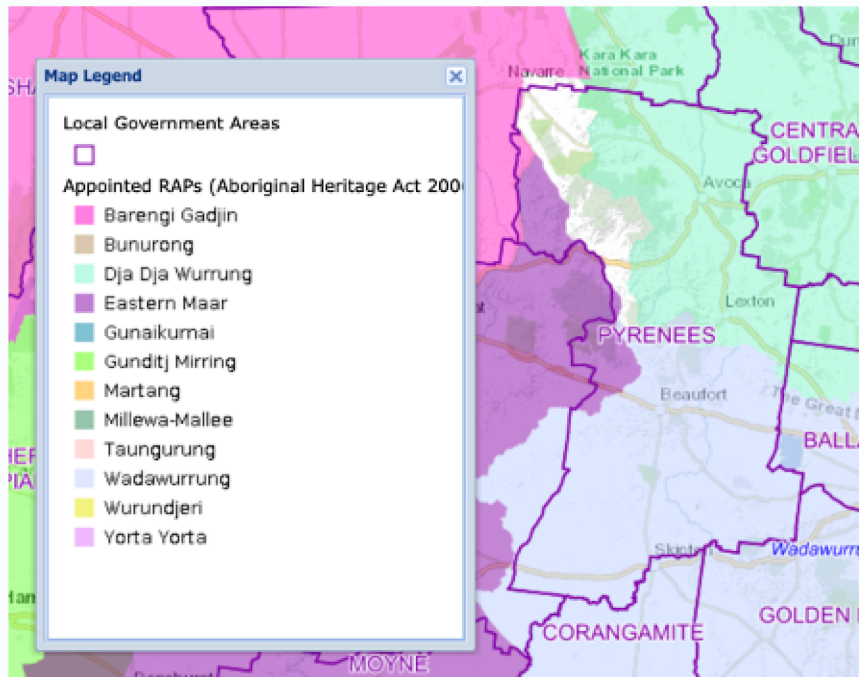
Each of the Traditional Owner Corporations have a form of a strategic plan to guide self-determination of Country and Culture. Below is a summary of how each of the groups have focused on culture or creativity within their respective strategies.

Djaara – ***Balaki Wuka*** (***formerly Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation***): The Healing Country (Dhelkunya Dja) Plan describes their community-determined pathways for rebuilding and prospering. The vision is for the health and wellbeing of the Dja Dja Wurrung people to be underpinned by a strong and vibrant living culture. The plan details nine goals to reach this vision, including rejuvenating and sustaining Dja Dja Wurrung cultural practices and customs.

Wadawurrung Corporation: Wadawurrung's Healthy Country Plan provides 3 programs to fulfill the vision of making Wadawurrung culture and people strong. Cultural strengthening (Gobata bengadak tjaara) is one of these three key programs and includes culture and language programs, a keeping place and a cultural centre.

Barengi Gadjin Land Council (***BGLC***): The BGLC Country Plan: Growing What Is Good identifies eight goals for the achievement of their vision to work together as custodians of Culture, Country, Heritage, Lore and Language. Creativity is listed as one of six principles that guide how they will reach their goals.

Easter Maar Aboriginal Corporation: The Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation's Country Plan (Meerreengeyye ngakeepoorryeeyt) includes the goal: "Our unique culture is getting stronger and we keep our Dreaming going'.

Council Context

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Council's Reconciliation Action Plan

Council's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) focuses partnership activities with the two groups whose lands make up the majority of the Shire – Dja Dja Wurrung and Wadawurrung. The RAP contains particular actions related to First Nations culture and creativity. These include:

- ·Investing in partnerships with Djaara and Wadawurrung to support the implementation of their Country Plans.
- ·Develop an annual NAIDOC program, including art exhibitions.
- ·Explore opportunities to use public spaces to celebrate Traditional Owner heritage and culture through art and native plantings.
- ·Develop protocols between Council and our partners that encourage and enable early engagement, and the possible co-design of place-based planning approaches.

> What role does Pyrenees Shire's creative community have in supporting reconciliation?

Geographic context

The Pyrenees Shire Council Local Government Area (LGA) consists of 29 communities, each with their own heritage, resources, community assets and economic context. These towns and settlements are diverse, distinct, and geographically disparate. Whilst Beaufort may act as a service centre for residents in the southern-central region of the Shire, many of the locality in the Shire are more geographically disconnected. Residents from different parts of the Shire are likely to orientate to other LGA's access services, entertainment, education and employment.

- South of the Shire >> Ballarat (Ballarat City Council)
- Northeast >> Maryborough (Golden Plains Shire)
- Northwest >> Ararat (Rural City of Ararat) or Stawell (Northern Grampians Shire).

The dispersed geographic nature of the Shire also means that smaller townships and settlements are important hubs for community activities and social interaction for residents to connect in their local area.

> How can a Shire-wide strategy create meaningful impact in diverse, unique, and geographically dispersed communities?
>
> What connections / collaborations can be occur between Pyrenees Shire and neighbouring LGAs to support a vibrant creative community in the broader region? Could this benefit residents of the Pyrenees Shire?

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Council's Economic Development Strategy

Certain localities in the Pyrenees Shire are well known for wine production and vendors have capitalised on the combination of wineries and high value natural amenity to create a strong tourism sector. The Council's Economic Development Strategy 2020 highlights that, along with agriculture and construction, wine production and tourism are the region's most significant industry sectors in the Shire. These sectors contribute directly to economic output, but also have with flow-on benefits for other sectors like services and retail. Council supports the community's creative sector to capitalise on the visitor economy through providing financial sponsorship and promotion and marketing support for events.

Council Plan 2021-2025

COUNCIL VISION 2025: Sustainable and welcoming places and natural environments that create inclusive, happy and healthy connected communities.

The Council Plan contains a great number of strategies of actions which could impact upon and be impacted by a Creative Community Strategy. During an internal workshop with Council Officers, actions under the below strategic areas of the Council Plan were highlighted as relevant to a new Creative Community.

People
- Support a vibrant community arts, culture and heritage environment.
- Improve accessibility and inclusivity.
- Promote health, wellbeing, engagement and connection.
- Improve social outcomes.

Place
- Sustain and enhance the unique character of our communities.
- Enhance the liveability and resilience of our communities.

Environment
- Foster a climate change resilient community.
- Encourage community care of biodiversity and natural values.
- Improve waste management to reduce landfill and reduce harm to the environment.

Economy
- Support our local businesses and help strengthen key industries.
- Encourage and invest in assets and infrastructure for commerce and community.

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Existing Council functions that support or impact community creativity (identified by staff)

Assets & Development
- Engineering
- Regulatory Oversight
- Public Realm design
- Creative infrastructure management
- Ensuring equitable access to resources

Economic Development
- Product development
- Creatives database
- Nurturing creative business
- Direct sponsorship
- Supporting external stakeholders to host events
- Marketing support

Libraries

Frontline services
- Spaces for creative activities
- Supporting community groups
- Directing community to support / services offered

Community Development
- Enabler / connector
- Leverage support
- Data-rich resources
- Advocacy
- Direct financial support through grants
- Youth engagement

Comms
- Promotion of internal and external events, and creative activities

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A Summary of our discussions, workshops and surveys within Pyrenees communities, April to June 2023

The findings in this discussion paper have been developed from a range of consultation including:
- Online engagement using Council's Engagement Hub page.
- Drop-in sessions at the Community Resource Centres at Beaufort and Avoca.
- Focus group session with community cohort at Beaufort Secondary School.

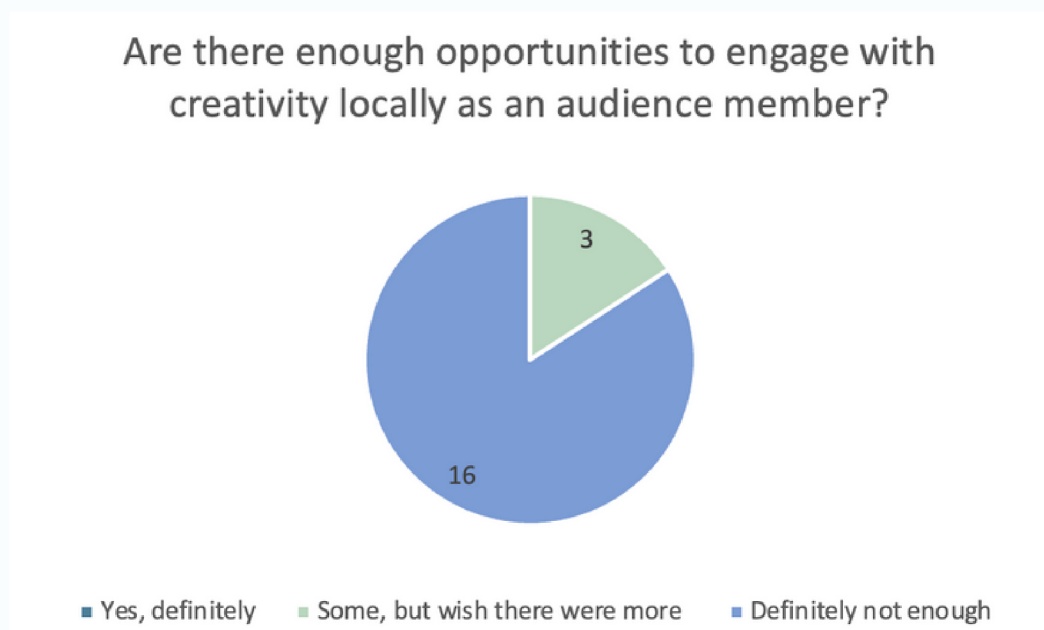Over 20 Outreach and opt-in telephone interviews with:
- 8 individual creative practitioners (including a mixture of artforms
- Leaders from 5 creative networks / arts organisations.
- Directors of 5 creative businesses.
- Leaders of 3 community groups with an interest in creativity.
- Managers of # Venues

Input was received from different localities around the Shire, including Landsborough, Moonambel, Amphitheatre, Avoca, Lexton, Beaufort and Elmhurst. There were no creatives or organisations interviewed from Snake Valley or other localities in the South of the Shire.

Our consultation focused on understanding the strengths, challenges, needs and opportunities for the Creative Community in the Shire, as well as understanding how a creative community strategy could help their practice, business or organisational purpose. The information captured is predominantly qualitative and is intended to identify a range of issues that might affect or be affected by a Creative Community Strategy.

Opportunities for audience engagement

16 out of 19 respondents stated there were definitely not enough opportunities to engage with creativity as an audience member.

Are there enough opportunities to engage with creativity locally as an audience member?

- Yes, definitely
- Some, but wish there were more
- Definitely not enough

Findings: Existing situation

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Audience development

Several respondents noted that the target audience of creative programming in the Shire appeared to be older, retired people and tourists. Community have commented that the hours within which existing programs (delivered either through Council or other bodies) are mostly suited to people not working or studying.

> *The poetry workshop – that was a new thing and it was strongly supported. I think there's enough people out there with the openness that's needed.*
>
> *Yes, but presently more through the U3A which eliminates younger people. The community is more engaged in Beaufort.*
>
> *it's all during the day - retiree hours basically. It's targeted at retirees and unemployed people, and that's great but there's nothing that is really working for me.*

What factors drive timetables for creative programming in the Shire?

Rural young people face barriers to participate

In a focus group at Beaufort Secondary College, young people identified that there, however all stated there were nowhere near enough opportunities to engage in creativity in their local communities.

The focus group participants identified a range of barriers to connecting with existing creative activities in the Shire including:
- Travel / transport / time
- Family commitments
- Work / sport / other commitments
- Money
- Motivation

> *Programs happening around are usually during school hours.*
>
> *Most creative things cost money or they're for older people.*

At Beaufort Secondary, students also noted that they were feeling the lack of opportunity to engage in creativity as there was currently no drama program, and no music program at the School.

How can young people be supported to overcome barriers to participating in creative activity in the Shire?

Findings: Existing situation

Opportunities for creatives to showcase work, share skills, and earn money locally

When asked if they felt there were enough opportunities to showcase work, share skills and/ or earn money from their practice locally, creative practitioners had mixed responses. The majority of creative practitioners interviewed cited minimal opportunities to present work locally, except where they were offering classes or exhibitions at a home studio.

> *You have to get involved*
>
> *it takes a bit of work, but there are opportunities to present your work to [local] venues and audiences.*
>
> *I exhibit in Melbourne. I would like to locally, but do less so. Cost of framing and not enough people coming through are barriers. My work isn't "nice" and tourists mightn't like it.*
>
> *I did get asked to teach guitar at a local primary school but it wasn't paid so couldn't afford to do it.*

Artists and creative businesses also cited the challenge where community members don't understand the value of artworks for sale – the relationship between the work put in by the artist and the cost of a piece. In retail, creatives found visitors were more likely to accept the pricing, and more likely to spend. Creative businesses relied on online or tourist sales, not local income.

What are the benefits of being a creative in Pyrenees Shire?

While some creative practitioners stated , many reflected on the natural environs as inspirational for their creativity.

> *The environs are very inspiring. I love this kind of bushland. I like it when it's summer and dry, beige.*
>
> *It's never easy being an artist, but we're in a picturesque environment and that makes it nicer.*
>
> *There's a freedom of living here and surrounded by nature and animals which is inspiring. There's an eclectic range of people here.*

How can a Creative Community Strategy capitalise and strengthen these positive associations with creativity and place?

Findings: Existing situation

Are organisations thriving?

The quotes below are from interviews with leaders of three different three different organisations in response to the question, 'do you feel your organisation is thriving?'

> *No we are not thriving. Covid has been a big factor. But I think there are some underlying issues. Volunteers has been a big problem, we don't really have enough volunteers. Not getting support from artists, particularly from artists.*
>
> *No. We are holding our own - like a duck, looks ok from the top but underneath the surface, peddling like mad. Hard to get new people involved, not many people have the time or the interest or they have other commitments.*
>
> *We are just drafting our governing documents [but there is a] drive in the community that is definitely there to create opportunities for people to connect and focus on their health and wellbeing - creative activities are totally on the map there.*

COVID has dampened certain activities that connected the different creative communities between different townships within the Shire. While individuals and organisations were keen to find ways to reconnect with artists in neighbouring communities.

> *I think with COVID and a few other things we've separated into our own groups, and we need to get back to being a Pyrenees collaborative.*

Does the Creative Community feel that the wider community values creativity, art, or experimentation?

> *Yes, but it varies. Some families say it is a waste of time. Overall lots of activity and support.*
>
> *Experimentation is not the most appreciated. We're a traditional-type community.*
>
> *No, I don't think so.*
>
> *Um... in pockets - people in business are interested in anything that attracts people to the town - Moonambel really does it well - some of the projects that used to happen - people skills . Experimentation less so.*

Existing situation

Events

A range of existing events in the Shire were cited by community, creatives, and organisations as contributing to the creative scene of the Shire. This includes larger events, such as Pyrenees Hideout, Pyrenees Unearthed, or the Rainbow Spirit Festival (formerly named Rainbow Serpent). These large events are are targeted at promoting tourism and bringing visitors into the Shire whilst also providing an offer for local audiences. For 2 years, Council has run free, community music and arts events in Beaufort and Avoca, but this was established with Covid activation funding, and is not otherwise resourced on an annual basis.

Community events like Barkly Ukulele Festival or Moonambel Photography are acknowledged to provide a great sense of community activity,

> *We need things to get people out; not much reason for them to get out the front door except to go shopping*

How could a creative community strategy help to strengthen existing events, and support new and emerging events?

Relational difficulties

Consultation has identified the presence of relational difficulties within organisations or projects. Respondents identified a range of factors that contributed to relational difficulties, including:

- Challenges with difference in personality and communication styles.
- Differing values regarding level of community input or control in a project.
- Conflicting visions of what forms art or creativity might take.
- Artists not feeling valued or paid fairly for their skills and contribution.

The rollout government-funded creative projects in rural areas is usually tightly resourced, and heavily reliant on volunteer contributions. Through accepting volunteer support as in-kind contribution, funding schemes can capitalize on high levels of social capital and community connectedness that can be present in rural areas. However, when relational challenges arise in this constrained environment they can lead to significant detrimental impacts on individuals and organisations. In discussing some of these impacts, respondents cited a lack of willingness to continue to engage or present work locally, as well as detrimental impacts on mental wellbeing.

What would help artists and organisations reduce the likelihood of relational difficulties arising in future projects?

Needs and opportunities

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Consultation aimed to identify a range of needs and opportunities among actors in the creative communities within the Shire. The findings here are presnted as discussion points, in no order of hierarchy or importance. Further opportunities and a strategic approach will be developed through collaborative workshops.

Main-street space

Arts organisations and creative practitioners have consistently identified a need for accessible affordable or free public spaces to present creative works.

Many wanted to reach a wider audience and were interested in more opportunities for public art and exhibitions in addition to gallery-type events. An art show in Beaufort's Art Trax or Avoca's Art Gallery, for example, may draw community members who think 'art is for them'. Public art is accessible to all, ideally placed so the community passes by in their day-to-day lives, and helps raise appreciation for and awareness of local art.

> *Free accessible places to display work locally. Pop-up spaces, street boxes, external walls, lots of options. Micro-grants. Ballarat does it really well.*

Space for learning / teaching / practice

The creative community have indicated a desire to know more about facilities and potential creative uses of community spaces - for instance listings of halls & community spaces could include suitability for different kinds of creative practice (for instance, whether it's suitable for painting / ceramics / rehearsals, what are the acoustics like etc); Some work on partnerships in this area could also be beneficial - like having a community usage agreement for use of the well-equipped performing arts theatre at Beaufort Secondary (which is very underused).

> *Make it easier to book/use the Shire Hall. Support and oversee arts better. Supportive contact for creatives.*
>
> *Help us find a teaching space for everyone to share talents.*
>
> *Venues - was very surprised, there are some facilities that are branded for a particular group but aren't actually owned by them - they may be vacant the majority off the time... venue managers / committees need support to broker; would be good to know - is there lighting / capacity, floor space, the way the spaces are descried at the moment, they assume a particular type of use, but the info could be updated to cater for broader community use - eg. Wetspace/dirty craft, power, noise, etc*

Youth / young people - articulated a desire for somewhere to rehearse & perform music in low-key, no-cost environments - therefore a PA upgrade to a hall(s) with a booking system that allows young people and other community members to freely access the space to develop, rehearse and perform music.

Needs and opportunities

Information & support – grants, opportunities, policies

Many artists and organisations were interested in advice and support with grants. They suggested support with grant applications, promotion and awareness of grant opportunities, and increased grants.

> *[we need a way to] know about opportunities, [have] support with Shire funding opportunities and grant proposals, and support with events. Advice/support on grant applications/ Grant workshop? Partnering for a grant. Support with advertising.*

Building networks

Creatives varied in their perception of the accessibility of their local creative community. Those that had been living in their area longer were more likely to be aware of other artists and creatives, but not always. Some communities seemed more connected and accessible than others. Creative workers also expressed that it was sometimes difficult to know what other artists were around, and to find opportunities to connect.

Is it easy to connect with other creatives in the Shire?

> *Ummm… not particularly, and I think it's because of lack of opportunities or connection touch points.*
>
> *You have to get involved: … If I didn't have my classes, it would be an issue. There are not many professional musicians here, difficult to find and connect with them.*
>
> *There isn't a context to do so.*
>
> *It would be great if we could bring like-minded people together – understanding the values of where we live, looking at sustainability, telling stories about peoples lives, expression -bringing people together and creating an energy. Understanding community concerns and problems and working out how we build things that.*
>
> *Connecting with artists. Events for artists. Networking for artists. Teaching events. Artist newsletter.*

Needs and opportunities

Promotion / connecting tourism

Many creative practitioners were interested in connecting with tourists – and understood the local wineries were a key drawcard for tourists and a potential host for their works or performances. They were keen to partner with wineries, and be promoted alongside wineries. Creatives saw an opportunity for better networking between artists and venues / events.

Connecting artists with events

Council events should support local artists as a policy. …. Council should encourage non-affiliated events to support local artists. Support for businesses and artists to connect.

For us as a venue, it costs in time and money to plan an event or bring an artist in, and there's no immediate return. It would be great to have support to do this.

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Needs and opportunities - identified by Council staff in internal workshop

Identify external organisations to invest in a creative community

Plan to ENCOURAGE CREATIVITY / pathways for creative participation

Assist community groups to be sustainable economically

Strategic Approach

Leadership

Shared direction setting

Support community leadership

Provide a voice for community

Empower community to act

Enhance community connectedess

Opportunities for people to be creative

nurture new creative events

Community empowerment / opportunity

Partnerships

A community stakeholder group to own and carry out actions (supported by Council)

A framework to ENABLE

Engagement of young community members to support their creative goals and aspirations

mental wellbeing – social engagement & community

Improve community connectedness

Increase community wellbeing

Improve health and physical wellbeing

Health and wellbeing outcomes

# Appendix 1> Strategic Context

National arts participation

The results of the Australia Council for the National Arts Participation Survey identify that the arts are widely valued and engaged with by Australian audiences. Australians have strong agreement that arts and creativity have positive impacts across a range of social, educational, wellbeing and economic domains. For instance, the following lists the percentage of Australians agreeing that arts and creativity have positive impacts on:

· child development (63%)
· our sense of wellbeing and happiness (56%)
· helping us deal with stress, anxiety or depression (56%)
· bringing customers to local businesses (41%)
· building creative skills that will be necessary for the future workforce (47%)

Women, young Australians and parents with children under 16 years, and people living in very remote areas were most likely to value the positive impacts of arts and creativity.

The National Arts Participation Survey identified that the further away from metropolitan areas people lived, the more highly they prioritised ensuring young people have access to arts and creative experiences: "Value attributed to this increases with distance from urban hubs: from 73% in metropolitan areas, to 76% in regional areas, up to 85% among Australians living in remote areas" (p.56).

The Survey indicates that 98% of Australians engage with the arts in some form.
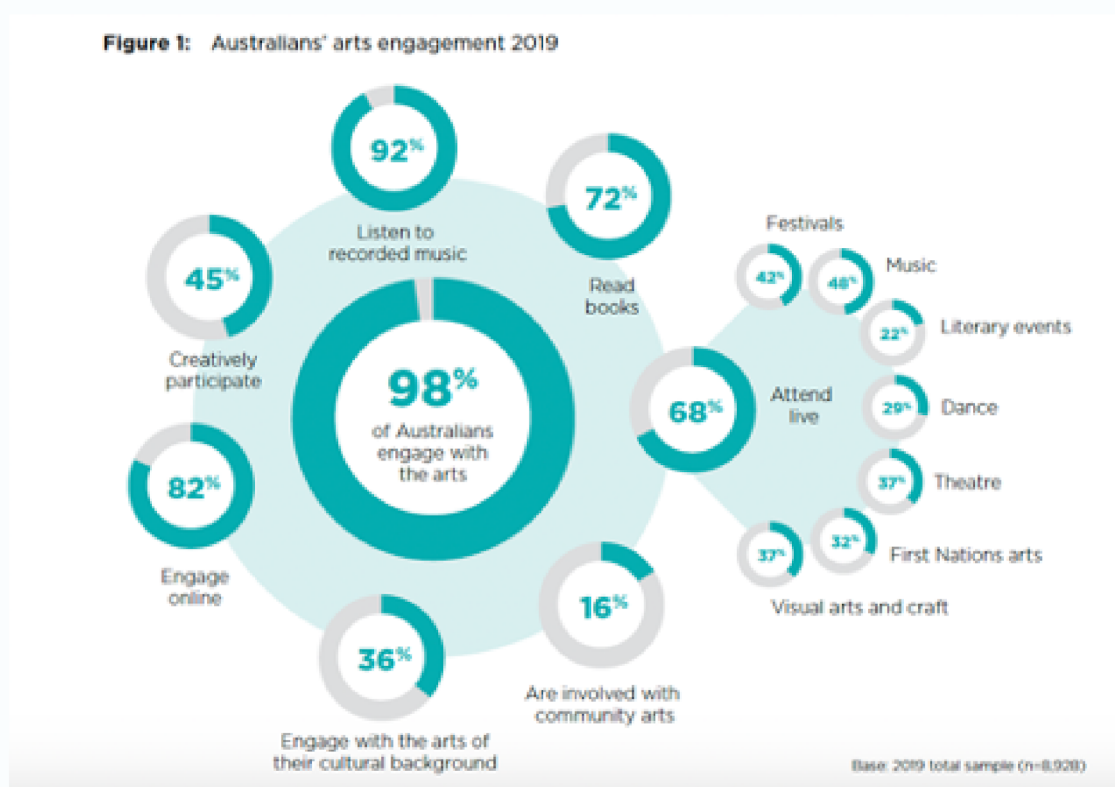
Source: Australian Arts Participation Survey, p.10

Appendix 1> Strategic Context

National creative strategy

Australian Council for the Arts, soon to become Creative Australia is the national body for championing and investing in Australian arts and creativity. This peak body invests in artist and organisations, builds capacity and skills for Australian creatives, collaborate and partner with organisations and government to add value to the arts sector, advocates for the arts, researches the sector, and advise and deliver on policy frameworks and initiatives. The work of the Australia Council is underpinned by the Australian Government's National Cultural Policy launched in January 2023. The transition to Creative Australia will incorporate new functions including a First Nations-led Board, Music Australia, Writers Australia, and Creative Workplaces.

The Policy is structured around 5 strategic pillars, which are:
- First Nations First: Recognising and respecting the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia's arts and culture.
- A Place for Every Story: Reflecting the breadth of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.
- Centrality of the Artist: Supporting the artist as worker and celebrating artists as creators.
- Strong Cultural Infrastructure: Providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts, culture and heritage.
- Engaging the Audience: Making sure our stories connect with people at home and abroad.

State creative strategy

Creative Victoria's annual calendar of funding opportunities are guided by the Creative State 2025 strategy which identifies has five objectives:
- More and better job opportunities and pathways: more jobs for more people, clearer career paths, and a more representative workforce in the creative economy.
- Innovative creative products and experiences: work that defines and represents Victoria's capability and cultural identity, breaks new ground and expands the sector's economic and public value.
- Industry stability and growth: stronger organisations, businesses and enterprises, employing more people, operating sustainable and producing creative products and services.
- Equitable access to the creative industries: Victorians have access to high-quality and diverse creative and cultural experiences, wherever they live; our world-class cultural attractions welcome all.
- New audiences and markets: Victoria's creative practitioners, organisations and businesses find a wider audience, new markets for their products and services, and increased revenue.

Appendix 1> Strategic Context

Economic contribution of the arts

The cultural and creative industries contribute a significant amount to the overall Australian economy. in Australia. Cultural and creative industries contribute around 6.5% of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employ approximately 5.5% of the total workforce.
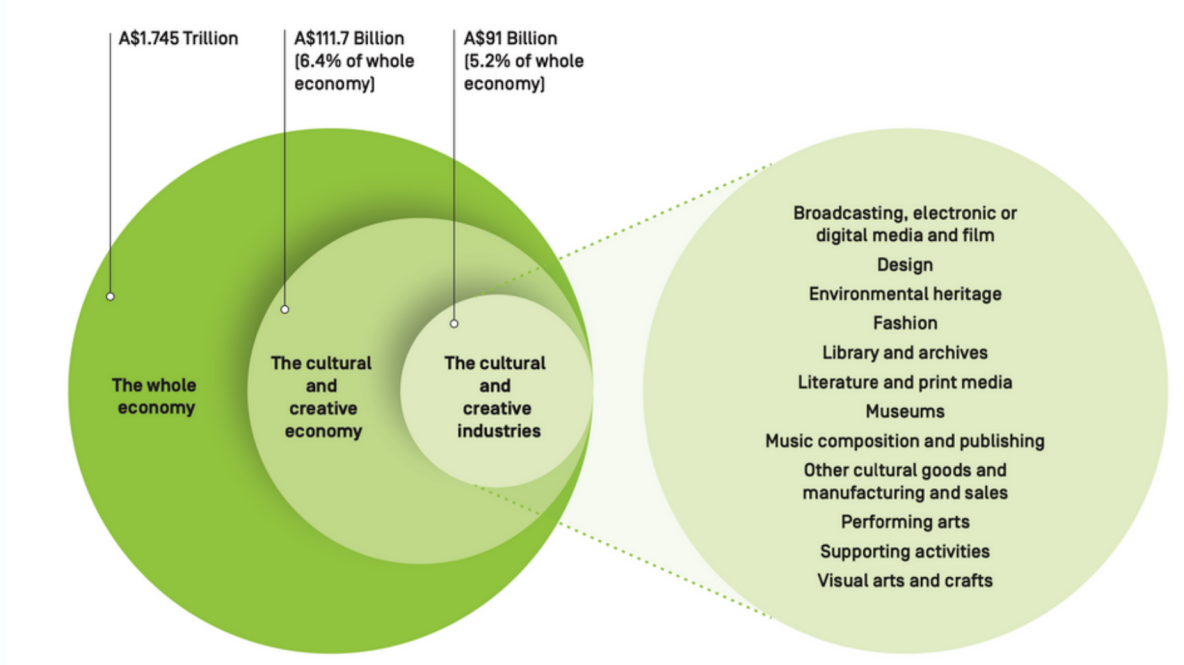

Source: Economy Insights Report Fact Sheet - ANA

However, ANA also notes that Australia has an international trade deficit when it comes to creative goods and services:

- for every $1 of Australian creative goods exported, up to $8 of goods are imported.
- for every $1 of Australian creative services exported, $2 of services are imported.

As well as contributing directly to GDP, the cultural and creative industries have broader impacts through their contribution to tourism. For instance, a 2020 report from the Australia Council for the Arts (Domestic Arts Tourism: Connecting the Country), reports on the ways in which domestic travellers who focus on arts engagement in their travels tend to be 'high value' tourists. That is, they are more likely to stay longer and spend more when travelling than domestic tourists overall.

Appendix 1> Strategic Context

Benefits of increasing access to creativity, through arts and culture

How a rich cultural life contributes to well-being and progress
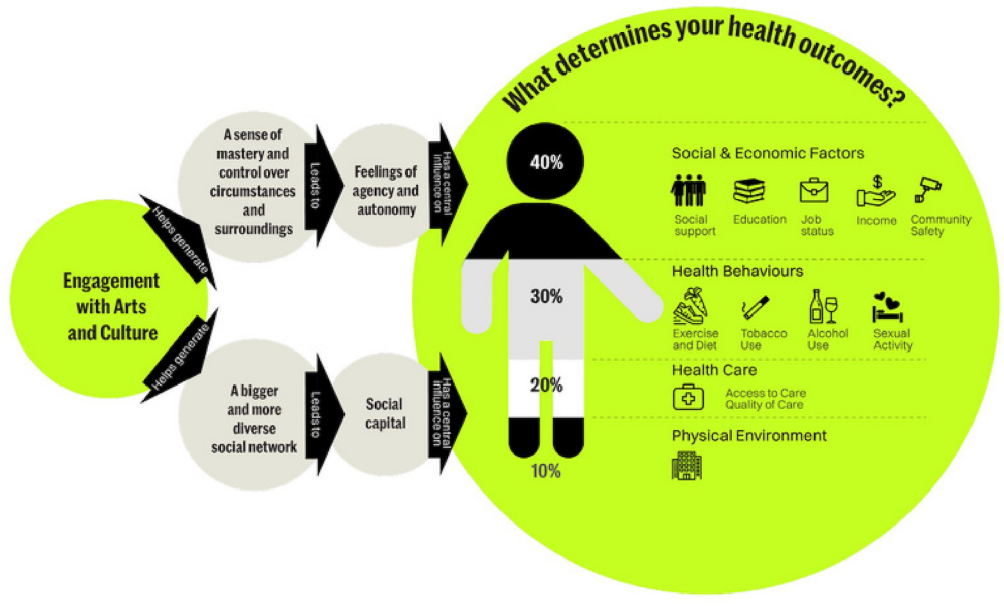
Arts and Culture: The Case for inclusion when measuring what matters. A New Approach, 2023

Research has illustrated incredible impacts on engaging with arts and culture, including on health and wellbeing. To capitalise on this, health agencies such as VicHealth, have in recent years developed strategic focus areas on arts and creativity.

Some VicHealth funding programs involve partnerships between creative organisations and local councils, with the council administering the grants. The Local Government Partnership Grants, for example, encourage creative organisations to partner with a Victorian council to create opportunities for more people to access the arts more often.