

ARTS AND CULTURAL STRATEGY 2016 – 2020

INTRODUCTION

This Strategy is a statement of Yarra City Council's values and outlines our priorities for the next five years. It has been written at a time when public funding for arts and culture in Australia, and internationally, is being hotly debated, again.

The Strategy is underpinned by two key assumptions:

1. Arts and cultural activities are essential for our community; and
2. They should be experienced as a part of our everyday lives.

Council recognises that our community is made up of people from all walks of life, from many different cultures and with many different needs and experiences. The conviction that arts and cultural services are an important local government function, and should be delivered using a coordinated all-of-Council approach, is central to how we operate, as is our commitment to ensuring that these services are accessible to everyone in the community.

Council takes its role as a leader and custodian for Yarra's creative community seriously and recognises the value of the creative identity that has developed in our City over the past decades. This is something that defines what our City is and it is a priority area for Council action.

Arts and cultural activities are valuable to our community and to those who live, work in and visit Yarra. Arts and culture are fundamental to a society that prides itself on diversity. Freedom of expression, experimentation and critical dialogue are invaluable and must be supported and nurtured.

The benefits can be measurable, but although they can be difficult to enumerate, they are always very palpable, widely documented, resoundingly acknowledged and clearly understood. Some of the benefits include: building a cohesive, liveable and attractive city; growing the economy; fostering collective knowledge; and enabling personal development.

This document outlines the opportunities and challenges that are unique to our local government and sets out the actions Council will take to ensure arts and cultural activities and programs are embedded in all areas of Council's work and accessible to all of our community.

VISION

Our vision is for arts and culture to be integrated into our City so that it can be an everyday experience; enjoyed by all of our community, whether they are makers, facilitators, audiences, participants or passers-by.

Creativity can occur anywhere and at any time and creative pursuits are open to everyone.

Embedding arts and culture into Council's services offers unique outcomes and adds value to our work.

SCOPE

This Strategy is concerned with arts and cultural activities expressed in the known forms of visual arts, music, theatre, performance, literature, public art, design, digital arts, film and craft, as well as unknown and undefined forms.

These are the activities that reflect how we think, behave and make meaning.

The products of these activities are often some of the most valuable modern commodities for their uniqueness, insight and innovation, as well as the enjoyment they provide.

However, this document is particularly concerned with a subset of the broader creative industries. We are concerned with all organisations with creativity at their core and those that are primarily driven by a preoccupation with creativity, culture and ideas.

We acknowledge that defining and fixing the meaning of arts, culture and creative processes is particularly difficult and needs to evolve continuously.

This is especially so an area that investigates and creates meaning, highlights subjectivity and where the manifestations of creativity continue to evolve. For example, we did not anticipate in the 18th Century that photography would become an art form, let alone the moving image. Yet, the visual representations of life, the world and our imaginations, can be traced back some 40-50,000 years to early cave paintings in Australia and elsewhere. Now, technology and the internet are assisting with the rapid dissemination of techniques and ideas and the cross-pollination of disciplines.

THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Yarra is on the traditional land of the Wurundjeri people. The suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood hold special historical significance for the Aboriginal community. These areas were a major hub of social and political activity for the Aboriginal community, and today remain a critical centre for Aboriginal services and organisations.

Respect for Traditional Owners and for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is a Council priority.

Social diversity has been fundamental to Yarra's identity. Yarra has a rich mix of cultures and communities, it is the first home of many migrants and refugees, and includes a spread of families from poor to affluent backgrounds. Over one-fifth of public housing residents in Yarra receive a Disability Support or Carer's Pension, highlighting the importance of access and inclusion.

Our residents have a high degree of commitment to social and environmental sustainability. Yarra became the first Victorian Council to be certified carbon neutral in 2012, which reflects a commitment to reducing the City's environmental footprint.

Yarra's much valued built heritage is evident in the many residential and activity centres that have some form of heritage protection. Managing change in this sensitive environment is a key challenge as well as an opportunity to shape the character of the City for the future.

Residents' attitudes towards the impact of population growth and neighbourhood change diverge. However, there is an appreciation of the need to plan for change and growth to ensure a range of housing options are available to support a diverse community and encourage developments that can provide opportunities for small businesses, particularly creative industries.

The City of Yarra is next door to Melbourne's central business district and borders Melbourne's sports and entertainment precinct, the Exhibition Building and gardens and Princes Park. This central inner city location makes Yarra accessible and visible and is a persistent reason why artists and arts and cultural organisations want to be here.

OUR CREATIVE IDENTITY

Yarra's identity as a creative place emerged when students, artists and activists moved to the inner suburbs in the 1970s. The relocation of post-war migrants to Melbourne's outer suburbs provided cheap rental housing and free tertiary education altered the demographics at universities.

Yarra is often referred to as the "engine room" of the arts because of the small to medium-sized arts organisations that make up much of our creative footprint. This is fed by the creative experimentation that occurs on small stages, in tucked-away artist run spaces, and in warehouse studios, most often off the high streets.

Yarra's cultural assets are too numerous to list in full, but here is a sample of what makes Yarra such a creative place.

- Over 60 galleries and artist-run spaces;
- Over 50 live music venues;
- Creative hubs, most notably the Abbotsford Convent; creative clusters in the Gipps Street precinct, as well as in Cremorne; and the new Contemporary Arts Precinct in Collingwood currently in development;
- Important Aboriginal meeting places and peak Aboriginal organisations;
- Four Community Radio Stations;
- Four Universities and TAFE Colleges and campuses;
- Many small to medium-sized arts organisations;
- Thriving creative businesses and industries; and
- Street art culture.

COUNCIL'S ROLE IN ARTS AND CULTURE

Local government is the tier of government most closely connected to the community that it serves and arguably most influenced by the local community's aspirations. Council is a regulator, a service provider and a facilitator of activities. It can shape community building, place-making and stimulate the local economy; it can influence the arts and cultural activities that occur in our City.

Council is well placed to understand the conditions influencing the local creative sector and to consider how this sector can be relevant in all areas of Council's work. Yarra exercises

four key roles (funding body, legislator, service provider and advocate) in supporting arts and cultural activities and has implemented leading initiatives, such as the Room to Create Charitable Fund to subsidise rising infrastructure related costs and the Live Music Venues Grants, as local responses to global trends.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Arts and cultural activities are good for us. Participating in and appreciating arts and culture is a way for people to connect and to express themselves. These activities can transform places and spaces, offering people another way of engaging with the context in which they live, work and play.

People choose to visit and live in Yarra because of the creative footprint that exists here. Creative people and organisations choose to be located in Yarra because of the opportunities to collaborate with like-minded people. Residents are often attracted to Yarra for the ‘vibe’ and ‘feel’ of the City.

Creativity and experimentation are essential to a society that prides itself on empathy, diversity and vibrancy.

The creative sector contributes significantly to Yarra’s tourism and local economy. Analysis of Yarra’s creative sector revealed that it employed significant numbers of workers in architecture, design, visual arts, digital arts, advertising and marketing.

OUR APPROACH

1. Creative Expression

Our City is abundant with creative expression; it is evident in music venues, in theatres, in galleries, in studios and on the streets.

Creative expression relies on freedom. Artists need space, time, resources and freedom to experiment in order to develop skills, ideas, stories and sometimes, to show us the world anew.

We recognise research and development are a part of the innovation process. By nurturing the experimental, inventive, unorthodox, brave, and difficult we support the creation of new ideas and world views.

We recognise that all stages of the artistic life-cycle need to be supported and this includes emerging, mid-career and established artists and project seeding, development and presentation.

2. Place Making

The creative identity of Yarra is a core value for our residents and visitors and a source of pride. This characteristic is crucial to our liveability and vitality. We want the creative footprint in Yarra to grow alongside population growth and be part of changes to our built form to ensure that our creative identity is maintained. We want to ensure that what draws people to Yarra in the first place is not lost.

Local government is well placed to combine urban planning with community building; this constitutes genuine place making.

Being a creative place means that we can encounter arts and culture in our streets, whether that be a mural, a public artwork or a public event. It means artists can find a work space where they can exchange ideas and make new work. It means we can hear live music in a local venue on any given day, or see an experimental performance piece in a non-traditional venue. It means we have opportunities to hear the latest stories from writers, participate in workshops, and have our children attend world class acrobatic programs in their neighbourhood. It means celebrated musicians and performers contribute to a local school fete or teach in our schools.

Being a creative place means songs and stories are written about our City.

It is vital that artists continue to live, work, and contribute to the local community in Yarra.

3. Community Building

Yarra's community spans from the First Peoples to the newest migrants; we are proudly diverse. Arts and cultural activities and programs offer important opportunities for self-expression and for cross-cultural understanding. They contribute to an open, engaged, and connected community. Arts and cultural activities enable people to connect with each other

around common interests and to come to a better understanding of each other by navigating and exploring their differences.

It is through arts and culture that we tell our stories and hear the stories of others; stories of history, culture and collective values.

Aboriginal culture, a complex integrated system of beliefs, arts and engagement with the land, is the world's oldest living continuous culture and is testament to the important role culture plays in creating identity.

We want to be a City where all people can express themselves and our community is made stronger because of our rich heritage and cultural diversity.

OUR PRIORITIES

1. Aboriginal Arts and Culture are Valued

Council is committed to upholding the proud Aboriginal history in Yarra and to promoting its rich cultural heritage and contemporary arts practices. We acknowledge that Fitzroy and Collingwood are areas of special significance to Aboriginal people as the birthplace of important Aboriginal organisations, the centre of social and political activism and a meeting place for Aboriginal people to link in with family, community and services.

Council seeks to remain a local government leader and innovator in promoting Aboriginal history and culture through partnerships with the Traditional Owners and the broader Aboriginal community. This approach is governed by ongoing consultation, responsiveness and advocacy, towards increased creative and collaborative projects, and employment opportunities.

2. Yarra is a Creative City of Artists

Yarra is home to a high proportion of creative practitioners and a hub for many who work and present here. The impact of this can be seen through the vibrant and diverse street life; distinctive and authentic neighbourhoods with a mixture of buildings; and pedestrian-friendly public spaces.

Yarra's identity as a creative city depends on the presence of artists in our midst. This creative identity is highly valued by many people who live, visit and work here.

Council wants to provide encouragement and support to artists and creative businesses to enable them to continue to experiment, create and flourish in our City.

3. Our City is Changing

The rate of change is speeding up everywhere.

The built form of our City is changing; the ongoing development of multi-storey residential buildings means 78.3% of Yarra's dwellings are medium or high density, compared to 28% in Greater Melbourne. This goes hand in hand with increasing land values, increasing demands for services, and changes in the demographic makeup of our City.

Yarra has the opportunity to leverage on the growth of our City, embed arts and cultural activity into the changing built form, and tap into new audiences for arts and cultural activities.

Council has taken some steps to address the affordability of creative work spaces and this along with the ongoing development of major independent creative hubs, will ensure the creative footprint in Yarra continues to grow.

There are significant challenges in retaining Yarra's diversity. Whilst public housing ensures a certain number of people on low incomes will remain here, there is a growing concern that high property values and by extension high rents are forcing others out, and that Yarra will become a city dominated by a privileged majority.

Council wants our arts and cultural services to be responsive to these changes and to enhance, rather than limit, our ability to be a diverse and creative city.

4. Yarra is Many Things to Many People

Precincts, neighbourhoods, streetscapes and shopping strips in Yarra all have distinct identities. Communities who live and work in these areas influence the character of their immediate environment and often feel very connected to that milieu.

Emerging creative hubs in Cremorne and Collingwood are examples of creatively concentrated neighbourhoods, but streets such as Swan or Smith also have creative identities. Yarra is made up of many parts and each corner of this municipality may have a special meaning to one person and another meaning to someone else.

This diversity is a great strength and can also cause conflict. Council recognises arts and cultural activities have the capacity to highlight unique characteristics and to bring a whole range of people together in a harmonious way. Arts and culture can exist in any context and can transcend differences in language, cultural or social backgrounds.

PRIORITY 1: YARRA HAS A PROUD HISTORY OF ABORIGINAL CULTURE

Council is committed to upholding the proud Aboriginal history of Yarra and to promoting its rich cultural heritage and contemporary arts practices. Council can take a leading role to develop an Aboriginal arts and cultural program that celebrates Aboriginal people, history and culture and that embraces the future of Aboriginal arts.

OBJECTIVES	OUTCOMES	RESOURCES
Provide support to Aboriginal artists practicing across all art forms and at all stages of their careers.	New works developed, produced and presented by Aboriginal artists.	Existing resources
	Increased representation of works in the Yarra Art and Heritage Collection by Aboriginal artists.	Acquisitions budget confirmed annually
	New opportunities for residencies, mentorships, performances and exhibitions for Aboriginal artists.	Existing resources
	New collaborations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists.	Existing resources
Support, produce and present arts and cultural projects that celebrate and share local Aboriginal history, knowledge and stories.	Festivals, events and activities that celebrate and share Aboriginal history, arts and culture.	New resources
	Partnerships with Aboriginal artists, producers and organisations.	Existing resources
	Deeper connections between Aboriginal artists and community members, and the broader Yarra community.	Existing resources
	Development of a public art project to commemorate the Stolen Generations.	New resources

Develop cultural products that provide employment and training for Aboriginal artists, producers and community members, and have tourism potential.	Employment and training for Aboriginal artists, producers and community members. Creative and educational projects that showcase Aboriginal history and culture whilst providing ongoing opportunities for Aboriginal people. Creative and educational projects that increase understanding of Aboriginal culture and history in Yarra.	Existing resources New resources
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PRIORITY 2: YARRA IS A CREATIVE CITY OF ARTISTS

Yarra is a creative City with numerous creative assets and many artists as residents. Yarra is home to an expansive number of galleries, peak cultural organisations, live music venues, studios and creative hubs and Council plays a key role in nurturing creativity.

OBJECTIVES	OUTCOMES	RESOURCES
Support artists working across all art forms and at all stages of their careers.	Deliver a nuanced short and long-term funding program, such as the Annual and Small Project Grants, Live Music Venues Grants, Creative Yarra and Celebrate Yarra Triennial Funding Program and the Room to Create Fund.	Existing with a commitment to CPI increases for the Grants pool – see Appendix 1.
	Promotion and marketing of events and activities through Council publications, websites and other platforms such as social media.	Existing resources
	Nurture new and ongoing relationships, partnerships and collaborations between Council, artists and arts organisations.	Existing resources
Facilitate appropriate and affordable venues and spaces that are suitable for arts and cultural activities.	Develop new and simplified, accessible and affordable policies and procedures that enable creative activities.	Existing resources
	Increase access to Council assets such as discounted use for community hirers and subsidised use as part of the Grants Programs.	Existing resources
	Grow the program of creative developments and presentations at the Richmond Theatrette increasing the visibility of this venue.	Existing resources
	Deliver a diverse program of heritage and contemporary arts projects in Council's town halls, libraries, other venues and public spaces.	Existing resources

Develop, display, and maintain Yarra's Art and Heritage Collection.	Build Council's Contemporary Art Collection through the annual acquisition budget.	Acquisitions budget confirmed annually
	Display the Art and Heritage Collection in key Council spaces including foyers, offices and meeting rooms; and explore other opportunities to showcase the Collection, including loans or special exhibitions.	Existing resources
	Continue to maintain the Art and Heritage Collection, including restorations.	Existing and new resources
	Update the Collection Management Policy in line with best practice.	Existing resources
	Develop a new Asset Management Plan for the Collection.	Existing resources
Be a strong advocate for the arts and cultural sector. Talk and listen to the sector and explore upcoming issues or opportunities.	Convene Council's arts advisory committees, YAARTS, Visual Arts Panel and Room to Create Panel, and consult through formal and informal channels.	Existing resources
Promote art, artists, creative organisations and businesses as an integral part of Yarra's fabric and community.	Provide networking opportunities and capacity building initiatives for artists at all stages of their careers and from all backgrounds and for local organisations, community members and Council staff.	Existing resources

PRIORITY 3: YARRA IS A CHANGING CITY

Increasing population and changing demographics pose challenges and opportunities for creating and experiencing the arts. Council's role in developing and facilitating partnerships and being responsive to change will keep programs relevant in a shifting landscape.

OBJECTIVES	OUTCOMES	RESOURCES (SEE APPENDIX 1)
Align and develop funding for arts and cultural projects and activities that respond to community changes.	Support of arts and cultural activities that reflect and respond to our changing city and represent a balance between the traditional and the new.	Existing resources
	Regular review of existing arts and cultural funding programs and guidelines, and new funding opportunities identified.	To be determined
	Grow the Room to Create Program to enable artists, arts and cultural organisations and arts practice to remain in Yarra, through subsidising infrastructure or rent.	Council contribution confirmed annually
Encourage new developments to contribute to the creative industries sector in Yarra through measures such as public art installations, providing creative spaces and affordable housing for artists.	Initiate and support public art commissions for eligible Council owned infrastructure projects according to Council's Public Art Policy 2015-20.	To be determined
	Develop projects with private and government agencies that generate more temporary or permanent spaces for the creative sector.	Existing resources
	Identify redevelopment opportunities for underutilised Council buildings, such as in the Collingwood Town Hall Precinct.	To be determined
	Develop strategic planning policies that recognise the importance of the creative industries sector to the local and metropolitan economy and support the retention and expansion of the sector.	Existing resources

PRIORITY 4: YARRA IS MANY THINGS TO MANY PEOPLE

Council will recognise and celebrate diversity in the arts and respond creatively to the needs of different communities, localities and cultures.

OBJECTIVES	OUTCOMES	RESOURCES
Tailor programs to respond to specific community needs and to celebrate local characteristics.	<p>Present a range of artistic, cultural and creative outcomes in close collaboration with the communities involved.</p> <p>Offer creative approaches to activate precincts across Yarra using road treatments, public art, events and interventions.</p> <p>Improve visibility of arts and culture in Yarra through programming, commissioning or facilitating artwork geographically around the municipality.</p> <p>Produce and facilitate projects that prioritise access for groups needing further support and greater visibility, and collaborations with under-represented artists and communities.</p>	Existing resources
Provide a distinctive annual Public Art Program including both permanent and rotating commissions.	<p>Develop high-quality public art projects across key Council managed sites and platforms and other pop-up opportunities.</p> <p>Improve processes and outcomes for the commissioning of street art using a place management approach.</p>	Existing resources
Foster and promote the distinctive strengths of Yarra's creative community to build capacity of the sector and to capitalise on opportunities such as tourism.	<p>Create promotional opportunities that celebrate Yarra's creative identity and diversity.</p> <p>Work in collaboration with live music venues to improve the ongoing viability of the sector.</p> <p>Work in collaboration with the visual arts sector on market development and promotional opportunities such as the Gallery Guide.</p>	Existing resources

Appendix 1: Resources of the Arts and Cultural Programs as of 2016

In 2016 Yarra Council's budget allocation for Arts and Cultural Services Unit is \$1.4m, of which \$590k is distributed in grants. There are 4.6 equivalent full time staff across six portfolios plus one Unit Manager that manages the Branch. Arts and Cultural Services sits within the Arts, Culture and Venues Branch which has a collective operational budget of \$2.5m.

The operational and capital works budget is confirmed annually by Council.

ARTS and CULTURAL PORTFOLIOS

1. Arts Development

The Arts Development Officer manages the Arts Development Stream of the Annual Community Grants Program which funds new work in any art form, as well as Triennial Grants, relationships and outcomes. The Arts Development Officer manages and develops the Room to Create Program (see below) and administers public art projects, the arts and cultural advisory committees, and internal working groups.

2. Visual Arts

The Visual Arts Officer is responsible for the Visual Arts Program within the City of Yarra including managing the Art and Heritage Collection (with a focus on the indoor collection), acquisitions, strategic development, storage and records management, display and conservation and the delivery of the exhibition program in Council owned venues. The Visual Arts Officer curates and manages public art commissions, the Gallery Guide and works on content for the Yarra City Arts website.

3. Public Art

The Public Arts Officer is primarily responsible for the management of the Yarra Outdoor Collection and manages the Public Art Program which includes the Carlton Library Light Boxes and roving projection sites, as well as future commissions. The Public Arts Officer represents Council's interests and rights in relation to private commissions in the public realm with the Council Planning team and manages the strategic planning and implementation of the Public Art Policy, and broader policy input relevant to public art in the City.

4. Community Arts

The Community Arts Officer works on identifying and addressing gaps in participation, production and presentation in the arts, as well as issues related to social justice, education, awareness and inclusion. This work takes many forms and includes funding projects and programs, brokering relationships between artists and communities and producing or co-producing events and activities which involve artists and members of Yarra's community. The Community Arts Officer programs the Richmond Theatrette with a particular emphasis on development and experimentation and the relationship between the arts and the community. This role works across all art forms but often in theatre, music, dance, installation and performance.

5. Festivals and Events

The Festival and Events Officer supports more than 20 cultural festivals and events every year, as well as many local, grassroots and community celebrations. This includes major street-based events such as Lunar Festival and Fiesta which attract over 80,000 people and smaller events including The Village Festival, Gertrude Street Projection Festival, Black Harmony, Fairfield Summer Music Series and Rock-a-Bye Baby. The Festival and Events Officer facilitates event planning and delivery, risk and safety management, logistics, approvals, consultation and promotion.

6. Room to Create

The Room to Create Program houses arts organisations in Council-owned buildings via a rolling tenancy program and also encompasses the Room to Create Fund, in partnership with the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation. The Fund reflects Council's commitment to keeping the arts in Yarra as the property market changes, and supports artists and organisations to maintain space here through grants for infrastructure related expenses. The Program includes The Circle, a new fundraising initiative designed to build the Room to Create Fund corpus. Room to Create also supports Live Music Venues via the Live Music Venues Grants Program which is for activities such as acoustic engineering, sound proofing and refurbishments that help to reduce noise related issues and complaints.

2016 ARTS & CULTURAL FUNDING PROGRAM

Over the last five years, we have gradually updated our funding streams to reflect the needs of our stakeholders. This includes creative triennial grants for organisations, increased and easier to access short turn-around funding, funding to develop the profile of our venues (Richmond Theatrette), funding for our three major festivals and funding for creative infrastructure.

- Annual Grants Streams – Arts Development, Community Arts, Festivals and Events and Richmond Theatrette \$210,000 p a;
- Small Project Grants \$22,000 p a;
- Celebrate Yarra Triennial Grants \$160,000 p a;
- Creative Yarra Triennial Grants \$170,000 p a;
- Live Music Venues Grants \$25,000 p a;
- Room to Create Charitable Fund Grants \$10,000 p a [variable].

2016 CREATIVE ASSETS

- Council-owned and managed Venues for performance, rehearsal, community activities, meetings, weddings and social events;
- Places including streets, neighbourhoods, parks, gardens and open spaces;
- Art and Heritage Collection valued at over \$3m with over 860 objects spanning contemporary art, heritage fine art, memorabilia and decorative art;

- Heritage of our locality, public places, buildings, culture and social history;
- Places for the public display of art including foyers, meeting rooms and libraries; and
- Block Studios: an Arts Program dedicated to young people and managed by Yarra Youth Services that includes an art and music studio.