

Attachment C3

Draft Cultural Strategy 2025-2035

What we're learning about culture in Sydney

Our conversations with the local sector revealed insights about how these global trends and local challenges are playing out in Sydney. This helps us understand how we can respond in a way that is custom-made for Sydney.



1

Ours is a city of polarities.

We strongly value our prestigious national institutions ... *but* we really love our hard-to-find, indie, underground, cool, queer, and gritty fine grain. We are particularly good at delivering large, free, family friendly events ... *or* high-priced, high-art experiences of cultural excellence. Sydney is seen as big, bold, world-class and world-leading ... *however* we're also known for being quiet, constrained and in bed by 9pm.

These are the kinds of polarities that have dominated our discussions about the state of Sydney's cultural life. When we talk about what will make our culture thrive, it's the middle-ground that people most want to see nurtured.

2

Bridging Sydney's 'missing middle' will unlock our full potential.

Sydney's polarities are most keenly felt in our precarious mid-tier. Sydney enjoys most of the national major arts institutions and our smaller independent sector is being sustained through subsidised spaces and project funding. But there is a notable lack of mid-sized venues, mid-sized organisations and opportunities for mid-career artists.

We heard that there is a certain scale of ambition or stage in career where opportunities simply disappear for Sydney's artists. Building strength in our mid-tier will create life-long career paths for local talent, sustainable growth in creative industries, and the kinds of mid-sized and mid-priced cultural experiences our audiences are lacking.





3

We must move from a culture of competition to one of collaboration.

The cultural sector is reliant on subsidies, and rightfully so. The work of sustaining and sharing culture is deserving of dedicated public funds. But our subsidy model through merit-based, competitive grants and tenders has for decades engendered a culture of competition in the creative industries.

After surviving a global pandemic and now facing existential threats, an empathetic, collegiate, battle-weary sector wants to collaborate, not compete. They have painted a picture of a resilient, thriving future for the sector that is integrated, with common goals, shared resources, and lateral networks of support.

4

The investment in culture needs to be expanded – and so does our way of thinking about it.

We heard there is increasing pressure on creative industries to meet 21st century expectations around environmental measures, social inclusion standards, developing new markets and innovating their craft, but all on 20th century budgets. There is not an unwillingness to undertake the work – artists are the original innovators, and the creative sector is often at the forefront of progressive change. But meeting these responsibilities comes at an expense, and it is mostly artist wages where savings are made.

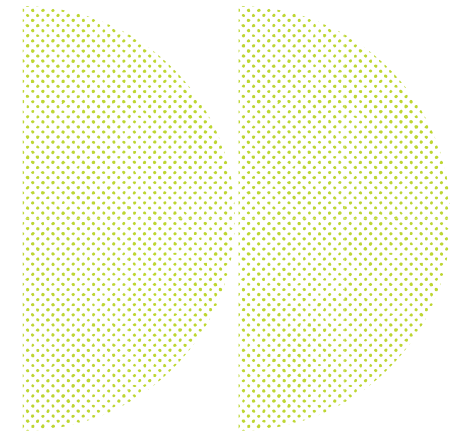
We need to challenge the notion that cultural subsidies are simply propping up not-for-profit operators whose costs of production outweigh their commercial returns. Instead, we need to embrace our investment in creativity as resourcing innovation, inclusion, adaptation, social cohesion and wellbeing. In the context of geopolitical tensions and the escalating climate crisis, an investment in creative, educated, empathetic, culturally connected communities is money well spent.

5

The sector is suffering from burn out – recovery will take time.

For the cultural sector, the deepest, most far-reaching impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic are not economic, they're personal. We already knew that Sydney's cultural life was reliant on a relatively small group of exceptional creative leaders. We now realise just how much they've been pushed to the brink.

Burn out is the new normal and it is openly discussed in cultural organisations across our city. We need to acknowledge it and work together to address it. There is no quick cash infusion or 'silver bullet' that will fix this; we need a steady, measured approach akin to nursing a patient through recovery. As we look to transform and build our city's cultural life, we must concurrently, consistently firm up the foundations.





WHAT WE'RE DOING

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Retain. Rebuild. Reimagine.

This is a ten-year strategy to set a path toward our vision for a thriving culture life in Sydney. But it begins at a time when the cultural sector and our creative workforce face unprecedented challenges.

The long tail effects of the Covid-19 pandemic continue to destabilise the foundations of our cultural sector, which was already diminished under liquor licensing lock-out laws. Inflationary pressures are driving up the costs of making and participating in culture, and an extremely unaffordable housing market poses an existential threat to local culture – driving artists out of our city and audiences away from cultural venues to save money.

We need to act urgently to retain the people and places that give our city's culture its authentic, diverse, inclusive, eclectic and electric feel. We need to keep our grassroots deeply planted in place.

At the same time, we need to invest in strategic initiatives that will accelerate the growth of our cultural sector, especially in the mid-tier, and begin working towards the systemic change that will see our cultural life and industries better reflect the diversity of our communities. We need to break down barriers that exclude people from participating in culture. We need to rethink our city as a place where creativity thrives in every corner, at every hour, and in unexpected and inspiring ways.

That is why this strategy is organised by these 3 strategic responses.



Retain

Urgent actions to retain Sydney's creative workforce and cultural infrastructure. This includes considered, place-based approaches to retain local character and community culture, despite urban renewal and property market pressures.



Rebuild

Strategic interventions to rebuild strength in Sydney's creative sector following years of unprecedented challenge. This includes restoring the cultural infrastructure required for sector growth, but also the resilience of our local artists, organisations and cultural leaders who sustained a personal toll through the struggles of recent years.



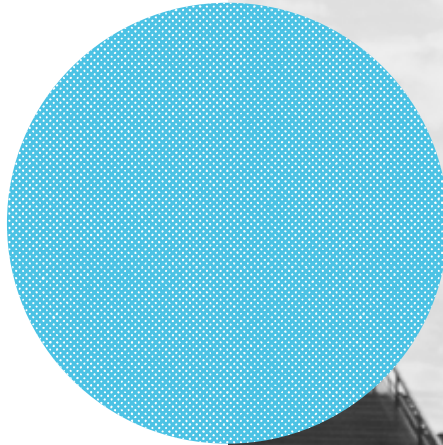
Reimagine

Systemic change to guide Sydney's cultural sector towards a more diverse, inclusive, green and equitable future with innovative approaches to unlocking the potential of Sydney as a haven for creative industries, artists and cultural tourism.



Vision

Aboriginal and
Torres Strait
Islander peoples
and their cultural
practices are visible
and respected



This is Gadigal Country. Gadigal people have cared for and nurtured this place for thousands of generations. The establishment of a British outpost on these lands had profound impacts on Gadigal people and their culture.

Sydney is now home to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples descended from nations all over this country, as well as a rich diversity of cultures that live here as a result of migration. We acknowledge the extraordinary resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures, despite the ongoing impacts of colonisation. While we celebrate what has survived, we must speak plainly of what has been harmed.

While we embrace the contribution of First Nations cultures to contemporary Australian identity, we understand that First Nations cultures need to be supported to heal and revitalise. As a first principle, we need to ensure we do no further harm.



Retain

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples maintain cultural practice and knowledge and retain the right to self-determine how First Nations cultures are acknowledged and celebrated.



Rebuild

Trust is rebuilt through truth telling, representation and consultation. Our memorials, history programs and public art projects will recognise and reflect First Nations people's experience. We'll help resource the appropriate cultural authorities so they can carry out the important work of reviewing and guiding storytelling and truth telling, and we'll invest in the cultural competence of our city. We will support creative businesses to review their programs and services through a 'First Nations lens'.



Reimagine

We will prioritise Aboriginal led enterprise and community organisations in our industry support programs, urban renewal projects and grant funding, and develop a strategic framework to articulate and achieve community aspirations.

Proposed actions

- Develop a comprehensive **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategic framework** to articulate the vision, themes and objectives for the work we do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Ensure First Nations artists and cultural practice are prioritised in **our grants programs** and provide resources to help increase the number of applications from First Nations peoples.
- Further develop **Calling Country** to provide more opportunities for First Nations artists and cultures to take centre stage at New Year's Eve celebrations.
- Continue to develop and produce **The Eora Journey Recognition in the Public Domain program** including **Yananurala – Walking on Country**, in partnership with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Undertake a **truth-telling** process through our libraries, monuments and civic collections.
- Invest in local cultural organisations and venues to participate in **cultural awareness training** to build the cultural competency of Sydney's creative sector, and better partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists.



Vision

We value our
cultural life and
champion our
creative industries

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Culture is one of the main pillars of local government policy. We recognise culture as both a means and an end: a powerful tool for driving social change, economic development and environmental stewardship; and the very thing that gives meaning to our lives, our prosperity and our resilience.

We recognise there is no culture without freedom of cultural expression and there is no cultural life without our creative industries – the people who spin our culture into tangible objects and experiences, where we can draw meaning and find community.



Retain

We'll review planning controls across our creative employment precincts to prioritise the retention of creative industries, local character and connections to culture. We'll advocate for creative enterprise zones that protect and incentivise development which supports local culture.



Rebuild

We'll carry out research and advocate for our creative industries to build a shared understanding of the needs and health of the sector, including how our interventions are working. We'll use our networks across the councils of Greater Sydney to track the supply of creative workspace and ensure the right spaces are being built to meet needs and facilitate growth.



Reimagine

We'll embrace innovation and provide the platforms and testing grounds to trial new ideas, technologies and approaches to making and sharing culture. We'll work with other levels of government, international networks and the local sector to develop export pathways for Sydney-made culture and local talent. We'll transform Sydney from being a net importer of culture to a net exporter.

Proposed actions

- Review the Oxford Street **creative precinct planning controls** to determine if they're achieving intended outcomes, implement appropriate changes and investigate applying them to other precincts.
- Develop **place strategies** and ongoing **place keeping plans** for our cultural quarters to maintain community connections with cultural identity and places of cultural significance.
- Undertake **research on behalf of the sector**, including an affordability study to demonstrate a standard model for providing subsidised creative space.
- Develop a **network of local governments to monitor creative spaces across Greater Sydney**, to ensure there is an adequate range and supply of space to meet the future needs of the community and Sydney's cultural sector.



Vision

An increasing number of creative workers live or work in the city

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Sydney is the only Australian capital city to see a decline in its artist population since 2017. We need to stem the loss of our artistic talent, hold our people in place and begin to rebuild our creative workforce.

 **Retain**

We'll urgently act to retain the core creative workforce of our city through measures that address cost-of-living and housing pressures.

 **Rebuild**

We'll invest in local leaders and strategic staffing positions in key cultural organisations so they may build strength in our workforce and invest in local production and artists. We'll advocate for increased access to affordable housing options for artists and creative workers.

 **Reimagine**

We'll advocate for systems reform that improves the conditions of casual cultural employment and leads to sustainable, equitable incomes from creative labour. By increasing the number of mid-tier organisations and venues in our city, we'll encourage life-long career paths in the creative industries.

Proposed actions

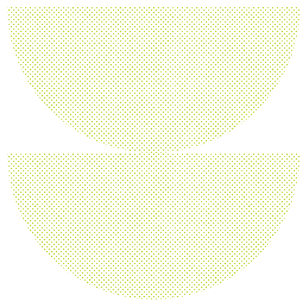
- Investigate a **fellowship style grants program** for diverse Sydney-based artists to work on their creative practice.
- Extend our **creative/live work tenancies** to 2-year leases.
- Produce a **cultural leadership program** for cultural workers, artists and the owners of creative businesses focused on peer-to-peer learning, mentorship, resilience, and professional development ambitions of our local leaders.
- Research the barriers to **affordable housing for artists** and associated impacts on the creative sector, and work with key stakeholders to remove them where possible.
- Research appropriate and affordable housing models to support the creative sector including **purpose-built artist housing** with live/work or co-located workspace.



Vision

Sydney's cultural life reflects the diversity of our communities

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Sydney is one of the most multicultural cities in the world, and our communities are enriched with a broad diversity of lived experiences. However, the cultural offering of our city does not necessarily reflect this and is being made and consumed by an increasingly homogenous demographic. We want to capitalise on our diversity and unlock opportunities for our city to better enjoy its rich cultural complexity.



Retain

We'll prioritise investment in projects led by culturally diverse artists, communities and organisations and work to retain connections between migrant communities, their cultural practices and languages.



Rebuild

We'll invest in the development of diverse leadership in our local organisations by building pathways that nurture culturally diverse talent. We'll use our own expertise and programs to mentor the next generation of creative workers.



Reimagine

We'll support sector-led initiatives to address systemic exclusion and review our own grant and procurement processes to maximise inclusion. We'll support local organisations to authentically meet diversity targets and set up structures that sustain diversity, in both representation and participation in our cultural life.

Proposed actions

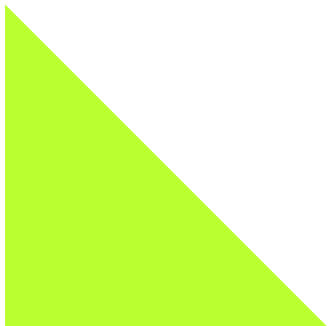
- Explore a **funding program** that supports local cultural organisations to **recruit strategic, diverse staff positions**, including dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander roles, people with disability and creative workers from diverse cultural backgrounds through placements, mentorship and professional development opportunities, supported by appropriate wrap-around services.
- Offer **traineeships for producers and event managers** through our events and cultural programs, prioritising diverse, emerging local talent.
- Review **procurement, creative tenders and grant application processes** to maximise accessibility and inclusion.
- Review our **artist employment and commissioning practices** considering the Modern Awards Review by the Fair Work Commission.



Vision

There is an increased supply of accessible creative space

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In the decade from 2012 to 2022, the City of Sydney area lost more than 172,000m² of creative floor space. We need a mix of government, private sector and cultural sector led creative space projects to rebuild this infrastructure and retain our position as the home of Australia's creative industries.

 **Retain**

We'll urgently act to retain at-risk cultural infrastructure and de-risk new cultural infrastructure projects.

 **Rebuild**

Through strategic partnerships we'll unlock the potential of City of Sydney-owned assets to rebuild workspace for core creatives – artists, musicians, writers and performers.

 **Reimagine**

New financing and governance models and for-purpose property development will encourage cultural infrastructure at scale and new avenues for philanthropic impact. We will explore the establishment of a Creative Land Trust for NSW that would take custodianship of suitable buildings or sites for cultural uses. We'll reimagine the cultural sector as landholders and caretakers of place, providing long-term security for cultural assets.

Proposed actions

- Provide a **cultural infrastructure improvement grant** to assist existing creative spaces and venues to upgrade their facilities and meet compliance costs.
- Provide a **creative spaces startup grant** to assist new creative spaces with establishment costs, expert advice, fit-outs and the first 3 months of rent.
- Provide access to **dedicated spaces for artists, musicians, writers and performers** in suitable City of Sydney-owned properties.
- Offer **artist residencies** across our library network, in community centres, and within appropriate departments of the City.
- Provide seed-funding to facilitate the establishment of a **creative land trust**.