

Attachment D

**Engagement Report – Sector Consultation
for a Draft Cultural Strategy 2025-2035**

Engagement report – cultural strategy refresh



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Overview

Background

The Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan 2014-2024 was adopted by the City of Sydney Council in August 2014 to elevate and articulate the role culture plays in strengthening our city and the value our community places in our cultural and creative life. The policy and action plan have delivered significant positive impacts.

We are now at the end of this ten-year plan and changes in the cultural landscape necessitate a comprehensive review. Census data and wellbeing surveys highlight urgent issues such as the loss of cultural workers and space.

In February 2024 we began consultation with targeted industry and community representatives on the current challenges faced by the cultural sector and aspirations for the next ten years. Insights from these discussions will be combined with data from other recent, relevant community and industry consultations to inform a cultural strategy refresh. The refreshed strategy will align with Sustainable Sydney 2050, address critical issues, and respond to opportunities now on the horizon.

Engagement summary

From 12 March to 2 May 2024, we ran a series of face-to-face workshops to ask the cultural sector to share their insights on current challenges and their ideas on priorities for the future for the purpose of shaping a refreshed strategy.

This report outlines the community engagement activities that took place and summarises the key findings from the consultation.

Purpose of engagement

- Collaboratively review our approach to supporting the cultural sector in our local area.
 - Prioritise known issues and identify any significant gaps.
 - Collaboratively identify the most appropriate role for the City in addressing the key issues.
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Figure 1. Engagement activity

Quantity	Description of activity
1340	Total comments received
7	Workshops held
89	People attended workshops
61	Organisations were represented

Cultural industry workshops

Six cultural industry workshops were held, with a total of 75 participants. The workshops brought together small, targeted groups of sector representatives and members of the City of Sydney advisory panel for in-depth conversations.

The workshop activities gathered insights from each group to ensure the new strategy accurately identifies current challenges, addresses critical issues, and responds to new opportunities on the horizon.

The targeted sessions gave key stakeholders an opportunity to connect with each other and to understand the range of priorities and real-world experiences that exist across the sector

The workshops were streamed into the following industry groups:

Screen and creative production

Small to medium and independent organisations

Design, technology, fashion and green organisations

Contemporary Music

Major institutions

One additional mixed session was held to capture insights from people who could not attend an earlier session.

Participants were given a short presentation on our research, prior consultation findings and our current understanding of the key issues facing the cultural sector. They were asked to identify the issues most important to them, then broke into groups to discuss the barriers and opportunities relevant to the top issues. The groups then suggested what the City's role could be in addressing those issues, considering where support will be most effective in different areas.

The participants considered what should be strengthened, saved, created, or ditched to improve the cultural life of Sydney, and summarised their aspirations for the future.

Screen hub workshop

A specialist workshop was held on the purpose and practicalities of setting up a screen hub in Sydney. The need for a screen hub was one of the most discussed items at the cultural industry workshop on creative and screen production. We hosted a follow-up session to discuss the idea in more depth to assist industry and government to progress this concept.

We worked with Screen NSW on the invitation list for this session to ensure diverse representation of people from across the screen and production sectors.

Feedback from this session is reported separately in the section on exploring a screen hub.

Exploring the issues

Priority challenges

At each workshop City staff presented a list of the known issues and challenges currently facing the cultural and creative sector¹. Participants were asked to vote on the challenges they felt were the highest priority. They were also able to nominate challenges they feel are not priorities or no longer relevant.

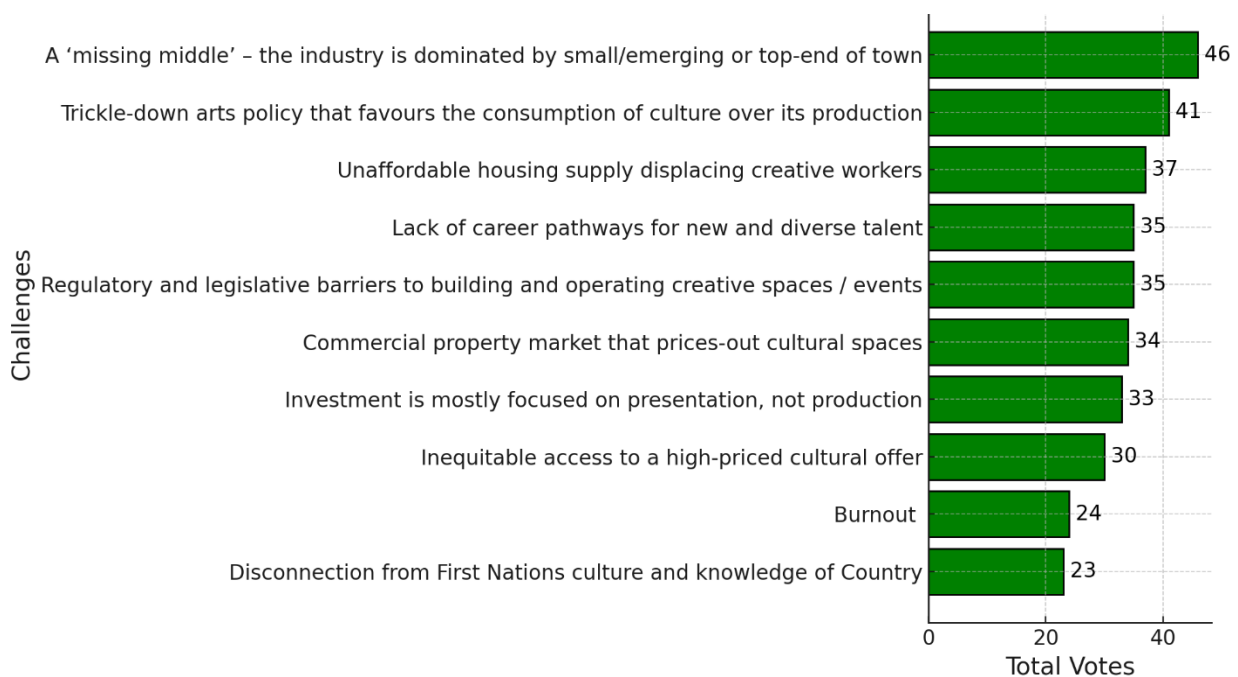
Participants were asked to place 3 to 5 green dots each for their priority challenges.

The challenges with the most votes as a priority are:

1. A 'missing middle'
2. Policy that favours consumption over production
3. Unaffordable housing supply displacing creative workers

Although lower in the overall vote, the issue of burnout was nominated by most participants in the Individual, small and medium organisation workshop as a significant issue for their group. Burnout was discussed in other workshops as a serious impact of the other priority issues.

Figure 2. Priority challenges by total vote



¹ See Appendix 1 and 2 for the full list of challenges.

Following the vote, workshop participants broke into small groups to explore the impacts, barriers, and opportunities for different priority issues. This section describes the combined feedback on those topics.

The missing middle

Participants agreed that financial, logistical, and structural challenges impede the development and sustainability of talents in the middle tier of the cultural and creative sector. The barriers they raised include:

- Lack of funding and support, especially secure long-term funding.
- Limited opportunities, notably in venues, affecting talent exposure and growth.
- High costs associated with running middle-sized events.
- Challenges faced by entities that are too big or established for emerging talent grants yet too small for large scale funding.
- Difficulty in transitioning to a living wage.
- Growth limited by an unclear pathway in career development.
- Constant grant writing being resource intensive.
- Lack of networks and sponsorships which limits exposure and opportunities.

They are concerned that the constant pressure of these challenges leads to burn out and the migration of talent away from Sydney.

The groups proposed opportunities that focus on collaboration, resource sharing, and structural support to empower the middle tier of the cultural sector, fostering growth and sustainability. The opportunities proposed include:

- Improved collaboration between government agencies and the creative sector to support the middle tier.
- Shared programming to maximise resource utilisation and exposure.
- Space sharing to reduce costs and increase accessibility for middle-sized entities.
- More spaces dedicated to producing experimental and new work.
- Longer term access to space to support project development.
- Strategies to prevent the drain of skilled professionals to other regions or industries.

They also suggested these 'silver bullets' to immediately and wholistically address the challenge of the missing middle tier.

Working Wage Funding: Fund artists directly with a universal working wage.

Funding Criteria: Develop specific funding criteria for the middle tier, aimed at supporting their growth and sustainability.

Philanthropic Relationships: Government agencies brokering major philanthropic relationships to support the middle sector.

Compulsory Metrics: Compelling organisations, via funding metrics, to achieve certain goals that support the middle tier, such as strategic priorities for diversity.

Diverse Opportunities: Creating diverse opportunities such as night school to support the cultural involvement and development of emerging talents.

Unaffordable housing supply displacing creative workers

Comments highlighted the detrimental impact of rising housing costs and the scarcity of affordable living and working spaces for creatives, which leads to creatives leaving the area or the industry.

The barriers raised include:

- The high cost of living pushing creatives to less central locations.
- A severe shortage of affordable studios and collaborative spaces.
- The gentrification of traditionally artistic neighbourhoods displacing creative residents.
- Policy gaps around the specific needs of creative workers.

The groups identified the following opportunities to address the issue:

- Dedicated housing for creatives.
- Zoning adjustments to allow for mixed-use properties where artists can live and work.
- Rental subsidies for creative professionals to stabilise living costs in key cultural areas.
- Integrating creative professional needs into urban development and housing policies.

The group suggested these ‘silver bullets’ to create affordable housing:

Community Trusts: Establish community land trusts to secure and manage affordable living and working spaces for long-term sustainability.

Creative Living Complexes: Build complexes that offer affordable living and working spaces tailored to the needs of creative professionals.

Housing Grants and Incentives: Provide financial grants and incentives for landlords and developers who offer affordable accommodations to the creative community.

Policy Advocacy: Advocate for policy reforms that prioritise the housing needs of creative workers within urban planning agendas.

Policy that favours consumption over production

Comments on this issue highlighted that current cultural policies focus mainly on consumer-facing events which draw immediate public and tourist attention. The distribution of funds heavily favours consumption, leaving production sectors underfunded.

This leads to several challenges:

- A significant lack of resources and infrastructure to support production efforts stifles the creation of original content.
- The development of new work is often not financially viable.
- Producers and creators feel that their contributions to the cultural landscape are undervalued compared to consumer-oriented activities.

The workshop groups proposed changes to create a more balanced support system between consumption and production, suggesting:

- Redefining cultural policies to ensure equal emphasis and funding for both production and consumption.
- Introducing specific grants and financial aids targeting producers to encourage more diverse and original cultural production.
- Building or enhancing facilities dedicated to production activities to foster a supportive environment for creators.
- Promoting production-based activities to increase their visibility and public engagement, similar to how consumption events are marketed.

The group suggested these ‘silver bullets’:

Balanced Funding Model: Implement a funding model that allocates equal resources to both consumption and production sectors.

Production Incentives: Establish tax incentives and subsidies specifically for cultural producers to encourage growth and sustainability in the sector.

Cultural Equity Framework: Develop a framework that ensures all aspects of cultural activities, from production to consumption, are equally supported and valued.

Burnout

The causes of burnout include:

- Financial pressure created by the high costs of living and housing.
- Financial pressure created by the lack of a stable income.
- Workload pressure created by the need to hold multiple jobs to sustain a livelihood.

The groups suggested these opportunities to address burnout among creative professionals:

- Sharing resources like HR and finance in the middle tier.
- Improved access to mental health support.
- Clear pathways in training and career progression.
- Streamlined processes to access funding, enabling more energy and focus on creative activity and less on administration.

Participants suggested these ‘silver bullets’ could provide a stable, well-funded middle tier:

- Multiyear operational funding
- Alignment of Federal, State and Local funding
- Centralising some functions for a collection of small arts organisations.

Key themes

Overview of key themes

The following themes emerged across all workshop groups as essential to Sydney's cultural industry. There was a unanimous call for a healthy ecosystem supporting creative talent, with a focus on affordable spaces and reliable, accessible long-term funding to foster artistic innovation. Stakeholders emphasised the need for increased funding and investment in creatives, alongside sustainable career paths ensuring long-term security and reducing burn out. These discussions underscored that a thriving cultural industry requires robust support structures addressing financial, spatial, and career sustainability to ensure the continuous growth and contribution of the creative sector.

A healthy eco-system

Across all the workshop sessions, people emphasised the importance of creating a healthy and thriving cultural ecosystem. They highlighted the need for more arts spaces, collaboration, and a coordinated approach to support the arts and artists. People told us that a healthy cultural ecosystem is sustainable and well-funded. It recognizes the diversity of First Nations culture and addresses the environmental impact of production. It includes better integration of partnerships between small, medium, and large organisations, and support for long-term residencies. Workshop participants mentioned the importance of private sector involvement, community connections, and the development of modern business models for the creative sector. Overall, their feedback emphasises the need for a vibrant, inclusive, and accessible arts and culture scene in the city.

More affordable space

Many comments highlighted the need for more diverse and accessible spaces for artists and creatives in the city. There is a demand for affordable and sustainable spaces that can be shared among artists and organisations. Additionally, there is a call for investment in infrastructure and the repurposing of underutilised spaces to support the creative sector.

Direct support for creative talent

People told us about the importance of creating platforms and opportunities for artists within communities. They emphasised the need for artist support, development, and affordable spaces for up-and-coming talent. They expressed concern for the mental health and well-being of creatives constantly under pressure and talked about the impact of burn out in the individuals and the industry. Their feedback emphasised the value of community engagement, collaboration, and investment in the arts to foster a vibrant and inclusive creative community. This theme connects to the theme of more affordable space as a form of support, along with mentorship and pathways (a healthy eco-system) and of course funding.

Affordability, funding, and investment in creatives

These three strong interconnected themes on financial viability emerged from the feedback across all workshop sessions.

Affordability

There is a recurring concern of affordability in the creative sector. Artists express the need for more affordable spaces, accommodation, and funding, as well as a living wage. The high cost of rent, living expenses, and running venues pose significant barriers to producing new work and reaching new audiences. There is a call for cost efficiencies, subsidies, and low-cost opportunities to support artists and ease the financial pressures they face.

Investment in creatives

This feedback highlights the need for more expansive and comprehensive support for investment in creatives. There is a perceived lack of support throughout the entire creative process, from conception to production, resulting in a break in the pipeline. It is crucial to invest in creating opportunities for emerging artists and establish new investment models to strategically plan and grow the middle tier. Additionally, there is a need for better understanding and awareness of the arts ecosystem, as well as long-term investment for community building and support for mental health. Overall, the goal is to create a well-funded and supportive cultural creative ecosystem that provides resources, funding, and opportunities for artists at all stages of their careers.

Funding

Many comments related concerns about funding gaps. They mention the importance of project-based funding, the lack of stability in funding sources, and the need for more support for mid-sized organisations. There are suggestions for creating funding opportunities for specific artistic projects and the recognition of production creatives in funding models. Some comments suggest a restructured funding model that prioritises mid-tier organisations and more unique or original projects.

Diversity

People emphasised the importance of diversity in various aspects, including cultural, linguistic, and leadership diversity. They highlighted the need for more inclusive opportunities, resources, and representation for individuals from diverse backgrounds. The missing middle tier of artists and audiences is seen as a significant gap that needs to be addressed to foster a vibrant and diverse creative community.

The City's role

We asked participants to consider the opportunities they identified during the workshop and nominate what the City's role could be in delivering a solution. They could nominate the City to advocate, facilitate, deliver, or fund the opportunity. They could assign more than one role to each opportunity.

Advocate

People asked us to advocate for:

Legislative and regulatory changes to support creative activities.

Funding that supports for the "missing middle" and greater diversity.

A living wage for creatives to provide financial security.

Facilitate

They asked us to facilitate:

Diversity in the industry, particularly support for smaller, local initiatives.

More affordable spaces and more subsidised spaces.

Deliver

They asked us to deliver:

Regulatory adjustments to enable more creative activity.

Financial support, such as grants for creatives.

Subsidised making and living spaces for creative work.

Efficient processes to access support, and to address lengthy grant application processes that can be a barrier for creatives.

Fund

People asked us to fund:

Accommodation and infrastructure, including short-term accommodation for creatives.

Diverse and sustainable careers through grants and infrastructure.

Initiatives that address the "missing middle" and career pathways.

Sydney's cultural life

As it is

At the start of each workshop participants were asked to describe Sydney's cultural life as it is now. Several themes were consistent across the groups.

1. Visibility and Accessibility

Many cultural offerings are hidden, hard to find, or not consistently available. This lack of visibility and accessibility prevents broader public engagement and limits the reach of the cultural sector.

2. Economic Barriers

High costs and insufficient funding are significant challenges. Terms like "expensive" and "underfunded" highlight financial constraints that restrict participation and hinder the growth and sustainability of cultural activities.

3. Diversity and Variety

Sydney's cultural scene is perceived as rich and diverse, with a wide range of activities and content catering to various interests. This diversity is a strength, offering something for everyone and contributing to a vibrant cultural landscape.

As it could be

At the end of each workshop, the participants were asked to describe an aspiration for what Sydney's cultural life could be.² These themes emerged from the collective responses.

1. Vibrancy and Diversity

The aspiration is for a lively, active, and diverse cultural scene. This includes a broad range of cultural activities and offerings that are continuously engaging and exciting, with a strong sense of uniqueness and energy.

2. Accessibility and Inclusivity

There's a strong desire for Sydney's cultural life to be accessible and inclusive for all members of the community. This includes ensuring affordability, widespread reach, and support for all demographics, including artists and cultural workers.

3. Support and Funding

Adequate support and funding are crucial aspirations. This includes stable funding for cultural initiatives, financial support for artists, and a nurturing environment that allows for the growth and sustainability of cultural careers and activities.

² The Mixed Group did not complete the "Describe what Sydney's cultural life can be" activity due to time constraints.

Exploring a screen hub

The consultation included a workshop aimed at exploring the feasibility and practicalities of establishing a screen hub in Sydney. The primary agenda was to identify specific needs of a screen hub, the components required to satisfy these needs, and any gaps in resources. Discussions were organised into two main parts: a collective session to create a mind-map of needs and potential solutions, and smaller group activities to detail designs for critical missing components.

Participants told us that a screen hub should serve as a visible focal point for the community, highlighting and showcasing local creative talents and resources. It should be a gathering ground that fosters interdisciplinary collaborations and produces influential work.

It should activate and enrich the broader arts scene, functioning as a dynamic centre. The hub is envisioned as a vehicle for promoting visibility, collaboration, and cultural enrichment within the screen and production sectors.

It should house interdisciplinary spaces that not only produce work but also enhance community relations and enable clear career pathways, making career options visible and fostering skill development, especially for diverse talent.

Defining the needs

Small group discussions mapped the needs of a screen hub from two different perspectives: requirements for makers and producers, and for consumers and the presentation of creative work.

For makers and producers, the most important elements of a screen hub include a campus-style environment that encourages collaboration and innovation. Accessibility is crucial, with a location close to transport hubs and affordability being key considerations. The hub could encompass multiple interconnected sites. Essential facilities include dedicated production spaces, collaborative workspaces with high speed internet, and versatile spaces that accommodate the full project life cycle range of creative and production activities.

For consumers, a screen hub should have interactive spaces that facilitate a direct connection with the creative processes and outputs. The hub should serve as a dynamic venue for cultural and educational events, showcasing local and emerging talents. Accessibility is vital, ensuring that the hub is a welcoming space for diverse audiences, including students and industry professionals. Features such as versatile event spaces, comfortable screening spaces, and skill development facilities are essential to attract and retain a broad audience base.

Overall, the main components identified as essential for a screen hub are:

- Well equipped, fit for purpose facilities
- Easy access (transport links)
- Spaces that foster collaboration
- Provision for production activities
- Affordability
- Consumer engagement spaces to showcase local talent and attract new talent to the industry.

Engagement activities

Overview of engagement undertaken

Consultation workshops

Six cultural industry workshops were held, with a total of 75 participants attending in-person. Their feedback has been incorporated into the key findings of this report.

The workshops were facilitated by City of Sydney staff, with several independent artists, musicians, writers, and directors attending alongside senior representatives from the following organisations:

- 107 Projects
- 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art
- Australian Film Television and Radio School
- Artspace
- Aus Fashion Council
- Australian Design Centre
- Australian Festival Association
- Bangarra
- Biennale of Sydney
- Brand X
- Carla Zampatti
- City Recital Hall
- Create NSW
- Critical Path
- Disney Studios Australia
- Enhance Entertainment
- Electronic Music Conference
- FBi Radio
- First Draft
- Form Dance Projects
- Hero Frock Hire
- Intangible Communication
- Left Bank
- Legs on the Wall
- Lexy Potts Photography
- Mardi Gras Arts
- Museum of Contemporary Art
- Milk Crate Theatre
- Music NSW
- NIDA
- PACT Centre for Emerging Artists
- Phoenix Central Park
- Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences
- Qtopia
- QueerScreen
- Ready Made Works
- Rogue Projects
- Screen NSW
- Seymour Centre
- Shaun Parker & Company
- Spectrum Films
- SUBVRT
- SXSW
- Sydney Conservatorium of Music
- Sydney Design Week
- Sydney Festival
- Sydney Fringe Festival
- Sydney Opera House
- Sydney Writers Festival
- Tortuga Studios
- University of Technology Sydney
- UNSW Art & Design
- Woodburn Creative

One follow up workshop was held to explore the specific topic of establishing a screen hub in Sydney. The in-person workshop was facilitated by City of Sydney staff. Fourteen people attended from the following organisations:

- Antenna Film Festival
- Ausfilm
- Blackfella Films
- Create NSW
- Cutting Edge
- Hero Frock Hire
- NIDA
- Powerhouse Museum
- QueerScreen
- Screen Australia
- Screen NSW
- SXSW
- Sydney Film Festival
- Sydney Screen

Figure 4. Overview of workshop program

Session	Date and location	No. participants
Screen and creative production	Tuesday 12 March, 3pm – 5pm Marconi Room	12
Small to medium and independent organisations	Wednesday 13 March, 3pm – 5pm City of Sydney Creative Studios, Bathurst Street	24
Design, technology, fashion, and green organisations	Friday 15 March, 3pm – 5pm Marconi Room	8
Contemporary Music	Tuesday 19 March, 3pm – 5pm Marconi Room	14
Major institutions	Wednesday 20 March, 3pm – 5pm Marconi Room	12
Screen hub	Thursday 2 May, 10am – 12pm Marconi Room	14
Mixed session	Thursday 2 May, 3pm – 5pm Marconi Room	5

Appendix

Appendix 1: Full list of Priority challenges by total vote

Topic	Challenge	TOTAL	12-Mar SCREEN	14-Mar INDIE	15-Mar FASHION	19-Mar MUSIC	20-Mar MAJORS	2-May MIXED
CREATIVE WORKFORCE CHALLENGES		173						
	Unaffordable housing supply displacing creative workers	37	7	14	3	6	5	2
	Labour shortages	13	3	4	2	2	2	0
	Lack of career pathways for new and diverse talent	35	3	8	4	8	10	2
	Lack of diversity in leadership positions	18	2	4	1	4	5	2
	A 'missing middle' – the industry is dominated by small/emerging or top-end of town	46	5	17	1	11	7	5
	Burnout	24	4	9		3	6	2
CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGES		137						
	Regulatory and legislative barriers to building and operating creative spaces / events	35	5	10	2	13	4	1
	Commercial property market that prices-out cultural spaces	34	9	5	7	9	2	2
	Investment is mostly focused on presentation, not production	33	4	17	2	2	5	3
	Redevelopment of industrial / warehouse building stock for residential supply	13	4	4	3	2		0
	Supply chain disruptions and reliance on offshore production	7		1	3	2		1
	Loss of local character and fine grain, neighbourhood cultural life	15	2	6	3	4		0
PARTICIPATION CHALLENGES		124						
	Inequitable access to a high-priced cultural offer	30	5	12		6	5	2
	Lack of cultural diversity in the cultural offer	7		2	1	1	1	2
	Disconnection from First Nations culture and knowledge of Country	23	4	3		10	4	2
	Exclusion of people with a disability	12	4	4		2		2
	Trickle-down arts policy that favours the consumption of culture over its production	41	7	19	4	7	3	1
	Exclusion of for-profit sectors from cultural policy	11		6	2	1	1	1

Appendix 2: Full list of challenges considered to be not relevant by total vote.

		TOTAL	12-Mar SCREEN	14-Mar INDIE	15-Mar FASHION	19-Mar MUSIC	20-Mar MAJORS	2-May MIXED
CREATIVE WORKFORCE CHALLENGES		2						
	Unaffordable housing supply displacing creative workers	0						
	Labour shortages	1		1				
	Lack of career pathways for new and diverse talent	0						
	Lack of diversity in leadership positions	0						
	A 'missing middle' – the industry is dominated by small/emerging or top-end of town	1						1
	Burnout	0						
CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGES		22						
	Regulatory and legislative barriers to building and operating creative spaces / events	2	1	1				
	Commercial property market that prices-out cultural spaces	0						
	Investment is mostly focused on presentation, not production	0						
	Redevelopment of industrial / warehouse building stock for residential supply	2	1					1
	Supply chain disruptions and reliance on offshore production	10	2	4			4	
	Loss of local character and fine grain, neighbourhood cultural life	8		3			2	3
PARTICIPATION CHALLENGES		10						
	Inequitable access to a high-priced cultural offer	0						
	Lack of cultural diversity in the cultural offer	3	1	2				
	Disconnection from First Nations culture and knowledge of Country	1		1				
	Exclusion of people with a disability	0						
	Trickle-down arts policy that favours the consumption of culture over its production	1	1					
	Exclusion of for-profit sectors from cultural policy	5					5	

