Maribyrnong
CITY COUNCIL

Draft Creativity Strategy 2030

Inspiring creativity in the City of Maribyrnong





Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of these lands. We recognise and respect the contributions of all First Nations people who live, work, and play within the City of Maribyrnong.

We pay our respects to their ancestors and Elders, past and present, and honour their continued custodianship of Country and its rich cultural heritage.

We celebrate their unique cultural and spiritual relationships with the land, sky, water, and sea, and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' extraordinary history as artists, storytellers, and custodians of the oldest continuous living culture in the world.

PHOTO BY KIT EDWARDS FROM MARIBYRNONG CITY COUNCIL'S RECONCILIATION WEEK YARNING CIRCLE.

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Our City is a thriving arts hub, where creativity flourishes and culture enriches the lives of all.

Introduction

Culture and creativity enrich our lives. They present us with new ideas and offer ways of seeing beyond ourselves. They connect us to one another and increase our sense of belonging. They build our capacities and spur economic growth. They make the world around us a better place. In short, they are powerful drivers of our collective wellbeing.

Maribyrnong City Council's draft Creativity Strategy seeks to amplify these profound impacts for everyone who lives, works and plays in our City. It commits Council to embedding creativity in every aspect of its work with the aim of increasing the social, cultural and economic benefits that creativity delivers for the whole community.

The following pages outline our aspiration for the future, the goals we are pursuing to realise it, the strategic initiatives we will undertake to get us there, and how we will stay accountable to the community.





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The arts and creativity play a vital role in culture, fostering imagination, storytelling, new ideas and exploration of the human experience.

GIULIANO HAMMAL IN AMPLIFY: BRIDGE, PHOTO BY NAMCHOPS PHOTOGRAPHY.

In this draft Strategy, we recognise that arts, culture and creativity are multifaceted and interconnected but also distinct from each other.

We define creativity as the ability to make something new through imagination and intent.

Culture encompasses the shared values, beliefs, social practices and communication methods that unite people.

Cultural life and the arts are defined as the production, distribution and participation in creativity by the City's community of residents, creative workers and visitors. It is delivered by a wide variety of creative industries; organisations, businesses and artists that employ people, generate new ideas and produce creative products and services. It comprises an evolving mix of sectors including performing arts, culture, history and heritage, screen, music, design and architecture, digital and new media, fashion, publishing, literature, the public realm and more.

The arts and creativity play a vital role in culture, fostering imagination, storytelling, new ideas and exploration of the human experience.



EMMA ISMAWI, 'WORK IN PROGRESS', PHOTO BY RASYIDDIN.

The strategic context

The City of Maribyrnong is one of Victoria's smallest local government areas, located in the inner west of Melbourne on the edge of the Maribyrnong River. It has one of the most ethnically diverse populations in Victoria, with 45 per cent of residents born outside Australia, representing more than 135 countries and speaking over 80 languages (ABS, 2021). Maribyrnong is also a young community, with 29 per cent of the population aged between 20 and 35 (ABS 2021). This strong multicultural community has played a significant role in the area's reputation as an innovative centre for creativity and culture.

Access to the arts is an important enabler that supports our strong interculturalism. More than just multiculturalism, interculturalism is the creation of an environment that supports equality, diversity, and interaction between a community's different cultures. Participation in the arts can dissolve barriers, build social cohesion and create empathy. Nearly three-quarters of Australians believe that the arts are an important way to gain different perspectives and 64 per cent consider the arts as a way to help understand other people (Australia Council 2017).

Participation in the arts and creativity supports our wellbeing. Focusing cultural and creative activities on social cohesion impacts helps to build community, belonging and trust; enhances empathy and inclusion; helps combat the growing issues of loneliness and isolation; assists individuals and communities to recover from trauma; and makes cities, suburbs and regions more liveable (Markus 2018).

The impact of the arts and creativity in educational outcomes is well established. Documented benefits include improvements in reading, language and mathematics, increased higher order thinking skills and capacities, increased motivation to learn, and improvements in effective social behaviours (ACER 2004).

Maribyrnong's creative ecosystem is made up of independent practitioners, nationally recognised not-for-profit arts organisations, and acclaimed creative businesses. The creative industries make up 5.4 per cent of Maribyrnong's total employment (2,811 jobs), equating to 4.2 per cent of total Output in the Economy ($639 million of Economic Output). Additionally, the local population are avid creative consumers, regularly attending or participating in arts and cultural events.

“Maribyrnong's creative ecosystem is made up of independent practitioners, nationally recognised not-for-profit arts organisations, and acclaimed creative businesses.

However, significant change is sweeping across Maribyrnong. The State Government's designation of Footscray as one of Melbourne's six Priority Precincts in 2019 (DPC 2019) triggered significant investment in education, health and civic projects. This in turn accelerated private development. Maribyrnong's population is currently forecast to grow 60 per cent by 2041, jumping from 91,762 to 153,000 (Value Advisory Partners 2024). Although parts of the City have gentrified quickly, there are still varying demographics, social and economic statuses across the municipality.

This rapid transformation brings economic benefits, but also social change that may affect the cultural identity of the City. Without deliberate intervention and planning, Maribyrnong risks losing what makes it a creative hotspot. Consultations with local creative practitioners and sector leaders highlighted the challenges for many community-focused endeavours, with access to space and opportunities highest on the list of needs. Engagement with the community reinforced the value they place on the social and wellbeing benefits of creativity, with calls for more live music, performances, festivals, and public art at the top of their list.

There is an opportunity for the City. Maribyrnong's high density of creative practitioners, adventurous local audiences, and proximity to both inner Melbourne and the outer west mean the conditions are perfect for strengthening and growing the impact of the region's creative sector. Alongside the cultural and wellbeing benefits this could bring the community, economic modelling shows targeted investment could add more than 3,000 creative industry and related jobs over the coming decades (Value Advisory Partners, 2024).

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2021) Census of Population and Housing, ABS, accessed 2024.

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2021) Census of Population and Housing, Census QuickStats, accessed 2024.

Australia Council (Australia Council for the Arts) (2017) Connecting Australians: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey.

Markus A (2018) Mapping Social Cohesion, The Scanlon Foundation.

ACER (Australian Council for Education Research) (2004) Evaluation of school-based arts education programmes in Australian schools.

Victorian Government (12 December 2019) Booming Footscray Our Newest Priority Precinct [media release], Victorian Government, accessed 2024.

Value Advisory Partners (2024) Maribyrnong Economic Study, report to Maribyrnong City Council, Value Advisory Partners.

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PHOTO BY LADY DREWNIAK.

Council's role

The draft Creativity Strategy is both shaped by and contributes to the broader strategies and frameworks guiding Council's work. This interconnected approach ensures that the draft Creativity Strategy not only drives cultural and creative initiatives but also enhances social, economic, environmental and infrastructure planning.

There are many elements required for an exciting and sustainable cultural and creative ecosystem. Primarily, the artists and creative practitioners themselves are the primary drivers of the cultural and creative life of our City. Council's job is to foster an environment in which artists and creatives can thrive. It will do this by playing the following supporting roles:

Enabler

Council will bolster the capabilities and capacities of creative communities, providing access to resources and opportunities to support their endeavours. Council also supports creatives by ensuring that activities align with safety requirements and creating systems that support an equitable ecosystem.

Connector

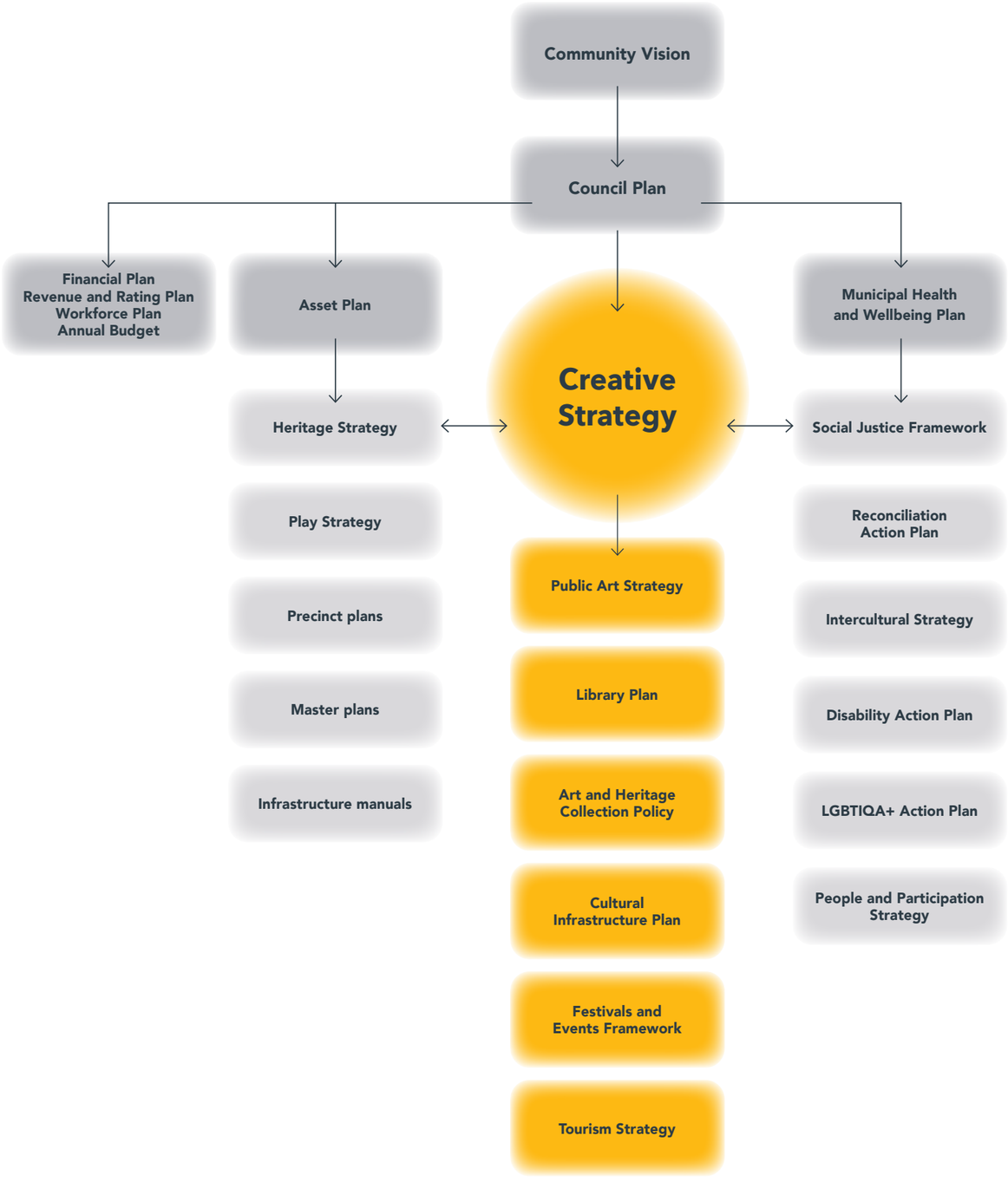
Council will act as a conduit between creatives and resources, including bringing them together with other sectors to define and pursue new possibilities.

Champion

Council will celebrate the west's cultures, heritage and creativity, promote its assets and advocate for local creatives to the wider sector and external audiences.

Investor

Council will invest in key initiatives and assets to ensure creative practitioners can operate in Maribyrnong, building partnerships to develop creative places, and producing or supporting events and activities.



What we believe

A number of core beliefs underpin Council's approach to culture and creativity, and guide our work in this area:

We must honour First Nations culture

First Nations arts and culture are central to Maribyrnong's identity. We honour their ongoing connection to Country and community, and respect and celebrate the role of creativity and storytelling in their enduring cultural practices and traditions. Central to this will be prioritising First People's perspectives, expertise and agency over their creative work and representation.

Our diversity is our greatest strength

Maribyrnong thrives on its cultural richness. We proudly embrace our diverse community, celebrating the long-standing traditions and new cultural expressions that shape our City's identity. We use art and creativity to share different perspectives and to build community, belonging and trust.

Creativity is for everyone

We believe in creating opportunities for everyone to participate in and contribute to a vibrant cultural and creative life. By breaking down barriers and fostering inclusive, culturally safe environments, will ensure that all individuals –regardless of their background, identity, or life experiences–can engage meaningfully with the arts and creativity.

We are better together

Working together is key to our collective success. We actively seek out partnerships because we believe that collaboration and harnessing diverse perspectives and expertise is the best way to enrich Maribyrnong's creative life.

Supporting artists benefits our community

Artists are at the heart of our creative community. When they thrive, our community benefits. We provide space, funding and opportunities, so our artists can develop and continue to inspire and enrich our City.

Council must be creative

We embrace creativity in our day-to-day work. We will embed creativity into Council's organisational culture, using it as an integral tool for problem-solving, designing programs, delivering services and developing infrastructure.

Creating sustainably

We're committed to a sustainable cultural future. By embedding eco-friendly practices into our work, we ensure that our creative initiatives are resilient and beneficial for both our community and the environment.

Our horizon

A city alive with creative precincts, inviting visitors to explore our neighbourhoods, and where imagination and innovation spill onto our streets.

PHOTO BY NICOLE REED PHOTOGRAPHY. FEATURED: WELCOME TO FOOTSCRAY BY BROOK ANDREW.

Our horizon

Our horizon sets out our idealised future. It describes our hopes and dreams of what the City of Maribyrnong's creative life could look like if we set a firm foundation.

Our aspiration is for a city alive with creative precincts, inviting visitors to explore our neighbourhoods, and where imagination and innovation spill onto our streets.

Our long-established riverside precinct is cemented through the bold vision of Footscray Community Arts, with creative arts tenancies and large-scale exhibition space. The Cotton Mills is home to thriving creative businesses and individuals, and the Melbourne Screen Hub supports Victoria's growing screen industry.

To the north, Melbourne's Living Museum will be a tourism drawcard providing insight into the inner west's social, industrial and First Nations heritage.

Nearby, the Footscray Activity Centre is a bustling central arts precinct. Commercial and artist-led galleries will prosper alongside our City's retailers and hospitality businesses. Public art will be embedded in master plans and new developments, delighting visitors and beautifying our streetscapes.

Musicians of every genre will call Maribyrnong home. Our brass bands, are some of the oldest in Australia and will be augmented by emerging collectives, classical ensembles and orchestras. By day our CBD will be activated by buskers. By night, our local economy will be enlivened by gigs and a pumping underground music scene.

Leading youth arts organisations – such as 100 Story Building, L2R Dance and Western Edge – will thrive, engaging our young people in high-impact community-engaged arts practice. The longstanding Women's Circus and newer First Nations led Na Djinang Circus will continue their ground-breaking work, and Snuff Puppets and Cinespace will continue to contribute to our local cultural landscape.

In our idealised future, fit-for-purpose space will not be a barrier for local artists, collectives, arts organisations and creative businesses. With an expanded arts hub at Footscray Community Arts, creativity will be supported with the transformation of the heritage-listed psychiatric hospital, housing contemporary arts and creative industries. The local performing arts scene will be strengthened with the City's first purpose-built performing arts venue. Co-located with a modernised Footscray Library, the multi-purpose hub will not only support the performing arts but provide space for learning, digital skills, creative making and a celebration of literature. Our environments for creative participation will transcend barriers of language, culture or ability.

We believe all this is possible,
but we can't do it alone.

Our aspiration needs commitment and collaboration from all levels of government, as well as from our artists, creatives, commercial, and not-for-profit sectors.

And it needs our community.
Over the next five years, Council will strengthen connections, advocate and build momentum.

While we know that delivering on our ambition is not possible within this timeframe, we do believe that we can shape a strong foundation.

We believe that a strong, collective vision can spark investment and drive collaboration as we work towards a creative west.

Goals

This draft Strategy is driven by three goals that define our ambitions for where the City of Maribyrnong will be in five years. Council's investments and activities in the cultural and creative space are designed to further these aspirations. Headline indicators for each goal are articulated so we can monitor our progress and refine our approaches.

A creative and inspiring place to be

Creativity connects us to ideas, new perspectives, each other and the world. It builds community wellbeing and resilience and sets us up to grapple with the future as it unfolds. Maribyrnong will democratise creativity and reduce barriers to participation for audiences and art-makers alike. We will increase opportunities for all the community, whether through the presentation of creative works, participatory events, lifelong learning and skills building, or by ensuring our neighbourhoods are vibrant and engaging places to be.

Headline indicator

By 2030, Maribyrnong will see a 30 per cent rise in community engagement with arts, culture and creativity, fuelled by greater access to diverse and inclusive programming across the municipality.

How will we know we've succeeded?

Our residents will experience their neighbourhoods as vibrant and inspiring, with more opportunities to engage in arts, culture and creativity, leading to improved wellbeing through stronger connection and belonging.

A hothouse for creativity

Our City will be alive with creativity as more artists, creative enterprises and workers choose to call Maribyrnong home. Creative precincts will flourish as the sector becomes a core part of Maribyrnong's identity and economic profile. Maribyrnong will be known as a place that celebrates creativity, values the arts and welcomes innovation. Our receptive audiences will provide a safe platform for sharing new ideas and perspectives, and fostering experimentation.

Headline indicator

By 2030, Maribyrnong will have a flourishing creative sector marked by a 20 per cent increase in the production of creative works, highlighting the City's dedication to artistic and cultural advancement.

How will we know we've succeeded?

More people in Maribyrnong will work in the creative industries, practitioners will feel confident about their future and have access to opportunities for advancing arts practice and professional growth.

An immersive cultural destination

Visitors will be drawn to Maribyrnong, where the City's edge meets the cutting edge of creativity. They will discover a vibrant arts scene and a destination that celebrates diverse cultures and authentic experiences. Creativity will thrive here – a place where something is happening every day and night, and where culture, retail, and hospitality seamlessly intersect. Every corner will tell a story, every visit will spark new inspiration, and Maribyrnong will become a must-see destination for culture seekers and creative explorers alike.

Headline indicator

By 2030, Maribyrnong will be recognised as a creative destination, evidenced by a 50 per cent increase in annual spending across cultural and creative industries, retail and hospitality.

How will we know we've succeeded?

Visitors will see Maribyrnong as a dynamic cultural destination, resulting in increased economic growth, improved perceptions of public safety and positive media coverage celebrating our unique cultural identity.



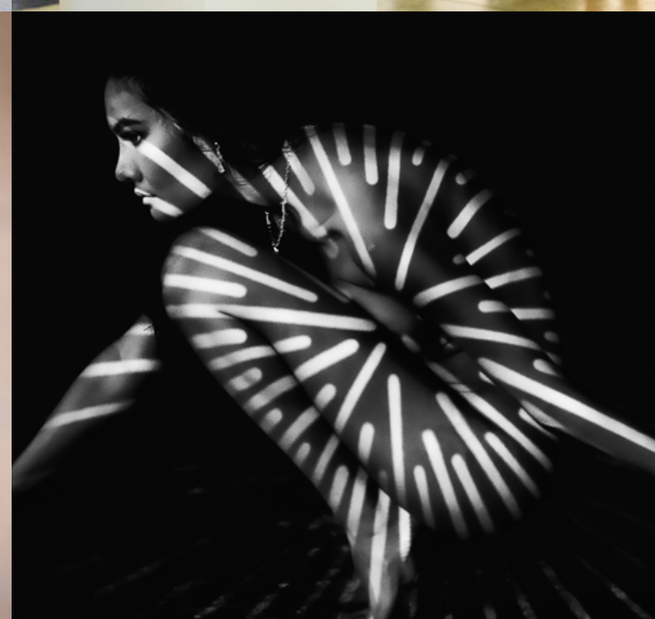












OF THE LAND ON WHICH WE MEET, NA DJINANG CIRCUS, PHOTO BY TIFFANY GARVIE.

Initiatives

Telling our stories

We will reshape how we promote the arts, culture, music and creativity within our City, highlighting the diverse narratives, creative expressions and voices that define our local identities. By creating engaging opportunities to share these stories, we will showcase our City's cultural vitality and evolution. We will craft a compelling narrative around the City's creative scene, elevating both the emerging and the established, giving profile to all those who contribute to our local creative ecosystem. Our communications will celebrate our uniqueness, attract new audiences and position the City as a hub of innovation and creativity.

Why this is important

We need to protect and champion our identity if we are to strengthen our reputation as a leading creative and cultural place.

Our city is sensory

We will expand the way we see our streets and public places, viewing them as potential sites for place-making, art and design. We want to maximise creative expression throughout our neighbourhoods, whether through temporary transformations, permanent public artworks, or expressive design of public spaces and amenities. Businesses will be encouraged and incentivised to participate in transforming our public realm.
We want our community and visitors to be surprised and delighted by our captivating City, as we embed creativity in our streetscapes, master plans and new developments.

Why this is important

Public realm design, public art and place-making initiatives revitalise public spaces, beautifies and improves liveability for the community and builds strong civic pride and identity.

Our city as stage

We will supercharge the number of creative things to do across the municipality to ensure a lively nightlife, well-connected community and bustling economy. By supporting creative programming, live music performances and festivals, we can provide both entertainment and opportunities for local creatives. Participatory offerings like workshops and classes will enable our community to develop creative skills and capabilities. Working alongside our local education sector and arts organisations, we want to build the capacity for communities to engage in life-long learning and express their cultures, as well as develop and attract new and exciting events to our City.
Our streets will be alive with joy, connection and expression.

Why this is important

A full calendar of activities and events builds the cultural capacities of the community and strengthens the local creative economy.

PHOTO CREDITS PREVIOUS SPREAD, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ROD CEBALLOS, FIAFIA PHOTOGRAPHY, WORK IN PROGRESS IMAGES OF 'WELCOME TO FOOTSCRAY' BY NICOLE REED PHOTOGRAPHY, FOOTSCRAY ART PRIZE, PHOTO BY GIANNA RIZZO, HOLI FESTIVAL, PHOTOGRAPHER PHILLIP GAO. ARCHITECTURE OF THE SOLE BY TRACEY LAMB, PHOTOGRAPHED BY ANNA KIPARIS.

Initiatives

Our creative places

We will actively cultivate our creative sector through the establishment and support of creative precincts where cultural and commercial initiatives can cluster. Our precincts will not only support connection, collaboration and innovation, but will visibly reflect and celebrate creativity, inspiring those who work there as well as our community and visitors. We will develop a cultural infrastructure plan to guide longer term investment, including development of a new library, theatre and park in the centre of Footscray, upgrades to spaces used by Council-supported organisations, enhanced creative spaces in libraries and community centres, and increased access to privately owned space for creative use. Maribyrnong will be an energetic hub for creative practitioners, organisations and industries.

Why this is important

Functioning creative precincts foster sector development and growth. Achieving them requires careful and deliberate planning.

Our connected culture

We will foster an environment of lively engagement across the City. By connecting local artists, entrepreneurs, cultural organisations, creative businesses, education providers and industry leaders, we will promote collaboration, co-creation and advocacy. We will actively facilitate unexpected partnerships to encourage innovation and creative problem-solving across sectors and recognise the important intersections between creativity and learning. This spirit of openness applies equally to Council itself, with all areas seeking out creative ways to deliver projects and services. For our creative community, we will act as a bridge to federal and state initiatives, connecting practitioners to career pathways, grants, training and development opportunities.

Why this is important

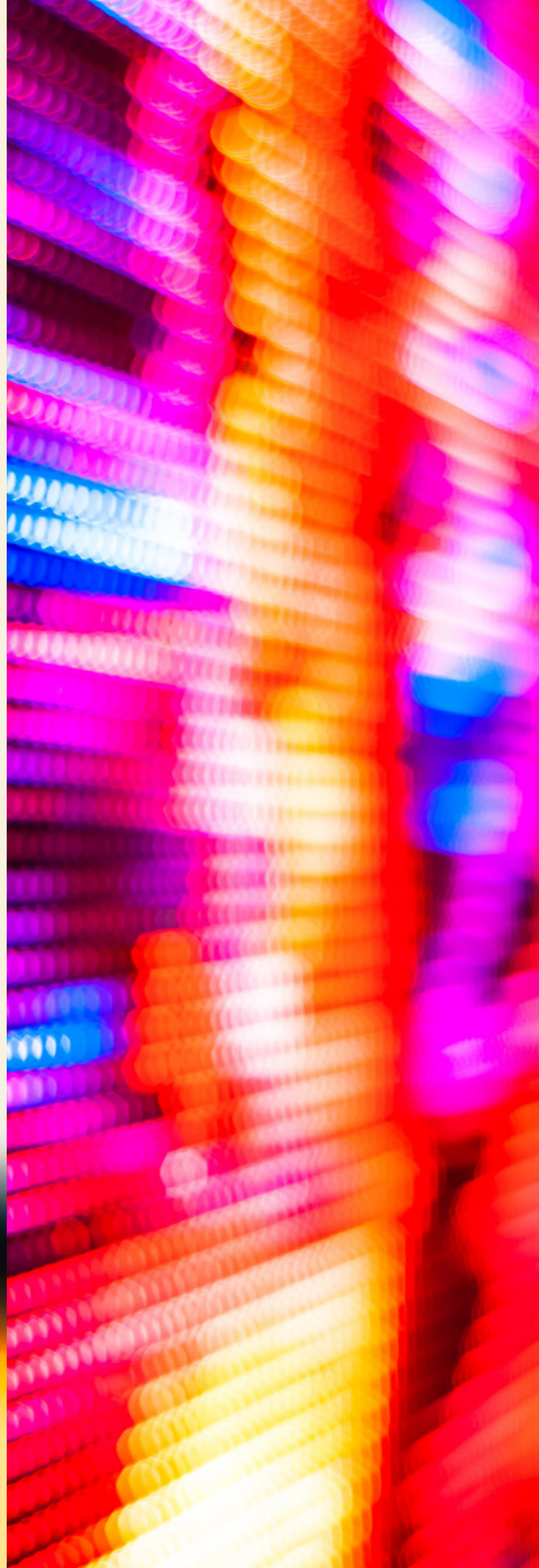
Establishing a culture of collaboration is key to developing new approaches, practices and creative innovation. Developing this capacity requires active support.

Support for our sector

We will support our local creative sector through a combination of funding, provision of space, development initiatives and a commitment to local procurement processes. Our approach will seek to fill gaps, support sustainability and stimulate external investment.
We will actively engage with industry to ensure major initiatives by government and commercial entities are brought into the city and connect them to our local creative sector. We will be known as an effective partner who is easy to deal with.

Why this is important

Support for developing practices, initiatives and enterprises is essential to creating a healthy and sustainable creative ecosystem.





Guiding our implementation

This is an organisation-wide strategy that will guide teams across Council to deliver improved creative outcomes for the community.

The draft Strategy sets out Council's goals and strategic priorities for the next five years. To guide implementation, we will use our goal headline indicators to support prioritisation of our activities. Each year we will come together to collaboratively plan activities and programs that advance progress toward our goals.

This underpinning action planning framework will allow Council to respond to developments in the sector and learnings from past work. This flexible approach allows us to innovate, continually improve and refine the deployment of our resources.

Vision

Our city will be a thriving arts hub, where creativity flourishes and culture enriches the lives of all

Goals

A creative and inspiring place to be	A hothouse for creativity	An immersive cultural destination

Indicators

By 2030, Maribyrnong will see a 30% rise in engagement with arts, culture and creativity, fuelled by greater access to diverse and inclusive programming across the municipality.	By 2030, Maribyrnong will have a flourishing creative sector marked by a 20% increase in the production of creative works, highlighting the city's dedication to artistic and cultural advancement.	By 2030, Maribyrnong will be recognized as a creative destination, evidenced by a 50% increase in annual spending across cultural and creative industries, retail and hospitality.

Strategic Initiatives

Telling our stories	●	●	●
Our city is sensory	●		●
Our city as stage	●	●	●
Our creative places	●	●	●
Our connected culture		●	
Support for our sector		●	●

Annual Planning Prioritisation

Multi-year initiatives	Annual action plans and monitoring reports
	Annual action plans and monitoring reports

Evaluating our impact

**Benefits of creativity span social, cultural, economic and environmental areas.
Some of these are directly attributable, while others are tangential.
Some are easily quantifiable, others require longitudinal data sets and qualitative inputs to demonstrate their effects.**

Through this draft Creativity Strategy we have adopted dual approaches. This will be underpinned by a monitoring, evaluation and learning framework, developed to track our implementation and impact over the next five years.

First, we will track our identified quantitative headline indicators to provide a high- level lens through which to monitor our progress and focus our efforts. Progress will be reported annually to the Executive Leadership Team, Councillors and the Arts Advisory Group, and shared with the community and other key stakeholders.

Our secondary approach is one of deeper and more comprehensive evaluation. We will collect data, feedback, sentiments and case studies to capture the impact of our work. Our evaluation will be designed to demonstrate the the positive impact the draft Creativity Strategy has on the social, cultural and economic life of our City.



DRAGON DREAMS BY JUSTINE MCALLISTER, PHOTO BY NICOLE REED PHOTOGRAPHY.



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FRONT COVER: PHOTO BY PHILLIP GAO.

Maribyrnong
CITY COUNCIL