



CREATIVE WEST

PHASE 1

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CONSOLIDATED REPORT

April 2026



Executive Summary

Creative West is a connected, creative precinct that revitalises Footscray and enriches community life.

As the project moves into concept design, it was essential to clearly understand community priorities to ensure the design reflects needs, aspirations and lived experiences. This report summarises and synthesises extensive feedback from Phase 1 Community Engagement, undertaken between **23 January and 1 March 2026**.

Creative West brings together a library, performing arts centre and town park in Footscray's thriving and welcoming civic heart. It is a 'home base' that strengthens community life, renews the day and night- time economy, and positions Footscray as a gateway to the Creative west.

Engagement used a mix of in-person and digital methods, contributing to both broad participation and in-depth discussion.

The report brings together detailed findings from three engagement reports.

1. **Maribyrnong City Council's Creative West Engagement Summary Report - Phase 1**, which presents detailed survey findings, demographic profiles of participants, and curated open text community feedback.
2. **Consultant Report: Information Gathering – Focus Group Findings Summary**, which provides detailed qualitative insights from focus group workshops, explaining what matters to different community cohorts and why.
3. **Creative West Pop-Up Summary Form** from the *Get a Taste of Creative West* event.

These reports can be found on the Creative West page, on Council's Your City, Your Voice website.

This report outlines what the community values most for Creative West and identifies key considerations to guide the design phase, ensuring the precinct is welcoming, inclusive, creative and deeply connected to Footscray and its community.



Engagement scale and depth

Phase 1 Community Engagement reached a wide cross-section of the community and was notable for both its scale and depth. A range of in-person and online and, captured.

BROAD: 891 total feedback responses across methods

- **246** ideas shared on the physical ideas wall (143) and drawings (eight), and 95 votes made at Footscray Library
- **234 online** surveys
- **150** people surveyed at the 'Get a Taste of Creative West' event
- **130** ideas shared verbally (nine) and on the ideas wall (44), 77 votes made at offsite events and
- **126** online idea board submissions for the town park (48), library (46), and performing arts venue (32)
- **four** emails sent to the project team
- **one** audio submission

Response numbers indicate total feedback items, as some participants contributed feedback in multiple ways.

DEEP: 19 targeted focus groups of 129 people involving:

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| ○ creatives and cultural professionals | ○ multicultural communities |
| ○ traders and local businesses | ○ people with disability |
| ○ parents and carers | ○ First Nations participants |
| ○ older people | ○ education |
| ○ students and young people | ○ women |
| ○ homelessness service | ○ LGBTIQ+ communities |

In addition, the `Project Team engaged **seven stakeholder groups**, reaching a total of **90 participants**. There were also 3 workshops with Wurundjeri Land Council.

Engagement context: Then and now

In January 2025, Council welcomed a \$5 million commitment from the Australian Government to support the planning and design phase, with funding matched by Council. Planning for Creative West has been shaped by community advocacy and engagement since 2015, with a concept design adopted by Council in 2020. Since then, Footscray, and the needs and diversity of its community, have evolved. Council undertook Phase 1 Engagement to confirm priorities, test assumptions and ensure Creative West reflects current community needs, providing a strong evidence base to inform concept design development.

Community Priority Summary

The feedback from Phase 1 engagement been synthesised into a Community Priority Statement, which captures the shared themes, aspirations and priorities expressed by participants across Council's extensive engagement activities.

Creative West embodies Footscray's diverse and welcoming spirit as a place where everyone belongs. Grounded in the area's rich cultures and histories, it reflects the community through genuine collaboration and representation.

It is a cultural precinct that supports making, learning and everyday community life. It provides adaptable and flexible indoor and outdoor spaces that can evolve over time, supporting creative production, rehearsal, collaboration and public activity at different scales throughout the day and evening. The precinct is inclusive, affordable and accessible, enabling participation for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. It is physically and culturally connected to the wider CBD.

Creative West is Footscray's 'home base' – a place for creativity and connection.

Community priorities by theme

Across Focus Group conversations, survey data and stakeholder discussions, the following themes emerged consistently as community priorities:

- **Flexible and adaptable spaces**
Spaces that can accommodate varied uses, group sizes and activities across the day and over time.
- **Creative production and rehearsal infrastructure**
Affordable, fit for purpose rehearsal, studio and production spaces that support creative making, not just presentation.
- **Inclusive and welcoming civic space**
A precinct that feels open and welcoming, with design and programming that reduce barriers and foster a sense of belonging.
- **Accessibility, affordability and equitable participation**
Design and operations that go beyond minimum standards to enable equitable access for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.
- **Safety and comfort**
A safe and comfortable precinct, supported by good lighting, visibility and active, well used spaces throughout the day and evening.
- **Useable outdoor public space**
Shaded, comfortable and flexible outdoor spaces that support everyday use, informal gathering and community activity.
- **Learning, making and knowledge exchange**
Spaces and programs that support learning, skill sharing and hands on creative practice.

- **Cultural identity, representation and genuine inclusion**
Design and expression shaped by community voices that authentically reflect Footscray's diverse cultures and histories.
- **Precinct integration with the wider Footscray CBD**
Strong physical and programmatic connections to surrounding streets, businesses and cultural activity.

General community feedback

Community Engagement Survey respondents were invited to provide open-ended feedback. Based on responses from **111 participants**, the most commonly raised themes (in order of frequency) were:

- support for Creative West in its potential to improve and activate Footscray, provide more programs and central services, and potential to offer a mid-tier destination for intermediate creatives that nationally we are lacking **(14.4%, 16)**
- the need for capacity-building opportunities such as leadership programs, volunteering, workshops and classes, spaces that encourage social connection and mentoring but also individual creation, grants programs, and professional development initiatives for creatives **(11.7%, 13)**
- ensuring safety with well-lit spaces and the opportunity to improve Footscray's nighttime economy **(10.8%, 12)**.



SATURDAY 14TH FEBRUARY '26

CREATIVE WEST

FOOTSCRAY LIBRARY



Findings by element: Library, Park, Performing Arts Venue

The summary findings in this section combine quantitative survey data with focus group sentiment. The graphs present aggregated results from the Your City, Your Voice online survey and in-person dotmocracy voting, with results shown separately for in-person participants under 18 and over 18.

Dotmocracy voting was undertaken across a range of in-person engagement activities, including the Taste of Creative est event at Footscray Library, as well as community and university events.



Casting a vote on the 'Dotmocracy' board at Footscray Library

The library

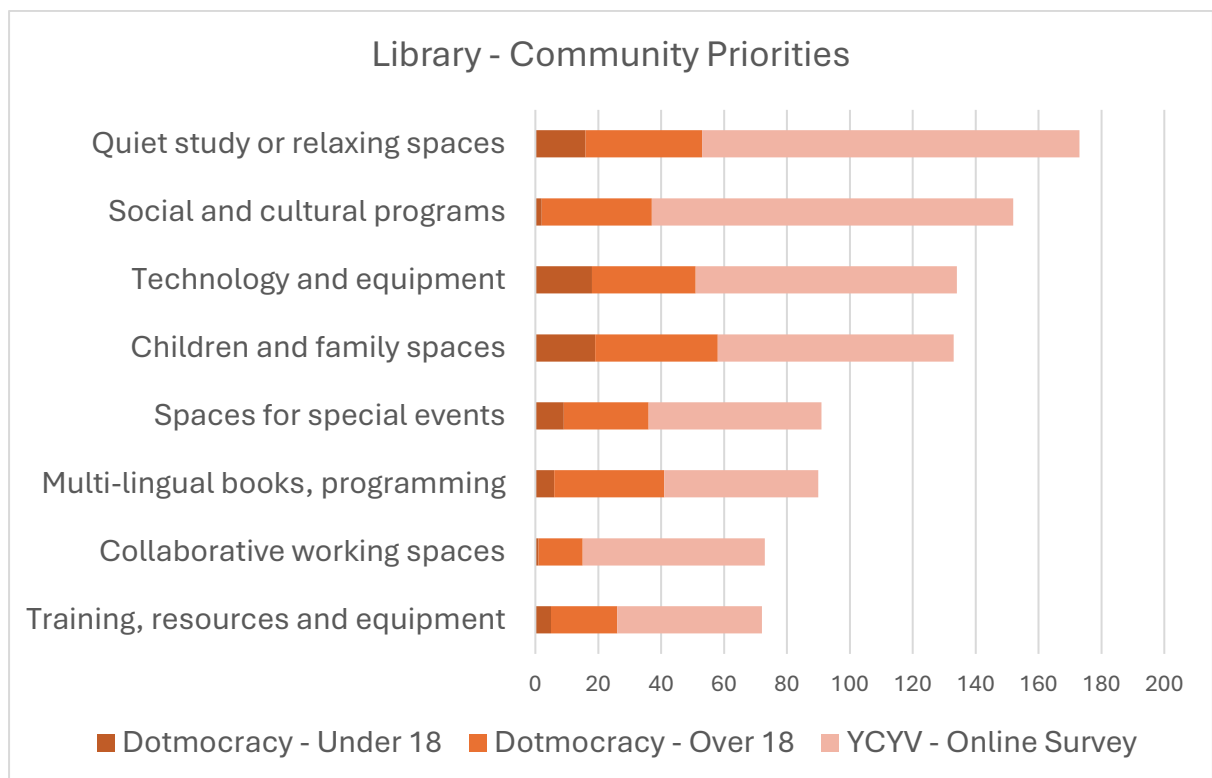
Community priorities for the new Footscray Library centred on it being an inclusive, welcoming place that supports everyday use, learning and connection. Survey and focus group feedback highlighted the importance of quiet study and relaxation spaces, alongside areas for social and cultural programs, children and families, and access to technology and creative resources. The library was consistently described as a place to spend time rather than pass through, with strong emphasis on comfort and accessibility. Participants also valued flexible spaces that can support learning, making and community activity, ensuring the library meets the diverse needs of people of all ages, cultures and abilities. Education participants framed Creative West as a “third space” for learning, not simply a nearby facility.

What are the three most important things for you at the new Footscray Library? Total votes: 918.

(Response method: Online survey and in-person dotmocracy votes)

Top priorities

- Quiet study or relaxing spaces – 173 votes
- Social and cultural programs – 152 votes
- Technology and equipment – 134 votes



When asked what was missing from the library, online respondents suggested:

Of **96** responses, the top priorities were:

- Expand collections (18)
- Dedicated and functional working spaces (8)
- Maker spaces / creative opportunities (7)
- Foster social connection / improve building amenity (6)
- Café / quiet and calm spaces / no changes (5)

Performing Arts Venue

Community priorities for the performing arts space focused on it being affordable, welcoming and deeply connected to local culture. Focus group participants reinforced these themes, emphasising the importance of accessibility, comfort and flexibility, and a venue that supports both local creative production and diverse audiences, rather than catering only to large-scale or touring performances.

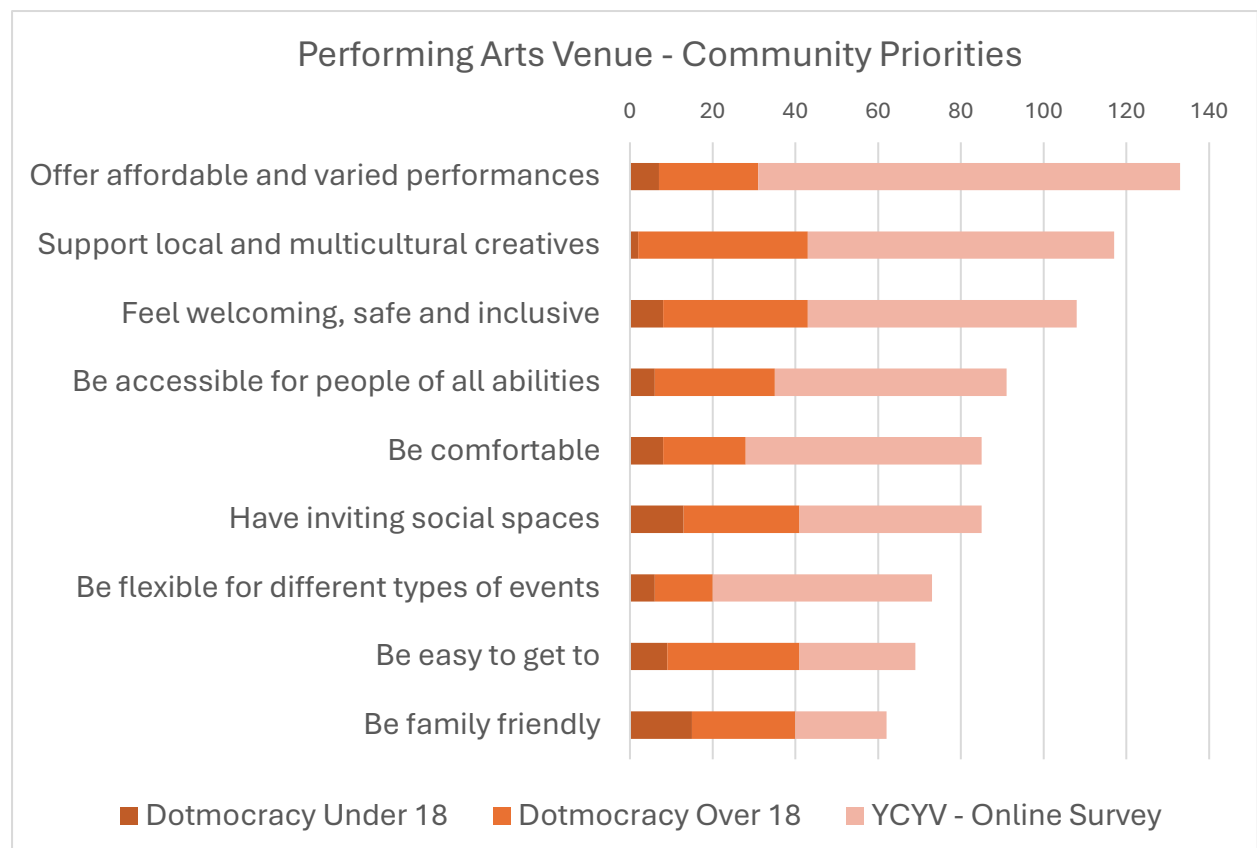
What are the three most important things this venue would need to make you attend?

Total votes: 823

(Response method: Online survey and in-person dotmocracy votes)

Top priorities

- Offer affordable and varied performances – 133 votes
- Support local and multicultural creatives – 117 votes
- Feel welcoming, safe and inclusive – 108 votes



What performances or events would you like to see at the new performing arts centre?

(Response method: Survey, Open question)

Of **118** responses, top priorities are:

- offering a variety of programs including plays, concerts, circus events, trivia nights, choir, discussion panels, First Nations performances, tours and in language events **(22.9%, 27)**
- live music that accommodates small and larger events and both amateur and establish artists – respondents noted that this would encourage new community groups to form and the opportunity for both indoor and outdoor events **(21.2%, 25)**
- offering programs and support for both local and touring artists **(16.9%, 20)**.

Town Park

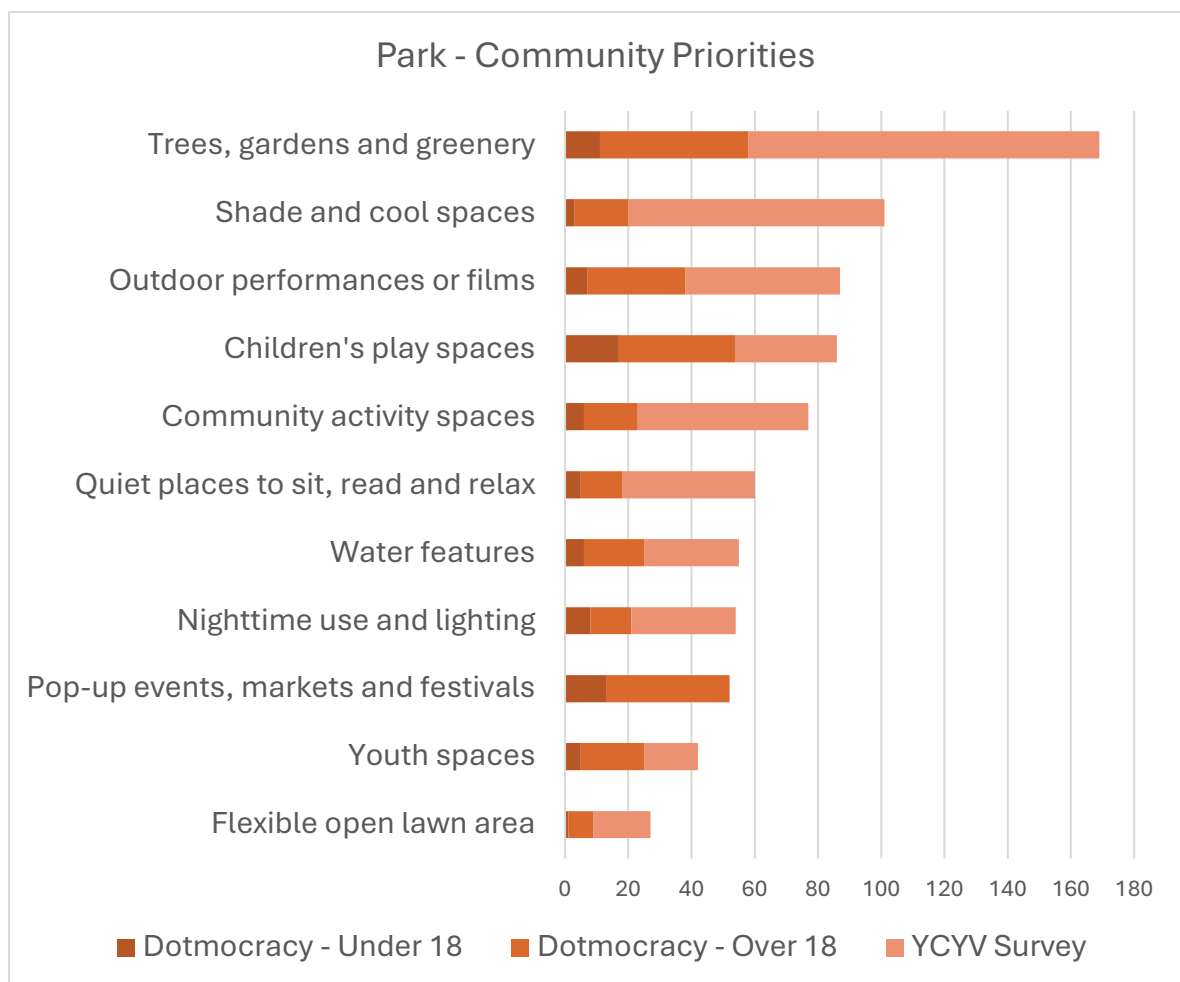
Community priorities for the new Town Park focused on it being a usable, welcoming and green public space that supports both everyday use and community activity. Survey and focus group feedback highlighted strong demand for trees, gardens and shade, alongside children's play spaces and areas for informal gathering. Participants also valued flexible spaces that can accommodate popup events, markets and performances, while emphasising the importance of safety, lighting and comfort to support use throughout the day and evening.

What are the three most important things for you in the new Town Park?

(Response method: Online and in-person dotmocracy votes)

Total votes: 810

- Trees, gardens and greenery – 169 votes
- Shade and cool spaces – 101 votes
- Outdoor performances or films – 87 votes



DEEP INSIGHTS: Focus Group findings by cohort

Focus groups were facilitated by independent consultants through structured, small group discussions designed to explore ideas in depth and capture shared perspectives.

Creative sector

Creative participants consistently described Creative West as needing to operate as a working creative precinct, not just a venue for presentation. Priority was placed on fit for purpose rehearsal, studio and production spaces that support regular use, affordable operations and professional practice. While flexibility was valued. Creatives cautioned against generic multipurpose spaces, instead favouring configurable black box formats, strong technical capability and well-designed back of house areas that reduce operational barriers. The venue should prevent “threshold anxiety” through activation and openness.

Traders and Business

Traders emphasised safety, activation and economic impact. Perceptions of safety, supported by lighting, active edges and defined uses for public space, were critical. It was also important that the precinct does not operate as an isolated civic block. Strong physical and programmatic connections to surrounding streets are seen as essential to drive foot traffic, support local business and create an authentic Footscray identity.

Education Sector

Education participants framed Creative West as a “third space” for learning, not simply a nearby facility. Strong emphasis was placed on real-world learning, modular and technically equipped spaces, and accessible environments that support study, collaboration and creative practice. Connection to Victoria University campuses was seen as critical, alongside potential for conference spaces to position the precinct as a regional learning hub.

Students

Students prioritised safety, comfort and opportunities to gather with friends. High school students valued clear navigation, affordable food options, calm environments and activities, while primary students emphasised reading (especially Manga), play, creativity and technology. Preferences varied between lively and quiet spaces, reinforcing the need for choice within the precinct.

Parents and Families

Parents prioritised safety, visibility and practical design that supports everyday family use. This included visible, child-friendly toilets, safe connected outdoor spaces, adaptable play environments and facilities that support caregivers balancing work and care. Welcoming, clean and calm environments were strongly preferred.

Older People

Older participants emphasised safety, comfort, accessibility and social connection. The precinct was seen as a place to actively participate, learn and contribute, supported by

seating, shade, greenery and easy navigation. Affordability and inclusive design were essential to enable ongoing use.

Multicultural Communities

Multicultural participants described inclusion as both physical and social, wanting visible signs of welcome such as wayfinding and friendly greeting. They prioritised affordability and opportunities to actively participate and spaces for cultural celebration. Design was expected to reflect Footscray's diversity, history and stories, and to support intergenerational use and community driven programming.

People with Disability

This cohort highlighted the need to go beyond minimum compliance, focusing on sensory regulation, independence, dignified access and inclusive amenities. Safety, wayfinding and calm spaces were essential, as was accessibility across the broader precinct approach, not just within buildings.

Health and Homelessness Sector

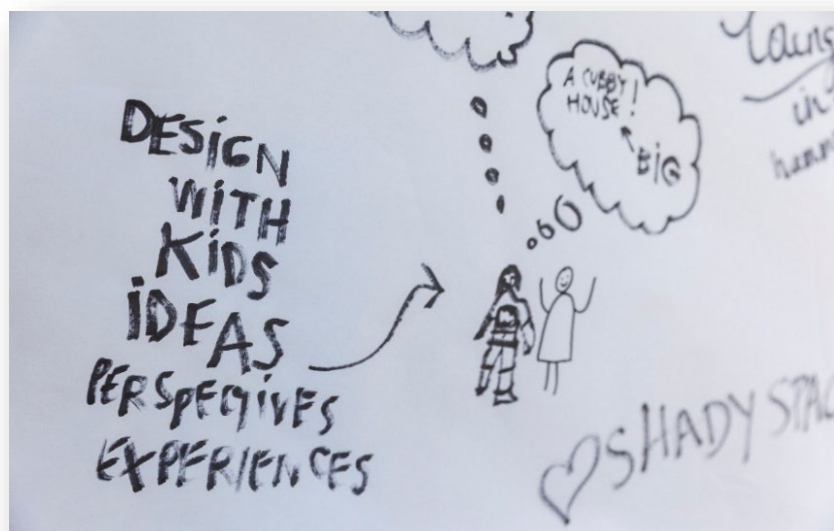
Participants emphasised dignity, welcome and access to basic needs. The precinct was seen as having a role in practical support through design, partnerships and staff capability, with safety achieved through proactive, humane responses rather than exclusionary measures.

Women

Women discussed safety, welcome and everyday usability, with emphasis on lighting, visibility, safe approaches and inclusive amenities. Flexible, affordable spaces for creative practice and wellbeing, alongside greenery and accessible outdoor areas, were also prioritised.

LGBTIQA+ Communities

LGBTIQA+ participants emphasised safety, visibility and the importance of existing inclusive spaces, particularly libraries. Concerns focused on displacement, affordability and ensuring the precinct remains welcoming through explicit inclusion signals and facilities.



Co-design with Wurundjeri Land Council

The Creative West concept design brief has been informed by three workshops with Wurundjeri Land Council, with a fourth in person codesign session scheduled to work through the concept design.

Creative West: A living expression of culture

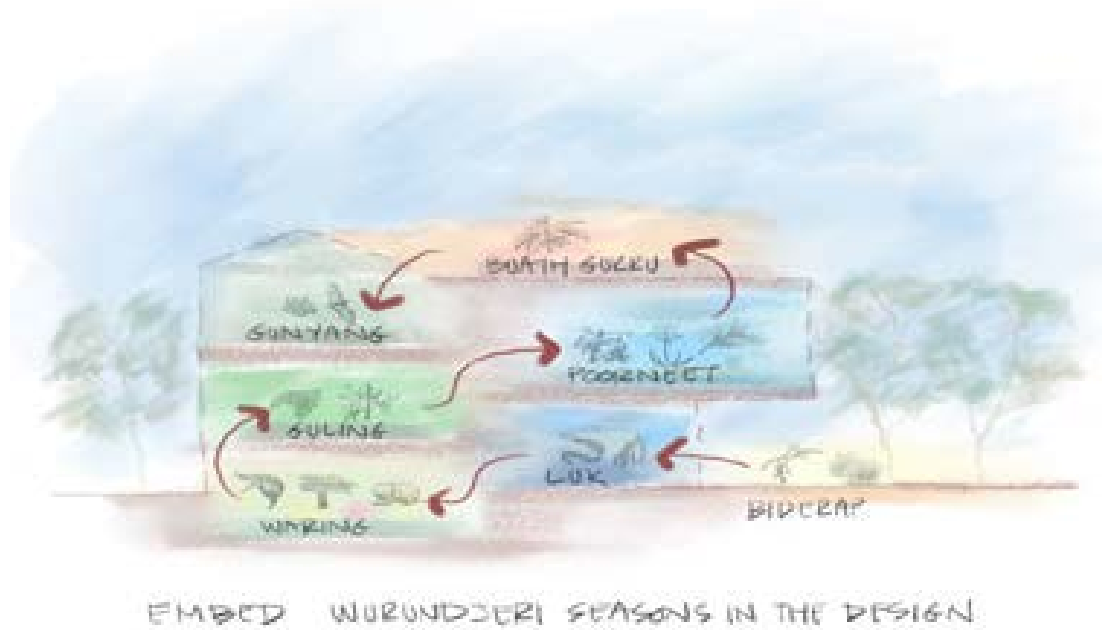
Prior to Phase 1 Community Engagement, a workshop in August 2025 established ways of working together and a shared cultural narrative, emphasising that Country extends beyond land to include seasons, elements and storytelling, and should be embedded in the design as a living expression of culture.

Workshop 2 – Design Inception and Seasons of Country (January 2026)

This session explored how connection to Country is felt through sensory experience and interaction with nature. Strong emphasis was placed on the Seven Wurundjeri Seasons, which are marked by changes in land, plants, animals, water and sky, rather than the Western calendar. Participants highlighted opportunities for seasonal planting, interpretive elements, climate responsive design, and spaces that promote learning, harmony & unity and intergenerational connection.

Workshop 3 – Information Gathering and Education Partnerships (March 2026)

The third workshop, involving the Wurundjeri Land council and Education Department, focused on practical opportunities for collaboration. Priorities included storytelling, language workshops, exhibition and learning spaces, public art, and sensory elements such as sound and music. Wurundjeri will provide a site-specific storyline, informed by seasonal knowledge, to guide ongoing design development.



Architectural interpretation of how Wurundjeri seasons may be embedded into the design.

Differences between cohorts and managing tensions

Consultation demonstrated strong alignment across cohorts, with differences reflecting how priorities are emphasised rather than conflicting views. These differences highlight tensions that will need to be balanced through design and operations.

Specialist Creative Infrastructure vs Community Flexibility

Creative organisations prioritised fit for purpose spaces for artistic production, cautioning that overly generic multipurpose spaces can undermine professional practice. In contrast, other cohorts favoured highly flexible, multiuse spaces to support workshops, learning programs and informal community activity, underscoring the need to balance specialist infrastructure with adaptable spaces.

Venue Scale and Configuration

Creative participants expressed differing views on venue size and format, with some advocating for smaller venues to support experimentation and emerging practice, and others emphasising larger venues to accommodate touring productions and festivals. These differences reflect the diverse needs of the performing arts ecosystem. Creative participants also emphasised that operational affordability should be considered early in the design. These differences reflect the diverse needs of the performing arts ecosystem.

Safety, Activation and Inclusion

Safety was a shared concern, though approaches varied. While some cohorts prioritised visible security and lighting, others cautioned that security-heavy environments can feel exclusionary, instead emphasising welcoming design, inclusive staff practices and dignity for all users.

Activity, Calm and Cultural Identity

Participants highlighted the need to balance lively, activated public spaces with calm, low sensory environments. There was also broad agreement that Creative West must reflect Footscray's local identity, with strong emphasis on genuine collaboration with First Nations and multicultural communities and avoiding generic or imposed cultural expression.

Project team Stakeholder Engagement

In addition to the Focus Groups, Council's Project team engaged eight stakeholder groups from community, education, arts and culture, traders and regional tourism groups reaching a total of 170 participants.

Positive themes (7):

1. **Heritage acknowledgement** – recognition of the existing library's history
2. **Inclusive design** – welcoming spaces for youth, families and diverse users
3. **Creative and cultural spaces** – flexible, affordable arts and gallery facilities

4. **Outdoor activation** – usable, well serviced outdoor areas for community activity
5. **Youth participation** – strong engagement and ideas from young people
6. **Advocacy and partnerships** – interest in supporting funding and advocacy efforts
7. **Community and regional value** – focus on broader local and regional benefits

Negative theme (1):

8. **Competition impact** – concern that a Council-run venue will disadvantage small independent venues

Acknowledgements and next steps

Council remains strongly committed to advocating for Creative West. The extensive community engagement undertaken in Phase 1 provides robust evidence to inform the concept design and supports ongoing advocacy for the funding required to deliver the project.

Community engagement will continue as the project progresses, including through the Community Co-Design Groups and ongoing collaboration with the Wurundjeri Land Council to ensure Country, culture and community are meaningfully embedded in the design.

Council sincerely thanks everyone who took the time to share their views, experiences and ideas. Community input has been central to shaping the future vision for Creative West and will continue to guide the project as it moves forward.



March 2026

Background

Creative West¹ is a landmark project that will revitalise the Footscray CBD.

The Creative West site takes in the existing Footscray Library and adjacent car park.

It will provide a welcoming place for the community to gather, learn new skills, attend events,

Creative West will be made up of three elements, including:

- a contemporary library supporting learning, creativity and innovation
- a performing arts venue supporting creatives and inspiring audiences across the west
- a shaded and green town park for wellbeing, recreation, gathering and events.

Advocacy and planning for Creative West dates back to 2015, when demand for community facilities was first identified by Council and the community.

A Concept Design was previously adopted by Council in 2020. With much having changed since then, we needed to confirm with the community that we're still on the right track.

The project page can be found at yourcityyourvoice.com.au/cw

Methodology

The community was invited to share their idea for Creative West over five weeks from **23 January to 1 March 2026**.

Feedback tools

Feedback could be shared by:

- sharing feedback through the online survey
- sharing ideas for the library, the performing arts venue, and the town park on separate online idea boards
- recording and sending a voice message using Speakpipe
- speaking with Council staff or participating in an activity at an in-person event
- contacting the project team at Creative.West@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au

The community could also:

- add a song to a community playlist to help set the tone for Creative West
- take part in a targeted focus group
- submit interest to be part of a co-design group to shape the designs.

Promotion

The project was promoted across channels including:

- a [project page](#) on Your City Your Voice² with:

¹ This project is proudly funded by the Australian Government's urban Precincts and Partnerships Program in partnership with Maribyrnong City Council.

² **1,496** people visited the project page during the engagement period, resulting in **4,038** views. **Fifty-six** people also followed the page.

- three newsfeed items on the home page – 23 January, 10 and 27 February
- three newsletters to site users with matching interests, project followers, and newsletter subscribers, reaching **2,540** people – 23 January, 13 and 26 February
- an update on our Creative West [webpage](#)
- promotional postcard sent to all 42,000 households in the City
- a radio advertisement on 3CR community radio in English, Cantonese and Arabic
- promotions in Council newsletters
- an article in the autumn edition of Maribyrnong Messenger, Council's quarterly magazine
- a feature in Maribyrnong News (February) and Star Weekly (5 February)
- social media posts on Council's Corporate social media accounts³
- a stakeholder letter to local businesses, creative organisations, community and advocacy groups, and service providers
- displays and postcards at the Civic Precinct and Community Hub, all libraries and community hubs, major reserves such as Footscray Park, in local businesses, at Phoenix Youth Centre, the Maribyrnong Aquatic Centre⁴, plus a physical idea board at Footscray Library
- postcards at all libraries and community centres
- corflutes signage at all neighbourhood houses, sporting pavilions and reserves
- on-hold messaging on calls to Customer Service
- promotion on Smart Cities kiosks in Footscray.

In-person events to boost outreach to community members also included:

- an onsite feature event called '[Get a Taste of Creative West](#)' at Footscray Library on 14 February with author talks, workshops, live music and performances, and opportunities for feedback
- presence at four offsite events – TET Lunar Festival, Braybrook Hub, and Victoria University campuses (Footscray Park and Nicholson Street) for O-Week activities
- a stall at Footscray Library ten times during the engagement period, and hosted specific groups such as Footscray High School students, where an idea board and drawing activities were available
- Lunar Festival event at Footscray Library
- hosted and promoted nineteen targeted workshops online, at Footscray Library, Footscray Primary School and Phoenix Youth Centre.

³ There were fourteen social media posts that featured Creative West. These were on 24 and 30 January, 4, 13, 14, 18 and 25 February.

⁴ On average nearly **3,500** community members visit the Maribyrnong Aquatic Centre each day.

Overall response

We received **741** responses from:

- **246** ideas shared on the physical ideas wall (143) and drawings (eight), and 95 votes made at Footscray Library
- **234** surveys
- **130** ideas shared verbally (nine) and on the ideas wall (44), and 77 votes made at offsite events
- **126** online idea board submissions for the town park (48), library (46), and performing arts venue (32)
- **four** emails sent to the project team
- **one** audio submission.

This report will unpack the above activities.

A separate report will unpack feedback from consultant-led activities, which received **279** responses from:

- engaging **150** people at the 'Get a Taste of Creative West' event
- discussions with **129** participants across 19 focus groups.

Response numbers indicate total feedback items, as some participants contributed feedback in multiple ways.

Overall findings

Across all engagement methods, community priorities were largely consistent for a town park, performing arts venue and library. While ideas varied in form, the underlying themes aligned strongly across all feedback.

For the town park, the highest priorities were green, shady and family-friendly spaces, with functionality to use outdoor spaces for a variety of programs and activities. Many emphasised wellbeing, accessibility and cultural recognition, including First Nations storytelling and public art. Some questioned the need for a new town park, expressing concern about cost and duplication.

For the performing arts venue, feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many describing the project as vital to addressing a gap in the inner west. Top priorities included diverse and frequent programming, affordability for local artists and community groups, inclusive access, and supporting spaces such as rehearsal rooms, studios and backstage facilities. Recurring ideas focused on nurturing local talent while attracting major festivals and events.

For the library, participants consistently supported its role as a modern community hub. Key priorities included flexible work and study spaces, inclusive design, lifelong learning programs and capacity-building initiatives, and creative and digital resources.

Detailed findings

Survey

234 surveys were completed online or in-person at Footscray Library.

The Footscray CBD is visited frequently by respondents. Most people (**76.3%, 171**) visit at least once a week. Only a small minority visit infrequently or are first-time visitors.

Respondents use a mix and often multiple forms of transport to travel to and within Footscray. **59.4% (139)** use a car, but **48.7% (114)** also walk and (**48.3%, 113**) use public transport. **86.6%, 203** of respondents reported using at least one non-car option.

When asked how often they visit the Footscray Library area, over half said they visit at least monthly (**57.1%, 129**) and nearly a third visit weekly (**31.9%, 72**). **24.8% (56)** visit less frequently (once a year or once a quarter), while **18.1% (41)** reported never having visited.

Respondents could choose to provide feedback on as many elements as they liked.

The library

Question: What are the three most important things for you at the new Footscray Library?

Of **201** responses, the top priorities are:

- quiet study or relaxing spaces (**59.7%, 120**)
- social and cultural programs (**57.2%, 115**)
- technology and equipment (**41.3%, 83**).

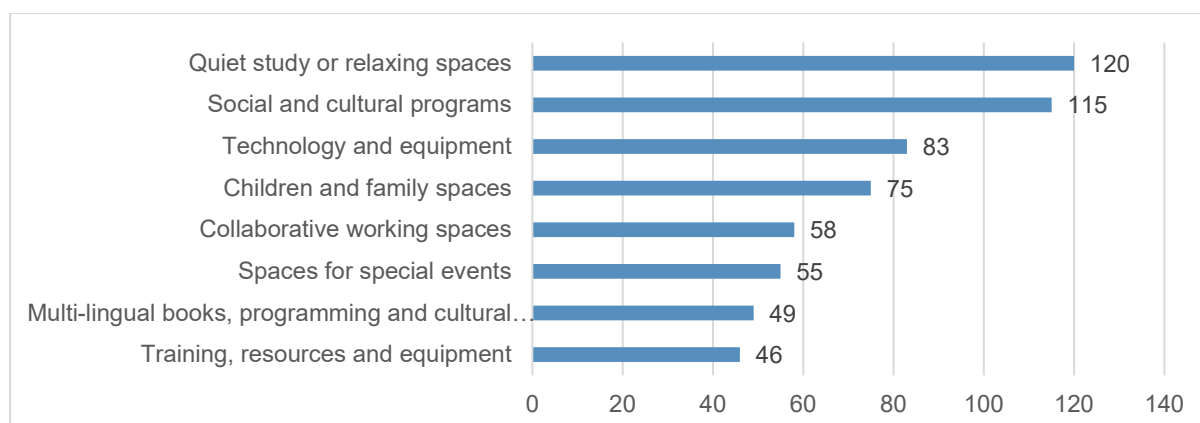


Figure 1. Overall preferences for the new library

Priorities are broadly consistent across the community, with quiet study spaces, social and cultural programs, and technology ranking highly for almost all demographic groups.

Points of interest include:

- people under 24 place much stronger emphasis on quiet study spaces and spaces for special events
- people who speak a language other than English at home prioritise multilingual collections and programs more
- people with a disability place greater importance on social and cultural programs, collaborative working spaces, and training and resources.

Question: Is there anything missing from the list above that would make the Footscray Library welcoming or useful for you?

Of **96** responses, the most common priority was expanded library collections that better reflect our community's diversity and offer both classics and new releases.

Dedicated spaces and opportunities for working and creativity were also prioritised, with examples including jewellery clubs, artist in residence spaces, and community gallery.

Note that some themes are grouped together where they were mentioned the same number of times.

Tag	Count	Percent	Sample quote
Expand collections	18	18.8%	"I frequently have to inter-library loan request what I consider to be pretty standard/basic books. I would like much better access to a much more expanded catalogue of books, and I think a specific subject survey might help provide more insight into the types of books people want."
Dedicated and functional working spaces	8	8.3%	"Free hot desks and workspaces for people to access, as an alternate to working from home, including soundproof audio booths and access to Wi-Fi."
Maker spaces; More creative opportunities	7	7.3%	"Involving local community artists and First Nations artists in design of space."
Foster social connection; Improve building amenity	6	6.3%	"Improvements to the entrance experience, air circulation, and overall atmosphere – not only in children's areas but across the entire library – would help make the space more welcoming."
A café; Quiet and calm spaces; No changes	5	5.2%	"It would be ideal if the library can be redesigned to have separate spaces that can be fully closed (not open floor plan) for children's and community events."

Table 1. Top five tag data – number, percentage and sample of themes tagged

Less common ideas include a kitchenette, a library of things, more learning-oriented programs such as language classes, improved technology, referral services onsite, and offering reading assistance and lockers.

The performing arts venue

Question: What are the three most important things this venue would need to make you attend?

Of **167** responses, the top priorities are:

- affordable and varied performances (**61.1%, 102**)
- support for local and multicultural creatives (**44.3%, 74**)
- a welcoming, safe and inclusive feel (**39.5%, 66**).

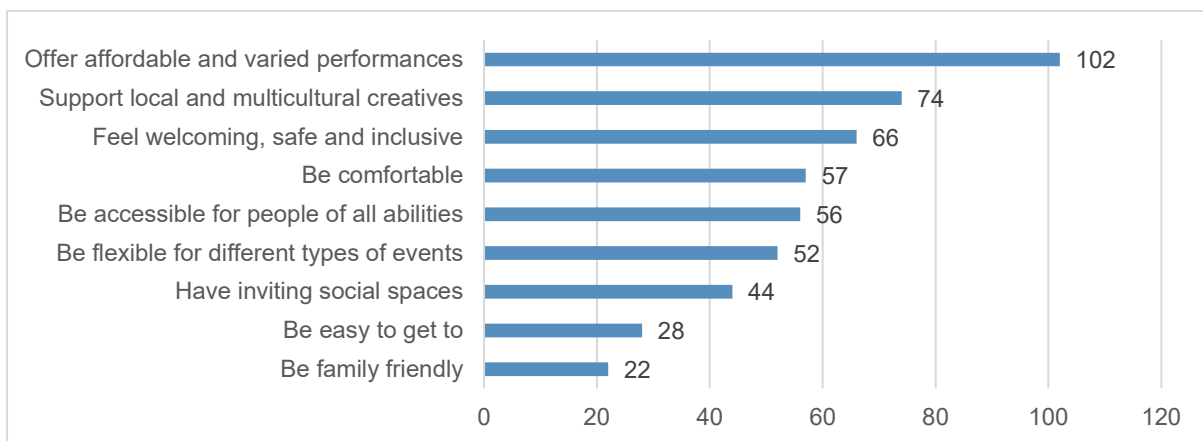


Figure 2. Overall preferences for a performing arts venue

Point of interest include:

- people under 24 place stronger emphasis on comfort and feeling safe and on inviting social spaces, while selecting affordability less often
- people who speak a language other than English at home prioritise supporting local and multicultural creatives, flexible event types, and family-friendly more than average, while choosing affordability less
- people with a disability place greater importance on accessibility and supporting local creatives.

Question: What performances or events would you like to see at the new performing arts centre?

Of **118** responses, top priorities are:

- offering a variety of programs including plays, concerts, circus events, trivia nights, choir, discussion panels, First Nations performances, tours and in language events **(22.9%, 27)**
- live music that accommodates small and larger events and both amateur and establish artists – respondents noted that this would encourage new community groups to form and the opportunity for both indoor and outdoor events **(21.2%, 25)**
- offering programs and support for both local and touring artists **(16.9%, 20)**.

Note that some themes are grouped together where they were mentioned the same number of times.

Tag	Count	Percent	Sample quote
A wide variety (more than 4+ mentioned)	27	22.9%	"Meaningful programming of events that can cater for multiple demographics of audience."
Live music	25	21.2%	"Music performances, a venue for larger festivals and events that tend to be focused on the CBD and a venue accessible to emerging artists."

Tag	Count	Percent	Sample quote
Local focus	20	16.9%	"I think it's important it serves as a venue significantly committed to local productions and talent. The only way to have a thriving arts industry again is to have a strong platform which gives diverse creatives support to grow and refine their craft."
Dance performances	12	10.2%	"I've been a part of multiple local dance schools...a community space with a proper stage, seating, and dressing rooms would be fantastic."
Theatrical performances; Comedy	9	7.6%	"Comedy fest shows immediately jump to mind! But I think a well-built venue will bring out plenty of ideas we're not even thinking of yet."

Table 2. Top five tag data – number, percentage and sample of themes tagged

Less common ideas include tours that connected with Melbourne's festivals to encourage visitation to the West, specific dance, theatrical, and comedy events, the importance of family-friendly options, functional and accessible spaces, and involving creatives and the community to pitch specific ideas.

The town park

Question: What three things would you want most at the new town park?

Of **169** responses, the top priorities are:

- trees, gardens and greenery **(65.7%, 111)**
- shade and cool spaces **(47.9%, 81)**
- outdoor performances, films or cultural activities **(31.9%, 54)**.

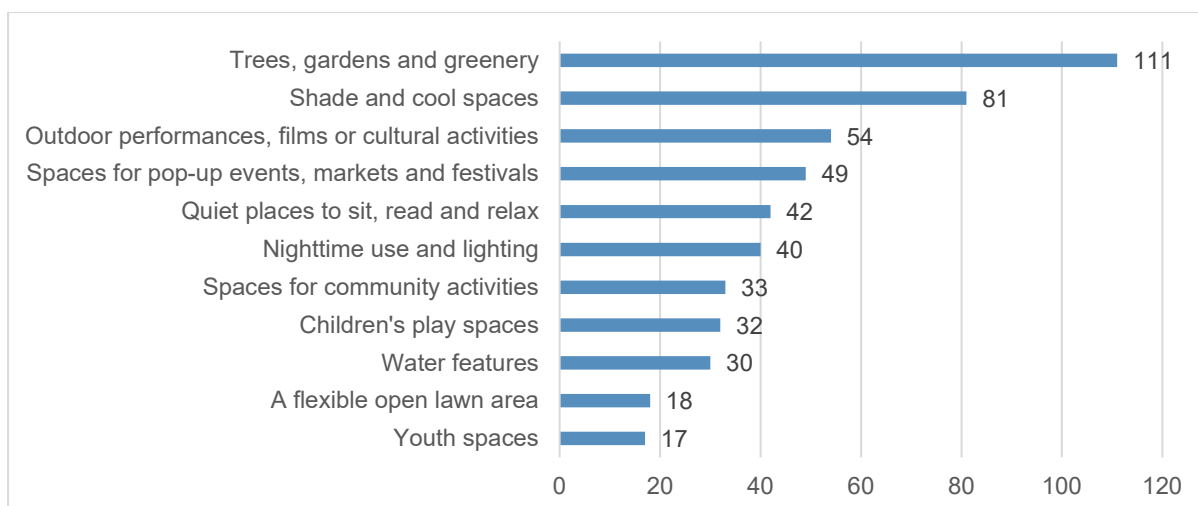


Figure 3. Overall preferences for a town park

Point of interest include:

- people under 24 prefer children's play spaces, night-time lighting and youth spaces
- people over 65 years lean strongly toward trees and greenery, and a flexible open lawn, and less likely to choose children's play spaces or outdoor performances

- people with a disability place greater importance on water features and shade.

Question: What other features would you like to see at the new town park?

Of **99** responses, the top priorities are:

- prioritising safety – for example, with lighting, nearby services, or passive surveillance – and offering enough seating **(11.1%, 11)**
- public area for events such as outdoor cinemas or an amphitheatre **(10.1%, 10)**
- incorporating public art and open green space **(9.1%, 9)**.

Tag	Count	Percent	Sample quote
Prioritise safety; Offering enough seating	11	11.1%	“Ensure the area remains open to passive surveillance is vital to reducing the risk of the area being a site of anti-social behaviour”
Public area for events	10	10.1%	“An outdoor stage or performance area for outdoor performances or local groups to meet at.”
Public art; Open green space	9	9.1%	“A space to commemorate art installations from local artists, switching them out once a month.”
Greenery; Play spaces	7	7.1%	“A water garden for children and adults to use on hot days and nights.”
More events; More trees	6	6.1%	“A mix of natives would be good particularly with the idea that there's something flowering throughout the year. So, for example, Golden wattle and Banksias in winter and then Jacarandas and Red Flowering Gum for Summer.”

Table 3. Top five tag data – number, percentage and sample of themes tagged

Less common ideas include welcoming infrastructure, incorporating Australian plant species, walking and bike paths, BBQ area, dynamic spaces for all ages and abilities, community garden, First Nations learning, chess space, space for vendors, ensuring upkeep, and offering charging points.

Question: Please share any other feedback or comments that could help shape the future of Creative West.

Of **111** responses, the most common comments are:

- support for Creative West in its potential to improve and activate Footscray, provide more programs and central services, and potential to offer a mid-tier destination for intermediate creatives that nationally we are lacking **(14.4%, 16)**
- the need for capacity-building opportunities such as leadership programs, volunteering, workshops and classes, spaces that encourage social connection and mentoring but also individual creation, grants programs, and professional development initiatives for creatives **(11.7%, 13)**
- ensuring safety with well-lit spaces and the opportunity to improve Footscray's nighttime economy **(10.8%, 12)**.

Tag	Count	Percent	Sample quote
Support for the project	16	14.4%	"So excited and supportive of this space. Footscray deserves this investment."
Capacity-building and empowerment initiatives	13	11.7%	"I'd love for there to be community leadership positions, ways for volunteering depending on the range and diversity of events and festivals."
Ensure safety	12	10.8%	"Please work in a safety plan - I am currently uncomfortable visiting Footscray CBD at night and this project has the possibility of improving safety and nighttime economy in the area."
Provide more programs	10	9%	"Getting involved with young people! Programs ran by and for youth."
Engagement feedback	9	8.1%	"More of these kinds of invitation events (Get a taste of Creative West) for feedback and suggestions."

Table 4. Top five tag data – number, percentage and sample of themes tagged

Less common ideas include ensuring the design is appropriate to community needs and surrounding environment, the potential for Creative West to be a community-led hub, ensuring accessibility, concern for spending and wanting to see current infrastructure repurposed to save costs, and ensuring there are more transport options available and parking.

Online idea boards

There were **126** online idea board submissions for the town park (48), library (46), and performing arts venue (32).

The town park

34 posts and 14 comments were made on the town park idea wall, which shows:

- strong support for green, shady, family-friendly spaces with nature-based play
- a desire for calm and relaxing features, including water, sensory elements and places for reflection
- support for cultural and First Nations features, public art and storytelling
- concerns about value for money, citing past projects seen as wasteful or short-lived
- repeated view that existing parks (especially Footscray Park) should be prioritised and better maintained before creating new ones
- a vocal minority oppose the proposal entirely, questioning the need and decision-making process.

The library

36 posts and ten comments were made on the library idea wall, which shows:

- strong support for the library functioning as a welcoming, multi-generational space for connection, culture and community engagement

- interest in film clubs, creative workshops, skills training (e.g. photography, podcasting), and interactive ways of bringing books to life
- requests for remote working spaces, calming sensory design, colour-zoned areas, and accessibility for seniors and people with a disability
- a need for expanded collections and services, including video games and digital media
- suggestions for senior exercise facilities and dog-friendly areas.

The performing arts venue

28 posts and 4 comments were made on the performing arts idea wall, which shows:

- enthusiasm for a dedicated arts venue in Footscray to address a gap in the inner-west and reduce reliance on Melbourne-based venues
- requests for varied offerings across theatre, live music, classical music, film, festivals, experimental and culturally diverse work, supporting all ages and skill levels
- a need for affordable hire, paid opportunities for artists, and accessibility for community groups, independent performers, and people with a disability
- interest in rehearsal rooms, studio spaces, galleries, backstage facilities, and learning programs (e.g. classes, clubs, development pathways)
- calls to draw inspiration from successful regional and metropolitan arts centres (e.g. Geelong, Frankston, festival venues).

The full, detailed responses can be viewed on the [project page](#).

Footscray Library drop-in activities and Lunar Festival event

246 ideas shared on the physical ideas wall (**143**) and through drawings (**eight**), and **95** votes made at Footscray Library.

A project team member was available ten times during the engagement period at Footscray Library.

Attendees could share ideas verbally with staff or by adding them to an idea board.

At the 21 February Lunar Festival event, attendees were invited to share their feedback over three activity boards where they could allocate three sticky dots across their preferred features for each of the three elements.

286 dots were placed by 95 participants as below:

- The library – respondents evenly prioritised technology, spaces for events, quiet study and family spaces (16 dots each)
- The performing arts venue – respondents prioritised access (19 dots), followed by social and inclusive spaces (13 dots each)
- The town park – respondents prioritised children's play (17 dots), with events and performances close behind (12 dots each).

Note: The placement of activity boards may have influenced results, as participants likely showed a preference for services associated with the venue or event.

Rank	Description
Library top preferences	
1	- Technology and equipment (16 dots) - Spaces for special events (16 dots) - Quiet study or relaxing spaces (16 dots) - Children and family spaces (16 dots)
Performing arts venue top preferences	
1	Easy to get to (19 dots)
2	Inviting social spaces (13 dots) Welcoming, safe and inclusive (13 dots)
Town park top preferences	
1	Children's play spaces (17 dots)
2	Spaces for pop-up events, markets and festivals (12 dots) Outdoor performances, films or cultural events (12 dots)

Table 5. Top preferences by element

Attendees at Footscray Library shared **113** ideas on a board, which are summarised below.

Tag	Description
Study, work and meeting rooms	- Easily reservable study and meeting rooms (free to book with library card) - Quiet study/computer access, some suggesting within focus pods - Late/longer hours, earlier or staggered opening, and a 24-hour community centre
Technology, resources and equipment	- Makers spaces, 3D printers, and woodworking and screen-printing workshop - Podcast room and musicians' technology (e.g. instrument library) - Video games and high-speed internet
Programs, learning and events	- Cantonese classes (heard three times) - Book summary contests and quizzes (heard twice) - Movie nights, free summer cinema (heard twice), evening gigs

Tag	Description
Arts and cultural displays and activities	- Public gallery and free art studios/spaces (heard twice) - Bookshop with kids' books - Rehearsal spaces and full-size stage
Town park and play	- Outdoor gathering and performance spaces like a story circle (heard twice) or amphitheater - Green spaces (e.g. zen garden), edible plants, rooftop community garden - Shade and water/splash play
Amenities (comfort and everyday needs)	- Comfortable seating, lockers, outdoor charging points and drinking fountains - Parenting room with microwave and kids-size toilets - Space for permanent or temporary vendors
Access, safety and inclusion	- Multi-faith prayer/meditation room (heard twice) - Consult people with all abilities for a fit-for-purpose design, fix footpaths for wheelchair users, and address current slope at bike parking - Good quality, zoned sound system for programmed areas
Transport, parking and streetscape	- Free parking (heard three times) and one opposed to car parking - Secure bike parking
Operations and sustainability	- Continued community consultation (e.g. artsboxes) - Focus on sustainability (solar, upcycling program, e-stovetops)

Table 6. Summary of ideas collected on Footscray Library ideas board

Council also hosted a group of 30 year nine students from Footscray High in early February and heard their thoughts, which included:

- need for a safe, clean and welcoming environment without graffiti, rubbish and anti-social behaviour
- calls for better security (CCTV, community policing, secure bike storage) to improve safety and comfort
- need for youth-friendly hang-out spaces with comfortable seating, private booths, lockers and shaded outdoor areas
- quiet study spaces, separated from social areas, and quiet pods/privacy booths
- importance of strong Wi-Fi, charging points, bins, lockers, borrowable headphones and textbooks
- strong interest in youth-led clubs and activities, including games clubs, board games, video gaming, competitions and student-run events
- requests for creative facilities, such as art spaces, podcast rooms, murals, art displays and resources for different art mediums
- desire for the space to feel colourful and inviting
- green space, including real grass, foliage, gardens, shade and outdoor seating

- need for affordable food options, such as a small cheap café, vending machines, packaged food and nearby food trucks
- interest in social and recreational facilities, including pool tables, basketball courts and informal sports areas
- preference for being open early (before school) and easy to access as a meetup, learning and social space.

Eight ‘my dream arts space/library/town park’ drawings were completed during the engagement period, which requested:

- a playground (three drawings)
- more room for the future library
- a recording space with amplifiers, sound proofing, e-drums and specialised equipment
- a water fountain.

Offsite events

Four additional offsite in-person events included:

- Victoria University O-Fest at Nicholson campus, 5 February, 11am-1pm
- Victoria University O-Fest at Footscray Park campus, 12 February, 11am-1.30pm
- Braybrook Hub drop-in session, 26 February, 4-6pm
- Tet Lunar New Year Festival at Footscray Park, 28 February 11am-3pm.

Attendees were invited to share their feedback over three activity boards where they could allocate three sticky dots across their preferred features for each of the three elements. Attendees could also share ideas for the three elements verbally with staff or by adding them to an idea board.

130 people participated, of which:

- 77 voted on their preferred features
- 44 added an idea to the board
- 9 shared their ideas verbally.

Event	Dots received	Participants (each received 3 dots)
O-Fest Nicholson campus	48	16
O-Fest Footscray Park campus	184	61
Braybrook Library drop-in	<i>Nil – discussions only</i>	
Tet Lunar New Year Festival	<i>Nil – promotional only</i>	
Total	232	77

Table 7. Participation using voting activity at offsite events



Figure 4. Nicholson campus O-Fest event



Figure 5. Footscray Park campus O-Fest event

Responses show a clear hierarchy of needs for event attendees, particularly tertiary students:

- for a performing arts venue, respondents most strongly prioritised affordable and varied programming, a flexible space that can host different event types, and easy access for transport, parking and bikes
- for the library, the emphasis was on quiet spaces to study or relax, with some interest in multi-lingual books, programming and cultural opportunities, and technology/equipment
- for the town park, the top preferences were greenery, and quiet places to sit, read and relax, followed by water features, with smaller but present interest in children's play areas, youth spaces, pop-up event/market spaces, and lighting for safe nighttime use.

Rank	Description
Performing arts venue top preferences	
1	Offer affordable and varied performances (59 dots)
2	Flexible for different types of events (44 dots)
3	Easy to get to (transport, parking, bike access) (33 dots)
Library top preferences	
1	Quiet study or relaxing spaces (7 dots)
2	Multi-lingual books, programming and cultural opportunities (4 dots)
3	Technology and equipment (3 dots)
Town park top preferences	
1	Trees, garden and greenery; Quiet places to sit, read and relax (both 3 dots)
2	Water features (e.g. fountains, misting) (2 dots)

Rank	Description
3	Children's play spaces; Youth spaces; Spaces for pop-up events, markets and festivals; Nighttime use and lighting (all 1 dot)

Table 8. Top three preferences by element

Participants at the in-person events shared ideas verbally or on an idea board, including:

- strong interest in creative and cultural activities, with repeated requests for art galleries, screen printing, drawing spaces, gamer spaces (all heard multiple times)
- broad support for diverse arts and making activities including dance, photography, sewing, pottery, calligraphy, and recording/podcasting
- desire for functional, inclusive spaces such as:
 - larger quiet areas
 - bookable rooms and breakout spaces
 - youth-focused spaces
 - safe parent-child areas
 - more seating
- appreciation for nature and requests for:
 - more trees and shade
 - nature play and kid-friendly outdoor features
 - community gardens
 - dog-friendly areas
- library-related needs:
 - more meeting rooms
 - affordable amenities (e.g. low-cost tea/coffee)
 - document printing
- requests for better access and transport.

Audio submissions

Speakpipe is an online tool that lets people record and submit voice messages. This tool was embedded on the project page to provide another option for people to share feedback, especially for those who find speaking easier than writing, or people who need audio options for accessibility.

One person submitted a recording, expressing concern about the prospect of new green spaces when there's evidence of maintenance lacking for existing green spaces and assets in our City. Before considering any new green spaces, the priority should be to properly maintain those already in place.

Emails

We received **four** emails, requesting:

- accommodating for theatre logistics like space in the wings for moving sets, a fly tower, communications available throughout the building, an easy to access loading dock, a laundry, and an intercom system
- a rooftop park
- a dedicated warehouse for people to source reused and repurposed materials that could support greener practices within the industry and lower the cost of access to arts and crafts materials
- resilient infrastructure in the form of biochar in concrete, mushroom-based panels with natural fire resistance, and CSIRO's printable solar panels.

Demographics

Those who completed the online survey or an online idea board were asked a series of demographic questions to help us understand who we're hearing from in our community.

Connection to the City of Maribyrnong

Of the **78** people who completed an online idea wall and provided information:

- **65.4% (51)** live here
- **12.8% (10)** work here
- an equal **7.7% (6)** are business owners or non-resident ratepayers
- **6.4% (5)** visit the City.

Connection to Creative West

Of the **234** people who completed the online survey:

- **58.1% (136)** were Maribyrnong Libraries members
- **45.7% (107)** visit Footscray
- an equal number (**35.9%, 84 each**) live in Footscray and attend performances or events in Footscray.

Other responses included being a resident previously or having friends or family members with a connection.

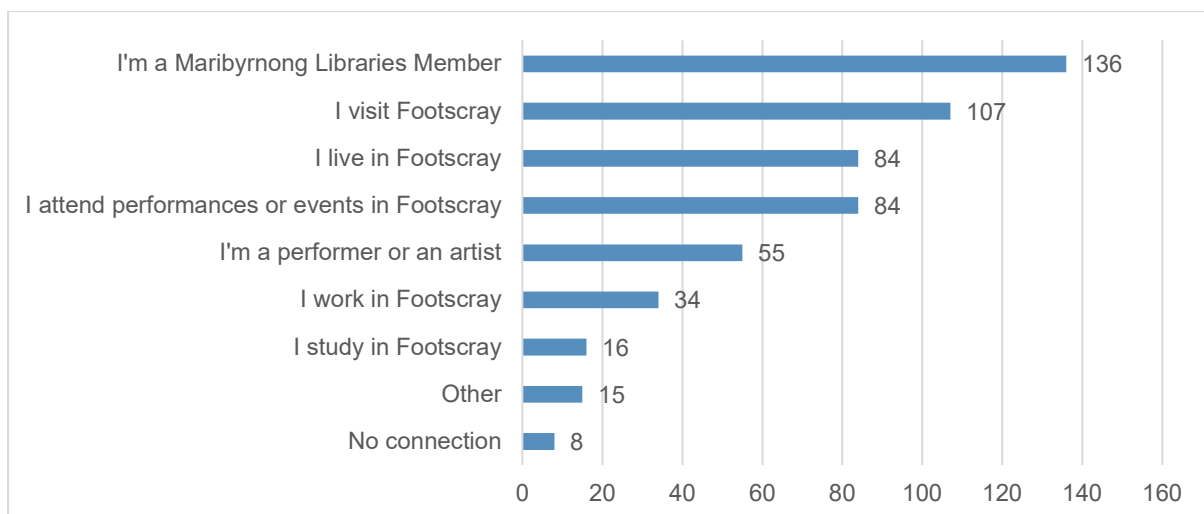


Figure 6. Respondent's connection to Creative West – online survey

Gender

Of **234** online survey respondents:

- **52.6% (123)** were female
- **38.9% (91)** were male
- **4.7% (11)** preferred not to say
- **3.9% (9)** had another identity not listed including non-binary and she/they.

Age group

The largest age group of **332** online idea wall and online survey respondents was between 30-34 and 40-44 years, followed by 35-39 and 45-49 years.

7.2% (45) of respondents were 24 years or younger and **5.7% (19)** were 65 years or older.

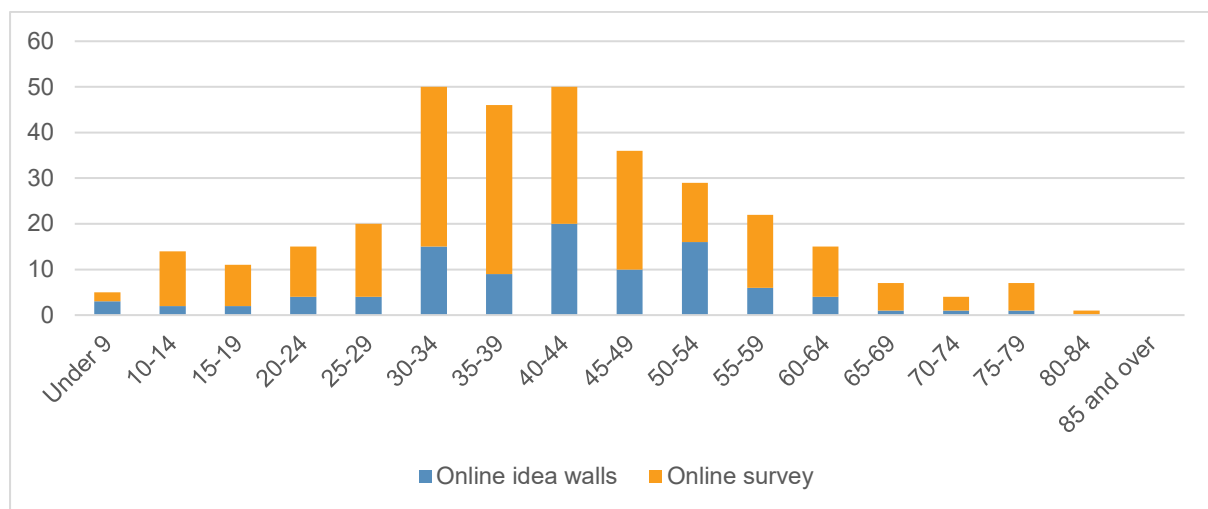


Figure 7. Age of respondents – online idea walls and online survey

The voting activity at Footscray Library also encouraged participants to vote with a coloured dot corresponding to their age (over or under 18 years). In total, 33 were under 18 years and 62 were over 18 years.

Suburb

Over a third (**34.9%, 116**) of **332** online idea wall and survey respondents were from Footscray.

This was followed by a suburb outside Maribyrnong (**14.5%, 48**) and Seddon (**11.1%, 37**).

Other locations included Altona, Altona North, Ardeer, Armadale, Avondale Heights, Camberwell, Elwood and Melbourne CBD, among others.

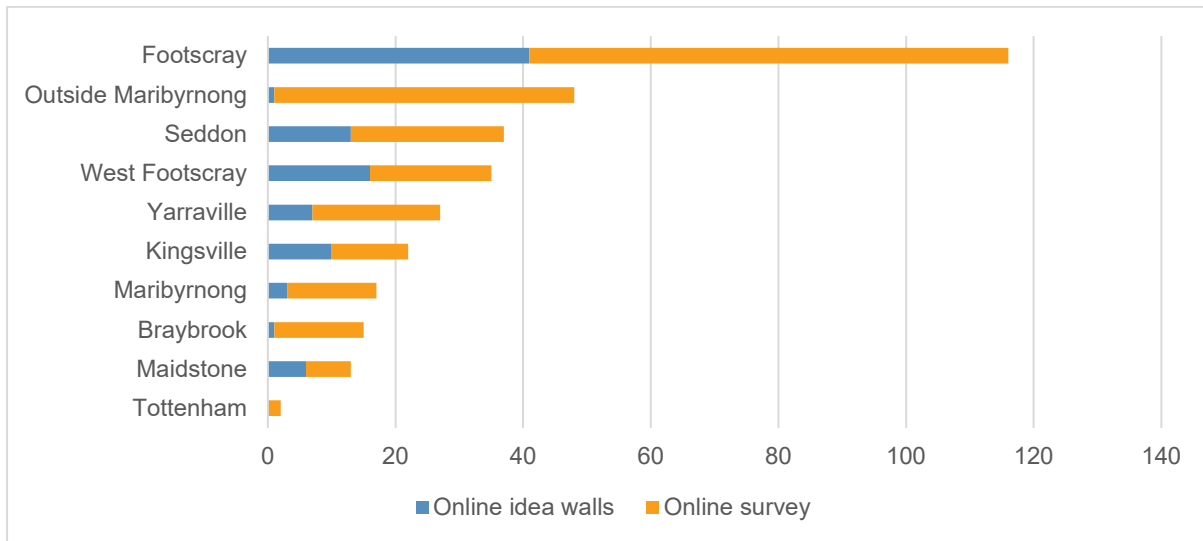


Figure 8. Respondent's suburb of residence – online idea walls and online survey

Diversity

People who completed the online idea wall and survey could share optional information about themselves. Of **176** people who ticked an option:

- **38.6% (68)** spoke a language other than English at home
- **38.1% (67)** were members of the LGBTIQA+ community
- **20.5% (36)** lived with a disability
- **2.8% (5)** were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

How did you hear about this project?

Of **234** online survey respondents, **23.5% (55)** found out about the project by word of mouth.

21.8% (51) found out by methods not listed including the Maribyrnong Libraries newsletter, an information session and from Footscray Library staff.

19.7% (46) were made aware by a postcard in the mail.

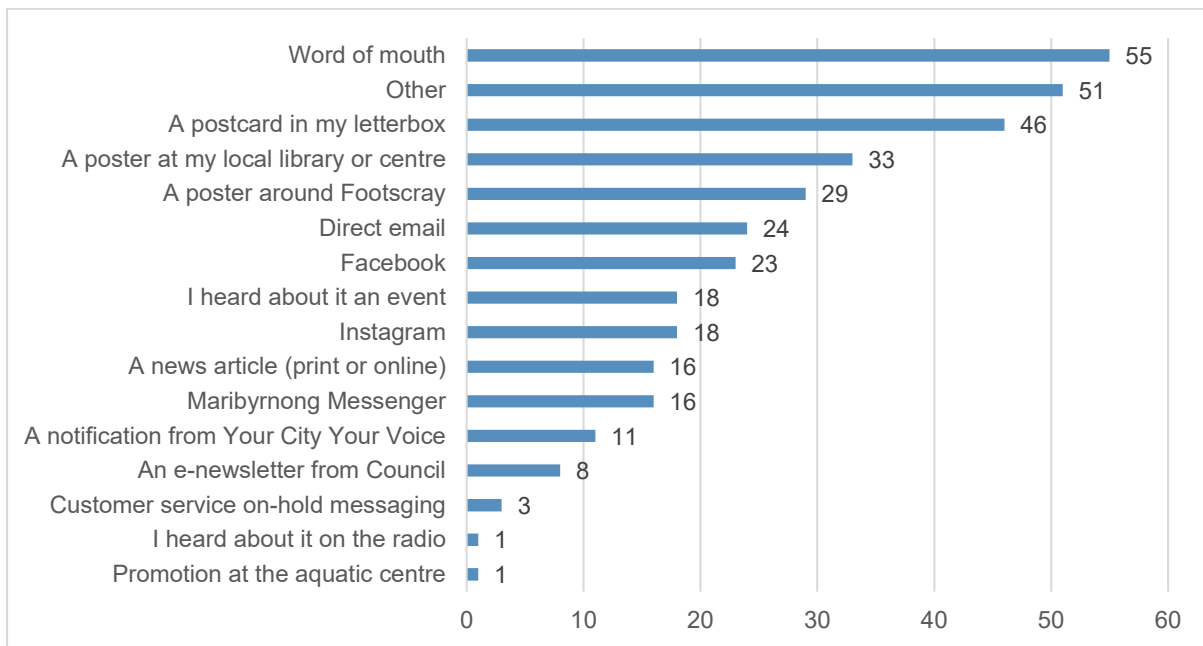


Figure 9. Respondent's method of awareness of the project

Conclusion

Engagement outcomes were highly consistent across all methods.

Participants told us:

- green, inclusive and functional design for a town park is vital
- strong investment in a performing arts venue is seen as critical infrastructure for the inner west
- they want a library that functions as a flexible, modern community hub.

Recurring expectations across all projects included accessibility, affordability, cultural representation and long-term value.

While overall sentiment was strongly supportive – particularly for the performing arts venue and library – some participants raised concerns about cost, duplication and the need to better maintain existing assets.

Overall, feedback indicates broad support from respondents for investment in social and cultural infrastructure, with a clear expectation that projects deliver inclusive, high-quality outcomes aligned with community needs.

Feedback from this engagement will help shape the Concept Design with the help of an appointed architect and community co-design group.

To get notified when it's open for feedback, click the 'Follow' button at the top of the [project page](#).



Creative West Precinct

City of Maribyrnong

Information Gathering - Focus Group Findings Summary



9 April 2026 Final





Acknowledgement

ChatterBox Projects and partners are proud to acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong (Boon Wurrung) peoples of the Kulin Nation as Traditional Owners of the land in the City of Maribyrnong, on which this engagement was undertaken. We pay our respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Elders, past, present and emerging, who have resided in the area and have been an integral part of the area's history.

Document title	Creative West – Information Gathering Focus Group Findings Summary
Version	Final
Date	9 April 2026
Prepared by	Sarah Bishop, Associate, Chatterbox Projects
Check and approved by	Sam Walsh, Director, Chatterbox Projects
The use of AI	AI tools may have been used to assist with the collation and organisation of community feedback data. Tools are used in confidential mode (not used to train AI models) and all personal identifying data is removed. All results and summaries are reviewed and verified by the project team to ensure accuracy and integrity. Our AI Policy is available on request.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Project background

Creative West is a major civic and cultural infrastructure project being led by Maribyrnong Council to revitalise the Footscray CBD as a centre for arts, culture and community activity. The precinct will be located on the current Footscray Library and carpark site on Paisley Street in central Footscray.

The project will deliver a range of new civic and cultural facilities for the community, including:

- a new library, learning and innovation hub
- a performing arts venue (up to 500 seats)
- a green public open space for community gatherings and events
- some level of car parking provision.

Together, these elements aim to create a welcoming civic destination where people can gather, learn, experience culture and participate in community life.

Creative West has been a long-term initiative for Council, shaped by several rounds of community and stakeholder consultation dating back to 2015, with the last round in 2020.

In January 2025, Council secured \$5 million funding from the Australian Government (through the Urban Precincts and Partnerships Program) to match its \$5 million allocation. This funding will support the completion of the planning and detailed design process for the project, which is expected to be completed by March 2027.

As the project is now formally progressing into the design phase, Council is seeking to check and update this earlier feedback to ensure the project reflects current community needs and priorities.

1.2 Engagement overview

The first stage of community engagement – ‘Information Gathering’ – ran from Friday 23 January to Sunday 1 March 2026. This stage ran alongside the development of the functional and technical brief, with the aim of testing previous consultation findings and capturing further insights from the community and key stakeholders to refine the brief and inform the next stages of design.

Activities undertaken during this stage included:

- Council-led community engagement activities:
 - Online survey
 - Drop-in sessions
 - Taste of Creative West event
 - Targeted key stakeholder engagement
- A program of 19 focus group sessions with specific community cohorts and stakeholder groups.

ChatterBox Projects was engaged to design and deliver the focus group program as described below, and this report presents the summarised findings of these focus groups only.





2. Focus group engagement approach

2.1 Purpose

The purpose of the focus groups was to ensure that the consultation captured a diversity of perspectives from community cohorts and stakeholder groups with different relationships to the precinct. A total of 19 sessions were organised around specific cohorts to enable participants with shared experiences or interests to discuss issues in greater depth.

Specifically, the focus groups were intended to:

- understand how the area around the proposed precinct is currently used and experienced
- identify priorities, needs and opportunities for the future precinct
- capture perspectives from different community cohorts and stakeholder groups
- surface potential issues or sensitivities that may influence future project planning and engagement.

2.2 Methodology

Focus groups were small group facilitated discussions that allowed participants to explore ideas collectively and respond to each other's perspectives. This format provided deeper insights than individual feedback methods, as participants were able to reflect on shared experiences and build on ideas raised during the discussions.

Sessions ranged from 1-2 hours each tailored to the cohort/stakeholder needs and delivery format (online or in-person). Each session was facilitated using a structured discussion guide to ensure consistency across the focus groups. Facilitators also allowed space for participants to raise additional issues and ideas that were important to them.

All sessions were facilitated by ChatterBox Projects consultants, with the exception of three sessions that related to specific performing arts technical requirements. These were led by the specialist architects and theatre experts.

Notes were taken during each focus group session, and facilitators completed a structured focus group summary template documenting:

- detailed notes organised according to the discussion topics
- a preliminary summary of key insights from the discussion.

These templates were made available to the design team and Council as they were finalised to iteratively inform the functional and technical design brief, and are the primary data source for the analysis presented in this report.





2.3 Schedule and participation

A total of 129 participants were engaged across the 19 focus group sessions, which ran from Friday 13 February to Sunday 1 March 2026. The table below provides a summary of the sessions and participant numbers and cohorts reached.

	129 participants
	19 focus groups
	13 February – 1 March 2026
	Footscray Library, Schools and community venues
	12+ community cohorts

Focus group	Session details	Recruitment	Facilitator	Location	Participants
Secondary College Students (Footscray Secondary College)	Friday 13 February 10-11am	Existing group	ChatterBox Projects	Phoenix Youth Hub	20 (year 9 students)
Multicultural communities	Monday 16 February 1pm-2:30pm Saturday 21 February 10am-11:30am	Open registration	ChatterBox Projects	Footscray Library	8 comprising: • 5 (16 Feb) • 3 (21 Feb)
Creative – Industry and Organisations	Thursday 19 February 10am-12pm (Local performing arts)	Targeted invites	Design Team	Footscray Library	12 comprising: • 5 Local performing arts





Focus group	Session details	Recruitment	Facilitator	Location	Participants
	Thursday 19 February 3pm-5pm (Performing arts and festivals) Tuesday 24 February 3pm-5pm (Circus arts)				5 Performing arts and festivals 2 Circus arts
Creative – Local Artists and Organisations	Friday 20 February 12pm-1:30pm Sunday 1 March 3pm-5pm	Targeted invites	ChatterBox Projects	20 Feb - Online (Zoom) 1 Mar - Footscray Library	19 comprising: 6 (20 Feb) 13 (1 Mar)
Traders/Business Owners	Tuesday 24 February 10-11:30am Thursday 26 February 5.30-7pm	Open registration	ChatterBox Projects	Footscray Library	10 comprising: 8 (24 Feb) 2 (26 Feb)
People with Disability	Tuesday 24 February 1pm-2:30pm	Open registration	ChatterBox Projects	Footscray Library	5 (4 + 1 support worker)
Women	Tuesday 24 February 4pm-5:30pm	Open registration	ChatterBox Projects	Footscray Library	6
LGBTIQA+/Rainbow	Tuesday 24 February 6pm-7:30pm	Open registration	ChatterBox Projects	Footscray Library	4
Maribyrnong Homelessness response Network	Wednesday 25 February 11am-12pm	Targeted invites	ChatterBox Projects	Online (Zoom)	7
Parents	Wednesday 25 February 12pm-1pm	Open registration	ChatterBox Projects	Footscray Library	2
Education Sector	Wednesday 25 February 2pm-3pm	Targeted invites	ChatterBox Projects	Online (Zoom)	5
Older people	Thursday 26 February 11am-12:30pm	Open registration	ChatterBox Projects	Footscray Library	10
First Nations	Thursday 26 February 2pm-3:30pm	Open registration	ChatterBox Projects	Footscray Library	1
Primary School Students (Footscray Primary School)	Thursday 26 February 1pm-2pm	Existing group	ChatterBox Projects	Footscray Primary School	20 (grade 6 students)
University Students	Student union contacted but unable to schedule a session				
				TOTAL	129 participants





As demonstrated in the table, the focus groups successfully engaged with a broad cross section of community demographics, cohorts and stakeholders.

In addition to general community members, this included representatives from the following organisations:

- 100 Story Building
- Barkly Bazaar
- Bindu Creative Dance and Yoga
- Born in a Taxi
- Chunky Moves
- coHealth
- Commonwealth Bank
- Cottonmills
- Department of Families Fairness and Housing
- Essence Productions
- Footscray Yarraville City Band
- IWSO (Inner West Symphony Orchestra)
- Kate Hunter Theatre
- Kindred Studios
- L2R Dance
- Little Pine Tree Productions
- Melbourne Fringe
- Melbourne International Jazz Festival
- Na Djinang Circus
- Ninja Video House
- PBS FM
- Rising Festival
- Salvation Army
- Seddon Deadly Sins
- Snuff Puppets
- The Women's Circus
- Trocadaro Art Space
- VCA
- Victoria University
- Victorian Association of PAC
- Western Edge
- WIT Incorporated
- Yooralla





2.4 Analysis process

The analysis process involved reviewing all focus group summaries to identify patterns and insights emerging across the sessions. This included:

- reviewing the preliminary analysis prepared by facilitators
- comparing themes across different focus groups and cohorts
- identifying recurring ideas and priorities raised by participants
- noting where perspectives differed between groups.

Insights were then synthesised to identify:

- themes raised across multiple focus groups
- perspectives specific to particular cohorts
- areas of alignment and difference within the consultation findings.

The findings presented in this report reflect these patterns and insights emerging from the focus group discussions.





3. Findings - major themes

Across the 19 focus groups, participants consistently described the civic precinct as a multi-purpose community hub that brings together learning, creativity, gathering, and everyday public life. They described it as a daily-use civic “**home base**” for Footscray, not only a destination for big events.

Participants did not see the precinct as a group of single-function facilities. Instead, they spoke about a layered civic place where **the library, performing arts spaces and public open space support each other**, so that different people can use the place in different ways across the day and week. Such as:

- creative production and performance
- learning and knowledge sharing
- community connection
- cultural expression
- informal gathering and recreation.

Across cohorts, the consultation highlighted strong expectations that the precinct should be:

- welcoming and inclusive
- affordable and accessible
- flexible and adaptable
- active throughout the day and evening
- reflective of Footscray’s diverse identity

However, the feedback also shows the need to balance different priorities that can pull in opposite directions:

- activation and vibrancy *and* quiet, calm places
- safety and security *and* welcoming, non-intimidating entry
- professional-standard creative facilities *and* community access
- outdoor openness *and* comfort in heat/rain + noise management
- local identity and cultural expression *and* avoiding tokenism or “generic” design

Many participants also stressed that the precinct should support both **professional creative practice and community participation**, ensuring that the space remains connected to the local community.

3.1 Flexible and adaptable spaces

Participants across many focus groups emphasised the importance of spaces that can support multiple uses, different group sizes and changing activities over time. Flexibility was not described as a “nice-to-have”, but as **a core requirement that allows the precinct to remain useful and responsive to the community**.

Participants highlighted the need for spaces that can scale up or down, supporting everything from small workshops and meetings through to larger performances, exhibitions and events. Common





suggestions included:

- flexible black box performance spaces
- multi-purpose rooms that can host workshops, meetings and community activities
- adaptable rehearsal spaces for theatre, dance, music and circus
- exhibition areas that can change configuration
- movable or modular layouts that allow rooms to expand, contract or change function
- spaces that can transition between learning, community and performance uses

Several participants described how rooms could serve different purposes throughout the day, for example: learning programs or workshops during the day, community meetings in the afternoon, and performances or events in the evening.

Creative sector participants also emphasised the importance of flexibility within performance environments, with some expressing a preference for adaptable formats rather than a single fixed “traditional theatre” configuration. Another recurring point was the need for layouts that reduce set-up burden, allowing spaces to work without complex technical requirements, large crews or long changeovers.

Participants also noted the importance of clear acoustic separation between spaces so that multiple activities can occur simultaneously without disrupting each other.

While flexibility was widely supported, creative sector participants also cautioned that overly generic “multi-purpose” spaces can become impractical if they are not designed with the technical and spatial needs of specific artforms in mind.



Who raised it

Strongly emphasised by:

- local creatives (both groups)
- performing arts organisations
- festivals organisations
- circus arts organisations
- education sector participants

Also raised by:

- traders, particularly in relation to events and precinct activation
- broader community participants discussing general community uses

Implications

Flexible spaces expand the range of activities the precinct can support and help ensure it remains relevant as community needs evolve.

Design:

- rooms that can accommodate workshops, rehearsals, meetings, performances and exhibitions





- adaptable performance environments that support multiple art forms
- operable walls or modular layouts that allow spaces to expand or contract
- sufficient storage, circulation and acoustic separation to support concurrent uses

Use:

- the ability to host multiple event types and community activities without needing dedicated spaces for each function
- greater opportunities for community organisations, creative groups and education providers to use the precinct

User experience:

- easier room bookings and more intuitive use of spaces
- reduced reliance on complex technical set-ups
- environments that feel approachable and usable for a wide range of community groups

3.2 Creative production and rehearsal infrastructure

A strong theme from the creative sector was the need for the precinct to support making, developing and rehearsing creative work, not only presenting finished performances or exhibitions. Participants consistently emphasised that a successful performing arts facility must function as a working environment for artists, not just a venue for audiences.

Many participants noted that affordable rehearsal and studio space is increasingly limited in the local area, which makes it difficult for artists and organisations to develop work locally.

Participants identified the need for a range of production-oriented spaces and facilities, including:

- rehearsal spaces for theatre, dance and music
- studio spaces for artists and creative practitioners
- creative production spaces where work can be developed and tested over time
- technical infrastructure that supports rehearsals, production and performance
- spaces large enough for ensembles, physical theatre and circus rehearsal

Creative organisations also shared detailed practical insights about what makes production spaces functional in real-world conditions. Recurring points included:

- Rehearsal spaces that match performance conditions, allowing artists to prepare work effectively before presenting it publicly.
- Functional back-of-house facilities, including adequately sized green rooms, amenities, kitchenettes, storage areas, safe back-of-house circulation and private dressing areas.
- Efficient loading and logistics, ensuring that production equipment can be transported safely and easily. This includes:
 - loading docks that accommodate the types of vehicles typically used by touring groups and production teams
 - safe and efficient bump-in and bump-out processes





- secure storage so groups are not required to transport equipment in and out for every use
- Reliable and intuitive technical infrastructure, with participants noting that technology should be straightforward and dependable rather than overly complex or specialised.

In some discussions, participants suggested that digital and projection-based approaches may be more practical than heavy traditional stage mechanics. For example, at least one group indicated that a fly tower may not be necessary if flexible digital solutions are available.

Circus participants emphasised the importance of adequate vertical clearance and clearly documented rigging capacity. Several noted that clear heights of approximately 7–9 metres are a practical minimum for many circus acts, and that rigging infrastructure must be transparent and well-documented to support safe use.

Participants also emphasised the importance of **operational affordability**. Several noted that design decisions made during the planning stage can significantly influence operating costs later. Facilities that are efficient and practical to run are more likely to remain accessible to local artists and organisations over time.

Who raised it

Most strongly emphasised by:

- local performing arts organisations
- festivals and performing arts organisations
- circus arts organisations
- local creatives (both groups)

Also raised by:

- education sector participants, particularly in relation to opportunities for students to access professional creative facilities and connect with industry pathways.

Implications

Creative production infrastructure supports the **local creative ecosystem** and helps ensure that the precinct functions as a place where creative work is developed, not only presented. Production spaces help generate **ongoing daily activity**, as artists rehearse, develop work and collaborate. This creates a more active and vibrant precinct, rather than a facility that is only used during performances or major events.

Design:

- rehearsal studios and production spaces that support a range of art forms including theatre, dance, music and circus
- appropriately sized back-of-house facilities such as green rooms, amenities, kitchenettes and storage
- efficient loading areas and circulation routes that allow equipment to move safely and easily between vehicles, storage and performance spaces





- technical infrastructure that supports rehearsal and production needs, including lighting, rigging and AV systems
- durable spaces designed for frequent use by creative organisations

Use:

- supports the development of new creative work within the precinct
- enables local artists and organisations to rehearse, collaborate and produce work locally
- allows creative organisations, festivals and performing arts groups to use the precinct as part of their regular operations
- creates opportunities for education partnerships, including student access to professional rehearsal and production environments

User experience:

- rehearsal and production spaces that function in ways familiar to creative practitioners
- reliable and intuitive technical systems that reduce barriers to use
- facilities that are efficient and practical to operate, helping keep hire costs manageable for local groups
- a precinct that feels like a working creative environment, supporting ongoing activity rather than being used only for scheduled performances or major events

3.3 Inclusive and welcoming civic space

Many participants emphasised the importance of the precinct being a place where everyone feels welcome, comfortable and able to participate. Across focus groups, inclusion was described as more than physical access. Participants framed it as a combination of **design, operations and social signals** that shape whether people feel that a place is “for them”.

Participants highlighted the importance of creating:

- a welcoming atmosphere
- spaces that feel open and accessible
- visible signals that the precinct belongs to the community
- programming that reflects the diversity of local residents

Several participants also discussed the concept of “threshold anxiety”- the feeling that a place may not be intended for them. Participants suggested that the design and operation of the precinct should reduce this barrier by making entry points feel open and approachable. Ideas included:

- visible activity at the edges of buildings and public spaces
- clear cues that entry is allowed
- spaces where people can comfortably arrive, pause and observe before participating.

Participants also noted that the way front-of-house and security is handled can significantly influence how welcoming a place feels. Some participants expressed concern that environments that feel overly controlled or checkpoint-like may discourage certain groups from entering or participating.





Another important nuance was the need for visible belonging cues, including cultural representation and programming that reflects the communities who live locally. Participants noted that seeing their cultures and identities represented helps people feel that they belong in the space.

Participants also highlighted that different people seek different types of comfort within public spaces, suggesting that the precinct should offer:

- lively and social areas that support gathering and activity
- quieter, low-pressure spaces where people can spend time without needing to participate in organised activities.

Who raised it

Raised across many cohorts including:

- multicultural participants
- First Nations participants
- LGBTIQ+ participants
- women
- seniors
- health and homelessness service providers
- people with disabilities
- broader community participants.

Implications

Environments that feel welcoming and inclusive are more likely to encourage regular visitation, informal gathering and participation in programs.

Design:

- entries that feel open and approachable rather than controlled or intimidating
- visual connections into buildings and public spaces that signal activity and welcome
- places to pause, sit or observe before entering programs or events
- spaces that support both social activity and quieter forms of participation
- design elements that visibly reflect the diversity and identity of the local community.

Use:

- programming that reflects the cultures, identities and interests of local residents
- activities that encourage different groups to use the precinct throughout the day and evening
- opportunities for informal use, allowing people to spend time in the precinct without needing to attend a specific event.

User experience:

- an environment that reduces feelings of exclusion or uncertainty about who the space is for
- front-of-house and operational approaches that prioritise welcome and approachability





- a precinct that supports a wide range of comfort levels, from active social engagement to quiet, low-pressure participation
- stronger community ownership and trust, encouraging people to return regularly and see the precinct as a shared civic space.

3.4 Accessibility, affordability and equitable participation

Across multiple focus groups, participants emphasised that the precinct should enable genuine access and participation for a wide range of community members. Participants highlighted that access involves both **physical accessibility and financial accessibility**, and that both influence whether people feel able to use the precinct.

Participants discussed accessibility in terms of **going beyond minimum compliance requirements** to support real independence and comfort. A key distinction raised was the difference between meeting regulatory standards, and creating environments that allow people to navigate, use and enjoy spaces independently and confidently.

Participants highlighted several design considerations related to sensory comfort and usability. Detailed input included:

- sensory regulation needs, particularly for people sensitive to overstimulation:
 - discomfort caused by harsh LED lighting, noise or glare
 - the importance of quiet or calm-down spaces
 - attention to smell, material choices and strong sunlight
 - the presence of greenery or natural elements as calming and regulating features.
- wayfinding as a form of independence, with participants noting that clear navigation enables people to move through spaces without needing assistance. Suggestions included:
 - clear signage and symbols
 - colour-coding or visual cues
 - intuitive layouts that make destinations easy to find.

Participants also emphasised the importance of amenities that work for everyday use, rather than minimal compliance solutions. Suggestions included:

- multiple accessible toilets distributed across the precinct
- gender-neutral and family-friendly facilities
- wider doors, larger lifts and smooth, accessible pathways.

Some participants also noted that staff attitudes and support are part of accessibility, highlighting that welcoming and informed staff can help people feel comfortable using the precinct.

In addition to physical accessibility, participants emphasised the importance of **affordability and equitable access** to spaces and programs. Participants expressed a desire to avoid the precinct becoming a space that feels “for professionals only” or only accessible to those who can afford it.

Participants noted that affordability concerns extend beyond ticket prices. Key issues raised included:





- ensuring local community groups and artists are not priced out of using spaces
- venue and room hire structures that support:
 - community organisations
 - emerging creatives
 - groups with limited budgets
- the importance of free or low-cost community activities
- accessible booking systems that allow community groups to use spaces without unnecessary barriers.

Several participants noted that design and operational decisions made early in the project can also influence long-term affordability. Spaces that are simple, efficient and practical to operate are more likely to remain affordable to hire.

Who raised it

Strong emphasis from:

- people with disabilities

Also raised across several cohorts including:

- creative sector groups (access to rehearsal and venue facilities)
- health and homelessness service providers
- seniors
- parents
- students
- education sector participants
- broader community participants.

Implications

Accessibility and affordability together shape who can participate in the precinct and how confidently they can use it.

Design:

- lighting, acoustics and material choices that minimise sensory overstimulation
- quiet or low-stimulation spaces where users can regulate and take breaks
- intuitive wayfinding systems including clear signage, symbols and spatial cues
- accessible circulation with wider doors, larger lifts and smooth pathways
- inclusive amenities distributed across the precinct, including gender-neutral and family-friendly facilities
- integration of greenery and natural elements that support comfort and wellbeing
- spaces designed to operate efficiently, helping reduce long-term operating costs.

Use:

- affordable access to rehearsal rooms, creative spaces and community facilities
- venue hire models that support community organisations, emerging creatives and groups with





- limited budgets
- programming that includes free or low-cost activities
- booking systems that allow community groups to access spaces easily
- governance approaches that maintain equitable access over time.

User experience:

environments that people can navigate and use independently and confidently

- reduced sensory stress through thoughtful lighting, acoustics and spatial design
- spaces that support a wide range of needs, including quiet retreat areas and accessible amenities
- a precinct that feels open to everyone, rather than restricted to professional users or those who can afford high costs
- stronger community trust and participation through equitable and inclusive access.

3.5 Safety, comfort and perceptions of safety

Safety and comfort were frequently raised in discussions about how people would access and use the precinct. Participants described safety not only in terms of crime prevention, but as **a broader combination of physical safety, social comfort and confidence in the environment.**

Participants identified several dimensions of safety:

- physical safety, including lighting, visibility and ease of moving through spaces
- social safety, or whether people feel comfortable and not judged when using the precinct
- family safety, particularly whether parents would feel comfortable bringing children into the area
- the importance of predictable and purposeful public spaces, avoiding environments that feel vague, poorly managed or inactive.

Concerns were also raised about safety when travelling to and from the precinct, highlighting the importance of well-lit pathways, clear access routes and visible activity around the site.

Participants emphasised that lighting and visibility play a major role in how safe a place feels. Several groups noted the importance of lighting that is functional and effective, rather than purely decorative.

Traders in particular highlighted that perception of safety strongly influences visitation. They suggested that spaces feel safer when they include:

- regular activity and “eyes on the park”
- clearly defined uses and destinations
- active edges where buildings and public spaces interact.

Participants also highlighted the importance of comfortable, well-maintained environments, noting that poorly maintained or empty spaces can reduce confidence in public areas.





At the same time, some participants cautioned that environments with a strong security presence and feel can undermine feelings of welcome and inclusion. Participants suggested that safety measures should balance security with a sense of openness and approachability.

Who raised it

Raised across multiple cohorts including:

- traders (both groups, particularly regarding perception of safety and visitation)
- women
- parents
- high school students
- performers and venue operators
- creative organisations (particularly in relation to safe logistics and bump-in/bump-out)
- health and homelessness service providers
- broader community participants.

Implications

Perceptions of safety will strongly influence whether people choose to visit, remain in and regularly use the precinct.

Design:

- lighting that prioritises visibility and safety across public spaces, pathways and building edges
- clear sightlines and circulation routes that make movement through the precinct easy to understand
- active building edges that create visual connection between indoor activities and public spaces
- comfortable seating and gathering areas that support passive surveillance and social activity
- well-maintained landscapes and public spaces that signal care and management.

Use:

- consistent programming and activity throughout the day and evening, creating regular presence and “eyes on the space”
- public spaces designed with clear purpose and identifiable uses rather than undefined areas
- operational approaches that balance safety with inclusivity and avoid creating intimidating or overly controlled environments.

User experience:

- environments where people feel comfortable spending time, including with children and family members
- clear and visible spaces that reduce uncertainty about how the precinct is used
- a public realm that feels active, welcoming and well cared for
- increased confidence among community members to visit, remain and participate in activities at the precinct.





3.6 Useable outdoor public space 🌳

Participants consistently emphasised the importance of the public open space. Rather than being viewed simply as landscaping around buildings, the park and open spaces were frequently described as the “daily heartbeat” or civic living room of the precinct.

Many participants expressed a desire for spaces where people could comfortably spend time even when no formal activities are taking place. Common suggestions included:

- gardens and greenery that contribute to a welcoming and comfortable environment
- shaded areas that provide comfort during warmer weather
- seating and gathering spaces where people can sit, meet friends, picnic or watch activity
- outdoor areas that support children's play and intergenerational use
- spaces for informal recreation, relaxation and social interaction.

Participants also expressed interest in sensory and nature-based experiences, including:

- water features
- planting and natural elements
- sensory-friendly landscapes that support wellbeing.

Some participants suggested the inclusion of community gardens or rooftop gardens, reflecting an interest in spaces that encourage community participation and connection with nature.

Participants also discussed the potential for outdoor performance and activation, such as informal performances, festivals or pop-up events. While there was enthusiasm for these uses, several participants also acknowledged practical considerations such as noise management, weather conditions and event logistics.

Traders in particular emphasised that the park should feel purposeful and active, rather than functioning as an empty lawn or passive landscape area.



Who raised it

Raised across multiple cohorts including:

- parents
- primary school students
- seniors
- multicultural groups
- traders
- people with disabilities (particularly in relation to the calming and regulating effects of nature)
- creative sector participants, particularly in relation to outdoor performance opportunities
- broader community participants.





Implications

Well-designed public open space will encourage regular visitation, informal social interaction and community activity.

Design:

- provision of greenery, gardens and planting that contribute to comfort and character
- shaded areas and sheltered spaces that improve usability in different weather conditions
- seating, pathways and gathering spaces that support informal use and social interaction
- play and activity areas that support children and intergenerational use
- sensory and nature-based elements such as water features or planting
- flexible outdoor spaces that can accommodate markets, performances and events.

Use:

- everyday gathering spaces where people can meet, relax or spend time informally
- opportunities for community activities such as markets, festivals, pop-up events, or outdoor performances
- recreational spaces that support a range of informal activities throughout the day
- community-led uses such as gardens, sharing cultural food or local programming.

User experience:

- a welcoming outdoor environment that encourages people to visit even when no formal events are scheduled
- comfortable and attractive public spaces that support relaxation and social connection
- a precinct that feels active and lively throughout the day
- opportunities for people of different ages and backgrounds to share and enjoy public space together.

3.7 Learning, making and knowledge exchange

Across several focus groups, participants described the precinct as a place where people should be able to **actively participate in learning, making and creative activity**, rather than only attending events or consuming cultural experiences.

Many participants expressed interest in maker spaces and workshop environments where people can experiment, build skills and work collaboratively. Suggestions included:

- maker spaces with equipment and worktables usable by both professional creatives and community members
- workshop spaces that support creative learning programs and skill-sharing activities
- environments where participants can develop practical skills through hands-on experiences.

Several participants also noted the importance of staff support and supervision in maker environments to ensure that equipment can be used safely and that participants can develop skills with guidance.





Participants highlighted opportunities to connect these spaces with youth programs and community learning initiatives, **creating pathways** for young people to develop creative and practical skills.

Participants also emphasised the importance of learning and collaboration spaces that support a range of activities, including:

- workshops and creative learning programs
- student learning and project work
- community education and skill-sharing
- collaborative creative development.

Some participants described the value of creating real-world learning environments that connect education and creative practice. This could allow students to interact with artists, creative organisations and industry practitioners.

Participants also expressed interest in opportunities to showcase work produced within the precinct, including:

- exhibitions of student projects
- demonstrations of creative processes
- presentations of community-created work.

In addition, some participants noted that the library component of the precinct could support learning through specialised resources, collections and research opportunities, complementing hands-on learning activities.



Who raised it

Strongly emphasised by:

- education sector participants
- students (both primary school and high school cohorts)
- creative practitioners and organisations

Also raised by:

- First Nations participant(s), particularly in relation to youth skill-sharing and creative learning
- broader community participants interested in workshops and community learning opportunities.

Implications

Spaces that support learning, making and knowledge exchange will strengthen connections between education, creative industries and the broader community.

Design:

- workshop and maker spaces equipped for hands-on learning and creative production
- flexible teaching and collaboration spaces that support classes, workshops and group learning
- storage and support areas for tools, materials and equipment
- exhibition and demonstration areas where student and community work can be displayed





- integration of library resources and learning spaces that support research and knowledge sharing.

Use:

- hands-on workshops and creative learning programs for different age groups
- youth programs that build practical and creative skills
- opportunities for students to connect with artists, creative organisations and industry practitioners
- community-led learning and skill-sharing activities
- exhibitions or demonstrations showcasing work produced within the precinct.

User experience:

- opportunities for people to actively participate in creative and learning activities rather than only attending events
- environments that encourage experimentation, collaboration and skill development
- stronger connections between schools, creative industries and the community
- a precinct that supports lifelong learning and encourages people to return regularly to develop new skills and interests.

3.8 Cultural identity, representation and genuine inclusion

Many participants saw the precinct as an opportunity to **celebrate the area's multicultural communities, creative scene and local history**, while ensuring that representation is authentic and meaningful rather than symbolic.

Participants highlighted the importance of cultural expression that reflects the communities who live, work and create in the area. Suggestions included:

- celebrating the presence and contributions of multicultural communities
- recognising and supporting the local creative scene
- showcasing the history and character of the area through storytelling and cultural expression.

Participants also noted that visible **cultural representation can help people feel that the precinct belongs to the community**, strengthening a sense of ownership and connection. Several participants also emphasised that cultural identity should be expressed through ongoing programming, storytelling and design, rather than just through isolated artworks or symbolic gestures.

Feedback from First Nations participants highlighted several important nuances. These included:

- concern that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures can sometimes be treated as part of a broader “multicultural” framing, rather than recognised in their own right
- a strong preference for genuine inclusion and collaboration, rather than tokenistic acknowledgement
- the importance of working with Traditional Owners and Elders on cultural representation,





including decisions about:

- artwork
- language and naming
- storytelling and interpretation.

Participants also expressed interest in visible and interactive forms of storytelling, including:

- portraits, sculpture or other public artworks
- etched maps or landscape elements that reference local history
- spaces such as yarning circles
- interpretive elements that allow people to learn about culture and history, including interactive or digital components.

Some participants also highlighted the importance of avoiding cultural identity that feels externally imposed or generic, emphasising instead that the precinct should be shaped by local knowledge and community voices.



Who raised it

Raised across several cohorts including:

- multicultural groups
- First Nations participants
- creative practitioners and organisations
- traders
- broader community participants.

Implications

Embedding local cultural identity within the precinct will help to strengthen its sense of place and help ensure that the precinct reflects those who live, work and play in the area.

Design:

- integration of cultural storytelling within the built environment and landscape
- public artworks, interpretive elements and spatial features that reflect local histories and cultures
- culturally meaningful spaces such as gathering areas or yarning circles
- design approaches developed in collaboration with Traditional Owners, cultural leaders and community representatives.

Use:

- programming that celebrates cultural diversity and local creative practice
- opportunities for community-led cultural events, festivals and exhibitions
- ongoing partnerships with cultural organisations, artists and Traditional Owners to guide cultural content
- activities that showcase local stories, histories and creative work.





User experience:

- a precinct that reflects the identity and diversity of Footscray
- environments where local communities feel recognised, respected and represented
- stronger community pride and ownership of the precinct
- opportunities for visitors and residents to learn about local cultures, histories and creative traditions.

3.9 Precinct integration with the wider Footscray CBD

Across multiple focus groups, participants emphasised that the precinct should not function as a standalone civic destination. Instead, it should operate as part of a broader network of cultural, community, education and commercial activity within the Footscray CBD.

Participants consistently discussed the importance of the precinct being physically and programmatically connected to surrounding destinations. This included stronger links to nearby cultural venues, education institutions, retail areas, community facilities, hospitals and public transport.

Several groups described the precinct as an opportunity to strengthen Footscray's existing creative and civic ecosystem rather than creating a new isolated hub. Participants spoke about the need for the precinct to complement and connect existing venues and organisations, helping to create clearer pathways between creative development, education opportunities and public cultural experiences.

In addition to physical connectivity, participants also emphasised that the impact of the precinct should extend beyond its boundaries. They discussed the importance of safe and welcoming approaches, strong pedestrian and cycle connections, wayfinding and activation that encourages people to move between the precinct and surrounding parts of Footscray.

Overall, participants expressed a desire for the precinct to contribute to the revitalisation of the wider area, enabling people to experience its cultural activity and community benefits even when they are not directly attending an event or entering the buildings.



Who raised it

Most strongly emphasised by:

- traders and business owners
- local creatives
- performing arts organisations and festivals
- education sector participants

Also raised by:

- women's focus group participants
- people with disability
- seniors





Implications

Strong physical and operational connections between the precinct and surrounding destinations will help ensure the project strengthens the broader Footscray CBD and supports existing cultural and community activity.

Design:

- clear pedestrian connections between the precinct and surrounding streets, public transport and nearby destinations
- safe and comfortable approaches to the precinct, including crossings, lighting and active edges
- cycle access and bicycle parking that support arrival from the surrounding area
- wayfinding that helps visitors navigate between the precinct and nearby venues, community facilities and retail areas
- public spaces and edges that visually connect the precinct with surrounding streets and activity

Use:

- partnerships with nearby cultural organisations, education providers and community facilities
- programming that complements existing venues and strengthens Footscray's creative ecosystem
- opportunities for shared events, festivals or cultural trails linking multiple destinations in the area
- activities that encourage people to move between the precinct and surrounding businesses and venues.

User experience:

- the journey to and from the precinct feels safe, legible and easy to navigate
- visitors can discover cultural activity through the surrounding area, not only inside the buildings
- the precinct feels embedded within everyday Footscray life rather than separate from it
- people encounter opportunities for creativity, learning and gathering throughout the wider precinct area.





4. Findings - cohort specific

4.1 Creative sector

Key themes

A precinct that supports “making”, not just presenting

Across creative cohorts, there was a consistent push for the precinct to function as a working creative facility:

- rehearsal spaces that are fit-for-purpose (and ideally match performance conditions)
- studio / making spaces and spaces that can be used regularly and for longer periods, not just one-off bookings
- secure storage so groups aren't “lugging everything in and out”
- embedding creativity in all spaces across the precinct and ‘thinking outside the box’ (eg, meeting rooms that may include a piano or no carpet for different types of activities).

Flexibility, within “fit-for-purpose” limits

Flexibility was widely supported, but creatives also flagged that “multi-purpose” can fail if spaces aren't designed for specific needs:

- black box / configurable theatre concepts were repeatedly preferred by local creatives
- some feedback highlighted the need for smaller targeted spaces for testing ideas and building audiences, not only large-scale venues
- outdoor performance was supported by some, but also seen as complex and easy to get wrong without infrastructure and planning (noise, weather, lighting, power, internet)

Operational affordability and practical access

Creative cohorts were specific about how design affects operating costs and access:

- build in practical elements now to keep venues cheap to run later
- reduce reliance on paid technical staff for every use (where possible)
- loading and logistics that work for real users (rigid vehicle/box van access; loading docks; bump-in/out efficiency)

Back-of-house and performer needs

Back-of-house was repeatedly emphasised, including:

- adequate green room size and amenities (including kitchenette in one group)
- safe and secure back-of-house circulation
- privacy needs in dressing/back-of-house (raised in circus cohort)

Entry anxiety and feeling welcome

Multiple creative cohorts described venues as feeling closed or intimidating and stressed the need to reduce “threshold anxiety” through:

- activation and openness
- visible community use
- layouts that don't feel disorienting or “rabbit warren” back-of-house





Technical priorities: practical, documented, genre-specific

Rather than “more tech”, the consistent call was for reliable, usable, documented capability:

- strong in-house systems (lighting/sound/projection) that don't require specialist staffing for basic use
- good acoustics and soundproofing essential
- circus cohorts strongly emphasised rigging clarity and capacity and adequate height
- preference from some for digital/projection rather than heavy scene flying mechanics.

Areas of variation within the cohort

Documented points of difference included:

- venue size and format
 - local performing arts orgs expressed a preference for smaller seating capacity (200–250) in that session
 - festivals/sector voices engaged with 500 seat logic but also noted commercial realities and that some shows need larger audience numbers to be viable
 - local creatives were split: some questioned the value of a large 500-seat venue; others acknowledged larger spaces are useful for schools/dance groups and broader uses
 - Many commented that both smaller and larger capacities could be accommodated through flexible design.
- traditional theatre elements
 - one participant wanted a more traditional proscenium approach in the local performing arts org session
 - festivals/performing arts org session included a differing view that an orchestra pit would be desirable
- outdoor performance
 - local creatives raised a genuine split: outdoor performance potential vs preferring outdoor space for passive enjoyment because performance outdoors requires a lot to do well

Non-negotiables and 'nice-to-have's'

Non-negotiables:

- affordability and “commercial access for local groups” (repeated in multiple creative sessions)
- flexible, usable spaces (black box/configurable theatre; multipurpose rooms with real functionality)
- rehearsal spaces (including needs aligned to performance conditions)
- practical loading access (box van/rigid vehicle access raised explicitly)
- rigging capacity and adequate height (circus cohort: 7–9m clear height as a minimum workable threshold for many acts; rigging must be clearly documented)
- safety and access to/from venue (including safe access via public transport raised as a must in one session)

Nice-to-haves:





- full commercial kitchen (beyond kitchenette)
- quiet rooms / breakout spaces (listed as nice-to-have in local performing arts org session)
- grand piano (listed as nice-to-have in festivals/performing arts org session)
- outdoor performance space with secure storage (raised as desirable in festivals session; also widely discussed with caveats)
- non-concrete floors / venue mats / Tarkett available (circus cohort)
- foyers with usable height (circus cohort)
- promotional visibility: signage, bulletin boards, pop-up shops, displaying/selling art throughout to keep the precinct dynamic (local creatives)

4.2 Trader and business cohorts



Key themes

Safety (and perceptions of safety)

Safety and perception of safety was a strong issue:

- multiple participants described not bringing children into central Footscray
- emphasis on lighting designed for real safety, not decorative effect
- active edges and “eyes on the park” (passive surveillance) as factors that change how safe a place feels
- parks should have defined purpose/activity rather than “vague open lawn”

At the same time, traders also emphasised that activation and purpose can improve safety outcomes without relying only on enforcement.

Connectivity beyond the site

Traders repeatedly raised the concern that the precinct must not become an isolated “civic block”:

- traders emphasised connectivity that extends into broader Footscray
- need for wayfinding and linkages so theatre-goers move through surrounding streets and businesses
- concern that without broader street improvement, the precinct alone may not shift perceptions of Footscray.

Activation and economic benefit

Traders stressed practical outcomes:

- consistent foot traffic, not only event-night spikes
- additional patrons to surrounding retail/hospitality (a “dinner and show” culture was raised)
- anxiety about repeating decline patterns seen in other commercial strips (future proofing)

Local identity must feel authentic

Traders reinforced that the precinct must not feel generic:

- embed local artists and local culture
- avoid “externally imposed” identity





Non-negotiables and 'nice-to-have's'

Non-negotiables:

- safety and perception of safety improvements (lighting, visibility, active edges, defined uses)
- connectivity/wayfinding that links the precinct to surrounding businesses and streets
- activation beyond event nights (regular use; day-to-evening activity)
- a precinct identity grounded in Footscray, not generic

Nice-to-haves:

- sensory/experiential design elements (engaging multiple senses; natural materials; native planting)
- iconic feel that creates “occasion” without feeling intimidating
- stronger mechanisms for ongoing feedback from visitors (raised in the second trader session)

4.3 Education sector

Key themes

Education participants consistently framed the precinct as an integrated learning and “third space”, not just a facility adjacent to schools/universities.

Key themes included:

- real-world, work-integrated learning connecting students with industry and practising artists
- modular and technically equipped spaces that can support different disciplines, group sizes and event types
- “third spaces” that offer what students can’t easily get at home (quiet study + high-speed internet + relaxed gathering + specialised collections)
- stronger physical/programmatic connections between VU campuses and the precinct to reduce barriers and normalise access
- conference-capable spaces so the precinct can function as a regional convening hub.

Non-negotiables and 'nice-to-have's'

Non-negotiables:

- open and welcoming access
- affordable, bookable, available creative production spaces (with extended opening hours)
- reflect Footscray’s multicultural community
- regular programming and events
- world-class but accessible performance facility
- flexible, reconfigurable rooms
- industry-standard technical infrastructure

Nice-to-haves:

- conference facilities
- opportunities for an Indigenous music archive to have a physical home/exhibition presence





4.4 Students

Key themes - high school students

High school students prioritised:

- safety was the highest priority (people, unfamiliar environments and design aspects)
- food, particularly affordability of food (and to a lesser extent shopping)
- places to meet and spend time with friends
- desire for quieter hangout spaces away from overcrowding and noise
- cleanliness, light and greenery as cues of calm and safety
- inclusive, friendly spaces that are easy to navigate
- “things to do” (activities, games, sports, entertainment, events)

There was some variation in views around preferred environments:

- some want lively activity and entertainment
- others strongly prefer calm/quiet spaces that feel less overwhelming

Key themes - primary school students

Primary school students prioritised:

- reading and Manga (these were the most repeated activity across all questions)
- cosy, calm and comfortable spaces
- play and activity
- creative performance and expression (theatre, recording)
- gaming and technology (3D printing mentioned frequently)
- fun through activities with friends
- adventure and imagination

Non-negotiables and ‘nice-to-have’s’

Non-negotiables:

- safety
- comfortable spaces
- places to gather with friends
- activities
- play spaces

4.5 Parents/ families

Key themes

- toilets: visibility, location and child-friendly independence mattered a lot (not down a corridor; visible from the library desk; doors not too heavy; kids can reach fittings; hooks; change tables)
- secure outdoor space connected to the library so children can use different zones safely
- play environments that are adaptable (movable play items; “feels new” each time)





- pods for working/phone calls that are soundproof and bookable (support for juggling caregiving and work)
- preference to avoid spaces that feel overly commercialised or dirty
- safe access (crossing points, traffic, lighting)
- interest in tech/play features (PlayStation, simulator, learning screens, craft/tech space, augmented reality- within a safe environment)

Non-negotiables and 'nice-to-have's'

Non-negotiables:

- safe enclosed outdoor space connected to the library
- toilets (all gendered and visible, not hidden)
- lights
- a place where kids feel safe
- ability to make tea or coffee

Nice-to-haves:

- water fountains
- flexible/movable play spaces
- low-cost or free parking

4.6 Older people



Key themes

Seniors repeatedly emphasised the precinct as a place that supports:

- safety was frequently raised (physical and cultural)
- comfort as a condition of staying (seating, shade, weather protection)
- seamless accessibility integrated into design (ramps, wide doors, space for scooters, easy way finding)
- social connection as an intentional outcome (combat loneliness)
- age-affirming environments where older people feel valued and able to contribute
- lifelong learning and creative participation (learn/teach/create)
- greenery and nature as essential to wellbeing
- affordability as critical for equity and access

Seniors expressed an interest in a broad and diverse range of activities and uses across the performing arts centre, library and open space – with the overarching emphasis on involvement, participation, learning and connection.

Non-negotiables and 'nice-to-have's'

Non-negotiables:

- shade
- green spaces (trees/grass/sensory garden)
- weather protection outdoors (rain cover / wind protection)





- quiet/warm spaces
- plenty of benches/comfortable seating (including seniors priority seating)
- safety and security
- toilets
- kitchen space
- ramps and wheelchair/walker-friendly access (including storage for walkers; wide spaces)
- a place where older people are seen, valued and able to contribute

Nice-to-haves:

- technology hub designed for all ages
- makerspace and tool borrowing
- recording studio and practice spaces
- music programming (regular/weekly), art classes, talks, community theatre
- transport supports (community bus; accessible bus stops; frequent evening service)
- cost reductions for seniors for shows (or free options)

4.7 Multicultural community cohorts

Key themes

Inclusion is social as well as physical

Participants described inclusion as:

- visible signs of welcome (multilingual cues, clear wayfinding) but especially the experience of being greeted (friendly face/smile at entry)
- spaces that support intergenerational participation and carers + families together
- spaces that bring people from different backgrounds together
- all gender toilets and accessible spaces
- affordability

Participation and “spaces to do things”

Strong emphasis on active involvement:

- workshops, cooking, games, sports, art, movies, music (emphasis on these spaces being designed so people can make noise, make mess without worrying others/fear of damage)
- outdoor spaces should be experiential (water play, gardening, smells, food), not passive only
- spaces where people can talk and connect (not traditional library quiet)

Cultural celebration and practical support

Participants wanted the precinct to support cultural festivals and also act as a community resource:

- spaces for cultural teaching and passing on culture
- opportunities for connection through community made food (not just a café)
- programs where services can present information/support (e.g., safety, health, legal/visa support)
- cultural ambassadors/outreach to encourage participation





Design must reflect Footscray

Strong emphasis on:

- bright, colourful, vibrant feel (but not glitzy or corporate)
- grounded in local community and history
- visible representation of Indigenous history, settlement and migration stories
- intuitive design for people who don't read English well

Non-negotiables and 'nice-to-have's'

Non-negotiables:

- community halls/spaces for cultural festivals and activities
- ongoing community involvement in shaping delivery
- education/support access for community
- community-driven food (not just a café)
- creative elements that attract diverse community
- parks and outdoor space
- ability to make free tea or coffee/ water

Nice-to-haves:

- multifaith rooms
- child minding spaces/services
- free fruit/juice raised as supportive for community in need
- transport supports for older CALD community members (bus)

4.8 First Nations

Key themes

This session strongly emphasised “genuine inclusion” and governance, including:

- concern that Aboriginal people can be excluded when multiculturalism is discussed
- desire to avoid tiptoeing or tokenism
- strong preference for working with Traditional Owners/elders on representation, artwork, language, naming
- visible storytelling approaches: portraits of elders, visual stories, etched mapping, sculpture, yarnning circle
- interest in interactive learning/interpretation (sensory elements, QR-style learning)
- welcoming environments: front desk/security arrangements can make people feel unwelcome; staff welcome is important
- maker spaces linked to youth skill-sharing and staff support for equipment use
- dedicated spaces for young people

4.9 People with a disability

Key themes





This cohort provided detailed, practical accessibility feedback, emphasising the need to go “beyond compliance”:

- sensory regulation (lighting, noise, glare, smells, harsh sunlight)
- quiet/calm-down rooms
- nature/greenery as regulating
- independence through wayfinding (symbols, colour-coded routes, ability to see inside before entering, digital navigation tools)
- amenities designed for real life (multiple accessible toilets; gender-neutral/family-friendly; adult nappy bins; charging points including mobility scooters)
- security approaches: uniformed security can feel intimidating; preference for less confronting approaches
- connection to wider precinct: access begins before the building (safe pedestrian routes, public transport links, crossings, lighting between venues)

Non-negotiables and ‘nice-to-have’s’

Non-negotiables:

- quiet spaces/calm-down rooms
- wider doors, bigger lifts, smooth wide paths/ramps
- multiple accessible toilets + inclusive amenities
- clear wayfinding with symbols and visual cues
- patient staff and accessible communication materials
- refreshment area (tea/coffee)

Nice-to-haves:

- volunteer programs / supports to help people attend
- technology access supports
- translator availability and accessible comms

4.10 Health and homelessness sector

Key themes

This cohort focused on dignity, inclusion in practice, and the role civic spaces can play in basic support:

- non-institutional welcome: how you greet people matters; concierge/peer support models
- avoid design that sends exclusion signals (e.g., outdoor seating where people can’t lay down)
- practical basics: lockers/storage, charging points, water refill, bathrooms, showers (with safety features), disposal containers, hygiene products
- service integration models (co-location or structured partnerships):
 - drop-in/hot desk for service providers
 - peer workers
 - data capture to advocate for services
- safety balanced with dignity:
 - mixed views: security presence vs safety through proactive health/social support response





- staff training and de-escalation processes stressed
- role in extreme weather response: safe space during heat events; shelter needs

Areas of disagreement or variation within the cohort

There were differing views about the best way to achieve and balance safety with dignity: one advocated for visible security, and others advocated for achieving safety through proactive support response rather than security officers.

Non-negotiables and 'nice-to-have's'

Non-negotiables:

- lockers / storage
- safe basic needs access (water, toilets, charging)
- welcoming entry experience
- accessibility
- relationship/partnership with homelessness/human services sector (spaces + staff training)
- lived experience engagement (in programs, events, arts/cultural features)

Nice-to-haves:

- lived-experience-led exhibitions and storytelling
- permanent murals representing different community members
- structured celebration/recognition of key calendar days relevant to homelessness and overdose awareness through art programming

4.11 Women

Key themes

This group discussed safety and welcome through a gendered lens, with emphasis on:

- clean, well-lit environments and safe streets/approaches
- avoiding dead/empty spaces (especially around key streets)
- cycling access and safe bike parking/cycle paths
- wayfinding and how the approach feels (not through dark/unsafe areas)
- inclusive facilities (all-gender toilets; more than one accessible toilet; wider entrances)
- features to support parents (private pods for calls/zoom meetings; earlier opening times)
- incorporating diverse languages and cultural symbols to reflect the community
- future-proofing through useful technology and tools (3D printing, podcasting, sewing, tool library)
- balancing affordable local access with sustainability and community ownership

Non-negotiables and 'nice-to-have's'

Non-negotiables:

- Shade
- Accessible bookable spaces (dance)
- Performance / theatre





- Precinct-welcoming, green, outdoor screen
- Rest, nature, wellbeing, restful vibe
- Park – Indigenous native plants accessible, bookable spaces (dance specifically raised as “one thing that must be part”)

4.12 LGBTIQA+



Key themes

This cohort had a consistent focus on:

- libraries as “already safe” spaces
- concern about exclusion/gentrification: ensuring people who currently gather in public spaces (e.g., the mall) aren’t displaced or made unwelcome
- inclusion signals matter (rainbow lanyards/stickers)
- all-gender toilets and a mix of open and smaller/private rooms
- seating and shade in green spaces (and not removing these to deter people)
- quiet/chill-out spaces
- desire for low-cost/free events and queer community events (Midsumma referenced)
- practical parking/access needs (free parking; accessible parking; 24-hour toilets accessible from outside)

Non-negotiables and ‘nice-to-have’s’

Non-negotiables:

- wrap-around supports for people in need
- security presence to feel safe (as stated by participants)
- more LGBTIQA+ books and magazines
- all gender toilets
- seating/shade and accessible parking
- free tea/coffee

Nice-to-haves:

- rooftop garden with views
- outdoor theatre space
- spaces for catering during small-scale events





5. Findings - differences between cohorts

The consultation revealed a high level of shared priorities across cohorts, however, some areas of difference emerged when comparing the perspectives of different groups.

These differences are not direct conflicting views between groups, but reflect different priorities, expectations or tensions that will need to be balanced.

5.1 Professional creative infrastructure vs broad community flexibility

Creative organisations emphasised the need for spaces designed specifically for artistic production, including rehearsal studios, technical infrastructure, rigging capacity and appropriate back-of-house facilities.

Their feedback highlighted the risk that highly flexible “multi-purpose” spaces can fail to meet the practical requirements of professional creative work if they are not properly designed.

In contrast, other cohorts often prioritised flexible, multi-use spaces that could accommodate a wide range of activities, such as:

- workshops
- community meetings
- learning programs
- informal creative activities.

5.2 Venue scale and format within the creative sector

Creative cohorts themselves expressed different views about the appropriate size and format of performance venues.

Examples included:

- some participants advocating for smaller venues (around 200–250 seats) to support experimental work and emerging artists
- others emphasising the importance of larger venues (up to around 500 seats) to accommodate touring productions, festivals and larger audiences.

There were also different views on venue configuration, including:

- support for flexible black box theatre formats
- interest from some participants in more traditional theatre features.

These differences reflect the diverse needs of the performing arts ecosystem. Smaller venues support creative development and emerging work, while larger venues support touring productions and large audiences.





5.3 Safety and security vs openness and inclusion

Safety was a shared concern across many cohorts. However, groups differed in how they believed safety should be achieved.

Some participants - particularly traders and some community cohorts - emphasised:

- visible safety measures
- security presence
- strong lighting and active public spaces.

Some traders expressed concerns about safety and public behaviour in nearby spaces.

Other cohorts expressed concern that civic redevelopment projects can unintentionally lead to displacement or exclusion of people who already use public spaces. And that overly securitised environments can feel exclusionary or intimidating, particularly for marginalised groups.

Participants from social service and LGBTIQA+ groups emphasised the importance of ensuring that the precinct remains welcoming to people who:

- currently spend time in public areas
- may be experiencing homelessness
- may not participate in formal programs.

They also emphasised the importance of:

- welcoming environments
- staff approaches that prioritise dignity and inclusion
- avoiding design features that intentionally deter certain users.

5.4 Public space activation vs calm and sensory comfort

Some participants emphasised the need for public spaces that feel active and lively, including:

- events
- markets
- performances
- courts and opportunities for sports and games
- visible activity.

Other participants emphasised the importance of calm, comfortable environments, particularly for people sensitive to overstimulation. These participants highlighted needs such as:

- quiet spaces
- low-sensory environments
- greenery and nature-based settings.

Many participants suggested that the precinct should provide both types of environments, allowing users to choose the level of activity they prefer.





5.5 Authentic local identity vs externally imposed identity

Participants broadly agreed that the precinct should reflect Footscray's local identity and diversity. However, some cohorts expressed concerns about how this identity might be represented:

- Traders and creative participants emphasised the importance of avoiding generic or externally imposed cultural branding.
- First Nations participants emphasised the need for genuine collaboration with Traditional Owners, rather than symbolic inclusion.
- Multicultural participants emphasised the importance of visible representation of the diverse communities who live locally.

Ensuring that cultural expression emerges from local communities and partnerships, rather than being imposed through design alone, will be important for the credibility and acceptance of the precinct.

