

## **National Cultural Policy, Public Consultation Submission**

### **Arts and Creative Industries Advisory Committee**

#### **City of Greater Bendigo**

##### **Introduction**

Greater Bendigo has a population of 121,470 people and is situated on the traditional lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung people, in central Victoria. Surrounded by a greenbelt of forest our natural heritage includes Box-Ironbark Forest that supports a rich array of flora and fauna, and mallee eucalypts of the 'Whipstick Scrub'.

Greater Bendigo's history is defined by resilience, creativity, innovation and invention; from First Nations people who shaped and nurtured this Country for thousands of years to the European and Chinese migrants adapting to this unfamiliar landscape.

Inventiveness was needed for survival, a legacy that remains strong in the Greater Bendigo community and is evident in our entrepreneurial spirit and the contemporary success of our creative industries.

Commencing in 1871, the Bendigo Easter Festival is one of Australia's longest-running community events celebrated with long standing Chinese cultural traditions, featuring Dragon Dai Gum Loong (the world's longest Imperial Dragon). Combined with community parades, art shows, music and a free festival in Rosalind Park, with estimated 80,000 people attending in 2026.

In 2019, Bendigo was proudly designated as Australia's first UNESCO Creative City and Region of Gastronomy, joining a global network that celebrates creativity as a driver of sustainable urban development and recognises both the city and broader region for its diverse and innovative food and beverage culture economy.

The City of Greater Bendigo (The City) plays an important role in the cultural and creative industries, actively working to support and retain creatives and attract more people and enterprises to the region.

In 2024-2025, City managed venues and programs delivered: 804 events and performances at the Capital Theatre and Ulumbarra Theatre with 138,554 attendees; Bendigo Art Gallery held 13 exhibitions attracting 169,172 visitors; 37,697 visitors attended 6 different exhibitions at Djaa Djuwima First Nations' Gallery; and 734 local artists were supported to participate in 87 community arts events.

## **Context**

This submission is made on behalf of the City of Greater Bendigo's (the City) Arts and Creative Industries Advisory Committee (ACIAC). The ACIAC is a representative body of arts and cultural leaders that advise the City on issues, trends and opportunities impacting the arts, cultural and creative industries both in a local context and with an eye to national and international conversations. The ACIAC also contributed to and provides oversight of the City's Greater Creative Bendigo Strategy, and Creative Action Plan 2025 – 2029.

The City of Greater Bendigo's [Creative Action Plan 2025 - 2029](#) recognises the creative industries as a core driver of regional identity, participation, and economic growth, based on the following 6 pillars:

*CONNECTING to Country and culture*

*INSPIRE a culture of creativity*

*CREATE more activated spaces*

*NURTURE and support talent*

*CHAMPION inclusion and access*

*SHOW the world*

## **Summary**

While the creative industries harness creativity to tell stories, creativity itself is not limited to the arts. It is a critical capability across all sectors, driving innovation, shaping policy and enabling systems to evolve.

As we enter an increasingly digital and automated age, this human capacity for meaning making is more important than ever.

*REVIVE* has made significant progress in strengthening funding, infrastructure and workforce conditions. The opportunity now is to extend this foundation by embedding creativity and storytelling across the systems that shape society. At the centre of this is the artist and the creative thinker.

## **Pillar 1 — First Nations First**

For Australian Art and Storytelling to truly reflect our profoundly deep cultural and historic richness – an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led and framed cultural policy is essential. It will also help distinguish and further establish a truly Australian way of doing and being in the creative and cultural context. This will enhance and empower a truly Indigenous and uniquely Australian world view in our arts and culture sector.

### **Actions:**

- Support First Nations identified roles within cultural organisations. Recognising the value of First Nations cultural leadership. Encouraging cultural organisations to embed First Nations programs and initiatives.
- First Nations leadership roles within public institutions and advisory bodies.
- Long term partnerships with Traditional Owners to guide place-based planning.
- First Nations cultural authority integrated into governance and decision making.

## **Pillar 2 — A Place for Every Story**

This pillar is significant for ensuring cultural expression extends to the full diversity of our community. The challenge is to be representative and inclusive. Within groupings such as disability there is great diversity.

Rather than having a list of measures to ensure inclusion and diversity it may be helpful to use the concept of using lenses that encourage conversation, education and advocacy.

Culturally safe and appropriately designed places for the sharing and presentation of story is essential, with embedded principles centred around Ceremony and Welcome to Country.

Expanded platforms have increased access, with the opportunity to integrate storytelling into civic, commercial and digital environments, strengthening belonging, participation and economic opportunity.

### **Actions:**

- Provide platforms where arts experiences can be presented in accessible formats. Works presented in civic spaces. E.g. Federation Square AV screen in Melbourne; specific show times or program for accessibility.
- Tool for creatives that provides a starting point for developing responses to diversity and inclusion within cultural activities.

### **Pillar 3 — Centrality of the Artist**

Centrality of the Artist must address the ways artists connect with other artists, with their communities and with the ecology of civic life.

Individual artists and smaller arts organisations have been severely impacted over the last 10 years, by the effective shrinking of funding pools, the effects of COVID, and increases in the costs of compliance, insurance, and materials. This sector of the arts needs urgent repair. We have lost capacity, resilience, the ability to just push through. We have lost talent, the vibrancy of activity, the edge that challenges what the new might be.

The small to medium sector is where transformational change has traditionally occurred. It cannot be left to continue in decline. The relevance of culture is at risk if this transformational edge is not sustained.

Supporting artists to take risks and push the edge of their practice is essential. Revising funding models and processes to ensure they are accessible and straightforward, with tiers for small, medium and larger projects as well as research, development, presentation and tour. The whole creative development pipeline.

Progress has been made in workforce conditions, yet artists are still primarily positioned as workers rather than leaders. Embedding artists across sectors as leaders in policy, systems design and innovation is the next step.

This approach builds a growing network of creative leaders who can initiate and sustain collaboration across industries, unlocking new pathways for innovation across health, education, industry, government and community.

Embedding artists within these systems also strengthens ethical decision making and informs legal reform, ensuring that emerging technologies, cultural production and public systems are shaped by human values, cultural knowledge and lived experience.

#### **Actions:**

- Support initiatives that encourage new collaborations, cross sector engagement with artists and creatives. Creativity as a leadership and innovation skill. E.g. Synapse CSIRO residences, City of Greater Bendigo Create Lab Grants fostering cross sector collaboration, ABC Top 5 early career researcher residency, Creative Emporium Hub's incubator program, Dumawul/DJAARA Creative Arts and Cultural Tourism Hub.
- Cross sector teams and advisory roles that include creative practitioners in policy and innovation processes, to ensure cultural, social and human perspectives. E.g. Megan Champion's 'We are untold' advocacy through the arts.

- A Creative Workforce approach that positions artists as leaders, with a funding stream for creative leadership and systems innovation.
- Inclusion of creative practitioners in ethical, legal and regulatory design, particularly in areas such as technology, AI and cultural rights.
- Recognising the small to medium sectors as innovators, with limited resources, support for brokering partnerships, new collaborations through providing support for producers that can support and nurture these partnerships. E.g. Extended residencies for artists in schools, some attempts made by state agency to broker education and artist relationships to varying degree of success.
- Promoting the arts with similar campaigns as ‘Australian Made,’ where supporting the arts in Australia is supporting our collective cultural identity. E.g. Bendigo’s Phoenix FM local radio campaigns.
- Allocation of public and commercial advertising space for artists.

#### **Pillar 4 — Strong Cultural Infrastructure**

The use of existing infrastructure and the design of new infrastructure must include the function of human and community interactions in ways that allow for shared activity.

Spaces for Interactions need to be promoted that are inquisitive, reflective, collaborative and open to research.

Culturally safe spaces that enable cultural engagement, education, presentation of story and ceremony.

Investment has focused on institutions and precincts. The opportunity is to expand infrastructure to include people, relationships and systems, with storytelling helping to align efforts and connect across sectors.

Cultural infrastructure belongs to the people and needs to reflect communities.

#### **Actions:**

- Investment in cultural infrastructure to include places for gathering, ceremony, and storytelling. E.g. Dumawul/DJAARA change of season ceremony in the Hargreaves St Mall, Bendigo.
- Cultural infrastructure includes affordable spaces that individuals, groups, and community can access, hire, present. E.g. Partnership between City of Greater Bendigo and CreateA ensembles.
- Investment in Community Art Centres in regional and small towns to build inclusion, social cohesion, strength and imagination. To bring awareness to the community of creative possibilities and cultural identity. Spaces where people can come together to develop and celebrate their sense of place.

- Hubs that enable innovation across industries, with innovation and collaboration at the centre. E.g. Emporium Creative Hub, Bendigo Tech School, Dumawul/DJAARA Creative Arts and Cultural Tourism Hub.

## **Pillar 5 — Engaging the Audience**

Making the audience experience uniquely Australian, differentiating from established models of experience, with more free and appropriately priced access to cultural events.

Access has grown through digital and broadcast platforms. The opportunity is to move from simply consuming content to creating and experiencing it together, in ways that are more engaging, personal and meaningful.

### **Actions:**

- Taking work to audiences where they are, outdoors, community festivals and events, local spaces. E.g. Paul Fletcher’s Imaginary Jungle interactive digital puppet show in the Hargreaves St Mall, Bendigo.
- Frameworks to measure cultural and social outcomes, participation and engagement alongside economic impact.
- Evaluation roles embedded within programs and institutions.
- National support for immersive, participatory and place based cultural experiences: Funding for large scale and community-based experiences, integration of arts into tourism, health and civic infrastructure. E.g. Arena Theatre Company’s ‘Creativerse’, Bendigo.
- Expanded platforms for storytelling across public, digital and commercial environments, amplifying diverse voices.
- Creativity embedded as a core capability within education systems, including curriculum, teaching practice and career pathways.
- Integration of creative thinking and storytelling across all subject areas.
- Artist led programs from primary through to tertiary education.
- Clear pathways linking education to creative and cross sector careers.

### **What would you like to see reflected in the next National Cultural Policy?**

It would be encouraging to see federal government’s spending on arts and culture keeping pace with population growth. Recognising the importance of access to arts and cultural experiences as an essential part of civic life for all Australians (source: [The Big Picture Report](#)).

The opportunity now exists to more deliberately connect creative industries, education, and emerging technologies into a single, coherent pipeline.

Creativity is recognised as a critical future skill, yet the creative process remains undervalued. The creative industries already influence outcomes across sectors through storytelling that shapes perspectives and policy. The next step is to embed creative thinking within the systems that shape those outcomes, positioning artists as leaders within decision making.

In these contexts, creative practice also plays a role in shaping ethical decision making and informing legal and policy responses, particularly as systems adapt to rapid technological and social change.

Equipping young people with the skills to thrive in a rapidly changing world through real-world, industry-connected learning, through acknowledging the future workforce requires hybrid capabilities: design, storytelling, digital production, systems thinking, and technical fluency.

This aligns strongly with global trends. The pace of technological change, particularly in artificial intelligence and digital production, is accelerating rapidly and reshaping how creative work is produced, distributed, and monetised.

For regional communities like Bendigo, this creates a unique opportunity to leapfrog traditional barriers to participation in creative industries, particularly through digital and remote-enabled pathways.

The opportunity now is to more explicitly connect creativity with education, technology, and workforce development, ensuring Bendigo is not only a place that celebrates creativity, but one that systematically builds and sustains its next generation of creative practitioners and industries.

## **1. Position creative industries as a future workforce priority**

*REVIVE* recognises the importance of creative practice and participation. The next step is to explicitly frame creative industries as part of Bendigo's future economy and workforce strategy. This includes areas such as digital media, game design, immersive technologies, and advanced manufacturing interfaces with design.

By embedding creative industry pathways into secondary education this will help students see viable local futures in these sectors.

Critically, this investment must reach beyond capital cities. Children and young people in regional and rural Australia miss out on the cultural and creative opportunities that are readily available to their urban peers. *REVIVE* can and should address that inequity directly.

## **2. Build a visible, place-based talent pipeline from school to industry**

One of the strongest opportunities for Bendigo as a regional centre is its ability to operate as a connected ecosystem. We recommend a clearer articulation of a local talent pipeline, linking:

- Schools and early exposure (e.g. Tech School programs)
- TAFE and university pathways
- Local creative enterprises and precincts

This could include structured industry immersions, co-designed programs, and creative residencies that start at the secondary level. The goal is to ensure that creative talent is not only developed locally but retained locally.

## **3. Leverage hybrid and experiential models of engagement**

Younger cohorts expect creative experiences that blend physical and digital environments. This is consistent with broader generational shifts toward hybrid, participatory, and community-driven experiences rather than passive consumption. This lends to the activation of spaces that function as both cultural venues and learning environments.

Creative spaces have the capacity to serve as living classrooms, where students engage directly with artists, technologists, and industry practitioners. Encouraging civic and accessible engagement with arts and cultural spaces.

When embedded across education and broader systems, creativity drives innovation, strengthens human centred design, improves wellbeing and builds the capacity to adapt in a rapidly changing world.

## **Conclusion: A vision for the future**

A sustainable and future ready economy recognises creativity as a national capability, with creative thinkers embedded within decision making across policy, education, industry and community, shaping how systems are designed and how people respond to change.

In this future, creativity strengthens economic outcomes, supports wellbeing and builds the capacity to adapt. It connects systems, deepens understanding and enables more human centred approaches to complex challenges.

This is the true value of creativity. This is how Australia can build a future that is innovative, connected and human.

### **Summary of key recommendations:**

- Embed artists and arts workers in decision-making roles within public sectors including education, health, science and justice.
- Recognise and embed First Nations cultural authority in public institutions and cultural organisations.
- Recognise and resource regional centres of arts and cultural activity.
- Develop practices and tools that provide pathways for the participation of the full diversity of communities and individuals.
- Develop career pathways for artists and arts workers from education to work that recognise the contribution of creative thinking.
- Provide organisational structures that encourages collaboration across arts practices and between arts and non-arts sectors.
- Provide infrastructure that enables people to come together, to celebrate, to participate in ceremony and to make art.
- Prioritise the promotion of locally created work that reflects local, regional and national identities.

## Case Studies

### Pillar 1 – First Nations First

#### Djaara Lights

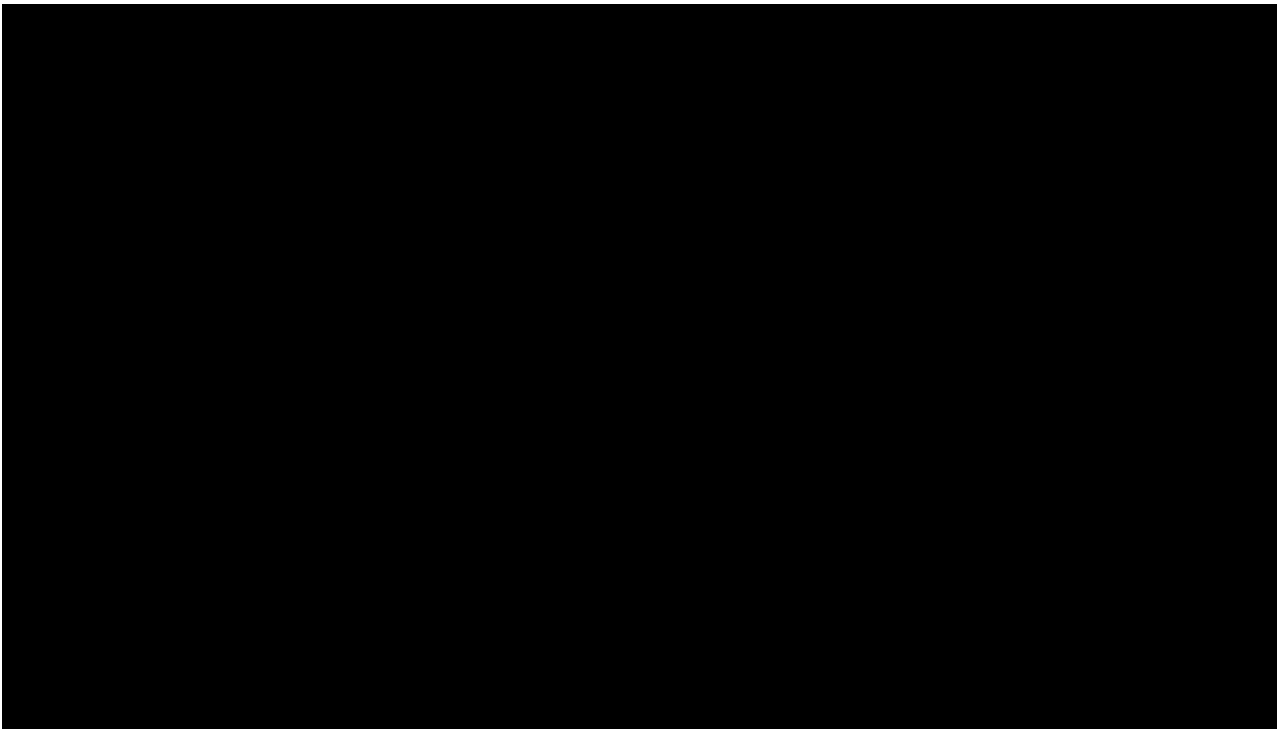
Djaara Lights is an initiative of the City of Greater Bendigo and DJAARA. A multi-site public art experience inspired by dreaming stories of Djandak (Country) from Dja Dja Wurrung people, the Traditional Owners of Bendigo.

Artworks by [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and First Nations students included Illuminated Sculpture, Augmented Reality (AR), and Street Art.

Djaara Lights is a significant activation that embedded 21 new artworks into Oscars Walk and Bath Lane precinct, along with the Telstra Exchange building and neighbouring creek.

The artwork allows participants to experience Djaara stories of the six times (seasons) emphasising Dja Dja Wurrung language.

The project provided opportunities across the creative industries sectors, including creative producers, artists, project management, electrical, lighting design, landscape architects, fabricators of illuminated artworks, engineering, signage graphic design services, Augmented Reality services, communications, marketing, videographers, Photographers, Publicists and Education & Tech Partners.



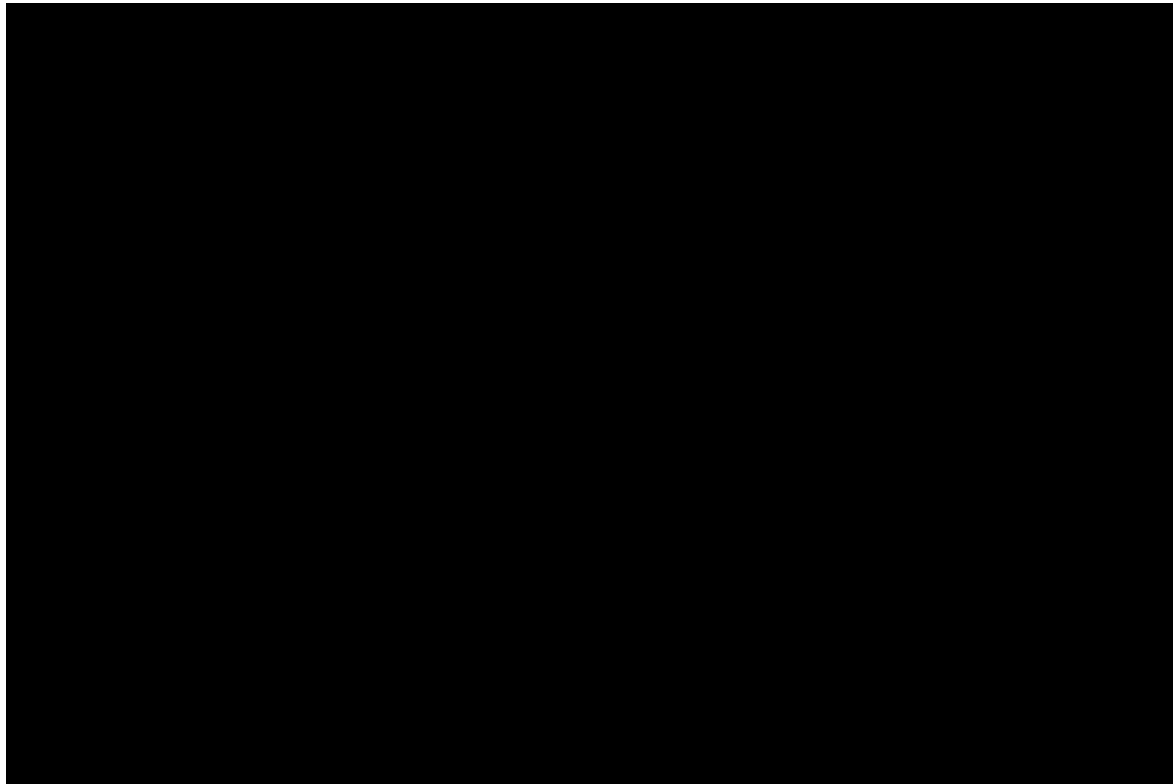
## **Pillar 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure**

### **Djaa Djuwima First Nations Gallery**

Djaa Djuwima is a dedicated and permanent First Nations Gallery on Dja Dja Wurrung Countr. An exciting and important cultural step in reconciliation, to better understand, recognise and respect the living culture and creativity of our Traditional Custodians of the land. Djaa Djuwima means to ‘show, share Country’ in Dja Dja Wurrung language.

For First Nations artists, this is a safe place for creative and cultural expression, to explore identity, heritage and connection.

Djaa Djuwima is owned and managed by the City of Greater Bendigo/ Exhibitions are curated by the Arts Officer First Nations who is supported by the First Nations Art Network.



### Pillar 3 — Centrality of the Artist

#### Young Producers Internship program

In 2025 – 2026 the City of Greater Bendigo supported a suite of paid entry level arts workers roles that encouraged access to career pathways in the creative industries.

These roles were aligned with specific project outcomes and will offer diverse and real-world experience in arts-based project delivery.

Supporting the pipeline of developing new workers for the arts, bridging the gaps between study, unpaid work and paid work in the creative industries.

Roles included:

[REDACTED], [REDACTED] worked with the City of Greater Bendigo supporting Eat.Drink.Art, a program that transforms cafés, restaurants, bars and businesses into galleries presenting the work of local artists.

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] worked with Arena Theatre Company supporting the delivery of Arena’s program in 2026. The role has now become ongoing.

[REDACTED], [REDACTED], worked with La Trobe Institute to support the delivery of LAI’s Stepping Out industry event in 2026.

[REDACTED], [REDACTED] worked with CreateA performance ensemble for people with a disability, supporting the delivery of the production of *Burnout Ballet*.

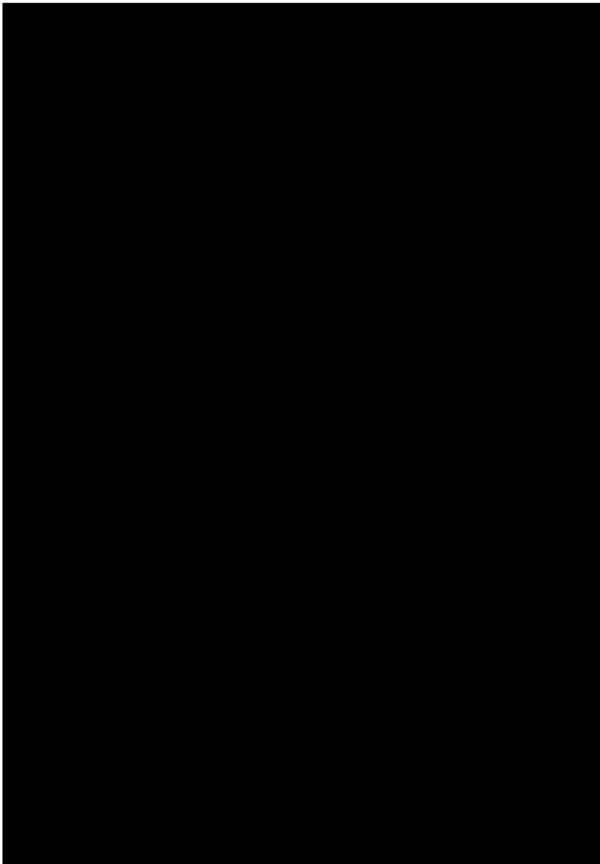
A few comments from interns:

‘The highlights of the role include getting to see the final launch of the event and how the artists had successfully installed their art within the venues. When following up with the venues, it was wonderful to see that they had all been really welcoming to the initiative and that they were seeing a range of new customers and people coming into space to enjoy the artwork,’ [REDACTED]

‘I loved the collaborative aspect of the theatre space. The tech crew, support workers for this project were lovely, experienced art professionals I got to work with, and not just as a young creative, but as a part in their team, with ideas they were curious to indulge,’ [REDACTED]

## Pillar 3 — Centrality of the Artist

### Create Lab – Supporting cross sector collaboration and creative research



Create Lab is the City of Greater Bendigo’s annual small grants program for artists and creatives, designed to support creative research and new collaborative relationships with sectors outside of the creative industries.

The program focuses on partnerships and development, with the opportunity to pilot new projects, engage in peer-to-peer mentoring, build evidence and documentation, and test the capacity for projects to develop further in the future.

In 2026 projects included:

ManAre.Space creative wellbeing program for men, cancer survivors’ polaroid project, community garden project.

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