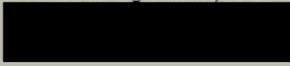
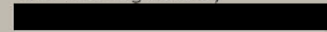


Merri-bek Civic Centre
Woi-wurrung Country



Postal Address
Woi-wurrung Country



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City Council

pathway for First Nations leadership, we also acknowledge the dynamic nature in which this structure would need to adapt, pending on the priorities of Mob.

In strengthening cultural rights, Merri-bek reaffirms the centrality of Traditional Owners in dialogue with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists. The development and creation of art is situated on unceded Country and should be recognised across all artforms, especially when placing First Nations first. The next iteration of cultural policy must acknowledge the lived experiences of First Peoples creative practitioners and assert self-determination as a vital component to the vibrancy and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to the cultural tapestry of Australia.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

The participation of diverse artists and audiences in arts and cultural activity is central to Merri-bek's role as both a supporter and producer. We provide significant support for grass roots and community-centred arts practice, and prioritise work created by First Peoples, CALD and LGBTIQ+ artists and communities across our programming.

Equitable access to funding and the removal of barriers to gaining grants at all levels of government is critically important to ensure the diversity of stories and creators. It is vital that all levels of government actively support and prioritise self-determined, community-led arts and cultural activity and ensure that lived experience is compensated appropriately. Arts and cultural activity need to be available across the country, include all artforms and there must be opportunities to engage as artists, audiences and participants.

Public libraries have a significant role to play in informing, shaping and presenting the stories of our diverse communities, particularly vulnerable and marginalised cohorts.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

It is vital that the National Cultural Policy has a whole of eco-system approach, with the artist at the centre. The income of artists has been declining for many years, and now the rising cost of living and reduced government funding are bringing the sector to a critical crossroads.

Funding at all levels of government needs to be increased to ensure that the creative industries can grow and flourish. Investments need to be artist led, with a focus on process and sustainability supporting artists to development work and connect with community.

Public libraries need to be recognised and supported for the essential role they play in disseminating culture, including through significant collections of works by Australian authors, and by the presentation of diverse creative programming. Public libraries are a source of funding support for many authors, and it is essential that the PLR/ELR schemes be maintained.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Increased multi-year support to the small-medium sector is vitally important to artists in Merri-bek. For many artists, these are the organisations that support the development of their career and

provide early to mid-career opportunities for presentation. By reducing or defunding these organisations pathways are lost, and the creative ecosystem is impacted significantly.

Merri-bek artists, along with those in many other inner urban Councils are facing the effects of gentrification. Access to affordable spaces within our municipality is rapidly declining leaving artists without development and presentation spaces. Federal and State government funding to support new arts infrastructure at the local level is urgently required, ensuring that access to facilities is affordable and available equitably across the country, enabling artists and audiences to participate in arts and cultural activity close to home.

The demands on public libraries continue to grow, and they must be supported to develop contemporary facilities that are flexible to our evolving communities, technologically advanced, and inclusive to all.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

Merri-bek strongly advocates for removing barriers for audiences, through ensuring the venues that we program are accessible, advocating for reduced ticket prices where possible, working across the municipality to ensure that there are localised arts experiences and working with schools, community organisations and community members to ensure inclusivity and accessibility. Federal funding for accessibility upgrades and audience development initiatives would be incredibly beneficial. Returning to a nationalised arts curriculum in schools would ensure we are working to not only encourage people to consider a career in the arts, but also to build audiences for our creative output in the future.

Public libraries across Australia offer an enormous suite of creative and learning programs and presentations that are free and accessible, many offering entry points into the cultural sector. Maker Spaces and other creative workshops, now very common in the sector, offer a safe and supportive space for community members to experiment or learn new arts, crafts, technologies and other creative skills.