



GEELONG ARTS CENTRE

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2025

geelong  
arts  
centre



Geelong Arts Centre is a leader, connector and creator of extraordinary cultural experiences for local and global communities.

**WE ASPIRE  
TO A FUTURE  
MADE BOLD!**







## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Geelong Arts Centre would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are located, the Wadawurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. For thousands of generations, this land has been a significant site of gathering, belonging and storytelling. We are proud to continue this tradition by embracing and celebrating the cultures of the First Peoples of Victoria and all First Nations peoples.

## THIS PLAN

The Strategic Plan was developed over a three-month period and involved the following consultation and engagement process:

- Workshops with Geelong Arts Centre Trust, senior leadership teams and whole of staff.
- Individual interviews with key stakeholders including state and local government officials
- Consultation with Wadawurrung Tradition Owners Corporation.
- Round table workshops with local cultural leaders, artists and other stakeholders

The plan was endorsed by the Centre's Trustees in June 2022 and is the primary strategic document as part of the Centre's comprehensive planning and reporting framework. This framework is outlined on page 26 of this document.

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR  
AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

This plan creates a shared future for Geelong Arts Centre. It defines a bold new era and outlines a clear plan for the future focussed on art, artists and audiences.

The Trustees, staff and our wider community have embraced the development of this Strategic Plan with optimism and a commitment to establish an ambitious, bold and shared path for the future. The breadth and depth of stakeholders engaged in creating this plan reinforce that we are on the right path in a shared vision for Geelong Arts Centre's future.

Across lively strategy discussions, Trustees spoke of the opportunity for 'fearless collaboration' in the presentation of work that is challenging, courageous, thought-provoking and memorable. Staff spoke of similar opportunities, for the presentation of bold work, offering something to and for everyone in the community, and stakeholders spoke of the unique position Geelong Arts Centre has as a leader, attractor and connector for the creative industries, employment and cultural tourism.

As the only State Government owned cultural institution located outside of Melbourne, it is essential that Geelong Arts Centre become a 'testing ground' for new work and an incubator of talent, which in turn, is shared in other regional or capital city centres and exported to the world. There is opportunity for a spirit of experimentation to bring new content development partners to the Centre, embracing a desire to extend the boundaries of the artform and create a community of shared practice.

Our partnership with the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners and other First Nations People in our region has been further strengthened through this planning and redevelopment process, and we look forward to celebrating the stories of our First Nations culture on our stages, with audiences and as part of our team over the life of this plan.

Our commitment is to engage with the broadest possible audience and present experiences which are unique, informed by our sense of place and also offer fresh perspectives on the world.

**Lesley Alway**  
Chairperson  
Geelong Performing  
Arts Centre Trust

**Joel McGuiness**  
Chief Executive Officer  
and Creative Director





# This plan heralds a new era for Geelong Arts Centre as the organisation looks to the future and to bringing its buildings to life.

It marks the completion of an ambitious redevelopment program and its reopening as a multi-venue facility, offering vastly expanded opportunities for engagement with the Geelong community and providing cultural leadership for the region and beyond.

The striking design of the building defines its own narrative and invites the creation of equally bold stories in the experiences it offers to visitors. The architecture and artistry throughout the exteriors and fabric of the building invite 'country' in and celebrate the Wadawurrung people, who have celebrated a special cultural connection with this site for millennia. The stories of our First Peoples' enduring culture will form an important dimension of Centre's offerings in the years ahead.

With this plan the Centre evolves as a gathering place for all – a place that boldly offers insights through performance, holds space for public conversation, supports creative experimentation and content development, and is a venue to connect, meet as a community and share a passion for the arts and creativity. It is the creative heart of Geelong.

The transparency of its architectural design offers the passer-by multiple windows into the creative process, showcasing opportunities for audiences, students and creative practitioners to engage with creativity and is an important dimension of the reimagined Centre. This focus aligns with ambitions for the Geelong region to develop the creative industries as a key dimension of its economic future.

The Centre is at the heart of a creative industries precinct, and the plan outlines pathways for collaboration and shared activity with the precinct partners to draw on the respective collections, scholarship and talent to offer unique experiences, reflecting Geelong's heritage, culture and bright future.

The opportunities in coming years are exciting and Geelong Arts Centre needs to embrace its leadership role, capitalising and collaborating on cultural tourism and positioning itself to be central to the delivery of the Commonwealth Games in 2026.

For more than 40 years, the Centre has built a deeply loyal audience across the Geelong community, with relationships established through childhood visits enduring through a lifetime of theatre-going. Reconnecting with this audience, while reaching out to the rapidly changing community of the Bellarine Peninsula, is a feature of this plan.

The learnings and impact of the pandemic have been manifold, not only in how we engage with audiences, but also in the way that engagement is manifest. The transition to digital programming with audiences has enabled a proliferation of platforms which invite content creation and sharing involving a new generation of makers – an expanding creative industry.

Ambitious arts organisations are now drawing on this creative capacity to establish new content creation pathways, and this plan reflects what we have learned from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as looks to the future.

The values that underpin and shape this plan are central to the Centre's operations. Their intent is to ensure that visitors receive a quality of service that is welcoming and memorable, that every aspect of the experience, from front-of-house, food and beverage, to cloaking and the technical support offered, encourages repeat visitation and celebration.





CONTEXT

This plan complements and responds to significant arts and culture policy initiatives at local, regional and state-wide levels.

Most important is the Victorian Government’s *Creative State 2025* outlining twenty-five actions with a focus on skills development and capability, and proposing a collaborative approach for delivery. Geelong Arts Centre will be key in its contribution to delivery of the plan as a regional and national leader.

The second is the City of Greater Geelong *Arts and Culture Strategy 2021–2031* which aims to ‘bring the region’s unique arts, culture and heritage into the life of every resident and experience of every visitor’.

A focus will be engagement with First Nations people both from the region and with communities across the state. Consultation with the Centre’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group, along with understanding priorities developed by the First Peoples Directions Circle, established as part of *Creative State 2025*, will support the development and delivery of a co-ordinated program of indigenous story-telling, and offer skill development opportunities for the community.

Geelong has been named as one of the four regional hubs for the 2026 Commonwealth Games. The Centre will begin planning to be an integral part of the cultural program offering unique opportunities to commission new works that capture the spirit of the region, as well as potential to coordinate significant parts of the program in regional Victoria.

The development of the plan has benefited from deep stakeholder engagement including consultations undertaken with key state and local government representatives, business and community leadership organisations, and partners and supporters across the arts community. A focus has been to ensure the Plan’s alignment with the key policy frameworks referenced above and capture a desire for other organisations to partner with the Centre to support content development, the creative industries skills to sustain a vibrant culture, and to enhance Geelong as a cultural tourism destination.

This policy context is reflected in the Goals and Success Measures of the Centre’s *Strategic Plan for 2022–25*.

A number of broader considerations have shaped the plan’s direction.

**Social** elements relate to a public demand for engagement with and experience of a more diverse range of artists, programming, and audience. The Centre has an opportunity to more clearly showcase and incubate the region’s cultural and social make-up, its artists, stories, heritage, and community. Celebrating the diversity of a changing society is important to many in the community and must be reflected in our staff, Trustees, audiences and art makers.

The way that **audiences** engage with culture has evolved and Geelong Arts Centre will be at the forefront of adapting and creating new opportunities. As audiences seek unique experiences and are curious to explore new cultural encounters, the Centre must establish itself as the leader of this vibrant experience economy.

Geelong Arts Centre will also be a key vehicle in supporting the wellbeing of the community, creating greater social cohesion through artistic expression, participation and engagement.

The **economic** context encompasses the rapid growth of the area and the diverse nature of its demographic and unique position as one of Australia’s fastest-growing communities. The Centre will be the heart of Geelong’s cultural precinct and collaboration and connection with neighbour institutions will bring this precinct to life. The growth of cultural tourism presents the opportunity for an innovative response to support both intrastate and interstate visitors to the region.

The region is also rich in potential to continue developing the creative industries sector and presents new opportunities for partnerships and collaborations with training institutions, design and other creative practices. The creative industries will be a growth area for the region and have significant economic benefits.

**Technological** influencers include the rise of ecommerce and the opportunity of digital content production. COVID-19 brought a response and ‘pivot’ to digital communication and content distribution in a very short period. This will continue and the Centre will be a leader in exploring new technologies and partnerships to advance opportunities for artists and audiences.

**Environmental** developments acknowledge the increasing impact of policies of the environment as a key community concern and shift in the way people access and experience the arts and culture. How the Centre responds and demonstrates leadership in its response to climate change could be a defining opportunity. The Trustees and staff are committed to being leaders in addressing climate change and the commitment to environmental sustainability must reflect industry best practice.

The plan will recognise Geelong Arts Centre’s significant history and herald a new era that celebrates contemporary culture and creative thinking. The plan will support the Geelong Arts Centre and its ambition to redefine the role of an arts centre.

The moment when an organisation can reset the relationship it has with its community is rare. The Geelong Arts Centre is at such a time in history and this plan will assist the Centre to grasp this opportunity.





VALUE  
PROPOSITION

Geelong Arts Centre is distinctive in the broader cultural landscape. The Centre is the only State Government Cultural Institution to be located outside Melbourne. When the redevelopment is complete, the Centre will be the largest regional performing arts centre in Australia.

• The Centre is embedded in the lifestyle of Geelong, with a sense of community 'ownership'. Its scale allows for flexibility and nimbleness in its operations. The Centre is a gathering space for the whole community to engage with arts and culture and will actively create space for all to be involved.

• The Centre will be the largest and a national leader in an emerging group of multi-venue arts centres in regional centres across the country. As such, there is a clear opportunity to develop a network of content collaborators, whose scale of programming and distinct narratives develop content of cultural significance for the touring network and whose output is world-class in its own right.

• The Centre will continue to evolve as a 'must-play' national venue for commercial touring product, conferences and events, and expand its entrepreneurial appetite in order to maximise return on investment and collaborative opportunities.

• The Centre has a diverse range of new venues and will be presenting a bold vibrant and rich mix of programming that includes local community, Australian arts organisations, commercial national and international touring, and the development of new work.

• The Centre is a key part of the Geelong cultural precinct, with opportunities to enhance the profile and identity of the district that includes the Geelong Art Gallery, Library, Platform Arts and Back-to-Back Theatre Company. This is complemented by proximity to the evolving Little Malop Street food and beverage offerings.

• The Centre's organisational culture has a level of autonomy that enables flexibility and adaptation in times of significant change. The Centre is a place of learning and development for arts administrators and allied professionals with structured career development pathways.

• The Centre optimises its role and government investment through Innovative collaboration, partnerships with artists, arts organisations and support of local business.

• The Centre plays a critical part in Australia's cultural infrastructure in the development and presentation of excellent art, a driver of cultural tourism and major contributor to the cultural economy in Geelong.



## VISION

Geelong Arts Centre  
is a leader, connector  
and creator of  
extraordinary cultural  
experiences for local and  
global communities

## PURPOSE

To nurture creative expression,  
lead artistic collaborations and  
inspire audiences, reaching out  
to all parts of our community.

## VALUES

### Bold

we embrace the freedom to challenge the boundaries of our work

### Welcoming

our smile celebrates inclusiveness and a shared passion for creativity

### Connected

we are proactive in connecting to and engaging with the arts and wider communities, reaching out and facilitating exchange of ideas

### Ensemble

our team seeks to work 'as one', respecting and valuing the role and contribution of all

## OBJECTIVES

Five objectives are at the core of the Strategic Plan  
guiding the Centre's key activity strands:

1

### Art

supporting artists, creativity and vibrancy

2

### Sector

supporting sector and market capacity development

3

### Audiences

making connections and supporting relevance for diverse communities

4

### Business

growing people, culture and commercial capability

5

### Assets

utilising and caring for our expanded infrastructure to  
create new opportunities for audiences, creatives and community

The five objectives are interdependent and together drive the organisation. The heart of the organisation is its people and organisational culture, bringing to life the extraordinary investment in cultural infrastructure through its redevelopment.

The Strategic Plan provides the evidence-based framework to support the Centre's submission for a Government base operational funding review, highlighting the capacity to lead and deliver ambitious outcomes in response to the investment made to reimagine the Centre as the state's most significant regional cultural resource.



# 1. Our art – presenting and creating great art



**OBJECTIVE 1**

Our art – presenting and creating great art

Geelong Arts Centre will be recognised for programming of distinctive character and depth, and providing experiences that extend the boundaries of artistic expression, engagement and participation. The opportunity is to activate the multiple spaces the enhanced Centre provides in a coherent and connected way, to build a clear identity as a dynamic multi-function hub for creativity.

This will be enabled by a content commissioning framework and the enhancement of partnerships with the National Performing Arts organisations, leading small to medium companies, independent artists, and the broader sector locally, state-wide and nationally.

**GOALS**

1. Sustain a robust partnership and programming dialogue with the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation and other First Nations organisations and engage a First Nations curator/producer.
2. Increase the diversity of cultural representation on our stages and in the creation of our art to more broadly reflect people from all backgrounds in our community.
3. Build partnerships with the National Performing Arts Framework (NPAF), leading Australian small to medium companies and local artists and organisations to enhance access to touring schedules, provide resources and opportunities for new stories, nurture community creativity and creative innovation.
4. Provide hiring opportunities that promote audience development and provide a complementary program of commissioned and curated content.
5. Lead the development of content delivery with a focus on new technologies, founded on entrepreneurial partnerships that extend the boundaries of multi-artforms and include activation and curation of complementary experiences across F&B, immersive events and foyer programming.

**SUCCESS MEASURES**

- Deliver annual First Nations programming stream in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Straight Island communities which promotes awareness of culture, history and reconciliation.
- Establish an artistic inspiration group to support wider sector capacity development.
- Commission a signature work to premiere at the Commonwealth Games Arts Festival that introduces the region’s story to an international audience.
- Deliver at least three new strategic partnerships that represent experimentation and innovation over the life of the plan with NPAPF and key small to medium companies.
- Deliver a commissioning strategy supporting the commitment to at least 2-3 works per year developed or co-commissioned by the Centre.
- Present or co-present at least one ‘premiere before capital city’ major work per annum from 2023.
- Establish an annual associate artist program.
- Develop a digital programming component as part of an annual strategy to ensure continuation of digital content.
- Increase Geelong Arts Centre Programming to represent 20% of overall output by 2024.
- Increase co-presentation opportunities with commercial hirers to minimum two events per year, as well as increase commercial hire revenue by 10% each year of the plan.
- Programming evaluation results achieve annual above 80% approval rating over the life of the plan.



# 2. Our audience – connecting and building

**OBJECTIVE 2**  
Our audience – connecting and building

Geelong Arts Centre will be recognised as the creative heart of Geelong with a strong sense of community ownership and diverse audiences that reaches far beyond the boundaries of the City. This will be achieved by re-engaging with an established loyal audience and reaching out to the region’s rapidly changing demographic with the offer of both cultural and social experiences.

The challenge and the opportunity is to sustain the interest and enthusiasm generated by the Centre’s re-opening through the life of the plan, as well as leveraging this opportunity to grow audiences for the future and ensure that diversity in all forms is genuinely reflected in our patrons.

**GOALS**

- 6. Ensure the customer experience optimises activation of the diverse spaces the Centre provides, supported by a communications strategy that builds awareness of the unique qualities of the reimagined Centre.
- 7. Develop community engagement and market segmentation strategies to better understand audience growth and diversification opportunities with a priority to extend artform boundaries and capitalise changing demographic boundaries.
- 8. Establish a loyalty initiative to reconnect and retain engagement with the Centre’s established audience.
- 9. Build Geelong’s cultural capital through state and regional tourism agency partnerships to position the Centre as a cultural tourism destination. Develop a cultural dimension to the proposed Geelong Convention Centre initiative as a supporting attractor to the conventions market.

**SUCCESS MEASURES**

- Embed and deliver on our second Reconciliation Action Plan for Geelong Arts Centre.
- Awareness levels in local, regional and intrastate communities increase by 10% annually over the life of the plan.
- A new audience framework is completed and aligned to all programming streams, including increasing targets for commercial revenue and venue hire.
- A loyalty program is delivered to support repeat visitation, which results in an increase in membership annually over the life of the plan.
- Develop formal partnerships with tourism organisations to market cultural tourism, including Brand Geelong Vision partnership.





# 3. Our sector – building creative capacity



**OBJECTIVE 3**  
Our sector – building creative capacity

Geelong Arts Centre will be known for its leadership in supporting pathways to professional practice.

The Creative Engine initiative is at the heart of the commitment to support new and emerging creative leaders. The Centre will become known as a testing ground for the development of new work and the creator of works destined for inclusion in national touring schedules.

**GOALS**

- 10. Expand the suite of programs delivered by Creative Engine that focus on professional development, workshops, network events and funding opportunities to become the region's most respected creative incubator.
- 11. Expand the delivery of the suite of creative learning programs for school students and creative industries skills training programs for tertiary education students in partnership with the Department of Education and Training, the Gordon Institute and Deakin University, and supported by the Melbourne Arts Centre Tech Connect initiative.
- 12. Lead the development of a peer network of centres across the country to co-curate or exchange programming.
- 13. Establish a residency and exchange program to support experimentation and iterative development of work in a professional and immersive environment, along with an Associate Artist Program in collaboration with others.
- 14. Explore opportunities to host cultural conversations or conventions for sector leaders from Australia and the Asian and Pacific regions.

**SUCCESS MEASURES**

- Participation in Creative Engine programs and events increases by 10% annually over the life of the plan.
- Participant satisfaction with Creative Engine programs and events is maintained at 80% or above over the life of the plan.
- The partnership with the Department of Education and Training delivers curriculum-aligned activities at the Centre and achieve participation growth of 10% annually over the life of the plan.
- A tertiary sector partnership delivers creative industries skills programs at the Centre to position it as a regional hub for training.
- The Centre leads the development and delivery of the collaborative regional creative industries public program as recommended in the *G21 Creative Industries Strategy 2021–2026*.
- The co-working space achieves 50% occupancy supporting delivery of the *G21 Creative Industries Strategy 2021–2026*.
- Establish a peer network across regional multi-venue arts centre venues to support collaborative commissioning of new work. A target of two new works over the life of the plan.
- A residency and exchange program established with philanthropic support with the ambition to deliver one signature experience by the final year of the plan.



# 4. Our business – creating a robust business with great people



**OBJECTIVE 4**

Our business – creating a robust business with great people

The Geelong Arts Centre will attract and develop the capabilities that guarantee its creative and commercial success. This will be enabled by two key frameworks – a people and culture plan, and a robust business model.

**GOALS**

- 15. Support the Centre’s values through the development of a People and Culture Plan, enabled by transparent internal communications, so that the team speaks with a common voice.
- 16. Plan to include the refining of the organisational structure to support delivery of the Centre’s goals, providing for significant growth and agility in its operations.
- 17. Establish an integrated environmental sustainability program to lead the implementation of state and national climate change goals.
- 18. Establish an integrated performance and change management framework to enable the capabilities required to support the Centre through a period of rapid growth and change.
- 19. Build capability to enable the creation of entrepreneurial partnerships to enable the provision of visitor services across the Centre.
- 20. Deliver the digital transformation project to integrate and streamline organisational systems and capability.
- 21. Build capacity to attract and retain philanthropic and sponsor support for programs and activities.

**SUCCESS MEASURES**

- Develop and implement updated four-year business and corporate planning to ensure optimal utilisation of expanded infrastructure .
- Workplace satisfaction increase by 15% in the first year of the plan and by 10% in successive years based on staff climate survey results.
- Develop and implement an employment and engagement plan to achieve agreed targets for a more diverse workplace, including First Nations employees.
- Trust approve an organisational sustainability plan with targets contributing towards achieving minimum net-zero emissions before 2050.
- By 2024, establish a Commonwealth Games Cultural Unit to lead the development of the regional cultural program.
- Develop robust business planning by business type setting appropriate financial targets for commercial, entrepreneurial and community projects.
- Secure and maintain one new major sponsor/partner to support programming or creative capacity annually over the life of the plan.
- The Digital Transformation project completed by 2023 and a new internal reporting framework delivered in the 2024 financial year.
- Embed and deliver on our second Reconciliation Action Plan for Geelong Arts Centre to develop opportunities for First Nations businesses and employment.



# 5. Our assets – utilising and caring for our expanded infrastructure to create new opportunities for audiences, creatives and community

OBJECTIVE 5

Our assets – creating opportunities, capitalising on and caring for the significant investment in infrastructure through our redevelopment, and the stewardship and ongoing improvement of our Centre.

Being the largest regional arts centre in Australia means bringing the buildings to life through completing, improving, managing and caring for our expanded infrastructure.

We must focus our attention into expanding a skilled, engaged, diverse and motivated workforce, and planning to maintain, continually improve and leverage the excellent and unique design of our Centre.

GOALS

- 22. Secure additional ongoing investment and funding support to ensure the organisation is able to operate an expanded Geelong Arts Centre sustainably and at optimal levels.
- 23. Capitalise on expanded infrastructure and diverse revenue streams from commercial business opportunities, including food and beverage, commercial partnerships and venue hire, as well as conferencing and events.
- 24. Collaborate with partners such as Deakin University, Committee for Geelong, G21 and others to further research and deliver on strategic priorities that respond to the unique infrastructure, design and capabilities of our expanded arts centre.

SUCCESS MEASURES

- Work with State Government to contribute to the Centre’s base operational funding review and clearly articulate the organisation’s contribution to the community and the creative industries sector.
- Secure an increase in base operational funding that allows for sustainable operations of the Geelong Arts Centre in its expanded capacity.
- Develop and Implement a comprehensive Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP).
- Develop a rolling 10-Year Capital Renewal Plan.
- Complete Economic Impact Study for Geelong Arts Centre, focussing on providing economic and sector impact for the Centre in the city and region.
- Leverage the work completed with Deakin University on our ‘Spatially Intelligent Arts Centre’ research project to implement at least two of the ‘proof of concept’ outcomes.



HOW OUR PLANS FIT TOGETHER





