

**WESTERN
EDGE**

STRATEGIC PLAN

2025 - 2028



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Western Edge acknowledges that we work and play on the unceded lands of the Kulin Nation.

We honour and pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging and recognise their continuing connection to and custodianship of land, waters and culture.

It is a great privilege to build community and tell stories on this land, home to the oldest living culture on earth. We commit to solidarity and action in the journey to reconciliation.

Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.



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ON OUR TERMS

Defining our terms with care, consideration and collaboration is central to our community-led practice. We acknowledge that finding the right language is challenging for people marginalised by the systems they operate in, and we are committed to the process of listening and reflecting our values and self-expression as they evolve.

IBPOC

Indigenous (People), Black (People), and People of Colour. We acknowledge the complexity of this highly contested term, and its US/Canadian origins. We use it here to delineate the specific, historic and continued socio-political oppression that IBPOC experience in the world.

Naarm

We use the traditional First Peoples' name for 'Melbourne' to acknowledge their rightful sovereignty and continued custodianship of this country, and practice solidarity in the struggle against colonisation and displacement.

The West

Our shorthand for 'Naarm's West', as colloquially used by our own community (it does not refer to the West in the global socio-political context).

Young Artists

As a performing arts company, we consider all young people who walk through our door to be artists. Our programs offer young people an evolution of practice from our in-schools programs to our professional touring productions – but this trajectory is not a necessity. We know our young artists come to us with different needs, at different periods, and consider everyone's artistic practice to be equally valid.

Marginalised

We use this term to describe the communities and people who experience discrimination and exclusion socially, politically and economically, based on intersections of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, neurodiversity and disability. We acknowledge that structural inequality is systemic and historic, and upheld by institutions as well as individuals, consciously and unconsciously.



“
I wouldn't say I found my space at Western Edge, I'd say I found my tribe. My people. No other institution feels like home.
”

PART 1. OUR STORY

OUR STORY

We are Western Edge, the only theatre company working with young people from IBPOC and marginalised communities across Naarm's vast and vibrant western suburbs. We tell Australia's new stories as a coalition of powerful artists, storytellers and cultural witnesses. We are a company of young voices, we are diverse and we are on the cusp of greatness.

Artistically, we create brilliant, courageous and subversive theatrical performances that challenge the mainstream establishment with a new creative culture and process. Our stories are grounded in our culturally diverse, refugee and migrant diasporas. Our work is embedded in community and carried out in local art spaces across the West.

Western Edge has been in the West for almost 30 years as a modest youth arts company with deep community roots. We have developed speciality community arts expertise over decades of navigating daily the disproportionate challenges entrenched in the region. Marginalisation, intergenerational and intersectional adversity is part of our everyday arts environment, exacerbated by the geographical vastness and isolation of the region and the historical sparseness of government investment.

By moving at the speed of trust in our communities over many decades, we have built a vertically integrated arts ecosystem in Naarm's West. We engage our youngest artists through school and community arts programs; we offer training, employment and leadership opportunities to emerging artists; and we create supported pathways to professional work within Western Edge and wider arts industry networks. This full circle model is our practical response to the under-representation of diverse voices and lived experiences on Australian stages, screens and leadership roles at every level of the arts sector.

Four years ago, Western Edge underwent the biggest transformation of our history. In that time, we have tripled our revenue, expanded to a highly competent and majority IBPOC core team of 10, doubled our artistic team to more than 40, undertaken a major Board transition and developed strong financial and governance foundations. Embodying diverse leadership and community representation, our Chair, Deputy Chair, Co-Artistic Directors, Co-Artistic Associates, 90% of core staff and 100% of our Lead Artists and Support Artists identify as belonging to multicultural and marginalised communities. To achieve this meaningful representation across the company requires significant scaffolding and resourcing and will require continued investment.

Our company is inherently international, with strong connections to the diaspora communities from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the Pacific Islands. In the next evolution of the company, we will grow from our local base in Naarm's western suburbs to carry out artistic collaborations with theatre companies from the Global South, and tour our new original Australian works nationally and internationally.

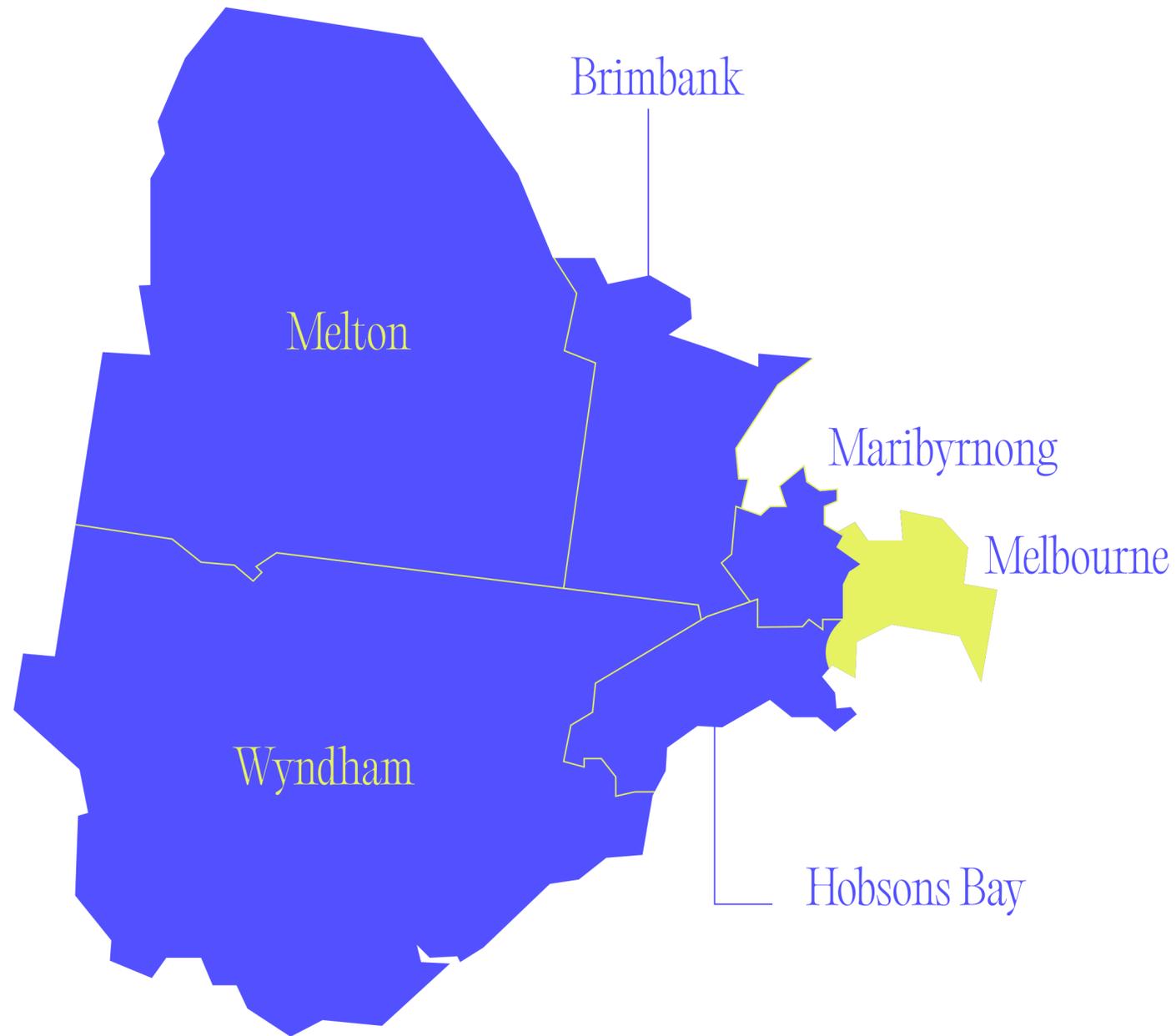
In the next four years, we will make an indelible impact on the West by leading the creation of its first purpose-built youth arts precinct. Working with an alliance of youth arts organisations, we will garner government and philanthropic support to deliver the creation of a formative space for the West. This site will be a hub of community engagement, youth arts activism and resilience, and next generation creative leadership.

We are now stepping into our power as artistic and cultural leaders spearheading the culture of art making in Australia. As Naarm becomes Australia's largest city, the West is taking its place as an ambitious region of creative and economic importance, powered by vibrant youth culture, ongoing immigration and unbeatable drive. We represent the ambitious, vibrant future of Australia and we invite you to read this Strategic Plan with a spirit of possibility, hope and excitement for what may lie in store.

“
Western Edge is family.
It's community.
It's the blueprint.”



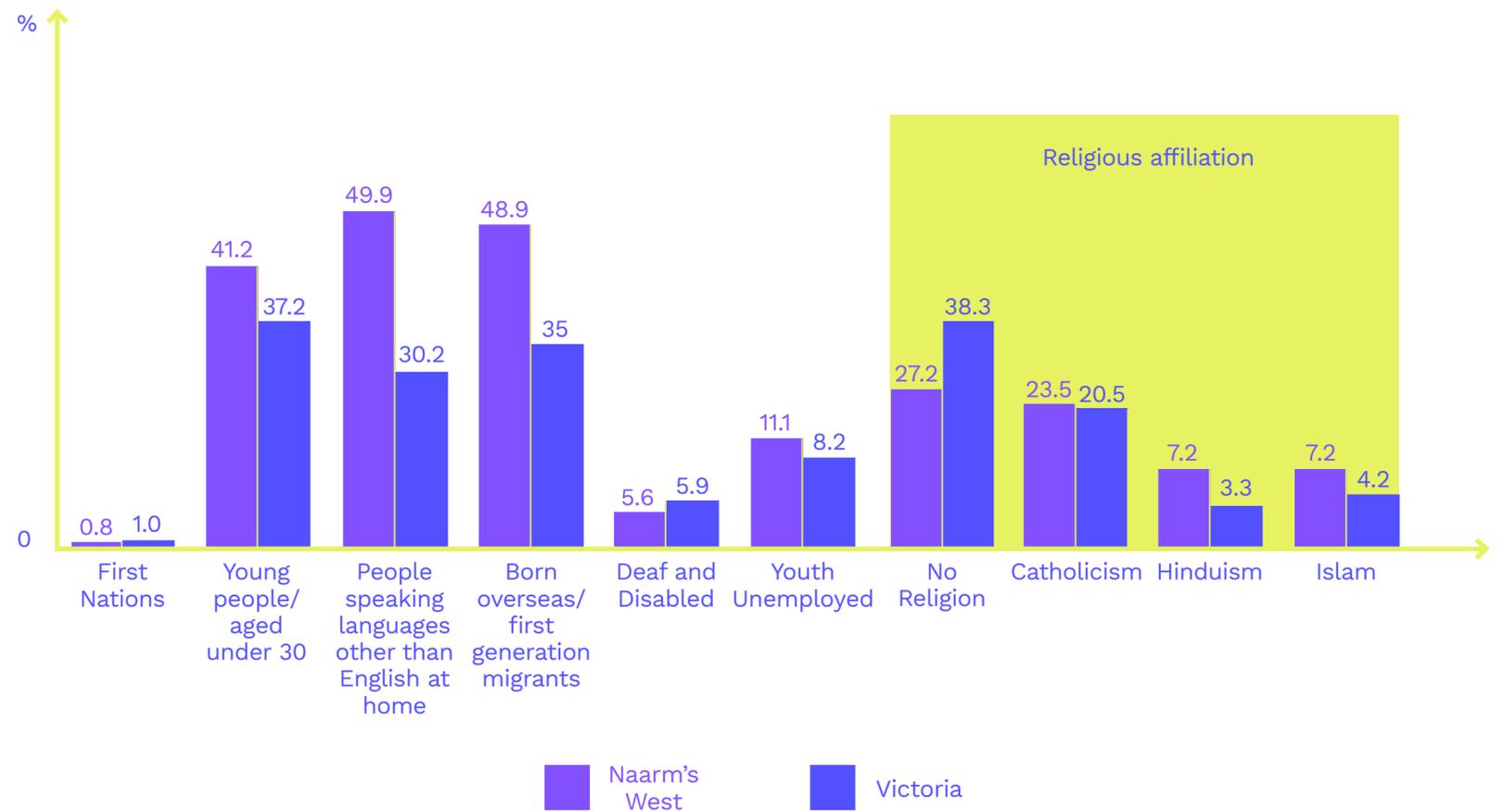
THE WEST



Naarm’s West is one of the fastest growing and most multicultural areas in the country with the highest population of young people. With over 130 cultural groups, 150 languages and 49% of people who speak a language other than English at home (the highest in Victoria) in an area that spans 6 local government areas (LGAs), the West is one of Australia’s most culturally and linguistically diverse regions.

It is also home to the most socio-economically disadvantaged LGAs in Victoria, with Brimbank as the most socio-economically disadvantaged, followed by Wyndham (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016, Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage).

Geographically, it spans from the inner West and increasingly gentrified suburbs of Footscray, Newport and Seddon, to central western suburbs such as Sunshine, Laverton and St Albans, to newly constructed and rapidly growing suburbs such as Melton, Wyndham Vale and Manor Lakes. Importantly, Western Edge serves all of these areas – from primary school programs in Melton to film screenings in Werribee to in-syllabus workshops in St Albans to community youth theatre performances in Footscray.



HISTORY

Western Edge began in 1994 at Footscray Community Arts with one school-based program and one community-based program. These core programs have become the foundation of our company. Some of our artistic highlights include:

Flemington Theatre Group (2009–2014)

An ensemble of emerging artists making work that specifically explored the African diaspora experience in the West, including *Black Face White Mask* that premiered in the Flemington Flats Housing Commission.

Beagle Bay Chronicles (2010–2013)

A creative and cultural exchange between Western Edge and First Nations community members in Beagle Bay, WA.

Fate (2013–2014)

A collaboration with Barkley Arts and hip hop choir collective Massive, combining theatre with old-school hip hop, gospel, traditional cultural tunes and protest music.

Caliban (2017–2018)

A decolonial adaptation of *The Tempest*, which toured to seven regional communities across Victoria.

Lele (2018–2023)

Part theatre, part siva, part drill rap, *Lele* was developed alongside our Pasifika community and an all-Samoan cast over five years. It explores gang culture and violence, the rise of drill rap, intergenerational knowledge and young Pasifika experiences of traditions and customs.

Voices of resistance, bodies of existence (2023-ongoing)

A liberation psychology approach to understanding community arts and cultural development in collective healing
- An ongoing PhD research partnership with Victoria University to document our community arts methodology.

Level Up (2021-2024)

Our groundbreaking professional development performing arts program for emerging IBPOC and marginalised artists offers free training and alternative employment pathways into the professional arts sector that is contemporary, culturally safe and located in the West.

The Retreat (2020)

Our first feature-length film project was devised, written and rehearsed on Zoom during the lockdowns of 2020 and shot at The Substation. It takes aim at the abuse of power and hierarchy in the performing arts sector and other institutions through black comedy, absurdism and satire.

Western Edge has been a small youth arts organisation for most of our 30 year history. In 2019, our leadership transition took us through a period of significant growth. We went from a core team of 4 with around \$450,000 revenue to securing major philanthropic support and Australia Council Four Year Funding for the first time in the company's history. We have emerged as a team of 10 with expanded artistic and operational capacity and reached a milestone of \$1M revenue in 2022.

FUTURE GROWTH

This Strategic Plan represents our next stage of growth to secure the company's sustainability and have a lasting impact on the Australia arts landscape. In addition to our core artistic programming, we will:

Carry out national and international (for the first time) touring with a professional touring ensemble, to deliver professional opportunities through Western Edge for our collective of artists and alumni.

Employ an experienced trauma-informed Cultural Coordinator to support our creative team in our complex cross-cultural community arts work.

Employ a senior Creative Producer to work on national and international partnerships and audiences.

Establish an Edge Advisory Group of young people from our community, to centre young people's voices in our company's work and direction.

Lead the delivery of a new youth arts precinct in the West.

Engage 4 emerging artists as Artistic Associates to work across our artistic program and engage in consistent independent creative practice.

Employ a Western Edge Wellbeing Collective of intersectional and culturally diverse mental health practitioners to offer free mental health support for participants, artists and staff.



VISION

A thriving community of *next generation artists* shifting the culture of art making in Australia.



PURPOSE

We exist to transform how, why and for who art is made in Australia.



VALUES

We move at the speed of trust.

We speak and act from a place of integrity and respect.

We centre play and joy in our artistry, operations and governance.

We have each other's backs and show up for our community.

We hold ourselves and each other accountable and move through discomfort with generosity and care.



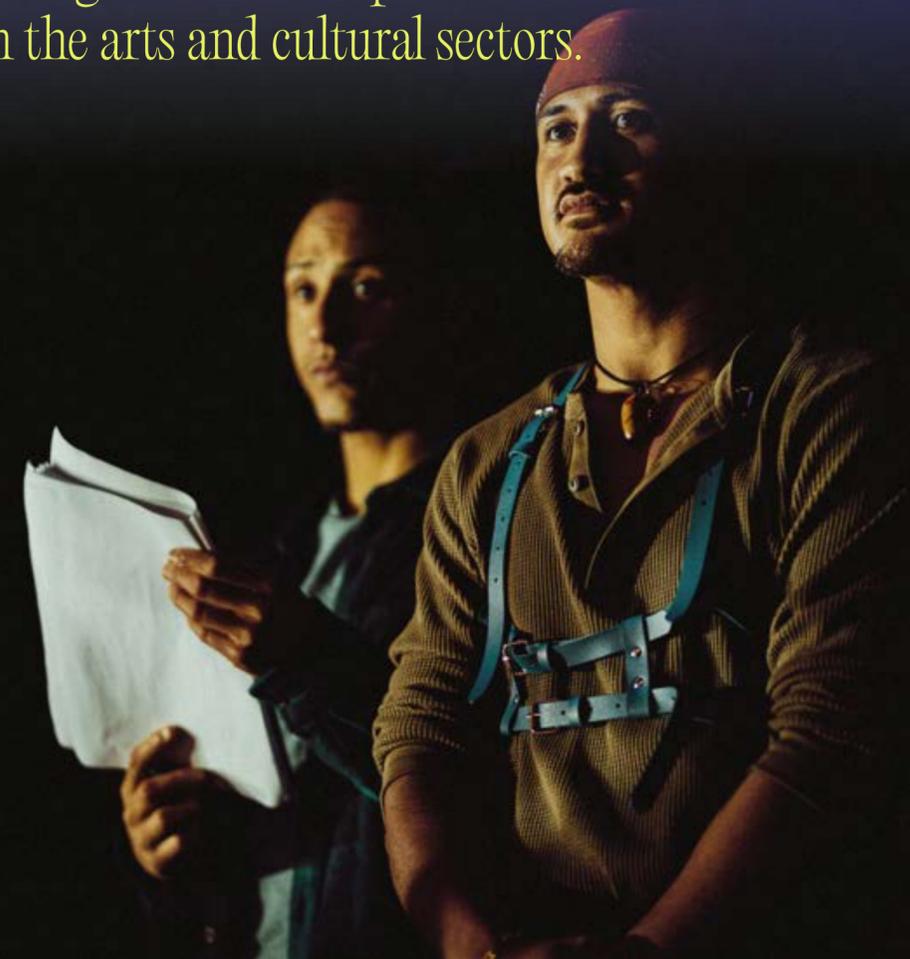
GOALS

We have engaged all members of our community in a Theory of Change process to inform our three key goals:

Young people feel worthy and valued as individuals and artists;

Young artists experience social mobility through the arts and cultural sectors;

Young artists are in positions of influence in the arts and cultural sectors.



APPROACH TO PRACTICE

“
In a Western Edge room
you never have to prove
who you are or why you’re
allowed to be there.”



▶ Youth-led

Young people have the ability to speak truth to power, shift paradigms, and re-centre conversations around what matters. We encourage all young artists to lean into their age, experience, and background to drive the creative process rather than limit it. We respond to the specific needs, interests, cultural backgrounds, knowledge systems and creativity of young artists ensuring the work serves and reflects them. We embrace and champion plurality and diversity.

▶ Collaborative

We champion collaboration in all forms across Western Edge, with ensemble-based artistic practice in our programs to co-leadership practice in facilitation and governance. We understand that true power rests in the collective. We celebrate the unique strength of a community that builds a shared vision, approach and practice from the multiplicity of individual identities, experiences and expertise.

▶ Care and Rest

We prioritise care and rest, both as a healing and wellbeing tool and as a political statement for our people and communities who experience disproportionate levels of trauma and systemic oppression. We do this in a multitude of ways: meal-sharing; welcoming, comforting spaces; developing, piloting and delivering projects with sustainable timelines; wellbeing check-ins; our company therapists and support networks; debrief and group reflection processes; office closures and paid leave – to name a few.

▶ Play and Joy

In step with our ‘Care and Rest’ philosophy is our belief and investment in play and joy as essential to safer, sustainable, embodied artistic and workplace practices. We see the difference in our work when we allow for imagination and playful creation. We follow our curiosity and joy in making, to cultivate healthy and enjoyable practices.

OUR SECTOR AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Western Edge is a leading voice within the dynamic local and national landscape of youth arts companies with a community-engaged practice. We set a benchmark for contemporary practice in community arts and cultural development and have a proven commitment to removing structural barriers to arts participation, community and industry leadership including geographic, economic, and cultural marginalisation.

Increasingly, major festivals, arts organisations and professional artists approach us to help engage marginalised and IBPOC artists and audiences from the West. For us, community engagement is not a budget line; it is the bedrock of our organisation. We do not have ‘outreach’ programs; our work exists almost exclusively in the outer metropolitan areas of the West. The edge of the city is the centre of our conversation.

Our Lead Artists and Support Artists are skilled facilitators in culturally safe community arts practice and deeply rooted in their culture and communities. We have earned the trust of our communities in the West to provide practical and tangible pathways to support young artists’ journeys

from initial exploration through to professional engagement. When young artists with lived experience outside the dominant hegemonic norm walk into our rooms they are in the majority – a rare occurrence in the Australian arts sector. Our work is supported by our community and cultural development frameworks, tools, pedagogies, and methodologies for working inter- and cross-culturally in respectful, reciprocal, empowering and decolonial ways.

It is this focus on relationality, care and trust that we can offer as example to our peers.

As the Ubuntu proverb says: I am because we are. It is in this spirit of reciprocity that we offer our expertise in youth engagement and leadership, community and individual resilience, and perseverance from different cultural vantage points, to strengthen Australia’s rich arts and cultural sector.

For our extensive collaborations and partnerships with peer organisations to champion innovation, sustainability, and wellbeing for our sector, see Appendix 1.

PART 2.
OUR
WORK

ARTISTIC PROGRAM

Intensives

Primary: Weekly workshops across the school year for schools with a high migrant and refugee demographic. There are no public outcomes for these intensives as we focus on confidence-building, literacy and creating a low-pressure space for our youngest artists to find their feet and feel a sense of belonging.

Secondary: 15 week programs that foster a deep and consistent connection with a school community, delivering a theatre program that culminates in an original new show made by the students.

Bespoke

A fee-for-service suite of in-syllabus workshops for primary, secondary and tertiary students, and professional development workshops for teachers. Students learn the foundations of improvisation, theatre, ensemble-building, text work and storytelling in the specified area of learning outlined in their curriculum, including Shakespeare, acting techniques and contemporary work. Workshops for tertiary students and teachers include an introduction to cultural competency, creative play and working cross-culturally.

Creative development

Through an EOI callout to young and emerging artists across the West, a selected artist receives a commission fee, resources and support for the development of the work. The program concludes with a public reading of the work accompanied by culturally relevant catering.

Premiere of a new Australian work

The second year of the program sees the work produced by Western Edge premiered in a partner venue in the West, with the possibility of touring across the West and beyond in future years.



Edge Ensembles

Delivered across Maribyrnong, Wyndham and Brimbank, this program brings young people together aged 13–30, in age-specific cohorts (under 18s and over 18s), to devise their own original productions over 15 weeks, culminating in a double-bill performance. Partnering with local council and arts venues, this is a vital community event that facilitates intergenerational and intercultural exchange while broadening Western Edge’s reach by welcoming new participants and audiences.

Masterclasses

We will deliver four intensive days of workshops annually created and delivered by leading practitioners in a variety of creative, cultural and social practices across the Australian arts sector, providing a comprehensive overview of the industry. This series is open to young artists aged 18–30 years from our Edge Ensembles and across the West.

International Engagement

To strengthen our practice, it is essential that we learn from and partner with artists and organisations who sit outside of the predominantly white Western European and American arts world which has historically silenced and erased our stories and artistic practices. International engagement for us is a political act in redrawing the lines of the geopolitical map we are operating in, and elevate our young people, artists and leaders in a global arts network. We will undertake one new international collaboration each year. This is a new growth area for us.

Local and national creative exchanges

This program focuses on strengthening networks across individual artists and organisations, and improving the wellbeing of artists and arts workers as we learn and grow together. In 2025, we look forward to collaborating with Rawcus, Polyglot Theatre, Bell Shakespeare and Arts Centre Melbourne.

NOTE

- Goal 1:** Young people from the West feel worthy and valued as individuals and artists.
- Goal 2:** Young artists from the West experience social mobility through the arts and cultural sectors.
- Goal 3:** Young artists from the West are in positions of influence in the arts and cultural sectors.

ADVOCACY



Home Base

OUR NEW YOUTH ARTS PRECINCT IN THE WEST

We will spearhead an ambitious vision of creating the first purpose-built youth arts precinct in the West. We will:

- Lead an alliance of youth arts organisations (Western Edge, Cinespace, 100 Story Building and L2R) to advocate for and secure state and federal government and private development partners.
- Work with Brimbank City Council on a feasibility study (currently in progress) to secure support from local members of Parliament, Department of Education, Creative Victoria and philanthropic foundations.
- Develop and re-locate by 2027.

GOAL 1 - GOAL 2 - GOAL 3

Research Partnership

PHD RESEARCH INTO OUR COMMUNITY ARTS METHODOLOGY

Partnering with Victoria University and PhD scholar Juan-Camilo Riano-Rodriguez, we will document and share our community arts methodology, exploring how our community arts and cultural development practices foster individual and collective healing for young artists of culture.

GOAL 3

Arts West

WEST-BASED ALLIANCE OF ARTS STAKEHOLDERS

The Arts West alliance includes 100 Story Building, Snuff Puppets, Women's Circus, the Substation, Footscray Community Arts, Arts Gen and two rotating independent artists. We meet quarterly to discuss, support and advocate for the arts ecology in the West.

GOAL 3

YOUNG ARTISTS

“The main thing is you’re heard. And there’s not a lot of places to be heard out here. There’s a lot of young people who are not heard.”

Our artists are aged between 6–30 years old and come from across Naarm’s western suburbs. The majority self-identify as IBPOC and from immigrant diasporas, with an increasing number having intersectional lived experience as LGBTQIA+, neurodiverse, or as Deaf and Disabled people.

As we look ahead to 2025–2028, we will continue to prioritise diversity within diversity to engage and platform First Nations, LGBTQIA+ and Disabled artists and leaders. We will provide opportunities for young people from a range of intersectional backgrounds and experiences to learn, meet, make and share their ideas, concerns and hopes for the future (see Capability Building, Part 5).

From 2025-2028

3000+ young artists will engage with our programs.



OUR CREATIVE TEAM

Support Artists

Artists aged 18–30 years who support Lead Artists to facilitate our programs. They represent our communities and have often first participated in our in-schools and community programs. They learn on-the-job training in facilitation, business, leadership, and creative skills.

Lead Artists

Professional artists with experience working with young people. Many have come through our programs and trained as Support Artists before stepping into the role. They share their skills in performance techniques and methodologies to build ensembles, direct performances and create communities of care.

Artistic Associates

Independent creative practitioners working within Western Edge on a permanent part-time basis. They work in our Future Makers or Community Builders programs, as well as have time to develop new work of their own. These roles diversify the industry by supporting sustainable careers for working artists with the benefits of non-casualised work.

Guest Artists

Cultural and artistic experts working in the creative industries, sharing their knowledge, sparking young artists' imaginations and increasing their sense of creative sovereignty and autonomy.

Co-Artistic Directors

Our cultural leaders, custodians of our artistic programming and guardians of our thriving Western Edge community. Together with our Support and Lead Artists, they create life-changing experiences for young artists, and advocate for Western Edge locally, nationally and internationally.

Operations Staff

Our behind-the-scenes heroes who lead the operation of our company. As a performing arts company we know that creativity comes in all different forms, and value and champion this in our staff – many of whom are creative practitioners in their own right. We prioritise staff who reflect the diversity and artistic nature of our community and have embodied expertise of what is needed in this organisation.

SUPPORT FOR OUR PEOPLE

We provide the following services, resources and experts to ensure that every member of our community is supported and cared for while engaged in our community arts practice:

- Annual staff training in trauma-informed practice, First Peoples cultural safety training, youth mental health first aid and child and young person safety and wellbeing.
- A trauma-informed Cultural Coordinator to provide specialised community-based support.
- Intersectional mental health practitioners as part of our Western Edge Wellbeing Collective, that any participant, artist, staff or Board member can access free of charge.

For a detailed structure of our Team see Appendix 2.

PART 4. OUR OPERATING CONTEXT

STRENGTHS

Reputation

Well-established reputation as a leading youth arts organisation, with a strong brand that speaks to our target audiences and provides a platform for growth.

Accessibility

Commitment to providing free, accessible programs that are welcoming and culturally safer for all participants.

Partners

Strong network of partnerships with community and cultural service organisations in the West, as well as major arts institutions state-wide, nationally, and internationally.

Staff

Growing number of dedicated staff who are highly skilled in working collaboratively with our stakeholders.

Governance

A stable and active board that reflects our community and brings a range of skills and expertise to our organisation.

Organisational Structure

Our organisational structure embodies our values of collaborative leadership and community focus.

Funding

Recurrent income from a range of sources, including multi-year agreements which provide organisational and project-based grants.

Evaluation

Revised evaluation and reporting framework to improve future monitoring of organisational goals.

Salaries and wages

Western Edge's wages have been significantly increased to ensure they are in the middle-to-upper brackets in the national average for the youth arts sector. This presents a significant strength for staff retention and attraction of talent in the future.

Child and Young Person Safety

As an industry leader in incorporating the eleven new Child Safe Standards into all levels of our organisation – from governance to resourcing our artists with skills and tools when working on site, we provide guidance to industry bodies such as Theatre Network Australia and broader arts sector in ensuring child and young person safety in an arts setting.

GROWTH AREAS

Staff Wellbeing

Our staff and artists work within communities and with young artists who are affected by systemic oppression and experiencing trauma. This impacts the team in complex ways. In 2022, we began investing in trauma-informed practice training for our staff. We have undertaken a wellbeing audit to establish an in-depth wellbeing plan specific to Western Edge's needs to ensure best practice is upheld. The findings from the audit inform implementation of an action plan in 2023-2024.

Income diversification

Our programs are free and performances are free or low-cost to ensure accessibility. However, this leads to a reliance on government and philanthropic financial support in a highly competitive environment. In 2021, we hired the company's first ever Development Manager who has worked closely with our Board to drive income diversification including donor engagement and fundraising campaigns.

Accessibility

We will develop a Reconciliation Action Plan, a LGBTQIA+ Safety Plan and an Access and Inclusion Plan specifically for people living with disabilities by 2025. We will build new partnerships with arts organisations who are experts in these areas and with the social services sectors. Training will be provided to our Board, core staff, Lead Artists and Support Artists to engage in genuinely holistic safe practices within intersectional complexities.

CHALLENGES

Economic Recession

Increased economic strain impacts us in multiple ways, including indirectly leading to a drop in our participant numbers. It is crucial for Western Edge to have a permanent Development Manager to diversify, maintain and grow our revenue.

White Supremacy

There is an increased awareness of institutionalised white supremacy that maintains oppressive structures and fuels racism, intolerance, hate, and fear. Racism and discrimination continue to be major issues for IBPOC young people nationally and consistently raised as an issue by young artists in our programs. Racial intolerance also presents a barrier to the professional pathways that Western Edge is facilitating for young artists, illustrated by the systemic under-representation of IBPOC people across the leadership of Australia's performing arts sectors.

Youth mental health

One in four young people in Victoria face mental health challenges. It is necessary to recognise the specific mental health factors posed by discrimination; the young people we work are affected by systemic oppression and grapple with compounding factors such as racism, marginalisation and financial stress.

Arts Funding

Changes in government arts policy has led to a decrease in arts funding, increasing competition for alternative sources of revenue, and the cessation of dedicated youth arts funding.

OPPORTUNITIES

Geographic Location

Naarm's West has one of the youngest populations in Victoria, and one of the fastest-growing in Australia with an anticipated 14% population growth across the region by 2036. Despite this rapid growth, young people in the West have limited opportunities to access the arts and Western Edge fills this gap

Cultural Safety In Arts And Education

With a growing awareness of the impact of institutionalised white supremacy, there is an urgent need for intercultural activities that provide safe and inclusive spaces where young people from different cultural backgrounds can build respectful relationships and develop cross-cultural understanding.

Arts And Wellbeing Partnerships

There is an opportunity to link our arts programs with intersectional and safer mental health professionals who have lived experience and a deep understanding of the specific needs of our young artists and the communities we work with.

Alternative Training

There is a need for alternative professional pathways that circumnavigate traditional inner-city institutions which are currently inaccessible to emerging artists from structurally disadvantaged areas. Our programs address this need.



PART 5. OUR SUSTAINABILITY

GOVERNANCE

Board

As part of our commitment to robust governance practice, our Board seeks to ensure deep alignment with the values of the organisation. Together we ensure that we are diligent in monitoring and guiding the growth and development of our company, but also questioning the nature of stewardship in an organisation committed to self-determination and devolved power.

Our governance practice is steeped in community engagement and directed towards decolonial desires. To that end, we seek to represent the communities we serve with self-knowledge and criticality about how governance process can both empower and oppress. We embody courage and discipline in change-making and to reject forms of practice that subjugate those we have power over. This is, naturally, an evolving and maturing practice. We will grow our Board when we are confident that our actions are values aligned.

For Board and Governance structure see Appendix 3.

RISKS

Our work is complex and nuanced. As a community-based youth arts organisation working in one of the most structurally disadvantaged and rapidly growing areas in the country, there are real and pressing challenges that we face. To ensure the sustainability of our organisation, we have identified a number of key business risks and have rigorous processes in place to ensure that each risk is mitigated so that young artists in the West can continue to access our artistic programs, productions and pathways.

For a comprehensive Risk Matrix see Appendix 5.



FINANCIAL

Our 2025–2028 financial plan outlines our framework for ensuring a stable financial position at present and into the future. Western Edge is committed to meeting strategic financial planning objectives to:

- Undertake ambitious creative projects;
- Prioritise cultural safety and community care;
- Build staffing capacity;
- Establish and manage new and diverse income streams;
- Plan for risk and manage unforeseen financial events;
- Have the capacity to support change in the future.

Recent financial achievements and management (2020–2023)

Western Edge is a financially sustainable organisation with a positive cash flow position. In 2020 we articulated an ambitious financial strategy, advocating for increased staffing capacity and diversification of incoming streams to deliver results. We have seen an increase of 68% in revenue between the years 2020–2022, and a projected revenue increase of a further 16% for 2023.

This increase speaks to the success of our current financial strategy. The increase in staffing capacity over the previous three years has allowed us to invest in diversifying income streams, establish fee-for-service models, and increase funding capacity from state, local and federal government funders, and philanthropic organisations. During the years 2020–2023, 6% of Western Edge’s income was earned through project delivery fees, 77% from local, state and federal grants and funding, and 16% through philanthropic trusts and foundations.

During 2020–2023, 81% of our annual expenditure went towards artists, creatives and arts workers’ salaries and fees. 3% of expenditure was spent on project-related costs such as production, 4% on marketing and just 11% on admin and overheads. It is worth noting that in non-COVID years, expenditure on marketing and production costs make up a significantly larger portion of the organisation’s expenditure.

Future financial achievements and management (2025–2028)

In the past three years, Western Edge has tripled its revenue, achieving industry parity for all artists and staff wages, generating more creative jobs throughout the West, increasing staff FTE and capacity and securing a healthy reserve base to ensure financial risk mitigation.

The 2025–2028 financial plan models revenue between \$1.5–\$1.6 million, delivering a small surplus of \$5,000–\$10,000 per year to ensure organisational sustainability. We believe the organisation has reached an optimal size and will work in the future to consolidate the current structure and work towards achieving efficiencies in all areas.

On average during 2025–2028, a projected 15% of Western Edge’s income will be earned through performance fees and project delivery fees. 59% of Western Edge’s income will come from federal, state and local grants and funding and 22% from philanthropic trusts, private sponsorship, and fundraising and donations.

This indicates a sustainable shift away from previous income composition of the past four years, whereby the organisation relied on 77% of its income from local, state and federal government funding. This is a trend that we expect to continue beyond the next four years as the organisation moves to sustain itself through delivering international tours and large-scale productions, increasing the organisation’s earned income through these production partnerships and box-office sales.

In addition, Western Edge is continuing to diversify income by delivering community-based fundraising campaigns and events. Western Edge also recognises that we are at the start of delivering our fee-for-service model, with a growing number of our artists creating and delivering workshops in schools across the West. We expect to see further adjustments to projected project delivery fees as we deliver this strategy.

72% of Western Edge’s expenditure will be directed to artists, creatives and arts worker wages, salaries and fees, creating more than 700 employment opportunities in the West over the next three years.

For a detailed financial plan see Appendix 4.

2020–2023

Company Milestone hit

\$1.3M in revenue

Increased our donor base by **424%**

Distributed

81% of annual expenditure

TO ARTISTS, CREATIVES AND ARTS WORKERS SALARIES AND FEES.

- **68%** increase in turnover between **2020–2022** and projected increase of a further **16%** in **2023**.
- Increased our reserves by 105%.
- Diversified income streams to increase philanthropic funding by 5%.
- Established a fee for service workshop model with 6% increase in self-generated revenue.

2025–2028

Sustain Annual Revenue

\$1.5–1.6M

Distribute

72% of annual expenditure

TO ARTISTS, CREATIVES AND ARTS WORKERS SALARIES AND FEES.

- Increase revenue from fee-for-service, fundraising and philanthropic to continue to strengthen our diverse income streams.
- Creating more than 700 employment opportunities in the West over the next four years.
- Achieve an annual surplus to ensure organisational sustainability.

CAPACITY BUILDING

First Peoples First

We prioritise partnership, accessibility, employment opportunities and leadership positions of First Peoples from the West in our organisation. We hire First Peoples artists, and prioritise engaging First Peoples businesses for services including web design and trauma-informed practice facilitation. Our Co-Artistic Directors regularly seek meaningful engagement with First Peoples artists in the delivery of Western Edge programs. We do so recognising that the First Peoples artists that we approach are experts and oftentimes current or future elders. We prioritise engaging stakeholders and contractors from First Peoples-led businesses. As of 2022, Western Edge acquires 20% of its infrastructure resources from First Peoples-led organisations.

This figure is set to increase as we formalise our acquisition and partnership strategy; as well as our first Reconciliation Action Plan. Western Edge is focused on seeking out First Peoples governance on our Board of Directors and prioritises seeking out First Peoples arts leaders when filling key leadership positions within the organisation.

Edge Advisory Group

In 2025, we will establish an Edge Advisory Group (EAG). This group will be led by young people from our community and will report on the challenges and successes of our artistic programs. As we grow, we must continue to embed young people's voices into the core of our company, and the EAG will be a way to future-proof what has been so organic for our small-to-medium organisation. The EAG will be paid to meet quarterly with an external facilitator and all feedback will be delivered to the executive leadership team.

Wellbeing Collective

Building on our initiative to employ an IBPOC therapist for our artists and staff, we will expand this commitment to create and employ a Wellbeing Collective in 2025–2028. This collective will include a range of intersectional therapists and be available to our participants, artists and staff at no cost to the individual.

Intersectionality

We partner with value-aligned organisations with intersectional expertise, including Arts Access Victoria, Rawcus, Yirramboi and All the Queen's Men. We provide skills exchange opportunities for artists and staff from each organisation, so that we can build a safer and more inclusive and accessible sector. In addition, all staff will undertake First Nations Cultural Competency Training, Transgender and Gender Inclusive-Awareness Training; and other forms of cultural safety training from cross-industry specialists – coordinated by our Cultural Coordinator. We will also develop and deliver our first Disability and Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) and as part of this, embed access features across all levels of the organisation.

Digital Storytelling

Strengthening our digital capacity is crucial to our growth and relevance in an increasingly digitally interconnected world. We will implement a new digital strategy, initially developed through the Australia Council's Digital Strategist-In-Residence program, to increase and integrate digital capacity across the company. This will allow us to connect to our audiences as a more accessible meeting point across the geographical expanse of the West, increase digital access into our programs including designing opportunities for digital participation, and support governance and organisational growth.

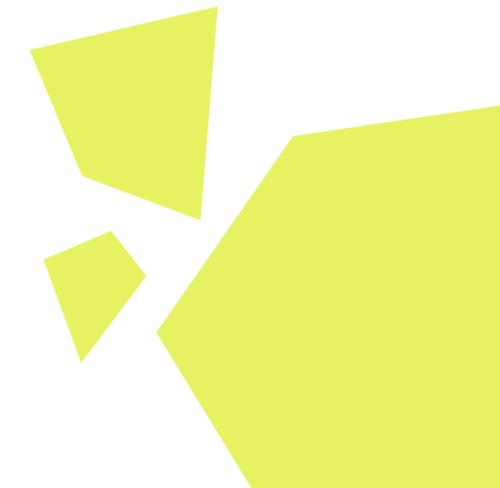


GOAL 1.

Young people feel worthy and valued as individuals and artists

WE WILL PROVIDE	AND DEVELOP	TO DELIVER	AND ACHIEVE THESE MEASURABLE OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safer spaces for marginalised young people to experience art and community • A diverse representation of role models within the company • Skilled arts practitioners with high cultural competency • Partnerships and networks with local schools, community groups, social and youth service providers, arts and cultural organisations • A trauma-informed Cultural Coordinator embedded in the company on 0.4FTE • Rigorous evaluation and reflective practice to centralise young people and their communities from the West in all we do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive and accessible creative workshops to increase self-expression and self-reflection • A diverse range of artistic genres and practices to offer young people varied experiences and exposure • Professional development and training for all artists and staff in youth mental health first aid, trauma informed practice and the Western Edge approach to practice • Reconciliation Action Plan • Disability and Access Action Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Primary School Intensives • 1 High School Intensives • 20 Bespoke Workshops • 4 Masterclasses • 3 Edge Ensembles (Aged 13-17) • 3 Edge Ensembles (Aged 18-30) 	<p>(CDN FRAMEWORK)</p> <p>80% Respondents give responses of 7 or more (1-10 scale) to questions designed to measure:</p> <p>Cultural:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creativity stimulated • Knowledge, ideas and insight gained <p>Social:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellbeing (physical and/or mental) improved • Sense of safety increased • Feeling valued experienced

LONG TERM IMPACT: ARTISTIC AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT



GOAL 2.

Young people experience social mobility through the arts and cultural sector

WE WILL PROVIDE

- Opportunities for young people to use art as the vehicle for self-expression and systems change
- Long-term support for the personal and artistic development of marginalised young people
- Safe physical spaces for marginalised young people to experience art and community
- Partnerships and networks with arts, community and cultural organisations
- Wellbeing support developed through our Western Edge Wellbeing Collective
- Rigorous evaluation and reflective practice

AND DEVELOP

- Platforms and tools for young people to create and share stories with agency to the wider community
- Resources for art making within our community of emerging artists
- Leadership, administrative, child safety and soft skills training to equip young people to work within the arts, cultural and community sectors
- Employment opportunities for emerging artists and professionals from the West
- A case for support for a youth arts hub in the West

TO DELIVER

- 1 Premiere of a new professional work (Biannually)
- 1 Creative Development (Biannually)
- 4 Creative Exchanges (Locally/Nationally)
- 2 International Exchanges (Internationally)
- 4 Artistic Associate positions
- Up to 20 paid employment opportunities for young people as Lead and Support Artists
- Mentorship and ongoing support
- A new, culturally safe, fit-for-purpose youth arts hub in the West

AND ACHIEVE THESE MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

(CDN FRAMEWORK)

80% Respondents give responses of 7 or more (1-10 scale) to questions designed to measure:

Cultural:

- Aesthetic enrichment experienced
- Knowledge, ideas and insight gained

Economic:

- Professional practice capability increased
- Employment-enhancing skill development facilitated
- Individual economic wellbeing increased

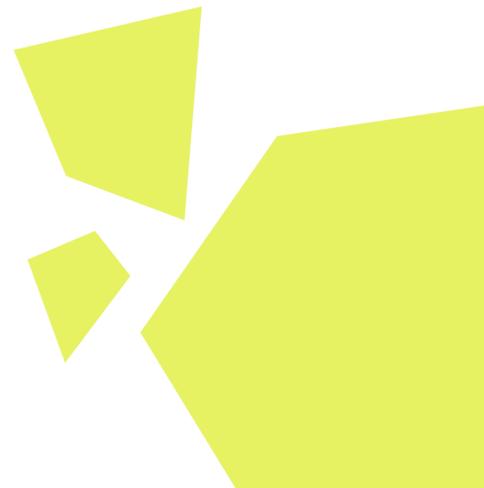
LONG TERM IMPACT: SYSTEMS CHANGE

GOAL 3.

Young artists are in positions of influence in the arts and cultural sector

WE WILL PROVIDE	AND DEVELOP	TO DELIVER	AND ACHIEVE THESE MEASURABLE OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education to stakeholders around the political and social systems and history that we work within • Organisational capacity to support complex spaces and social change • Long-term support for the personal and artistic development of marginalised young people so they can advocate for their needs • Safer spaces and opportunities for marginalised young people to advocate for, and gain and embodied understanding of, the intersection of arts and social change • Partnerships and networks with arts, community and cultural organisations • Rigorous evaluation and reflective practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sector advocacy for artists in the West through the Arts West alliance • Stronger partnerships with wellbeing, cultural and community groups in the West • A PhD research partnership with Victoria University on the impact the arts have on wellbeing and community healing • A safe online space to amplify the voices and stories of our community of artists • A youth advisory group to ensure a youth voice and upskill young people in leadership and governance • An audience development strategy to increase engagement with localised arts, cultural and social change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 Arts West meetings (annually) • Edge Advisory Group • Public, creative and youth co-designed outcomes from Victoria University PhD research partnership • Community driven fundraisers and local business partnerships • Exclusive premieres of all our artistic works at venues and festivals in the West • Youth representation on our Board 	<p>(CDN FRAMEWORK)</p> <p>80% Respondents give responses of 7 or more (1-10 scale) to questions designed to measure:</p> <p>Cultural:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of cultural expression appreciated • Sense of belonging to a sense of shared cultural heritage deepened <p>Governance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to beneficial networks and other resources increased • Agency and voice enabled • Sense of civic pride enhanced

LONG TERM IMPACT: BEST PRACTICE IN YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ARTS AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT



OUR PARTNERS *Appendix 1*

▶ Educational partners

Victorian State government schools servicing communities affected by systemic oppression. They report NAPLAN scores and learning gain below the state average, and School Student Family Occupation and Education (SFOE) Index ratings below 1. Together, we create spaces that dismantle the social and structural barriers that have prevented young artists from connecting with each other and the education system.

▶ Investors

Federal government (Australia Council for the Arts; Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regions and the Arts; Creative Partnerships Australia); state government (Creative Victoria; Department of Education and Training; Department of Premier and Cabinet; VicHealth; Westgate Neighbourhood Fund; and Department of Families, Fairness and Housing); local government (Brimbank City Council; Maribyrnong City Council; Wyndham City Council; and Hobsons Bay City Council); philanthropic foundations (Ian Potter Foundation; Williamson Foundation; Besen Family Foundation; Newsboys Foundation; Equity Trustees; and Social Ventures Partners) and cross-sector partners (Centre for Multicultural Youth). Together, we are re-investing wealth in community-focused arts to uplift and showcase a plurality of voices

▶ Arts organisations

Local, state, national and international arts organisations such as Malthouse Theatre, L2R Dance, Cinespace, Pacific Island Creative Arts Australia, Next in Colour, Polyglot, Arts Centre Melbourne, Bell Shakespeare, Human Rights Arts and Film Festival, Melbourne Theatre Company, Arojah Royal Theatre (Nigeria), Teater Ekamatra (Singapore), Kenyan International Theatre Festival (KITFest) and many more. Together, we are creating new opportunities and referral pathways across organisations to ensure that young artists are connected into a robust and rich tapestry of artistic programs and networks.

▶ Local arts and cultural venues

The Substation, Wyndham Cultural Centre, Phoenix Youth Centre, Bluestone Church Arts Space, The Bowery Theatre, Woods Street Arts Space and St Albans Community Centre. Together, we reactivate and reimagine spaces to meet the needs of young artists and provide platforms for them to share their stories with the community.

▶ Arts West

100 Story Building, Snuff Puppets, Women's Circus, the Substation, Footscray Community Arts, Arts Gen and two rotating independent artists. Together, we create an alliance of West-based arts organisations and independent artists who meet quarterly to discuss opportunities and threats to the arts ecology in the West, share resources and advocate for greater support for arts and cultural investment in the West.

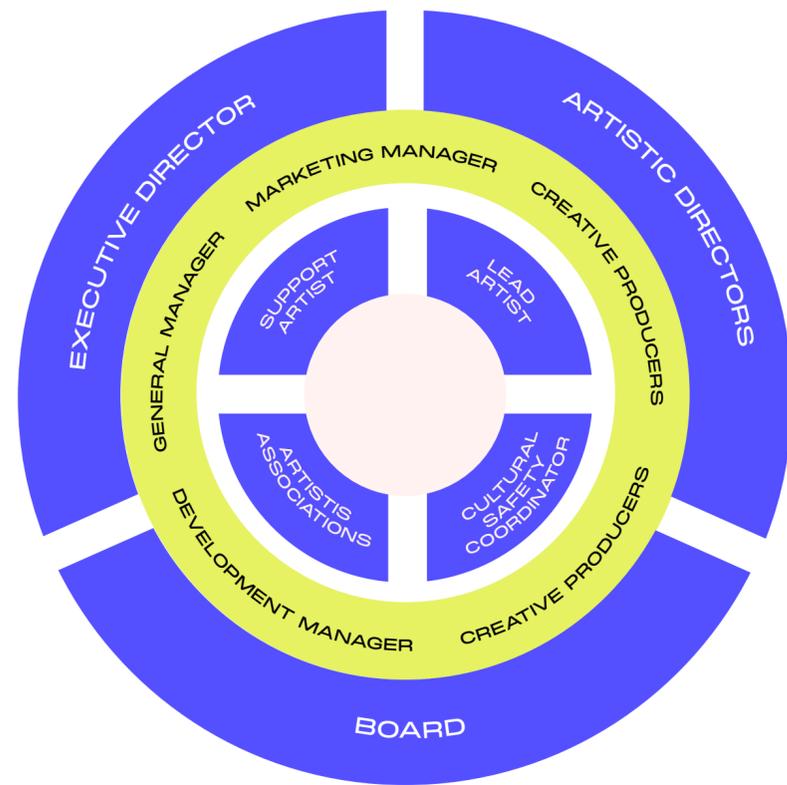
▶ Guest artists

Multi-disciplinary professional artists who are innovators in their fields. Together, we are creating a lateralised approach to practice that centres reciprocity, lived experience and community knowledge, where both young artists and professional artists are learning from and sharing with each other.



OUR TEAM Appendix 2

Staff and Organisational Structure



Western Edge will employ the equivalent of 7.6 FTE core staff including an Executive Director (1.0 FTE); two Co-Artistic Directors (1.2FTE), a General Manager (1.0 FTE), two Creative Producers (1.6FTE), a Cultural Coordinator, a Development Manager (0.8FTE), a Marketing Manager (0.8FTE), and four Co-Artistic Associates (1.2 FTE).

In 2025-2028, casually employed program staff will include **7 Lead Artists, 20 Support Artists** and **approximately 20 technical and production creatives** and **Guest Artists**.

Succession Planning

To ensure succession planning within the organisation and diversify staff skill sets, Western Edge is committed to:

- Facilitating and resourcing professional development for all core team members and Lead and Support Artists;
- Undertaking annual performance reviews for all core staff;
- Evaluating and debriefing with all Lead and Support artists after each program;
- Articulating internal career progression pathways for artists, administration and management staff;
- Supporting and advocating for external career progression pathways for artists, administration and management.



OUR BOARD *Appendix 3*

In 2022 Western Edge transitioned into a new phase of Board leadership, welcoming Veronica Pardo as Chair, Anushka Wijendra as Deputy Chair and Liss Gabb as Board member and Child Safety Officer. They are joined by ongoing Board members Mario Agostinoni as Treasurer and Kiera Moloney as Secretary. Two new positions will be filled in 2023/2024.

Our governance structure and framework is set out in Western Edge’s Charter of Board of Directors and Rules of Association. Western Edge’s Governance Policy and Procedures Manual includes the rules, relationships, systems, and processes by which Western Edge’s Board and management undertake effective accountability and control.

Succession Planning

The Board comprises of a maximum of 10 members for a four-year maximum term. The Board conducts an annual audit to identify skills gaps and recruit new members accordingly.

	Date	Experience	Role
Veronica Pardo	29/06/2022	Arts Leadership, Strategic Planning, Governance, Racial Equity and Justice.	Chair
Anushka Wijendra	29/06/2022	Fundraising Governance, Legal.	Deputy Chair
Mario Agostinoni	21/10/2020	Finance and Accounting, Governance.	Treasurer
Kiera Moloney	21/10/2020	Philanthropy, Governance, Strategic Planning.	Secretary
Liss Gabb	29/06/2022	Community Engagement, Art Management, Producing, Education, Community Development.	Child Safety Officer

DETAILED FINANCIAL PLAN

Appendix 4

Income	2025 \$	2026 \$	2027 \$	2028 \$
Earned Income	228,091	231,544	250,662	255,889
Federal Grants	340,000	340,000	340,000	340,000
State Grants	403,000	408,000	419,000	428,000
Local Government Grants	178,000	188,000	191,000	196,000
Sponsorship and Partnerships	30,000	40,000	45,000	50,000
Corporate and Private Giving	340,000	350,000	360,000	370,000
In-kind Services	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000
Total Income	1,544,091	1,582,544	1,630,662	1,664,889

Expense

Management & Admin Salaries	354,534	361,505	368,615	375,867
Artist + Creative Salaries	629,139	663,226	665,678	699,310
Contractors Fees	117,800	122,800	126,800	127,800
Fees Allowances + Oncosts	146,101	152,452	153,900	159,513
Program + Production + Touring Costs	116,380	99,180	123,380	99,220
Marketing + Promotion Costs	59,000	63,000	65,000	67,000
Development Costs	25,000	30,000	35,000	40,000
Infrastructure + Admin Costs	87,970	84,970	85,697	88,970
Total Expense	1,535,923	1,577,133	1,624,070	1,657,680

Surplus/Deficit	8,168	5,411	6,592	7,209
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RISK MATRIX Appendix 5

Risks	Impact	Likelihood	Consequence	Risk Rating	Controls	Effectiveness	Residual Risk Rating ¹
Strategic Risks							
Strategy	Lack of participant, community or industry engagement	Unlikely	Major	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO, Co-Artistic Directors and Board are highly engaged with strategic planning. Community consultation is centred in all aspects of organisation planning and structure. 	Strong	Low
Resources	Impact on service delivery through lack of income diversification.	Possible	Moderate	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The organisation has a diverse financial strategy that is not heavily dependent on one income stream. Skilled group of grant writers within the organisation to secure funds. The organisation has a strong donor base and fundraising strategy in place. 	Limited	Low
Best Practice	Artists, staff and organisation do not comply with Child Safety standards and procedures.	Possible	Major	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All staff receive induction into workplace policies and procedures, including child and young person safety, incident and complaints reporting, bullying and harassment and rights within the workplace. All staff and volunteers are inducted and trained on child and young person safety annually. Board includes a Child Safety Officer and child safety is an ongoing agenda item at Board meetings. 	Very Strong	Medium
Operational Risks							
Organisational Knowledge	Staff turnover, retention and succession.	Possible	Moderate	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Western Edge's salaries are competitive within the industry. Organisation provides additional leave, wellbeing models and professional development stipend to all staff to prevent staff burnout and encourage retention. All documents are stored on the Western Edge Sharepoint and all meetings are minuted. 	Limited	Medium
Funding	Decline of support from key funding stakeholders.	Possible	Major	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial strategy ensures Western Edge is not heavily dependent on one funding stream or funder. Highly skilled Board, Development Manager, CEO and Co-Artistic Directors have capacity to develop strong relationships with stakeholders. 	Strong	Low
Cultural Business	Community events, conflicts, tragedies and complexities disrupt artists, staff and programs.	Likely	Major	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Included time off for cultural/community needs. Western Edge has a wellbeing plan and mental health policies that recognise the impact of community tragedies and outline our response. All artists and staff have lived experience in cultural business or are highly culturally competent. 	Limited	Medium
Sector capability and safety	Lack of cultural safety in partner workplaces.	Likely	Major	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Western Edge's procedures maintain that the organisation does not engage with other organisations that display culturally unsafe practices. Western Edge continues to exist to create culturally safer spaces for IBPOC and marginalised artists. 	Strong	Medium
Financial Risks							
Strong financial position maintained	Inadequate financial planning results in negative cash flow or insolvency.	Unlikely	Moderate	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board, Treasurer, CEO and General Manager are highly involved in the development of responsive financial planning. 	Strong	Low
Financial Compliance	Non-compliance with financial reporting requirements and protocols.	Unlikely	Moderate	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Treasurer and Board ensure mechanisms are in place to review organisations compliance with financial obligations. Western Edge is independently audited annually. 	Strong	Low

WESTERN EDGE

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