



STRATEGIC PLAN

2025 - 2029



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-school 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 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 experience 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. Since then, 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.

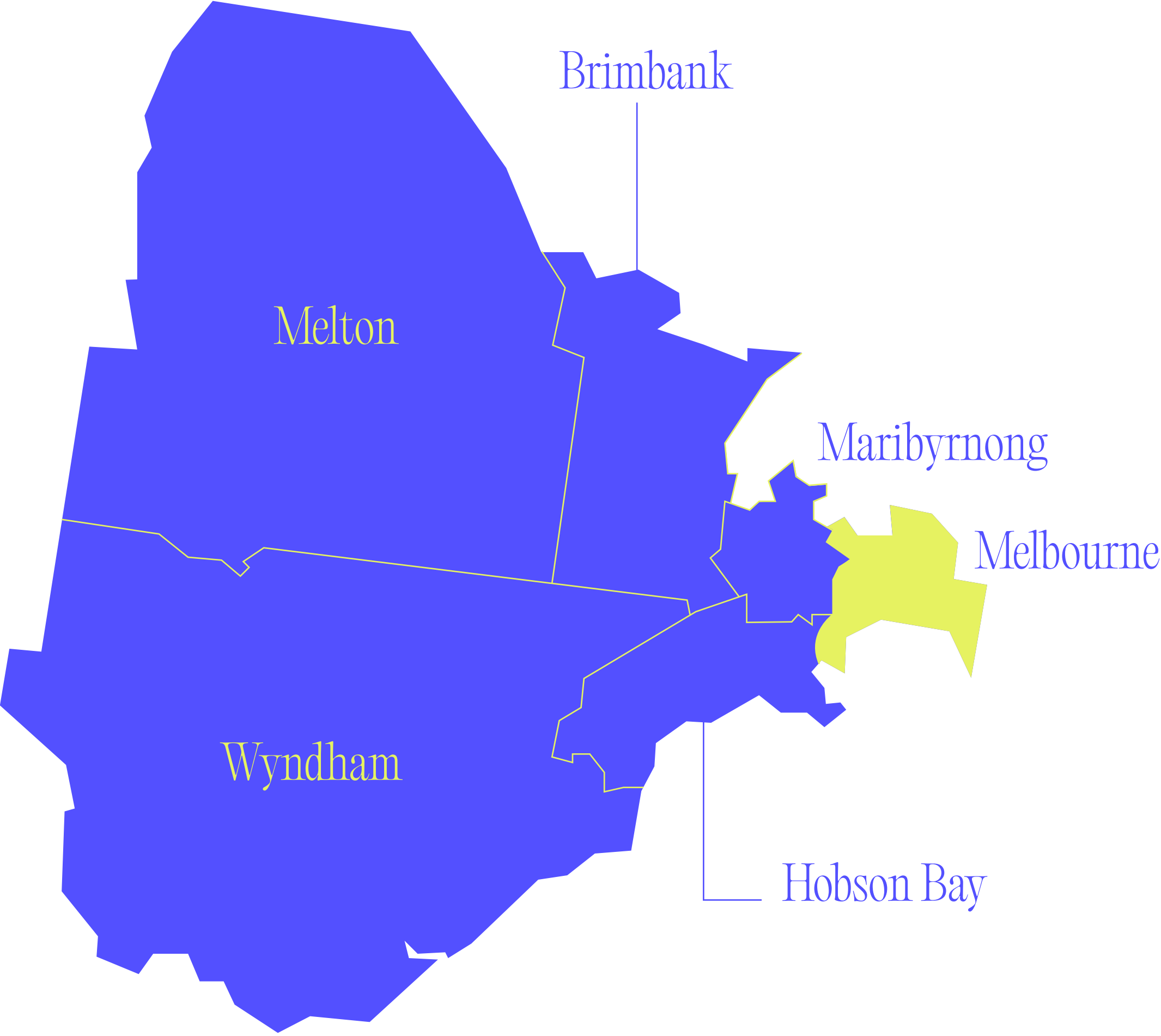
In the next four years, we will make an indelible impact on the West by leading the creation of its first purpose-built youth arts precinct. Working with an alliance of youth arts organisations, we will garner government and philanthropic support to deliver the creation of a formative space for the West. 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.”



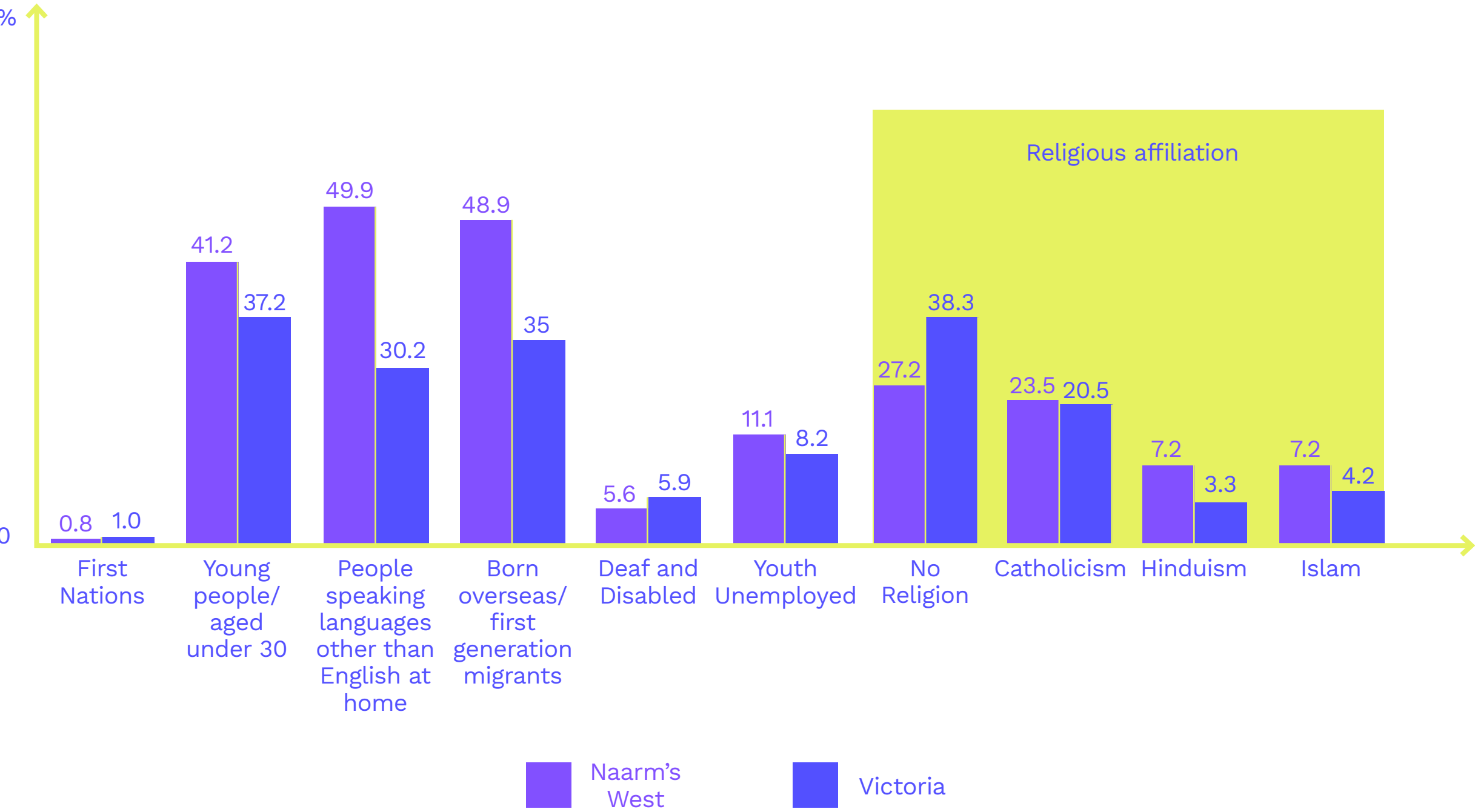
THE WEST



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:

Work with experienced, trauma-informed and culturally responsive mental health and wellbeing practitioners to support our artistic team in our complex cross-cultural community arts work. This includes approaches responding to the cultural trauma of First Peoples due to colonisation, and responses to complex migratory experiences.

Facilitate opportunities for touring professionally to deliver opportunities through Western Edge for our collective of artists and alumni.

Engage emerging artists to provide individual professional development in their own creative practice and tangible pathways into a viable arts career whilst working across the Western Edge artistic program.

Consistently consult with young people from our community to centre young people’s voices in our company’s work and direction.

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

Research the delivery of a new youth arts precinct in the West



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.



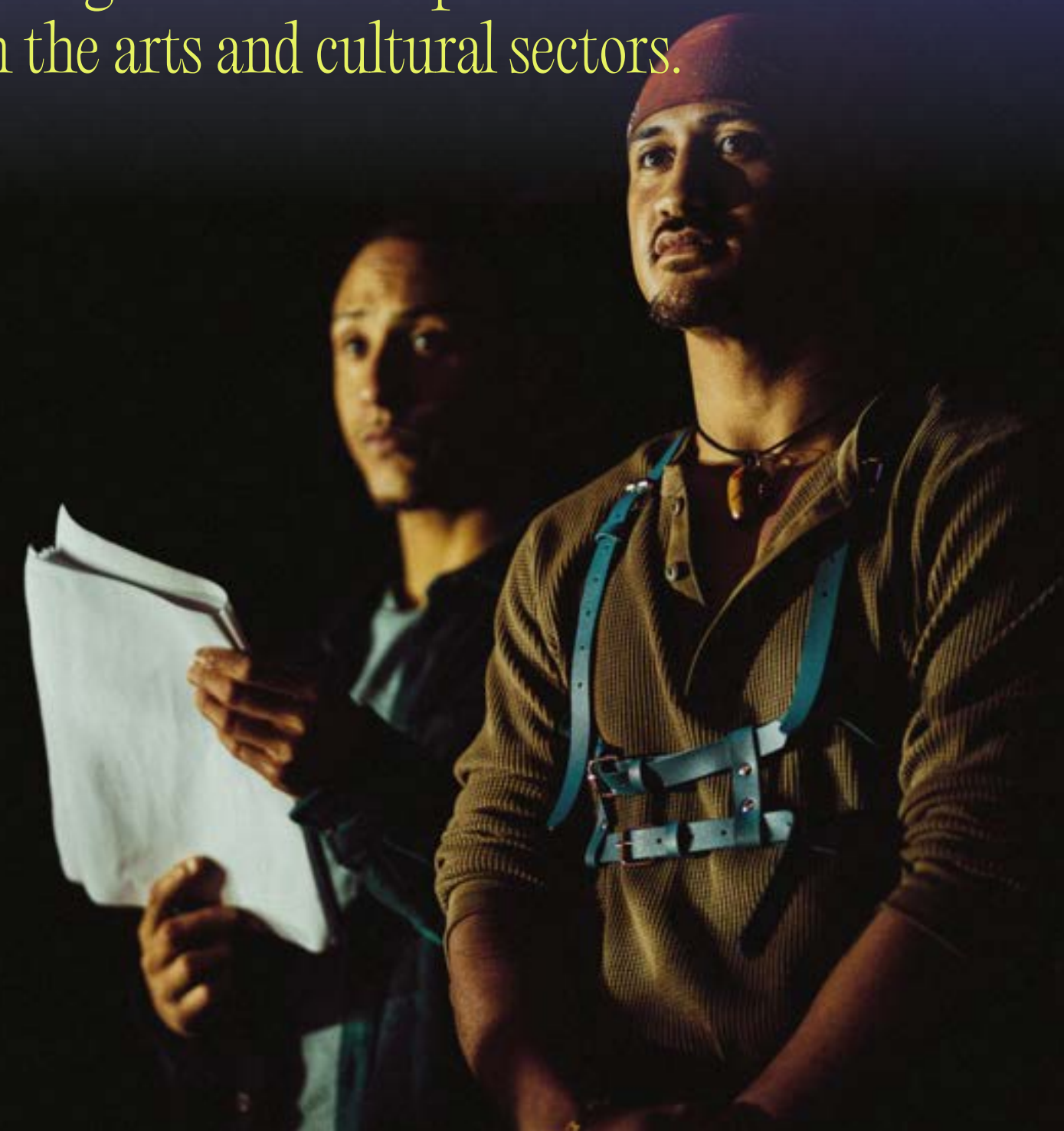
GOALS

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



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.

“

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

”

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 philosophy of Ubuntu 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.

ARTISTIC PROGRAM

Intensives

Primary: Weekly workshops across the school year for schools with a high recent 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.

First Nations work

Support, develop and produce new First Nations writing and theatre, with an emphasis on community connection and centring First Nations voices.



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.

Intensive Workshops

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. 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 — Deferred

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 2026.

GOAL 1 - GOAL 2 - GOAL 3

Research Partnership

PHD RESEARCH INTO OUR COMMUNITY ARTS METHODOLOGY

Partnering with Victoria University and PhD Candidate Juan-Camilo Riaño-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 2025–2029, 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 2025–2029
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.

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.

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.

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.

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:

- Regular staff training in trauma-informed practice, First Peoples cultural safety training, youth mental health first aid, child and young person safety and wellbeing, consent, and neurodiversity.
- Intersectional, culturally responsive and trauma-informed mental health and wellbeing practitioners 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.

First Peoples First

We will refine and implement our First Peoples Cultural Safety Plan and Community Engagement Plan, ensuring they are co-designed in consultation with community and grounded in reciprocal relationships. We will create and implement a formal Reconciliation Action Plan, establishing a clear framework for sustainable, accountable action towards reconciliation and cultural equity.

Accessibility

We will develop an LGBTQIA+ Safety Plan and an Access and Inclusion Plan specifically for people living with disabilities by 2026. 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 colonisation and institutionalised white supremacy, there is an urgent need for intercultural activities that are safe and inclusive spaces for young people from diverse cultural backgrounds which also centre First Peoples voices and honour First Peoples' custodianship, for all to 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 2025-2029 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:

- Build long-term capacity for creative developments;
- Prioritise cultural safety and community care;
- 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 (2024)

Western Edge is a financially sustainable organisation with rigorous financial strategy and management. In 2024, we delivered a large and responsive program in an extraordinarily challenging year, through keen financial management that prioritised cultural safety and community care. We maintained minimal deficit and retained reserves to sustain the community through future economic, social and cultural upheaval.

Our financial focus on sustainability and capacity building has driven the successes of 2024. We have generated a turnover of over \$1 million; maintained industry parity for all artists and staff wages; distributed 82% of annual expenditure to artists, creatives, arts workers; maintained philanthropic funding at 14% of income as resources have become stretched across our sector; maintained our new income stream of a fee-for-service workshop model and diversified income streams with interest income increased by 5 times. We tripled our box office while maintaining accessibility with our ‘pay as you feel’, (no one turned away for lack of funds) ticketing model beginning at \$0 tickets.

Future financial achievements and management (2025-2029)

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 2025-2029 financial plan aims for sustainable and long-term growth. Taking into consideration the economic and sociopolitical climate’s wide-ranging impacts on funding, costs, and on community, the plan focuses on deepening, consolidating and sustaining financial relationships. The plan models revenue between \$780,000 – \$900,000, delivering a small surplus of over \$20,000 across 5 years to continue organisational sustainability.

Western Edge is at the start of delivering our fee-for-service models in education, and in partnership with various organisations. We have a growing number of artists creating and delivering workshops in schools across the West. We have also facilitated acting, directing and workshop opportunities for artists in play readings, developments, and projects where community and industry meet, where pathways are built, and where young creatives from the West thrive. We expect to see further adjustments to projected project delivery fees as we deliver this strategy.

Western Edge is continuing to diversify income by delivering community-based fundraising campaigns and events. The long-term relationships and investment in the organisation from our diverse community take shape in numerous ways, including financially. We will continue building sustainable fundraising capacity, onboard donors for the long run, and create opportunities to honour and celebrate the community’s spirit of reciprocity.

78% 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 five years.

The 2025-2029 financial plan centres on modest and sustainable growth. It anchors the organisation’s visionary programming and replicates the steady and generational change being implemented in all areas of our work.

For a detailed financial plan see Appendix 4.

2024

Company Milestone maintained

\$1M in revenue

Distributed 82% of annual expenditure

TO ARTISTS, CREATIVES AND ARTS WORKERS.

- 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**.

2025-2029

Sustain Annual Revenue \$780-900K

Distributed 78% 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.

Ongoing Community Consultation

As we grow, we must continue to embed young people's voices into the core of our company. Community consultation will be a way to future-proof what has been so organic for our small-to-medium organisation. The community consultants 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 2025–2029. 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 skill 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.



MEASURING IMPACT

“

I wouldn't have known what I was capable of if it wasn't for this space and these people.

”

In 2018-2019, we worked with the Cultural Development Network (CDN) to develop a new evaluation framework, placing young people and artists as central in everything we do. For the past four years, we have engaged in rigorous evaluation methods involving surveys, interviews and focus groups with current and former staff, young artists, Board Members and partners. Each program in the company feeds into our three key goals and is tracked through CDN's evaluation reporting program, Takso. Through Takso, we are able to identify measurable outcomes across our three strategic goals, as well as for each individual program and activity, through four key domains: cultural, social, economic and governance. In this way, each program and activity across our organisation is strategically planned, researched, recorded and evaluated. This ongoing evaluation process underpins our three key goals moving forward in 2025-2029:



GOAL 1.

Young people feel worthy and valued as individuals and artists.

WE WILL PROVIDE	AND DEVELOP	TO DELIVER	AND ACHIEVE THESE MEASURABLE OUTCOMES
• Safer spaces for marginalised young people to experience art and community. • A diverse representation of role models within the organisation. • Skilled arts practitioners with high cultural competency. • Partnerships and networks with local schools, community groups, social and youth service providers, arts and cultural organisations. • Rigorous evaluation and reflective practice to centralise young people and their communities from the West in all we do.	• 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.	• 1 Primary School Intensive. • 1 High School Intensive. • 20 Bespoke Workshops. • 4 Professional Development Workshops. • 3 Edge Ensembles (Aged 18-30).	(CDN FRAMEWORK) 80% Respondents give responses of 7 or more (1-10 scale) to questions designed to measure: Cultural: • Creativity stimulated • Knowledge, ideas and insight gained Social: • 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	AND DEVELOP	TO DELIVER	AND ACHIEVE THESE MEASURABLE OUTCOMES
• 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.	• 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.	• 1 Premiere of a new professional work (Biannually) • 1 Creative Development (Biannually) • 4 Creative Exchanges (Locally/Nationally) • 2 International Exchanges (Internationally) • Up to 20 paid employment opportunities for young people as Lead and Support Artists. • Mentorship and ongoing support.	(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 Social: • 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
• 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. • Safe 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.	• 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.	• 4 Arts West meetings (annually). • Ongoing Community Consultation. • 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.	(CDN FRAMEWORK) 80% Respondents give responses of 7 or more (1-10 scale) to questions designed to measure: Cultural: • Diversity of cultural expression appreciated • Sense of belonging to a sense of shared cultural heritage deepened. Social: • 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

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 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.

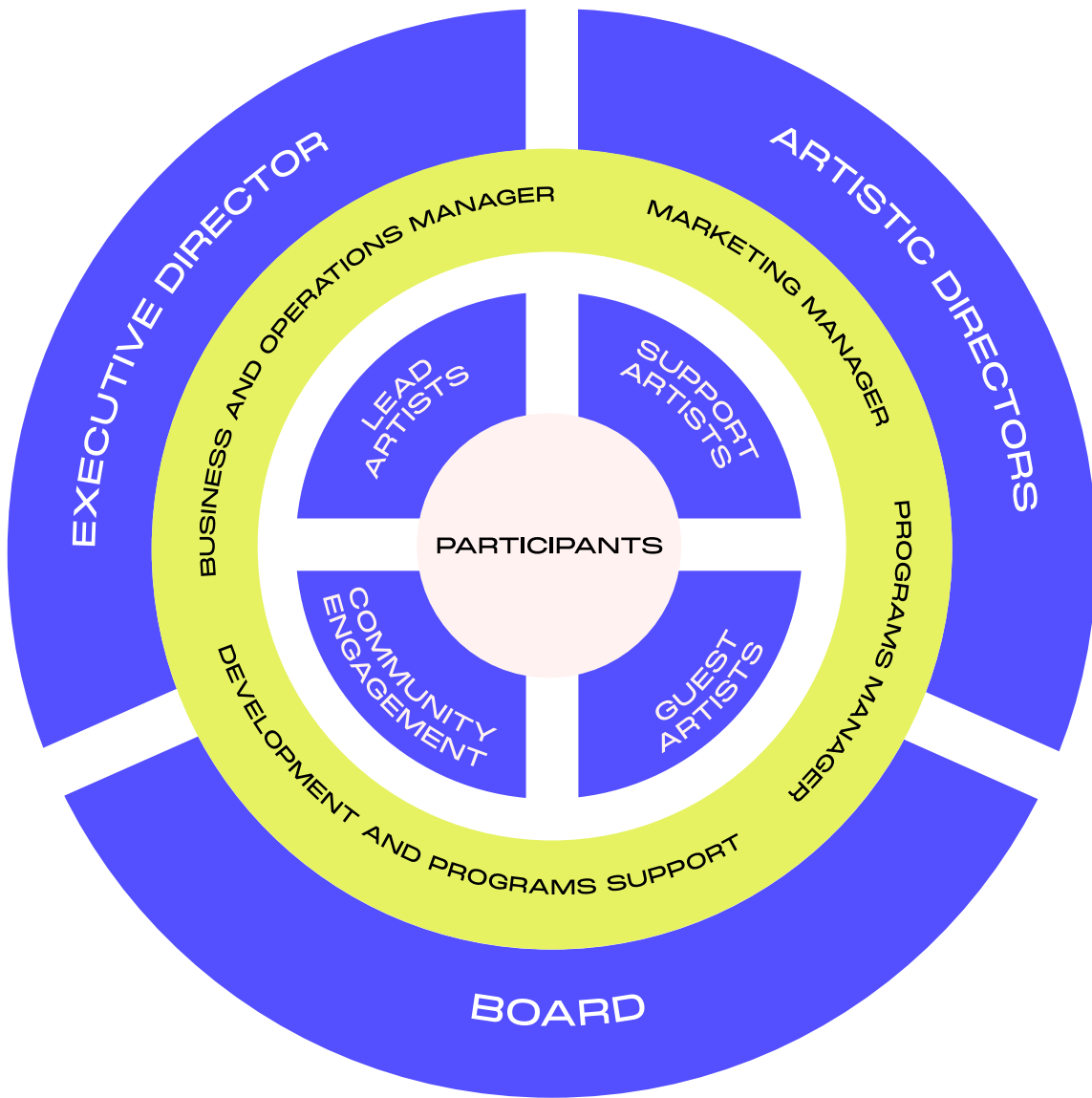
Arts organisations

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.



OUR TEAM Appendix 2

Staff and Organisational Structure



Western Edge will employ the core staff including an Executive Director (1.0 FTE); two Co-Artistic Directors (0.8 FTE); Business & Operations Manager (1.0 FTE); Program Manager (0.8 FTE), a Marketing Manager (0.6 FTE).

In 2025-2029, casually employed program staff will include **10 Lead Artists, 8 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

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
Liss Gabb	29/06/2022	Community Engagement, Art Management, Producing, Education, Community Development.	Deputy Chair and Child Safety Officer
Kiera Moloney	21/10/2020	Philanthropy, Governance, Strategic Planning.	Secretary
Erin Milne	19/2/2025	Arts, Producing, Secretariat	Ordinary member
Allie Stapleton	19/2/2025	Arts, Business, Accessibility	Ordinary member
James Mckinnon	19/2/2025	Arts, Youth, Community development	Ordinary member

DETAILED FINANCIAL PLAN

Appendix 4

Income	2025 \$	2026 \$	2027 \$	2029 \$	2029\$
Earned Income	41,691	32,500	36,000	37,800	39,690
Federal Grants	315,000	315,000	315,000	315,000	330,750
State Grants	214,000	215,000	220,000	230,000	220,000
Local Government Grants	112,000	110,000	120,000	110,000	120,000
Sponsorship and Partnerships	9,000	11,000	11,500	12,000	12,500
Corporate and Private Giving	54,000	80,000	90,000	3100,000	110,000
In-kind Services	15,000	17,000	19,000	20,000	20,000
Total Income	787,928	780,500	811,500	824,800	852,940
Expense					
Management & Admin Salaries	274,250	258,890	296,246	274,630	282,869
Artist + Creative Salaries	262,644	228,704	237,852	242,609	249,888
Contractors Fees	38,040	47,547	48,023	48,983	50,453
Fees Allowances + Oncosts	77,700	75,258	77,515	79,066	81,438
Program + Production + Touring Costs	46,479	56,520	66,520	67,850	69,886
Marketing + Promotion Costs	20,510	23,010	23,240	23,240	23,937
Development Costs	7,500	8,000	8,000	8,000	8,240
Infrastructure + Admin Costs	77,810	76,787	78,323	79,889	82,286
Total Expense	777,934	774,716	1,624,070	824,162	848,996
Surplus/Deficit	9,994	5,784	2,781	532	3,944

RISK MATRIX

Appendix 5

Risks	Impact	Likelihood	Consequence	Risk Rating	Controls	Effectiveness	Residual Risk Rating`
Strategic Risks							
Strategy	Lack of participant, community or industry engagement	Unlikely	Major	Medium	• 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	• 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	• 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	• 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	• 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	• 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	• 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	• 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	• 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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