

Nillumbik Arts and Culture Strategy

2022 – 2026

DRAFT

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Acknowledgement of Country

Nillumbik Shire Council respectfully acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Owners of the Country on which Nillumbik is located, and we value the significance of the Wurundjeri people's history as essential to the unique character of the shire. We pay tribute to all First Nations People living in Nillumbik, give respect to Elders past, present and future, and extend that respect to all First Nations People.

We respect the enduring strength of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and acknowledge the ongoing impacts of past trauma and injustices from European invasion, massacres and genocide committed against First Nations People. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people hold a deep and ongoing connection to this place. We value the distinctive place of our First Nations People in both Nillumbik and Australia's identity; from their cultural heritage and care of the land and waterways to their ongoing contributions in many fields including academia, agriculture, art, economics, law, sport and politics.

Statement from Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Corporation.

This is an ancient land with a rich and deep human history stretching back thousands of years. If you are not of Indigenous heritage, it is important to remember that you are here as guests on this land where the first people of Nillumbik, the *Wurundjeri Woi wurrung*, lived, loved, played, fished and farmed. Our knowledge of this place is as complete as anything that has been seen. It is important to us that our history and culture are preserved and presented properly in all parts of our Country. Arts and culture are one and the same for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people.

Some of our Elders and representatives were asked about Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung arts and culture in Nillumbik and this is what they said:

Art is intrinsic to Wurundjeri culture and heritage and cannot be separated into different art forms. It is embedded in all parts of the Wurundjeri culture.

Every artwork tells its own story and is as important as culture or language.

Paintings are like a corroboree; connecting, bringing families together and they are intimately connected to the land.

Ceremony and ritual are very important – storytelling.

Art is all part of family and connection to country – this is Wurundjeri culture. Wurundjeri connect through artwork.

The story of Wurundjeri can be told through art.

Talk to people - explain what the land is about and how to look after it properly.

We have heard that the people of Nillumbik would like Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung arts and culture to be more visible and present in the area. We agree, Wurundjeri arts and culture should be part of everyday life and accessible to all. For us, retaining cultural heritage and sharing this knowledge with the communities living on, and visiting, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country is important.

Some of the places in the Nillumbik area we have been involved in are the Moor-rul viewing platform that looks over our ancestral lands and the Gawa Trail and Panton Hill Bushland Reserves trails, where people can learn about Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung culture. Some of our artists have also performed and presented their works in Nillumbik.

In the coming years, as well as helping to maintain these places, we are looking forward to being involved in the development of a number of projects. These projects will help us realise our aspirations for Country. These might include: telling our story through the panels at the Moor-rul Viewing Platform, extending the native grasslands at the Moor-rul Viewing Platform site (with our Narrap Unit), and creating more trails with signage and/or other interactive mediums to tell our stories. We would welcome spaces that invite people to stop and experience Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country. These could include artwork and sitting rocks that encourage connection to the land. They could also attract people to the area so they could learn more about Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country, culture and history in Nillumbik.

Authors: Aunty Gail Smith, Aunty Georgina Nicholson, Aunty Julianne Axford, Uncle Tony Garvey, Tarlina Gardiner, Ash Firebrace, Klara Hansen, Delta Freedman.

Proposed Access, Equity and Inclusion

Nillumbik Shire Council is committed to creating a fair, equitable and inclusive community, where human rights are respected, participation is facilitated, barriers are reduced, and diversity is celebrated. We support the rights of all people regardless of age, gender, ability or background. We value the diverse and changing nature of our community and understand that some people and individuals experience more barriers than others.

We walk alongside our First Nations Elders, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, and broader communities of artists, partners and collaborators in our interconnected community.

Over the next four years, we will continue to engage with ideas and creativity, and champion diverse cultural practices for people living with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTQIA+ communities, and support local artists to develop and showcase their work.

Council statement

[Text to be added]

Introduction

[Short statement to be added]

[Communications: Infographic page – where venues are, where creative work happens. Supporting creative communities, arts and cultural facilities, heritage, creative places and spaces.]

Culture, arts, and heritage are integral to the health, prosperity and the vitality of our communities. They bring us together, help us enjoy our environment and to flourish personally. They foster creativity and innovation, provide employment and celebrate our unique heritage.

“The arts have the potential to bridge our worlds, harness the wisdom of our different views, engage our imagination to explore new ways of thinking and create experiences that can be shared by all people in our community”.
Creative Victoria.¹

Our Artistic and Cultural Heritage.

Council understands the importance of acknowledging and celebrating the Shire’s artistic and cultural heritage whilst embracing the next wave of contemporary arts and culture. Arts and culture is constantly evolving; a fluid and reflective means to explore and capture societal influences through time.

Nillumbik has long been renowned for, and continues to foster, its deep connections to the arts. Our cultural heritage begins with the first people of Nillumbik, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. This rich and enduring culture continues to inspire and educate us today.

Our artistic roots stem from the early 1900s, with the Heidelberg School artists who lived and painted locally; with Australia’s oldest artist commune, Montsalvat, founded in the 1930s; and with the unique ‘Eltham Style’ properties that showcase the earth building movement of the 1940s and continue today with award-winning contemporary mud-brick architecture.

¹ The Arts Ripple Effect: Valuing the Arts in Communities, Creative Victoria.

The collaborative efforts of artists in and around Nillumbik has been significant with the establishment of artistic cooperatives, collaborative studios and public programs such as The Potters Cottage Co-operative, the Dunmoochin Artists Co-operative, the Baldessin Press & Studio and the Nillumbik Artists Open Studios program. The Shire also has a vibrant community-led festival scene.

Nillumbik has a strong history in literary arts that is supported today through the Nillumbik Prize for Contemporary Writing. The Nillumbik Prize for Contemporary Art similarly supports visual arts of all mediums and acquires new artworks that build on the legacy of the Nillumbik Shire Art Collection. In October of 2019, Council adopted a percent for art on major infrastructure development paving the way for a contemporary public art program that will continue to build on the impressive Public Art Collection across the Shire.

Nillumbik is committed to creativity. Activities offered by Council through its arts and culture programming add to the rich tapestry of opportunities for our community to engage with Nillumbik's arts and culture, past, present and future.

Building on this rich tradition, the depth and breadth of our programs and venues reflect our commitment to creativity in Nillumbik:

- The Nillumbik Prize for Contemporary Writing is awarded every two years and builds on the Shire's strong tradition of supporting contemporary Australian writing.
- The Nillumbik Prize for Contemporary Art is awarded every two years and is open to emerging and established artists working in any medium across Australia. The winning artworks become part of the Nillumbik Shire Art Collection.
- The Nillumbik Shire Art Collection includes works by historically significant local artists such as Walter Withers, Clifton Pugh and George Baldessin, as well as works by contemporary artists such as Peter Wegner, Dale Cox, Deborah Halpern and Jessie Imam.
- The Eltham Library Community Gallery is an important platform for emerging artists that provides entry into professional practice. The gallery space offers a diverse exhibition program that showcases both traditional forms of art-making and new methods of art production, along with themes and ideas that are relevant to our times.
- The Nillumbik Public Art Collection has major artworks integrated into public spaces, parks and public facilities around the Shire. It enables the community to engage with art as an everyday experience and creates a sense of place.
- Nillumbik Artist in Residence Program offers opportunities for local artists to explore their professional practice and engage with local community.
- Nillumbik Community Fund provides grants to support a range of initiatives to strengthen, enhance and benefit Nillumbik communities.
- The Nillumbik Heritage Guide has been created in collaboration with historic societies, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, Nillumbik Reconciliation Group, Yarra Plenty Regional Library and dozens of other contributors. The guide showcases the rich history of Nillumbik.
- History and Heritage annual grants fund community programs and projects connected to our history and/or heritage.
- The Arts and Cultural Advisory Committee provides a formal mechanism for Council to consult with key stakeholders, seek specialist advice and enable community participation in the development, implementation and evaluation of Arts and Culture.

The arts and culture team at Nillumbik also connect with and refer to a range of external stakeholders who are important for the national and state development of arts, culture and creative industries, such as the Australia Council for the Arts; Creative Victoria and its major cultural policy Creative State; the Australian Museums and Galleries Association (Victoria); the Public Records Office Victoria; Public Galleries Association of Victoria; the National Association of Visual Artists, and the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance.

Development of the Strategy

Our Arts and Culture Strategy is a living document, a planning tool providing Council with a clear set of priorities for the enrichment of arts and culture facilities and programs across the Shire over the next four years.

Arts and Culture links directly to Council's four key themes, as follows:

Community and Connection

How arts and culture encourage inclusion and participation to support health and well-being and equitable access to services, programs events and initiatives.

Place and Space

How arts and culture can strengthen identity, reinforce local character, improve accessibility, encourage social connections and enjoyment, and respect for the environment.

Sustainable and Resilient

How arts and culture can contribute now and into the future to community adaptation to changing circumstances that affect our community: climate change; environmental sustainability; resilience and recovery; and supporting a vibrant economy.

Responsible and Accountable

How arts and culture can demonstrate strong leadership and strategic work for the community through the development, implementation and ongoing evaluation of this strategy.

Our strategy

- Acknowledges the centrality of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people to Nillumbik's arts and culture.
- Illustrates how arts and culture can sit alongside and impact on other public policy domains.
- Is based on community values and a diverse spread of community needs and aspirations.
- Is evidence based.
- Highlights the value of arts and cultural activities and the role they play in the Shire's rich culture.
- Tells the story of the potential and contribution of our creative community.
- Supports and empowers our creative community.
- Enriches the development and growth of our region through cultural and financial investment.
- Activates mechanisms for evaluation and measurement.
- Contributes to good governance and strong leadership in the Arts and Culture sector.

Methodology

In addition to Council's indicators for measuring success in quantitative terms, we work with the planning framework and measurable cultural outcomes developed by the Cultural Development Network (CDN).

This Framework was conceptualised in response to the needs identified through a 2013 Local Government survey that highlighted the lack of an agreed framework and informing principles in the development of Council Cultural Plans/Strategies. This research also demonstrated the need for a more systematic use of data and evidence with a greater focus on outcomes rather than inputs and activities.

It has been constructed in the context of key national and international policy agendas with particular reference to the United Cities and Local Government Policy Statement on Culture.

The framework recommends a planning process that is integrated with the rest of Council's planning activity. It is underpinned by six key principles: based on values, directed towards goals, focused on outcomes, informed by evidence, underpinned by a 'theory of change' and respondent to evaluation.

We will focus on measurable outcomes for each of our goals, always in the cultural domain, and include others in the social, economic, environmental and governance domains where relevant, to clearly identify how arts and culture impacts upon and integrates with other public policy domains.

Using these outcomes helps us to assess what difference our work makes to those who receive it. We allow outcomes and evidence to guide our future activities, and activate mechanisms for evaluation and measurements.

Consultation

To discover what is most important to the community for arts and culture now and in the future, we conducted the most extensive consultation ever undertaken in Nillumbik for arts and cultural planning from December 2020 through to 31 July 2021. The consultation program included a comprehensive range of digital and in-person engagements. Digital engagements involved online surveys, online focus groups including targeted consultation with cultural and special interest groups, and individual feedback through emails and online meetings. In-person engagements comprised 23 pop-up roving performance engagements in public spaces, a 6 day interactive exhibition at the Eltham Community Library Gallery and in-person focus group discussions with performances.

2216 residents from all corners of Nillumbik participated in the engagement, and their histories, cultural journeys, personal experiences, hopes, dreams and visions for the future have been collated into a significant research and consultation document, the *What We Know: Arts and Culture Strategy 2022–26 Community Consultation Report*. It provides the strongest possible evidence base for the development of our Strategy.

The common key values that emerged from the community consultations form the basis of our strategy's goals and express the desired long term future for arts and culture in Nillumbik.

What we heard:

Collaborative, creative, forward thinking is how the Nillumbik community want to define our identity. We want to focus on telling our stories both old and new in daring and contemporary ways. We want to be more progressive and inclusive and less conventional.

We value our environment, our artistic heritage and our ability to work with community. New important things have emerged from our consultations: our interconnectedness, our desire to produce contemporary and challenging work, the value of our artists in a broader community context, and Nillumbik as a distinct and desirable cultural destination that celebrates diversity of cultural expression and artistic practice.

Three distinct themes emerged from analysis of the consultation documents, expressing the values and aspirations of the Nillumbik community. These, in alignment with the four themes of the Council plan, underpin the strategic plan and will inform all decisions regarding arts and culture:

Interconnectedness

Our distinctive feature and the foundation of our identity, intrinsic to the practice and sharing of the arts in Nillumbik. We use creative expression to foster connection and partnerships, build social capital and create a sense of belonging.

Creative Capital

We desire to establish Nillumbik as a creative destination one that nurtures the production of art and the wellbeing of creative practitioners and creative industries, where art is produced and people are inspired. We develop and grow our creative industries.

Diversity in cultural expression and artistic practice

We ensure respectful representation of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung culture, cultures from other lands and LGBTQIA+ expression. We support the production of and engagement with contemporary work as well as unusual and non-mainstream art forms.

Arts and Culture Goals

We have developed four goals underpinned by our planning framework and informed by the extensive consultation process for the Arts and Culture Strategy 2022-2026 and the strong themes that emerged from it, as outlined above.

Our Arts and Culture goals are clearly aligned to Council's themes, articulated in detail in each goal below, and aim for measurable outcomes across several policy domains that will be evaluated during the life of the strategy.

For all our goals, we are looking for cultural activities that:

- spark imagination and creativity encouraging creative expression;
- stimulate sensory experiences that are outside the everyday – joy, beauty, wonder;
- encourage creative thinking and deeper understanding;
- promote the value of diverse cultural life experiences in our community; and
- deepen the sense of belonging to shared histories and heritages.

Goal 1: An Interconnected and Creative Community

Aligns with Council Theme: Community and Connection

Community and Connection encourages inclusion and participation to support health and well-being and equitable access to services, programs events and initiatives. Arts and Culture can contribute to this theme in many ways.

We know that interconnectedness is a distinctive feature of our creative identity in Nillumbik; a bond between the creative community, our artistic heritage and natural environment. We use creative expression to foster connection and partnerships, to build creative and social capital and create a sense of belonging. We know that cultural activity plays a pivotal role in connecting communities and encourages inclusion to support health and wellbeing and can be a vehicle for recovery.

We will therefore:

- build an interconnected creative ecology through physical spaces for connection and creation;
- demonstrate the value of arts and culture in the community; and
- enhance connections with our heritage, and champion socially engaged practice.

We will look for cultural activities in the social domain that:

- empower our community, form bonds between people who share common interests;
- strengthen understanding between people of different social identities; and
- encourage a sense of self-worth when an individual's achievements are recognised by family, friends and people who are important to them.

What our community told us in relation to this goal:

- Create and co-locating infrastructure to enable creative practice.
- Stronger connection with Wurundjeri heritage and culture.
- More information about what's on.
- More support for under-represented art forms – writing, theatre, dance,
- Smaller townships feel under-served.
- More heritage information and support for historical societies.

What we already know about an interconnected creative community:

- Connectedness to each other and community was classed as important or very important by 92% of respondents from the community online survey. ²
- 4 in 5 Australians agree that indigenous arts are an important part of Australia's culture. ³
- Interconnectedness is fostered by having physical spaces for creative people to meet and be inspired by new ideas and practices. ⁴
- Welcoming physical spaces with inclusive programs can increase participation from emerging creators. ⁵
- Involvement in arts can increase social connections, promote a sense of well-being and help to deal with anxiety and stress. ⁶
- Arts and cultural activity and engagement bring many direct and sometimes immediate benefits to society, also value to individuals and society by creating conditions for change, spaces for experimentation, risk-taking, reflection about personal community and societal challenges. ⁷
- Socially engaged practice describes art that is collaborative, often participatory and involves people as the medium or material of the work. ⁸
- Supporting people to come together and find a shared interest and purpose are key drivers of enhancing wellbeing. ⁹
- Arts provide opportunities for individuals and groups to generate civic pride and support communities to form a strong and distinct shared identity.
- Hubs can increase useful connections between local arts practitioners / organisations and local businesses. ¹⁰
- Libraries are places of cultural meaning and significance, gathering places, important for social outcomes, as incubators of creativity, as cultural connectors, as supporters of multiculturalism, and as nurturers of the spoken and written word.¹¹

² Participate Nillumbik Arts & Culture Online Survey. Nillumbik Shire Council, 2021.

³ Arts in Daily Life: Australian participation in the Arts, Australia Council for the Arts, 2014.

⁴ What We Know Arts and Culture Strategy 2022–26 Community Consultation Summary Report, Nillumbik Shire Council, 2021.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The arts and creative industries in health promotion: An Evidence Check rapid review by the Sax Institute for The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, March 2020.

⁷ Understanding the value of arts and culture – The AHRC Cultural Value Project 2016 – Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kazynska

⁸ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/sociallyengaged-practice>.

⁹ Creative and Cultural Activities and Wellbeing in Later Life Age UK 2018
https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/health--wellbeing/rb_apr18_creative_and_cultural_activities_wellbeing.pdf

¹⁰ Workspaces: Why People Thrive in Co-Working Spaces. Harvard Business Review, Gretchen Spreitzer, Peter Bacivice, Lyndon Garrett, September 2015.

¹¹ CREATIVE COMMUNITIES The cultural benefits of Victoria's public libraries Summary Report, State Library of Victoria.

We currently support our community's interconnectedness through:

- Safe, best practice art spaces in venues for performance, exhibition and creation.
- Attracting local community and visitors to our creative spaces with contemporary programming, exhibitions and activities.
- Provision of post-COVID recovery programs.
- Provision of exhibition space.
- Commissions, engagements and employment of artists into programs.
- Arts and culture grant programs, events and festivals.

Considerations towards supporting an interconnected creative community:

- Creative space/s that includes studio and rehearsal space, exhibition and performance space.
- Inclusive creative participation across all townships.
- Prioritise support for under-represented art forms – live music, literature, and dance.
- Involve next generation of artists in repositioning artistic heritage for the future.
- Engage a wider audience with a shared experience of Country in partnership with local First Nations artists.
- Encourage collaboration with the library service as exhibition and events space.
- Art that addresses social issues.

[These quotes are intended to be slotted in to this goal in relevant spaces depending on the layout:]

“Nillumbik arts is a collective thing, it’s an atmosphere that runs through the whole place, and you can hook into that interconnectedness of it. That’s quite a powerful thing.” Grant, A. (2021). Arts & Culture Focus Group Consultation Report.

“Art connects us. It gives us a sense of shared identity. It helps us belong.” Bromley, E. and Mooney, L. (2021). Artbeat of Nillumbik at Eltham Library Community Gallery 19–24, January Artist Report.

“Creative networks date back through our artistic heritage and are embedded in the way creative practitioners live and work together in Nillumbik today.” Grant, A. (2021). Arts & Culture Focus Group Consultation Report.

Goal 2: A Visible and Supported Creative Community

Aligns with Council Theme: Sustainable and Resilient

We know that if we nurture the support of our creative businesses and individual practitioners, we seed fertile soil for our creative community to grow and flourish. Our creative industries can make positive contributions to a vibrant local economy and cultural tourism.

We will therefore:

- encourage strong collaborative relationships between creators, Council, businesses and community organisations to build trust and elevate the reputation of the creative community in the non-cultural arena,
- support our creative practitioners with programs to enhance skills for growth
- celebrate Nillumbik as a creative centre through proactive promotion and marketing of our cultural programs and activities.

We will look for social outcomes that:

- empower our community, form bonds between people who share common interests;
- strengthen understanding between people of different social identities; and
- encourage a sense of self-worth when an individual's achievements are recognised by family, friends and people who are important to them.

We will look for economic outcomes that:

- increase knowledge and experience to inform creative practice leading to increased productivity and efficiency;
- develop skills to gain employment;
- increase economic wellbeing and resources to meet living costs; and
- support our local economy to gain direct and indirect benefit from cultural activities.

We will look for environmental outcomes that:

- enhance our value of the natural world,
- illuminate the meaning of our natural and built environments and how we interact with and value them; and
- increase a sense of responsibility to care for our environment.

What our community told us in relation to this theme:

- Better promoted and advertised activities, opportunities and events
- More Council visibility in the arts community.
- More live music and outdoor events.
- Help with business and marketing skills.
- More artist residency opportunities.
- Council facilities can be difficult to access and expensive to hire for creative outcomes.

What we know about a visible and supported creative community:

- Talent and creativity are essential for a culturally ambitious vision of our future, so it is important to address how we value our creative community through support structures, protections and remunerations.¹²
- Creative industries make up an important economic sector.¹³
- Arts and culture activity can strengthen local businesses and attract visitors and new residents.¹⁴
- Artists can be supported through collaborations with non-cultural sectors.¹⁵
- Artist residencies inspire creativity and connection, nurture experimentation and new ideas and support research and development¹⁶
- The world of work in the future will require skills inherent in the creative community; empathy, creativity, collaboration and leadership.¹⁷

We currently support our creative community through:

- Arts and culture grant programs, events and festivals.
- Nationally recognised Art Prizes that offer local representation.
- Art, civic and public art collections of significance.
- Exhibition programs.
- A community representative committee.
- Commissions, engagements and employment of artists into programs.
- Dedicated public art and visual art commissions and acquisitions programs.
- COVID-19 recovery programs for the creative community.

Considerations towards a visible and supported creative community:

- A centralised digital online hub covering a calendar of cultural events in the Shire, a list of venues available for events, and a directory of creative practitioners and industries.
- Greater visibility of Council Arts and Cultural Development officers in the community.
- Prioritise cultural value over tourism and economic value in Council arts and culture language and communication.
- Artist residency programs in inspiring places
- Professional development programs for artists.
- Street fairs, festivals and events that showcase local artists, particularly musicians.

¹² Making Art Work: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia, David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya, Australia Council for the Arts, 2017.

¹³ Creative State 2025. Creative Victoria 2021.

¹⁴ Arts and Culture Strategy 2022-2026 Yarra City Council. Also see City of Melbourne Creative Strategy 2018-28 for discussion on arts and culture activates economy.

¹⁵ What We Know Arts and Culture Strategy 2022–26 Community Consultation SUMMARY REPORT, Nillumbik Shire Council 2021.

¹⁶ Conceptualising the value of artist residencies: A research agenda, Kim Lehman, John Moores University, Liverpool.

¹⁷ Making Art Work: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia, David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya, Australia Council for the Arts, 2017.

- A program designed for business owners on the benefits of working with creative practitioners.
- Encourage affordable pop-up spaces in vacant tenancies.
- Streamline Council venue hire processes.

Quotes:

“Artists’ skills and capabilities are considered to be among those least likely to be automated and increasingly sought in the workforces of the future. It is predicted that time spent engaging with people, solving strategic problems and thinking creatively will increase for all jobs. Accelerated change is likely to prioritise transferable skills, diverse perspectives, and lifelong learning for adapting skills and building new capabilities - all embodied in artists’ working lives and professional practice.” Making Art Work, Australia Council for the Arts 2017.

“We need to place front and centre our local talented professionals. We need to support this fragile industry with resources, information, facilitation, spaces and training.” Nillumbik Shire Council, Evaluation of Arts Recovery Industry Event (2021)

“It is becoming increasingly clear that creativity itself is an essential ingredient in a community’s prosperity.” Benefactor Group 2021, Building Creative Capital, Benefactor Group—Giving Institute, viewed 24 September 2021

<https://benefactorgroup.com/building-creative-capital/>.

Arts Recovery in response to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the lives of our whole community, our nation and our world. Participating in and viewing art of all kinds during the pandemic has provided comfort and inspiration, connection and engagement in challenging and uncertain times. For many people, gaining access to art has never been easier, and has inspired many to explore their own creativity.

However, the creative industries are facing significant ongoing challenges as the impacts of the pandemic become clearer; the difficulties of sustaining practice has become apparent, particularly for disciplines that rely on live audiences, and under-employment is an issue for many creative practitioners. As Creative Victoria has said in their current strategy *Creative State 2025*: “New approaches and investments are required to ensure a timely recovery, to retain and develop our creative talent, to reactivate and reinforce our creative industries, and to reconnect and re-energise our communities”¹⁸

Arts recovery is front of mind in our strategy, The Nillumbik Community Pandemic Recovery Plan 2021-22 recognised that arts and culture will require a longer term recovery plan, and has made provision for opportunities to sustain/support local businesses, which will benefit our creative practitioners in the future.

Council led the way early in the pandemic by providing an immediate commission based employment program for artists, Art in the Time of COVID-19, which employed 163 creative professionals. This was followed by further support programs including the Nillumbik Artist in Own Residence Program, Arts and Culture Grants and the Local Arts Recovery Industry Report.

Council will make every effort to ensure that the findings of the *What We Know Arts and Culture Strategy 2022-2026 Community Consultation Report* are supported so that local artists and creative businesses can return to pre-pandemic levels of activity, and beyond.

¹⁸ Creative State 2025. Placing creativity at the heart of Victoria’s recovery and prosperity. Creative Victoria, 2021.

Goal 3: A Diverse and Resilient Creative Community

Aligns with Council Theme: Sustainable and Resilient.

Arts and culture can assist in ensuring our community remains sustainable and resilient, by supporting our First Nations people, encouraging diversity of people and practice, developing and supporting our creative industries to be adaptive and flexible.

We know that the community wants to learn from Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people.

We need to ensure that our arts and culture spaces are welcoming for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people living with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and LGBTQIA+ communities.

We will therefore:

- collaborate with our Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Aboriginal Corporation and local First Nations people to share truth-telling stories with the wider community.
- recognise and support diversity,
- support emerging artists, and
- ensure that Nillumbik develops cultural longevity for the future.

We are looking for social outcomes that:

- empower our community, form bonds between people who share common interests;
- contribute to a sense of safety in the community;
- strengthen understanding between people of different social identities;
- enhance bonds between people who share common characteristics and interests; and
- encourage a sense of self-worth when an individual's achievements are recognised by family, friends and people who are important to them.

We are looking for environmental outcomes that:

- enhance our value of the natural world;
- illuminate the meaning of our natural and built environments and how we interact with and value them;
- increase our understanding of sustainability and the impact of environmental issues; and
- increase a sense of responsibility to care for our environment.

What the community told us in relation to this theme:

- Better visibility of Wurundjeri people, culture and truth-telling stories.
- More representation for multi-cultural communities.
- Inclusion and equality for LGBTQIA+
- A call for under-represented art forms such as theatre, dance, fashion, music and literature.
- Support the development of artists from under-represented art forms.
- Support needed for creative events in more intimate venues.
- Better support for writers.
- Children's art classes.
- Linkages between seniors and young people.

What we know about a diverse and resilient community:

- Supporting new and emerging creators will ensure that Nillumbik has a succession plan and remains a cultural centre well into the future.¹⁹
- Introducing audiences to non-visual arts will create a more holistic experience of arts and culture in Nillumbik, elevating the presence and reputation of artists that lack a public platform and encouraging connection and greater cohesion.²⁰
- When indigenous and non-indigenous communities are brought together, it provides opportunities for people to reflect on their individual and shared experiences. This can reduce isolation and strengthen ties between the Aboriginal community and other cultural and social groups.
- Participation in the arts benefits indigenous communities, including improved physical and mental health and well-being; increased social inclusion and cohesion; some improvements in school retention and attitudes towards learning, increased connection to culture, improved social and cognitive skills.²¹
- Creating a safe place through arts activities, and building trust, enables participants to work through challenges and potential community and personal change without fear of retribution or stigma.²²
- Supporting and creating opportunities for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to meaningfully participate in community can build a strong sense of agency and belonging.²³

We currently support a diverse and resilient community through:

- Festivals and events, arts and culture grants.
- Recovery programs.
- Exhibition programs.
- A Community representative committee.
- Commissions, engagements and employment of artists into programs.
- Art, civic and public art collections of significance.

¹⁹ What We Know Arts and Culture Strategy 2022–26 Community Consultation SUMMARY REPORT, Nillumbik Shire Council 2021.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Supporting healthy communities through arts programs, Vicki-Anne Ware, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse 2014

²² Ibid

²³ Active Citizenship, Participation and Belonging, Centre for Multicultural Youth

Considerations towards a diverse and resilient community:

- Partnerships with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung for outdoor cultural programs.
- Ensure major cultural art events have a traditional ceremony by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation
- Greater diversity in commissioned and acquired work.
- Ensure diversity on our advisory panels.
- Specific arts and culture celebrations during NAIDOC Week.
- Acknowledge the importance of Kangaroo Ground to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung
- Celebrate literature.
- Safe and supportive space for LGBTQIA+ arts and cultural expression.
- Activate non-traditional spaces across the Shire.
- Support an open studio model for under-represented art forms.
- More art programs for young people.
- Mentorships for new generation artists.

Commitment from Nillumbik Shire Council to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Arts and Culture

Nillumbik Shire Council is committed to:

- Retaining and protecting Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural heritage and sharing this knowledge with the communities living on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung land.
- Recognising, supporting and acknowledging, that land and waterways are intrinsic to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung culture and that art is the expression of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung culture and identity.
- Creating opportunities for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people to tell their own stories.
- Having Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people supply any Woi-wurrung language that is to be used.
- Considering Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung artists when art is produced for places on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung land such as: permanent paintings and other imagery on site, sculpture, design and other permanent public artworks.

Quotes:

“Creative projects aimed at enriching a sense of community identity. can not only affirm the value of social and cultural diversity, but also allow for an assertion of the importance of community in an uncertain world.” Martin M & Smith P.(2009). “Governance and the Turn into Community: Putting Art at the Heart of Local Government.” ReGenerating Community Conference Papers. Melbourne

“Connectedness to others makes you feel like you belong. Promoting tolerance, accepting of difference, and a sense of belonging is important in our towns.” Nillumbik Shire Council: Our People Our Places Our Future Engagement Summary (2021)

“A desire to have more opportunities to learn about and/or celebrate indigenous history in the area, or to cultivate the kind of values that indigenous culture embraces.” Bromley, E. and Mooney, L. (2021). Artbeat of Nillumbik at Eltham Library Community Gallery 19–24 January Artist Report

“I like that the strong presence of the arts, including diversity and originality in some of our public and private buildings, contributes to a sense of outside the mainstream.” Nillumbik Shire Council: Participate Nillumbik (2021)

Goal 4: A Distinctively Nillumbik Creative Community

Aligns with Council Themes: Place and Space

Place and Space is about strengthening identity, reinforcing character, improving accessibility, encouraging social connections and enjoyment, and respecting the environment.

In Arts and Culture, we want to establish Nillumbik as a creative destination with its own unique flavour, where inspiring art is produced and consumed, which sparks civic pride in our community. A place where we create a mutually supportive ecology between artists, Council and community.

We will therefore:

- celebrate and enhance local character,
- champion art in everyday life,
- encourage closer connections between Council and the creative community.

We are looking for social outcomes that:

- empower our community, form bonds between people who share common interests;
- strengthen understanding between people of different social identities; and
- encourage a sense of self-worth when an individual's achievements are recognised by family, friends and people who are important to them.

We are looking for environmental outcomes that:

- enhance our value of our natural world,
- illuminate the meaning of our natural and built environments and how we interact with and value them;
- increase our understanding of sustainability and the impact of environmental issues; and
- increase a sense of responsibility to care for our environment.

What the community told us in relation to this theme:

- Nillumbik to be recognised as a quintessential arts destination.
- Stronger connections between creative community and Council.
- Inclusion of artists in Council projects; integrate art into processes from the beginning.
- Increased visibility of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung.
- Make Nillumbik art, civic and public art collections more visible to everyone
- Better support for local art and history knowledge in Council.
- More inclusion of Council-run art and cultural activities and creative infrastructure development.
- Distinguish Nillumbik Shire as a cultural destination through more public art commissions.
- Create 'vibrant villages' theme.
- Support a sharing resource scheme, e.g., artists given felled trees to use in practice.
- More collaboration with local produce producers at art events.
- A Maker Space for art, craft and produce.
- Better quality events Shire wide.

- Evaluation through community, social and cultural lens instead of purely economic.
- Connect new residents with the creative community via Welcome Packs.

What we know about a Distinctively Nillumbik Creative Community:

- Nillumbik is well placed to capitalise on its strong cultural heritage, local character and broad range of artistic practice to create a unique environment for cultural excellence.²⁴
- 'If creative capital is not a luxury but rather is vital to personal and community well-being, then the traditional method of consumption...needs to give way, to many more opportunities to produce and participate actively ... a will to take part, engage and leave a legacy'²⁵
- Creative place making and public art can encompass not only traditional methods of artmaking such as murals, music, sculpture, lighting, but also more general creative work, such as creatively engaging stakeholders and residents by using space in novel ways. It can also improve community safety by promoting empathy and understanding, influencing policy, providing employment, supporting well-being and advancing the quality of built environments.²⁶
- There is great value in incorporating local artists, their work and ideas into early stages of projects and developments, so that creativity is manifest throughout the life of a project from design and community engagement to activation and promotion²⁷.

We currently support a distinctively Nillumbik creative community through:

- Dedicated public art and visual art commission and acquisition programs.
- Art, civic and public art collections of significance.
- Commissions, engagements and employment of artists into programs.
- Attracting local community and visitors to our creative spaces with diverse programming, exhibitions and activities.
- Art and culture grants programs, events and festivals.
- Nationally recognised Art Prizes that offer local representation.
- Percent for Art scheme.

²⁴ What We Know Arts and Culture Strategy 2022–26 Community Consultation SUMMARY REPORT, Nillumbik Shire Council 2021.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Creative Placemaking, Ann Markusen, Anne Gadwa

²⁷ What We Know Arts and Culture Strategy 2022–26 Community Consultation SUMMARY REPORT, Nillumbik Shire Council 2021.

Considerations towards a distinctly Nillumbik creative community:

- Embed this Strategy as a whole-of-Council document, so that the cultural domain is equally recognised with social, economic, environment and governance domains within all Council plans.
- Inclusion of artists in Council projects, Council meetings and events.
- Evaluate major Council projects through Cultural Impact Statements
- Placemaking that celebrates and enhances local character.
- Continue to work to the adopted public art policy and percent for art.
- Inclusion of First Nations artists in public art and as a defining character of Nillumbik.
- Resource sharing.
- Nillumbik Art Collection online.
- Quality events showcasing unique Nillumbik identity.
- Inclusion of produce growers and producers to events.
- Welcome new residents to creative Nillumbik.

Quotes:

“A desire for Nillumbik to be seen as a vibrant centre for the arts was very clear – as was ensuring that art and culture is visible to the community and visitors.” Bromley, E. and Mooney, L. (2021). Artbeat of Nillumbik at Eltham Library Community Gallery 19–24 January Artist Report

“A place that encourages the arts to flourish” Nillumbik Shire Council: Our People, Our Places, Our Future Survey Responses (2021, Share your big ideas)

“Recognition that Nillumbik is different to other areas and as such be protected ...” Nillumbik Shire Council: Our People, Our Places, Our Future Survey Responses (2021 Top 3 Things)

“A shire of vibrant villages” Nillumbik Shire Council: Our People, Our Places, Our Future Survey Responses (2021, Share your big ideas)

“Nillumbik is unique: our places have cultural, environmental and community importance”. Nillumbik Shire Council: Our People, Our Places, Our Future Survey Responses (2021, Our People Ideas)

Implementation and Evaluation.

An Annual Implementation Plan will outline how Council will deliver activities that contribute to outcomes, with timeframes, areas of responsibility and any partners. An annual review and summary report will be shared with Councillors and key stakeholders.

The Arts and Culture Strategy includes evaluation consistently as part of the normal work process. Evaluation findings are used to inform future decision-making ongoing during the strategy.

The strategy will be evaluated for its efficacy and contribution to the operations of the Council. Assessing the success of the Arts and Culture Strategy 2022-2026 and improving its next iteration is essential to building the capability, increased productivity and value of cultural development activities to the Council.

In addition to Council's indicators for measuring success in quantitative terms, the Arts and Culture Strategy 2022-2026 will work with the planning framework and measurable cultural outcomes developed by the Cultural Development Network (CDN).

Appendix 1: Cultural Development Network (CDN)

The Cultural Development Network has developed six essential steps that enable us to undertake outcome focussed planning and evaluation.

These essential steps are:

- Based on values
- Directed towards goals
- Focused on outcomes
- Informed by evidence
- Underpinned by a theory of change
- Respondent to evaluation

Based on values

The plan responds to the collective values of the community that underpin the strategy. Gained from existing documents and supplementary consultations to complete information or test assumptions. Values will be evident in the council's stated goals (vision, purpose, mission etc.).

Directed towards goals

The plan is directed towards goals, the desired long-term futures determined by the council and articulated in the Council's strategic plan. The existing six guiding principles of Councils are set to enable specific measurable achievement towards the goals.

Focussed on outcomes

The plan is focussed on outcomes, that is, the difference our work will make to those we are responsible to serve, rather than the activity undertaken to get there. Measurable outcomes help us determine whether objectives were met, and therefore addressing the goals.

Informed by evidence

The plan will articulate decisions informed by evidence. This includes practice knowledge, published research or data that provides information about the local context, the issues being identified that will help or hinder the way forward, and approaches to reaching the intended outcomes.

Underpinned by a theory of change

The plan uses a theory of change to assist and explain choices of activities. Theory of change is the reason why we do what we do. It can be represented by this short summary:

We are looking for . . . (this strategic objective), and we know . . . (this evidence), therefore, we will do . . . (these activities)

This section is where the previous four sections come together to form the 'plan' into strategic objectives which are unique to the organisation, given the context above.

Measurable Outcomes

The schema of measurable outcomes of cultural engagement is based on the premise that cultural products and activities do not hold intrinsic value in and of themselves. Value is generated or experienced as humans engage with the artwork or experience, with different individuals perceiving or receiving this value in different ways. Therefore, the outcomes are not assessing 'quality' or 'excellence' of the cultural experience, but the impact on the person who engages with it.

Evaluation

Evaluation will determine the effectiveness of this Arts and Culture Strategy. The evaluation process should occur at different times throughout the life of the strategy: from when it is just written; as it is being used; and as it reaches key thresholds.

Takso Outcomes Planning Platform is an option for planning, recording and evaluating the activities identified in the plan.

Takso is a new platform developed for the arts sector that until now has not had a consistent method for measuring the impact of its activities. The framework that underpins this strategy is also used at the activity level and every activity of Council can be recorded in a consistent method, contributing to a larger community of interest including other councils large and small, artists and producers, arts and cultural organisations

Appendix 2: Document Review:

An analysis of relevant, pre-existing data and feedback from the following documents was undertaken in the development of this strategy:

Nillumbik Shire Council Plan 2021-2025

Community Vision – Nillumbik 2040.

What We Know: Arts and Culture Strategy Report 2022-26

Youth Strategy 2022-2026

Nillumbik Economic Development Strategy 2020-2030

Nillumbik Community Pandemic Recovery Plan

Nillumbik Shire Art Collection Policy

Nillumbik Shire Art Collection Curatorial Guidelines.

Nillumbik Shire Public Art Policy

Nillumbik Shire Public Art Implementation Guidelines.

Nillumbik Health and Well Being Plan 2021-2025.

Digital Nillumbik Heritage Guide.