

Arts Merri-bek Strategy



Brunswick Music Festival / Image: Simon Fazio

2023

2030

**Acknowledgement
of Country**

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek. We recognise their continuous connection to culture, community and Country and embrace their traditional and contemporary cultural and creative expression.

Contents

02 Mayor’s message

03 Vision

04 Context

08 Key Priorities and Commitments

10 Creation

12 Connection

14 Investment

16 References

**Mayor’s
message**

Throughout our consultation for the 2023-2030 Arts and Culture Strategy, we repeatedly heard how important culture and creativity are to the Merri-bek community – how art creates connection, provides an opportunity for self-expression, creates spaces to celebrate and to tackle the big issues of our times.

Your feedback directly informed the creation of this strategy and our vision to make Merri-bek a place where creativity and culture thrive.

The Merri-bek community is known for its creativity and connection to the arts. It is home to many artists across all disciplines, and enthusiastic audiences. Our festivals, galleries, arts studios and live music venues deliver quality experiences for both residents and visitors.

This strategy will create increased opportunities for First Nations artists and audiences, migrant and refugee communities, people living with disability, LGBTIQ+ communities, young people and older people. It will strengthen and support our creative community through three priority areas of creation, connection and investment.

In addition to new initiatives, Council will continue to deliver its exceptional program of festivals, offer opportunities to engage with the issues of our times through contemporary art at the Counihan Gallery in Brunswick, commission a range of new public art and murals to enliven our streets and deliver support for our arts sector through grants and professional development programs.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the development of this strategy – artists, community members, arts and community organisations, the Merri-bek Arts Advisory Committee, our First Nations creative consultation group and Councillors.



Cr Angelica Panopoulos

Vision

Merri-bek – where creativity and culture thrive.

The Arts and Culture Strategy speaks to the identity, ambitions and passions of the Merri-bek community¹, a place where arts, culture and creative expression are valued.

Diversity, equity and inclusion drives everything we do; arts and culture is our platform to create social change and social justice, beautify our area, delight and connect our community.

We prioritise:



First Nations artists and audiences, in line with our Statement of Commitment²



Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, migrant and refugee communities, people living with disability, women, LGBTIQ+ people, young people and older people



Collaboration with the community and across Council



Advocacy for artists as workers

“ Big, bright and bold! I'd love to have Merri-bek renowned for its support of the arts and culture. More funding, more events, more public spaces accessible for events.”

Community engagement participant

“ Cross-cultural and cross-generational inclusiveness. Use arts to make Merri-bek the foremost arts precinct in Melbourne.”

Community engagement participant

IMAGE CREDITS

Future River Exhibition
Djirri Djirri
Image: Simon Fazio

Fawknor Festa
WALA
Image: Jacinta Keefe

Making it in Merri-bek
Image: Wild Haart

Making Space
Artist: Emma Ritches
Image: Madeline Bishop

Context



Fever'Dreams Exhibition / Artist: Mitchel Brannan / Artwork Left: Child-God (generic) 2023 / Artwork Right: Portraiture (of spleen) 2023 / Image: Simon Fazio

Arts and cultural programming plays an important role in communities by:



Creating opportunities for self-expression and participation



Building a sense of belonging and connection



Increasing participation in civic life and combatting loneliness



Making the city more liveable³

IMAGE CREDITS

Brunswick Music Festival
Caribe Carnaval
Image: Simon Fazio

Fawkner Festa
Image: Jacinta Keefe

Coburg Night Market
Image: Nic Cleary

'Ancestral Connections:
The Ties that Bind' Mural
Artist: Kent Morris

Arts and culture beautifies the city and creates opportunities for celebration and critique, from murals to building design to festivals. It creates opportunities to explore issues of social justice and builds momentum for social change.

Arts and cultural activity also has a significant economic impact, bringing customers to local businesses and providing employment, within the creative industries and beyond.

What we mean by arts and culture:

VISUAL ARTS

CULTURAL SITES

TRADITIONAL
CULTURAL
EXPRESSION

PERFORMING ARTS

AUDIO VISUAL

NEW MEDIA

CREATIVE SERVICES

DESIGN

PUBLISHING

PRINT MEDIA ⁴

What we mean by engaging with arts and culture:

ATTENDING EVENTS AND VENUES

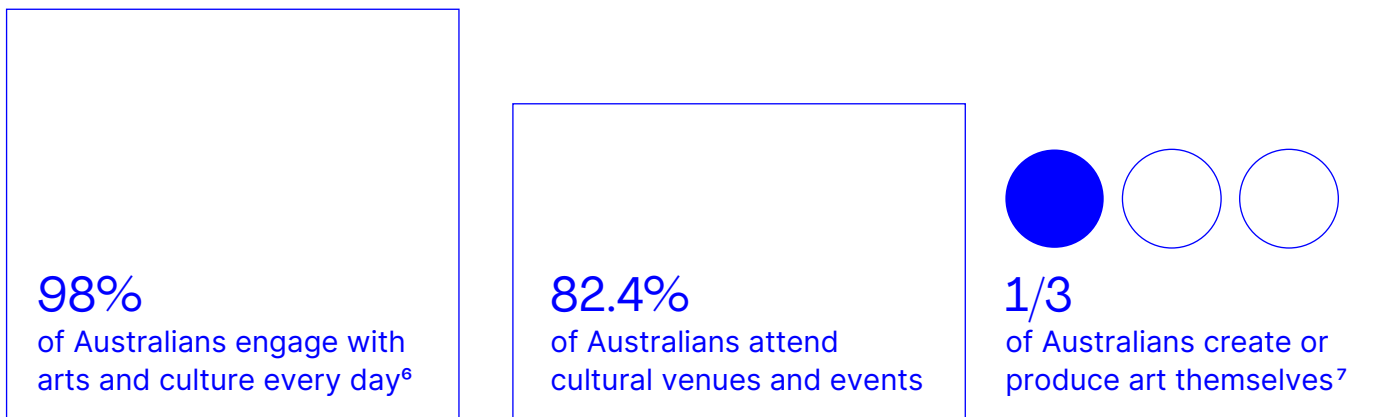
CREATING SOMETHING

PERFORMING SOMETHING

ENGAGING WITH ARTS

CULTURE AND CREATIVE
CONTENT IN YOUR HOME ⁵

Arts engagement



Merri-bek is renowned for its thriving arts sector and creative industries. They attract residents and visitors and play a significant part in Merri-bek's economy.

Merri-bek Creative Industries

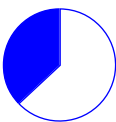


Brunswick is home to a significant number of artist studios, artist-run galleries and artist-led initiatives and has a thriving design industry. Brunswick also has the largest population of songwriters in the country, and Coburg has the sixth largest. Live music venues are prevalent in the south and centre of the municipality. Coburg North industrial areas are thriving with pockets of artists’ studios and event spaces and there is an increasing demand for opportunities for creation and presentation in the North of the municipality.

The Merri-bek community is socio-economically diverse, so while our creative community is thriving in the south, we must also recognise that access to arts and culture is often connected to location and socio-economic background. Those with lower incomes and reduced access to information are less likely to participate in arts activity. The Arts and Culture Strategy addresses equity at its core to ensure that everyone in Merri-bek can participate in arts and cultural activities.

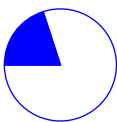
Merri-bek Community

The median age is



37.1%
of Merri-bek residents
were born overseas

Close
to 1/3 of the
population is
aged between



20.1%
of Merri-bek households use
a language other than English⁹

Hadfield / Glenroy / Fawkner

73 – 84% ↑
of suburbs across Australia
have **more** socio-economic
advantage

East Brunswick

87% ↓
of suburbs across Australia
have **less** socio-economic
advantage¹⁰



IMAGE CREDITS
Brunswick Music Festival
Artist: Lola Paulova
Image: Simon Fazio



Construction Ensemble II
Artist: Pat Perry
Image: Alan Erpi



Brunswick Music Festival
Image: Simon Fazio



Zero Carbon Merri-bek Mural
Artist: Hayden Dewar
Image: Simon Aubor

Arts and Culture at Merri-bek Council

Merri-bek City Council arts and culture program:

- **Festivals** - Community-engaged events Fawkner Festa, Glenroy Festival and Carols by the Lake, events that encourage economic stimulation and visitation like Sydney Road Street Party and Coburg Night Market and major events like Brunswick Music Festival
- **Counihan Gallery in Brunswick** - A year-round exhibition program curated from an expression of interest process, which champions political and social justice issues
- **Public art** - Commissioning new public artwork for Council's building, open space and streetscape developments and temporary public art programming
- **Professional development for artists**
- **Grants** - Small grant program for the creation of new artwork and sector support for organisations and individuals
- **Counihan Gallery Strategic Plan and the Arts Merri-bek Disability Access and Inclusion Plans** form an integral part of the Arts Merri-bek Arts and Culture Strategy

Government investment (non-COVID related) in the arts in 2020/2021 in Australia:



Government investment in the arts 2019/2020 in Victoria:



Designing the strategy

Over 200 people participated in the design of the strategy through an online survey and face-to-face consultations. We also engaged directly with Merri-bek's Arts Advisory Committee, First Nations Creative Consultation group and Children's Reference Group.

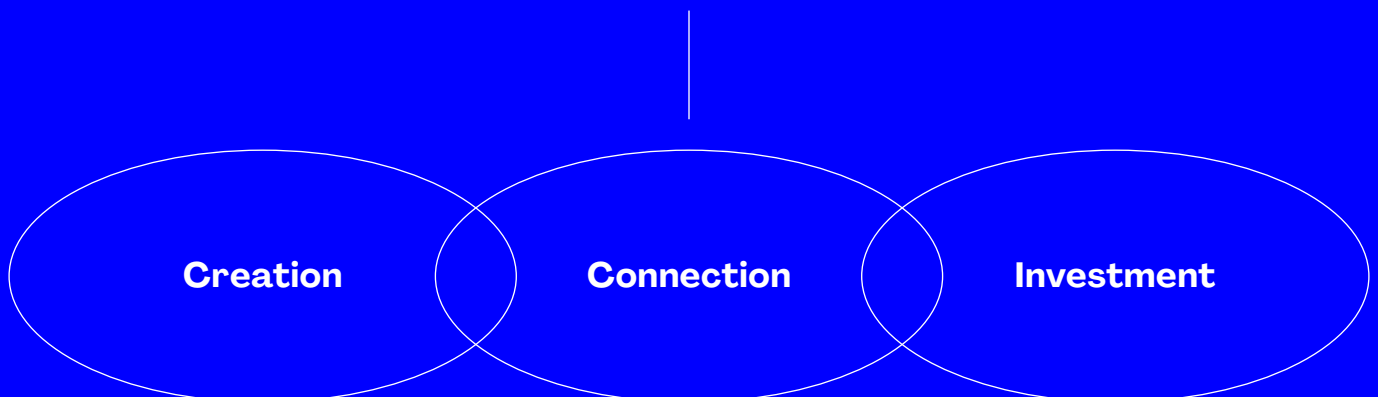
Responses were positive, aspirational and hopeful. We heard that our community:

- is passionate about Merri-bek and want to see more artists and more activity everywhere
- is proud of the arts community and want to see Merri-bek identified as the leader of arts and culture across Melbourne and Victoria
- see the arts as a vibrant force for community cohesion and core to the celebration of diversity

Key Priorities and Commitments



Future River Exhibition / Artist: Maree Clarke / Image: Simon Fazio



Key Priorities and Commitments

The needs and ideas that we heard through this extensive consultation have directly informed the development of this strategy, and its key priority areas – investment, creation and connection.

The 2023-2030 Arts Merri-bek Strategy will be supported by annual action plans, and with the aim to deliver on five key commitments and source additional resourcing as required.

Holding our vision and values at the centre, we will deliver through three priority areas to achieve strong social, environmental and economic outcomes for the Merri-bek community.

Priorities

CREATION

A city that champions arts and cultural activity that is self-determined, intersectional, intergenerational, accessible and available across the municipality.

CONNECTION

A city that foster connections between artists, audiences and community.

INVESTMENT

A city that invests in the creative community and generates opportunities for artists and the creative sector.

Commitments

Increased employment for First Nations artists

Increased arts and cultural programming and creative spaces in the North of the municipality

A refreshed festival program that is flexible, innovative, and more accessible across the municipality

Increased access to spaces and funding for artists and creatives to make, collaborate and present work

Public art to be built into Council capital works, urban design and open space projects

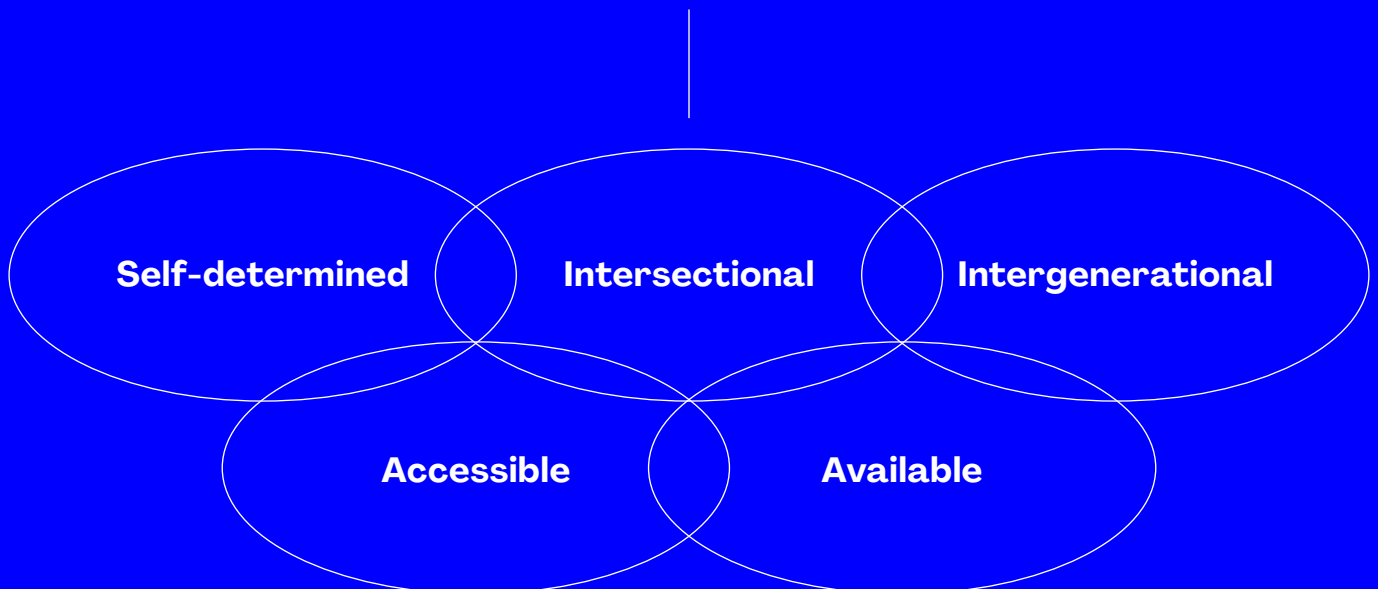


Terra Pneumatics, Glenroy / Artist: Isadora Vaughan / Image: Jacinta Keefe

Creation



Community Mural, Fawkner / Artists': Olana Janfa and Abbey Rich



Creation

We will champion arts and cultural activity that is self-determined, intersectional, intergenerational, accessible and available across the municipality.

Arts Merri-bek is renowned for presenting a diverse and dynamic festival program, the Counihan Gallery in Brunswick and its public art and street art offerings. These programs have increasingly focused on supporting artists from the Merri-bek Human Rights Policy priority groups to create and present work across the municipality.

Our next step is to work with artists and community to ensure they have the agency and are able to actively participate in Council's decision making processes in regards to arts and cultural programming. We seek to create opportunities for this self-determination and recognition of intersectionality across our program. Recently we have worked with a pilot First Nations Creative Consultation group to create self-determined programming opportunities and will expand on this work with Merri-bek's First Nations creative community into the future.

With artistic excellence at their core, we will ensure our programs offer intergenerational opportunities for both artists and audiences across their life spans and supports diverse artists at all stages of their careers.

Through our Arts Merri-bek Disability Access and Inclusion Plan we will increase the accessibility of our programs through working with disabled artists, consultants and staff on programming, event design, access needs and marketing.

Our festival program will be refreshed to remain responsive to community need and to ensure that opportunities to engage with events and the arts are offered equitably across the municipality. We will also continue to assure that free and low cost events are prioritised across the program.

We will ensure that arts, culture and creativity is integrated into the way we work across all areas at Council. This will improve public amenity and civic pride, create employment opportunities for our artists and firmly establish Merri-bek as a leading municipality for the arts.

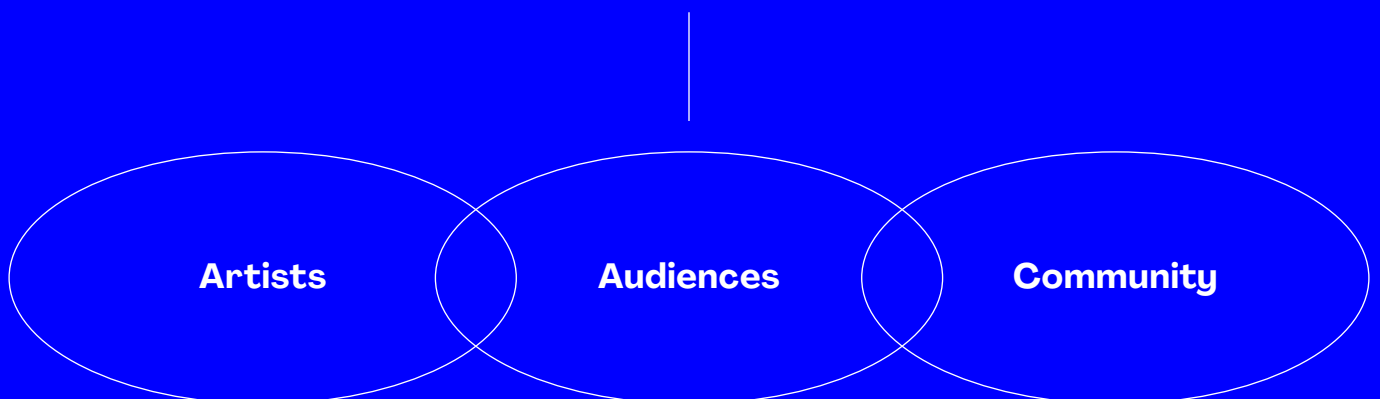


Brunswick Music Festival / Baarka / Image: Jacinta Keefe

Connection



Future River Exhibition Opening / Djirri Djirri / Counhihan Gallery / Image: Simon Fazio



Connection

We will foster connections between artists, audiences and community.

We are committed to connecting audiences with the work of the Merri-bek creative community, and to increasing access to arts programs and events locally. We aim for audiences to reflect the diversity of municipality.

In recent years we have grown the marketing and social media presence of our arts and cultural program significantly, however through the community engagement process we regularly heard that people didn't know what was on in the municipality or how to engage with our programs.

We will investigate platforms and pathways to better promote local events and activities to our diverse audiences and seek opportunities to connect artists with audiences directly.

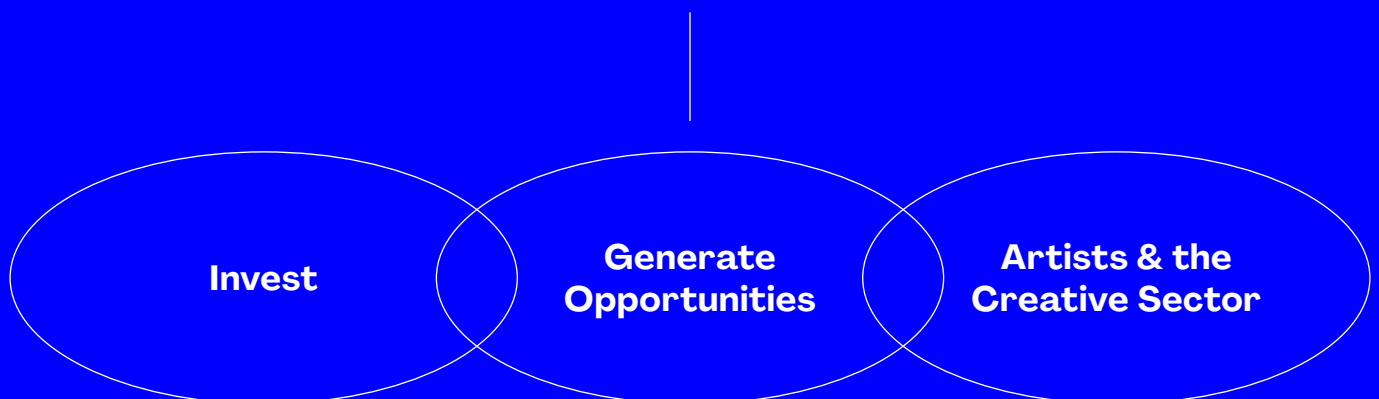
We also heard frequently from artists and organisations wanting to connect with each other. We will take a lead role in enabling industry networking and community-building to contribute to a thriving sector. We also want to create long-term opportunities for artists within the Merri-bek community through supported residencies and fellowships.



Investment



Coburg Night Market / Image: Nic Cleary



Investment

We will invest in the creative community and generate opportunities for artists and the creative sector.

Strong investment in arts, culture and the creative sector is vital to ensure Merri-bek maintains and grows its creative neighbourhoods for future generations. We have a large creative population and want to support them to remain living and working in Merri-bek despite the challenges of city growth and gentrification. Keeping our artists here not only keeps them connected to community, but also creates a flourishing and vibrant city for both residents and visitors alike. It drives economic development and tourism, building on Merri-bek's already excellent reputation for live music and the arts.

There is a significant unmet demand for affordable, flexible creative spaces across the municipality. The strategy aims to support the sector's need and will activate more spaces to create and present work, including studio and rehearsal spaces, performance spaces and galleries. Council's redevelopment of 33 Saxon Street into a cultural and community hub will offer significant opportunities for artists and the creative industries to work and play close to home.

Through grants and professional development programs, Council invests in artists to develop new works locally for presentation within Merri-bek, Melbourne, Australia and around the world. This investment provides sustainable funding for artists and organisations, promotes community connection and is responsive to the long- and short-term needs of the sector. Improving the accessibility of EOI and application processes, and cutting red tape, will open up our investment opportunities more broadly, particularly to those from marginalised communities.

We also seek to grow investment in artists by commissioning public art and through the Merri-bek Art Collection, ensuring that artists contribute to the vibrancy of new and refreshed community buildings and spaces.



Fawkner Festa / Super Mande Percussion / Image: Jacinta Keefe

SOCIAL

Instagram

@artsmerri_bek

Facebook

@artsmerribek

YouTube

@artsmerribek

CONTACT

Email

arts@merri-bek.gov.au

Phone

(03) 9240 1111

Address

90 Bell St, Coburg VIC 3058



References

1. 2021-2031 Merri-bek Community Vision: Merri-bek is our home. We respect and look after our land, air, waterways and animals. We care for our people and celebrate our diverse stories, cultures and identities. Merri-bek is enhanced by all of us supporting our local businesses, arts communities and social organisations. We work together proactively and transparently to continue to create a vibrant, safe, healthy, resilient, innovative and regenerative community.
2. Merri-bek City Council Statement of Commitment: <https://www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/living-in-merri-bek/community-services/diversity/reconciliation/>.
3. A New Approach, 2020, 'Society and place: Transformative impacts of arts, culture and creativity' [Factsheet 1]. Produced by A New Approach think tank with lead delivery partner the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra.
4. Fielding, K., Trembath, J.L., February 2022. 'The Big Picture 2: Public Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative activity in Australia in 2007-08 to 2019-20'. Insight report no. 2022-01. Produced by A New Approach (ANA). Canberra, Australia. Page 49.
5. Fielding, K., Trembath, J.L., February 2022. 'The Big Picture 2: Public Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative activity in Australia in 2007-08 to 2019-20'. Insight report no. 2022-01. Produced by A New Approach (ANA). Canberra, Australia. Page 48.
6. Australia Council, 2020, 'Creating our Future, Results of the National Arts Participation Survey August 2020'. Page 10.
7. A New Approach, 2020, 'A rich cultural life: Transformative impacts of arts, culture and creativity' [Factsheet 7]. Produced by A New Approach think tank with lead delivery partner the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra.
8. Merri-bek's Creative and Cultural Sector, <https://www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/globalassets/website-merri-bek/areas/building-business/business/why-merri-bek-for-business/which-sectors-to-invest-in/merri-bek-creative-and-cultural-sector-profile.pdf>
9. 2021 Moreland, Census All persons QuickStats, Australian Bureau of Statistics, <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA25250>.
10. City of Merri-bek, Community profile, <https://profile.id.com.au/merri-bek/seifa-disadvantage-small-area>.
11. Vivian, A., Fielding, K., Acker, T., March 2023. 'The Big Picture 3: Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative activity by governments in Australia in 2007-08 to 2020-21'. Insight report no. 2023-01. Produced by A New Approach (ANA). Canberra, Australia. Page 35.
12. Fielding, K., Trembath, J.L., February 2022. 'The Big Picture 2: Public Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative activity in Australia in 2007-08 to 2019-20'.
13. Insight report no. 2022-01. Produced by A New Approach (ANA). Canberra, Australia. Page 31.