

2021 - 2023

strategic plan

*sharper.
deeper.
clearer.*

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Festival icon near the page number.



We acknowledge the Traditional Owners, the Yorta Yorta Nation and the clans whose lands cover the area now called Greater Shepparton, the Kailtheban, Bangerang, and Nguaria-ilaiaim-wurrung. We acknowledge that First Peoples have never ceded sovereignty over their lands.

This always was, and always will be, their country. We are conscious that colonial laws and practices led to displacement and disempowerment, and that they continue to do so with a profound and rippling effect. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and to emerging leaders. We value their vision and strength that enabled the continuity of culture and connectedness to country.



Come on in

We believe in the power of art to speak the truth to our hearts as well as our minds: to provoke us, surprise us, uplift us, and inspire us to reassess our beliefs and our values and either become reassured about who we are and the way we live, or to be energised to address that which needs to be addressed.

This, above all else: We seek to enable the creation and delivery of art in a way that sharpens our sense of who we are, where we come from and where we are going, and deepens our capacity for empathy and artistic enrichment. On the following pages, we have envisioned our destination. We want to find the path to it with you and walk it together.

Sharper. We will use art as a way to stimulate discourse, to draw a picture of what it looks like when we, as a community, fulfil our potential. We will use art to identify solutions and to name what holds us back. We will be courageous.

Deeper. Our diverse community's happiness and prosperity are inextricably linked to our ability to become a truly **inclusive community**. We believe that our journey to that destination must begin with reconciling our past. That is why we will put **First Peoples First**. We know that we need to engage meaningfully and listen more attentively to understand more deeply.

Clearer. For us to deliver a sharper and deeper Festival we must be creative, focussed, efficient and effective. To do that, we need to act **purposefully, transparently and accountably**. We need to be clear on how we convert our understanding of our purpose and context into strategic direction, how this determines our creative and organisational plans, how we communicate them, and how we monitor progress against them. To achieve this, we will invest in strengthening our governance and operational processes so that our goals, objectives and roles are clear and targeted.



Art is in our DNA

OUR PURPOSE

Shepparton Festival's Association Rules state that its purpose is twofold:

- "Give arts and cultural groups a platform to perform; it is designed for everyone in the community to be involved; therefore engaging a broad audience. The focus is on grass roots engagement – to let people know that **art is for the whole community**."
- "Build the profile of Shepparton as a **destination to live and visit**; to demonstrate the diversity and liveability; and **improve social cohesion**. It helps to celebrate what is special about Shepparton (multicultural, refugees, indigenous) and encourage tourism and visitation to the town."

The committee believes in the continued relevance of this purpose statement and renews its commitment to delivering on it.

OUR MISSION

We support the development of a creative community whose members seek, see, hear, and speak truths of all kinds, with an ever-empathetic heart, an unflinching eye, an open mind, and the readiness to listen and grow. In this way, we enable and encourage our community to participate in art that strengthens and unites, while stimulating reflection and growth.

OUR VISION

A stellar arts festival that is locally treasured and valued beyond our region.

OUR CULTURE

We are **creative, inclusive** and **courageous**. We value the arts, our community, our diverse histories and our strengths. We value discourse and seek influences within and beyond Greater Shepparton that can help us understand, improve, and set and achieve our goals.

Our **trajectory**



Origins

What have we achieved?

We have been around for 25 years. We have seen a lot of change, and we were part of making change happen. We were established because our community noticed that we needed to have more locally accessible arts and culture offerings, and that we needed to build our local creative capability and capacity. We have inspired many and they have inspired the next generation.

Over the last 6 or 7 years, we were a key part of our community's collective effort to reframe and own the narrative about us:

We increasingly understand and embrace our history and diversity, and we are aware of our strengths and celebrate them. More of us are now proud of where we live, love and work - Shepp Proud. This reframing has been successful in many ways. Our community has become more progressive, we have attracted more investment, and our economy is stronger.

For our part, we have delivered more and a broader variety of events, achieved more attendances, and we have left people with enduring memories of wonderful experiences. We invested in professionalising our team to provide the rigour needed to do so, and we invested in building our brand. We are proud of who we are and what we have done, and we know that we still have a long way to go.

The test of truth

Are our actions aligned with purpose and strategy?

Looking back over the last few years, we noticed that we have tried ever harder to do more with limited resources, and that this risks both sustainability as well as quality. We also recognise that, while our region's drive for self-determination required a stronger inward focus, we are now at a point where we need to be more outward looking. We need other influences to open our hearts and minds, to learn and mature.

We reflected on our purpose statement from our Association Rules and our past two strategic plans as the "test of truth" to see how we think we're going and whether we have been able to convert intent into outcomes. And this has led us to make some changes. Going forward, **we will consciously and systematically focus our activities on creative output, creative process, and deep community engagement.**

We recognise that with a total budget of \$250,000 and a team of 1.3 FTE, we cannot expect to do this sustainably and well if we keep delivering a Festival programme with more than 60 events over more than two weeks. That is why **we decided to shorten the festival, which will give the team the resources and focus it needs to deliver on our purpose.**



Fidelity

How do we ensure purpose, strategy, and actions align?

We investigated to what extent we converted our strategic intent into action and outcomes. We determined that we achieved this to a point. We never acted outside of our purpose or intent, but we realised that we can achieve more if we have a clearer line of sight between association rules, strategic plan, and annual implementation plans. We also noticed that we need to enquire as to progress on both plans more systematically. This will also give both creative director and general manager a clear authorised environment within which they can operate freely and creatively. In this way, we will enable stronger three-way accountability:

- Between Shepparton Festival and our community,
- Between the committee and staff, and
- Between Shepparton Festival and its funders (government, philanthropy, donors, ticket holders).

This will assist role clarity and avoid the unintentional blurring of governance and operational matters. It will also enable better planning, monitoring and reporting. Going forward, we will have a clear 3-year strategic plan upon which annual operational and creative plans are based. Plans will contain clear, measurable objectives, and we will systematically review progress against these during our committee meetings.

Artwork credit: Olinda Poulton.

Clarity

What is our focus?

In addition to reviewing our past performance together, we also interviewed 13 stakeholders individually. Interviewees included staff, committee members, and external stakeholders at local, state, and national levels. We realised that we needed to be 100% clear about our identity: Are we a community festival or are we an arts festival? We understand that they are not mutually exclusive, but we also understand that this is a critical strategic question for us to answer conclusively because it determines our approach, our product, our staffing, and our funding sources. With absolute clarity, **we are an arts festival** that focuses on creative output, creative process, and community engagement.



Inclusiveness

Where do we start?

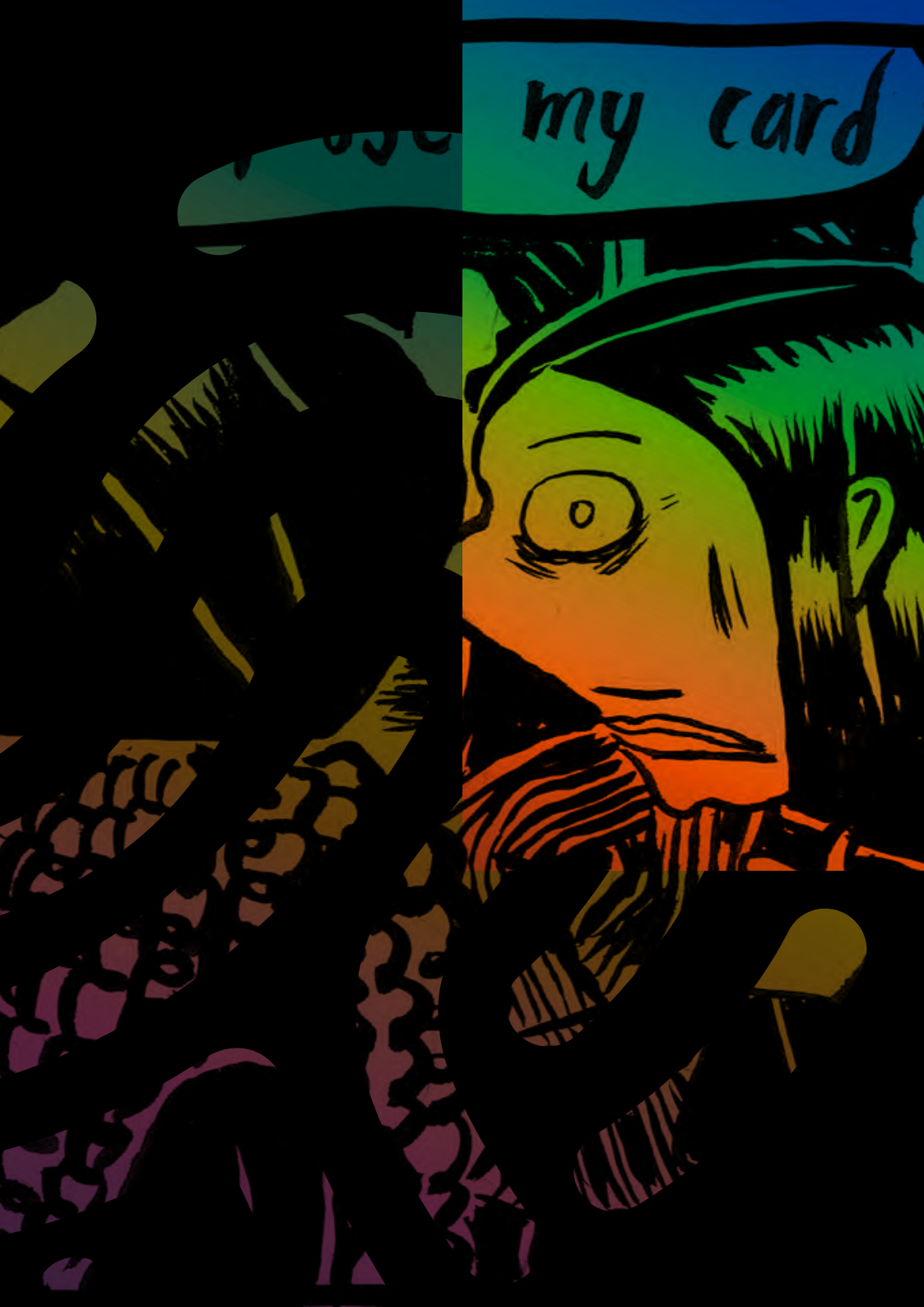
Our diverse community's happiness and prosperity is inextricably linked to our ability to become a truly inclusive community. We recognise that our journey to that destination must begin with reconciling our past. That is why we will put **First Peoples First** as a matter of principle and apply this principle to all of our organisation's activities. We acknowledge that there are no quick fixes and that the journey to true reconciliation is likely to be difficult and painful, particularly at the start. We know that it is our responsibility to educate ourselves before we ask for guidance. And we know that we need to invest in developing trust. We are committed to doing so, and we are committed to *adapting policies, processes, and activity* to address this **First Peoples First** principle.

Engagement

With who, with what aim, and how?

While we had already identified the need to engage more deeply with our community to understand its diverse needs and the role we can play to address them, a detailed review of our political/policy context gave us an understanding of what we didn't know. Our environment and how it moves is determined by a number of factors, including national, state and local government policy. We determined that we need to be more engaged with decision and policy makers to calibrate our own direction where warranted and in a timely way. We also strengthened our intent to learn from other arts organisations and festivals. With a more focussed team, we will have more time to do both. We also note that committee members should play a more active role in this regard. Going forward, we will engage with a stronger awareness of our external context and develop a stakeholder engagement plan to guide us.





Financial Health

How do we use our resources purposefully?

Shepparton Festival's income has remained relatively stable over the last 4 financial years, as have the sources. The significant majority (ca. 50-60%) of income is derived from grants, ca. a third from sponsorships from local organisations and businesses, and roughly 10% from other sources including donations and ticket sales.

This represents a stronger reliance on government grants compared to other thriving festivals. Further, the grants income is dominated by one larger grant coming to an end in June 2022. This income distribution highlights our heavy reliance on a small number of grants and we recognise it as a significant risk.

We will seek to diversify our income streams over the next 3 years to ensure that the loss of a grant will not threaten the viability of the Festival.

Our drive to professionalise our delivery has brought significant strength to the Festival and we are committed to this approach. However, we note that our expenditure is therefore less flexible and that we need to ensure we continue being able to dedicate sufficient funds for the development of our creative sector, including the adequate payment of artists.

We will achieve this by more strongly gearing our expenditure towards the creative sector, shortening the festival, being more engaged with potential funders and sponsors, and having a more systematic approach to planning and therefore readiness to apply for grants and sponsorships. We will also develop an artist remuneration policy to ensure that we consistently apply these principles.

Governance

How do we fulfil our duties without getting bogged?

We renew our commitment to good governance. As outlined in previous sections, we know that role clarity, planning, and monitoring will strengthen our organisation's capacity to deliver on our purpose.

To ensure that we are not overburdened, we will prioritise and step out this development. At the same time, we acknowledge that funders' expectations with respect to good governance are significant, irrespective of the organisation's size. We therefore understand that we will need to resource this activity specifically.

Artwork credit: Domenico De Clario.

1

We will develop a governance charter that translates our association rules and culture statement into a document that outlines "how we do governance": Our role as committee members and our expectations of each other, how we conduct our meetings, how we manage conflict, how we make and carry out decisions, and how we monitor progress.

2

Further, we realise that we would benefit from purposeful development of our committee to ensure it continues to address our strategic intent. We will develop a succession plan as well as a skills matrix to guide this development.

3

While our team reports on risks on a regular basis, we determined that our approach to risk management can mature. We will develop a risk management framework to strengthen this approach at a whole-of-organisation level.

4

To facilitate the efficient and effective fulfilment of the committee's statutory role and to structure our committee meetings with more foresight, we will develop a governance calendar that schedules compliance and strategic aspects throughout the year.

5

We seek a stronger artistic voice in the governing of our organisations and, while we develop our skills matrix and succession plan, will consider how we can make this happen in a way that embraces and enables creative thinking while retaining roles clarity, specifically with respect to creative director and committee members.

6

To allow new committee members to understand and carry out their roles, we will develop an onboarding package.

COVID

How do we deal with it?

Like so many other sectors, the creative sector was profoundly impacted by COVID-19 and associated restrictions. Because our sector is part of the gig-economy and relies on small amounts of short-term funding, the impact represents an existential threat. We cancelled most of our 2020 program EVOLVE - a difficult decision, but the right one. We are now developing UNIFY 2021 in consideration of our new normal.

Victorians have not stopped accessing art but, rather, have chosen different media and forms of art. It is likely that some of this change in behaviour will persist indefinitely. We acknowledge that COVID-19 presents us with a strategic crisis because it affects our entire community and how we connect, our delivery methods, and the funding available to us. However, we note that our organisational strategy should hold true irrespective of COVID, or any other natural disaster - whether acute (fire, floods, drought) or slow moving (climate change). From a governance perspective, **we will treat COVID as both a hazard and a risk that deserves its own strategy.** This COVID strategy must not conflict with our organisational strategy, but is overlaid and so provides the team with additional direction to guide their implementation planning.

And, perhaps most importantly, we also recognise that COVID has made us stop, reflect, and change. With this plan, we embrace the opportunity this has presented us with.

In short

HERE'S A SUMMARY OF WHAT WE DECIDED

- We will invest in becoming a more inclusive festival and community, and we will put First Peoples First.
 - We will deliver a shorter arts festival with stronger focus on discourse, deep community engagement, creative process, and creative output.
 - We value artistic input and practice and commit to developing and supporting our creative sector accordingly.
-
- We will seek ideas, methods, and practices that can help us and our region prosper.
 - We will strengthen our organisation by investing in training, better governance, better planning, income diversification, and stakeholder engagement.
 - We will plan and prioritise to prevent us from becoming overwhelmed.





Our plan

Sharper

OUR AIM

We will use art as a way to **stimulate discourse**, to draw a picture of what it looks like when we, as a community, fulfil our potential. We will use art to **identify solutions** and to name what holds us back. **We will be courageous.**

OUR OBJECTIVES

1. By the end of each year, we will have in place detailed Creative and Operational Plans that articulate how the Sharper, Deeper, and Clearer Strategies will be converted into action, and how they will be funded and evaluated.
2. By the end of June 2021, we will have drafted an artist payment policy and designed a consultation process for its finalisation by the end of 2021.
3. By the end of 2021, we will have adjusted our programming processes to ensure we select and support artists who can demonstrate a focus on creative process, creative output, and community engagement.
4. By 2022 (and thereafter), 50% of programmed events will celebrate our strengths and 50% will challenge the status quo, particularly with respect to truth-telling (First Peoples First principle).
5. By 2022, a minimum of 30% of programmed events will be commissioned by Shepparton Festival, a maximum of 40% by EOI, and minimum 30% by our partners SAM, Kaiela Arts, and STAG.
6. By 2023, 50% of programmed events will be commissioned by Shepparton Festival, 20% of programmed events will be generated through the EOI process, 30% of programmed events will be generated through formalised partnerships with SAM, Kaiela Arts, and STAG.



Deeper

OUR AIM

Our diverse community's happiness and prosperity are inextricably linked to our ability to become a truly **inclusive community**. We believe that our journey to that destination must begin with reconciling our past. That is why we will put **First Peoples First**. We know that we need to engage meaningfully and listen more attentively to understand more deeply.

OUR OBJECTIVES

1. By the end of each year, we will have in place detailed Creative and Operational Plans that articulate how the Sharper, Deeper, and Clearer Strategies will be converted into action, and how they will be funded and evaluated.
2. By the end of 2020, we will have established an Inclusivity Plan.
 - a. This will include (but not be limited to) the establishment of an Inclusivity Subcommittee with at least 5 and maximum 7 members. At least 3 members are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander artists living in Greater Shepparton.
 - b. We will adjust our governance and operational practices, policies and plans based on current best practice and the subcommittee's advice.
3. By the end of 2021, all staff and committee members will have completed cultural awareness training with an authorised, local First Nations organisation or consultant.
4. By the end of 2022, all staff and committee members will have completed cross-cultural training through the Ethnic Council.
5. By the end of 2023, at least 20% of events are held within Aboriginal-controlled environments, at least 20% of artists participating in the Festival are Aboriginal, at least 20% of board members are Aboriginal, and at least 20% of staff (FTE) are Aboriginal.

Shepparton Festival acknowledge the use of the Long Neck Turtle in this document as being of special significance to the Yorta Yorta Nation, the Traditional Custodians of the lands upon which the Shepparton Festival operates.

Clearer

OUR AIM

For us to deliver a sharper and deeper Festival we must be creative, focussed, efficient and effective. To do that, we need to act **purposefully, transparently and accountably**. We need to be clear on how we convert our understanding of our purpose and context into strategic direction, how this determines our creative and organisational plans, how we communicate them, and how we monitor progress against them. To achieve this, we will invest in strengthening our governance and operational processes so that our goals, objectives and roles are clear and targeted.

OUR OBJECTIVES

1. By the end of 2021, we will exceed the requirements set out in Creative Victoria governance checklist expectations. We will have in place policies and processes that support good governance, good management, and strong relationships.
2. We will review progress against our creative and operational plans at every committee meeting.
3. We will review progress against our strategic plan quarterly.
4. We will publish an annual progress report against our strategic, creative, and operational plans on our website.
5. By December 2022, we will have retained our 2021 level of multi-year funding.
6. By the end of 2023, there will be no single source of funding that accounts for more than 20% of our budget.
7. By the end of end of 2023, our funding mix is multi-year grants and one-off grants (50%), sponsorships (25%), ticketing/other (25%).
8. At least 80% of our annual budget expenditure is spent on festival costs, with a direct focus on our customers and supporting artists. No more than 20% is spent on administrative overheads.





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Artwork credit: Wendy Cook.

