



CONTEMPORARY
ASIAN
AUSTRALIAN
PERFORMANCE

2023

ENGAGE!

**A report on engagement with diverse communities
in the performance touring sector**

DEVELOPED BY

Contemporary Asian Australian Performance
and Arts on Tour

SUPPORTED BY

Creative Australia through the
Re-Imagine Sector Recovery Fund

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Want to put some of this information into action?

Great! This Report has a friend!

Engage! Toolkit: A Guide to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Community Engagement

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WHY ENGAGE?

This *Engage!* Research Report and Toolkit stems from a desire to ignite long lasting change within the performing arts sector by enabling ourselves and our peers to better build relationships with CALD communities. It is our aim that this research provides information for those within the touring ecology who produce, present, and support touring work to be empowered to expand their scope of who gets to experience touring activity.

The National Performing Arts Touring Scan^[1] outlines the touring ecology as one that comprises of those who:

- Produce touring work
- Present touring work
- Support touring work, and
- Experience touring activity

The Touring Scan also reported that, “Presenters and venues indicated that they wanted to improve their reach into different communities in their region and thereby increase the range of audiences with which they engaged.”^[2]

Within *Engage!* we consider touring as a part of infrastructure that mobilises culture, in this case performance and theatre. The activity requires a mixture of hard and soft infrastructure: ‘hard’ including built spaces such as theatres, and ‘soft’ infrastructure the expertise and knowledge and aesthetic sense of artists, and the services of arts organisations including touring agencies, local arts organisations, local government cultural departments, and state and federal arts funding bodies.

Contemporary Asian Australian Performance (CAAP), as a producer of performance works, has been a trailblazer in presenting Asian Australian works on a national scale. In 2019, CAAP partnered with Arts On Tour to tour *In Between Two* to 13 regional venues nationally – engaging for the first time with regional audiences across Australia, from Portland to Karratha. The tour highlighted the need for an exploration of how we as a sector approach engaging with CALD audiences: *Engage!* was born out of this exploration.

A hit of Sydney Festival 2016, *In Between Two* is an autobiographical ‘slide night like no other’ based on the fascinating family histories of hip hop artists Joel Ma (Joelistics) and James Mangohig. Consummate storytellers and charismatic performers, this is a joyful and captivating show to celebrate our diversity and start conversations. Two hip hop artists take to the stage to explore what it means to grow up Asian in Australia.

Having proven that this kind of work is able to hold its own within the Australian performance sphere, CAAP, alongside Arts on Tour, are now refocusing on how to reframe an approach to community engagement with CALD communities.

Following the success of *In Between Two*, CAAP and Arts on Tour partnered on a second regional tour in 2022 of the work *Double Delicious*.

Double Delicious is a sumptuous storytelling and culinary experience. Combining food and theatre with immersive visual and sound design, five storytellers reveal the secrets of dishes that are significant in their lives as they share compelling tales of family, upheaval, loss, and legacy. These are bitter, sweet, sour, and salty stories from the heart, infused with memory and lived experience. At the end of each story, the audience tastes the dish, completing their experience of the story just revealed. The production featured strong Asian Australian content whilst the stories remained highly accessible and relevant to broader audiences. As members of this tour, all six performers, three out of four key creatives, and two of three production staff identified as Asian Australian.

1. Merryn Carter/ Culture Counts (2020). The National Performing Arts Touring Scan: Final Report. <https://creative.gov.au/investment-and-development/protocols-and-resources/national-performing-arts-touring-scan/>
2. Ibid. page 32
3. Diversity Arts Australia, BYP Group and Western Sydney University. (2019). *Shifting the Balance: Cultural Diversity in Leadership Within the Australian Arts, Screen and Creative Sectors*, Sydney.

The *Engage!* research team worked with the presenting venues on the tour to investigate existing methods of engaging CALD communities and local opportunities, recognising that these efforts are not as embedded within performing arts community engagement practices as they could be. Key reports such as *Shifting the Balance* by Diversity Arts Australia^[3], the *National Performing Arts Touring Scan* and *Creating Our Future: the Results of the National Arts Participation Survey* have highlighted concerns about minimal CALD Leadership within the arts, the need to better engage CALD audiences, and the willingness of CALD audiences to participate in the arts.

We hope to provide an overview for what it means to welcome these communities into local venues and instil confidence within performing arts centre (PAC) managers when it comes to associated presenter challenges and community needs.

The *Engage!* research team utilised the tour of *Double Delicious* to meet and collaborate with four presenting venues, The Art House Wyong, Bunjil Place, Merrigong Theatre Company and Wagga Wagga Civic Theatre from December 2021, ahead of the tour in mid-2022. These meetings were used as opportunities to discuss CALD community engagement, identifying what systems and approaches each PAC had in place, and where there may have been gaps specific to the *Double Delicious* tour.

Engage! worked with partner venues to assess their capability and strategies to engage with CALD communities. As we progressed, it became clear that this work is an industry-wide responsibility but engagement, almost by definition, takes place on the ground. Therefore, the breadth of activities happening in local regions in relation to arts and cultural participation, local artist development and community led projects – alongside audience development strategies for the touring shows – were critical to the success of a touring show within the community. The ability to attract new audiences from CALD backgrounds is impacted by what activities are happening in local areas, the continuity of activities over sustained periods of time, organisational capacity and the sustainability of

A note about terminology:

The *Engage!* team acknowledges and agrees with Creative Australia's 2020 report 'Towards Equity: A research overview of diversity in Australia's arts and culture sector', which states

"The term culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) is used in Australia as a measurement of diversity across many policy areas. However, there is no widely used standardised approach for defining CALD, or measuring and reporting on cultural diversity in a respectful, accurate and inclusive way. Many have identified that the term is no longer fit for purpose".

The *Engage!* project did not have the scope to interrogate the terminology in detail and have used CALD for the purposes of this report. The *Engage!* team also acknowledges that the scope of this report is wholly focused on CALD communities to align with CAAP's mission and vision, which in this instance is not specifically inclusive of First Nations communities.

engagement. Hence staff turnover and job succession are important factors affecting engagement throughout the sector where relationships are often held by individuals and not embedded in the organisation.

A report from Deakin University, *Changing organisations to diversify arts audiences: Summary of findings from national survey (2023)*^[4] reinforces the 'limited success' policy and funding interventions have had in attracting audiences from "non-dominant cultures such as First Nations people, Deaf and Disabled communities, and those from different cultures, age groups, geographic locations, and sexual and gender identities." The report calls for arts organisations to create internal and intentional change to their approach in order to succeed. While this report on diversity focuses on the responses

4. Glow, Hilary, Anne Kershaw, Katya Johanson, Abbie Trott, Tracey Margieson, Mark Taylor and Wesley Enoch (2023). Changing organisations to diversify arts audiences. Summary of Findings from National Survey. <https://blogs.deakin.edu.au/audience-diversification/research/survey/>

of individual arts organisations, there is a clear need to consider collaboration and partnership initiatives. An inspiration for sustained community engagement and broadening collaboration comes from Regional Arts Australia's *Collaborating with Regional Communities: Guidelines and Tools for Regional Arts and Cultural Engagement*, who suggest that slow touring and longer-term engagement can achieve a more lasting impact within the community.

Slow touring approaches:

- Take time to adapt to the resources available in each host town. Encourage artists to spend more time in communities.
- To engage more deeply with a few can be more valuable than shallow engagement with many.
- Start small, work slowly, achieve greater outcomes.^[5]

Nevertheless, slow touring as a sustained sectoral strategy requires both organisational commitment as well as significant increases in funding support for a model that can sustain artists and arts workers for increased engagement and creative activities in a single location. Examples in WA have seen an increase in the artist-in-residency models of touring that allow for percolation of community-led projects from the ground-up, locally.

WHY NOW?

This research arises from the need to make change in the Australian performing arts sector, and arts and cultural policy at a state and federal level, which has not yet effectively supported the presence of CALD communities off-stage, on-stage or in our seating banks. Diversity Arts Australia's *Shifting the Balance* report showed that less than 1 in every 10 Australian arts leaders were from a CALD background (in 2019), a fact that becomes more drastic considering that CALD is a broad statistical term, rather than a category people directly identify with, as opposed to specific terms such as Asian or People of Colour.

An article published in *The Guardian* in July 2023 bore the headline "Australian Arts Organisations Have Done Little To Diversify White, Middle-Class Audience, Study Finds."^[6] The survey of Australian arts organisations by Hilary Glow and colleagues, finds that the diversification of work on stages has made little impact on diversifying audiences, and requires significant commitment from arts organisations to examine to overhaul their practices. Some 80 percent of organisations had responded with 'tokenistic' or no change to their usual practices. The encouraging news is that some 20 percent of organisations matched the survey's 'leader organisation' category, which entailed recognising the need for change, organisational commitment to diversify audiences, identifying target audiences, researching audiences and barriers to participation, developing programs in response to a target audience, and undertaking evaluation and reflective practice.^[7]

While we are delighted that there has been an increase of interest in programming works made by and for the CALD community, there is a disconnect between the intent, the action, and therefore the impact of the work we support as an organisation. The increase in programming works led by CALD artists highlights the urgent need for a more embedded, authentic and long-term strategy to community engagement that goes beyond selling tickets for the show on stage. Creative Australia's (formerly The Australia Council) *National Arts Participation Survey* indicated that 42% of CALD respondents would like to attend the arts more than they currently do.^[8] There are potential loyal audience members in many areas who have never been addressed by presenter communication strategies, who may not feel safe or included within a venue or are only spoken to when a work reflects their cultural background.

With this research, CAAP and Arts on Tour wish to indicate to presenters, producers, marketers of performance works that it is possible, and necessary, that we finally engage our population as a whole when it comes to attracting audiences to shows. And paradoxically perhaps, engaging with communities new to theatregoing will require thinking that goes beyond how to get their bums on theatre seats.

6. Kelly Burke, "Australian arts organisations have done little to diversify white, middle-class audience, study finds", 21 July, 2023,

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2023/jul/21/australia-arts-organisations-diversify-broaden-audience-white-middle-class-age-study>

7. Hilary Glow, Anne Kershaw, Katya Johanson, Abbie Trott, Tracey Margieson, Mark Taylor and Wesley Enoch, Changing organisations to diversify arts audiences: Summary of Findings from National Survey, 2023, <https://blogs.deakin.edu.au/audience-diversification/research/survey/>.

8. Australia Council for the Arts, *Creating Our Future: the Results of the National Arts Participation Survey, 2020*, <https://creative.gov.au/advocacy-and-research/creating-our-future/>, p. 82.

HOW DID WE DO IT?

Engage! and its associated activities were researched using a combination of narrative inquiry and observation alongside a regional New South Wales and Victoria tour of *Double Delicious*. This model allowed for an open-ended approach in dialogue with the partners of this project, ultimately leading the team to appreciate that the gap of knowledge, expertise and capacity to engage CALD audiences with *Double Delicious* is emblematic of a wide-spread concern across the arts sector that requires many systemic changes. It is also worth noting that limited capacity sector-wide had an impact which rippled through the research process as all partners had limited staffing, budget, and ability to adhere to the intended pre-tour and tour schedule, as well as previous more optimistic marketing and engagement strategies.

It is also important to note that the impacts of COVID was still having a significant impact on the capacity of all parties during the *Double Delicious* tour.

Casual interviews were conducted between *Engage!* Research Team and four touring venues across regional Victoria and New South Wales. Consultation began by asking each venue partner what their aims were for *Engage!*, who makes up their existing audience base, CALD audiences and communities that they would like to engage with, as well as establishing their current knowledge, experience, and capacity for community engagement and audience development ideas at that time. As this research progressed the *Engage!* team refined their focus towards community engagement, with the assumption that audience development within CALD communities will follow once better community engagement practices have been established.

Observations were conducted during pre-tour workshops designed to build audience appetite ahead of the *Double Delicious* tour and encourage ticket sales, where researchers noted engagement dynamics and the demographic background of participants. Observation was limited by a reduction in the number of workshops offered with partner theatres due to COVID effects and subsequent capacity issues.

A survey developed in consultation with Huber Social was intended to provide quantitative evidence of social impacts among participants from Asian diaspora

communities in four regions with a wellbeing-based approach. From the period of the pre-tour engagement, it became evident that the sample sizes required for such a measurement tool to be rolled out would not be achieved. The survey process did not sufficiently consider best practice or alternatives to important details such as support for patrons for whom English was not a first language, or a better considered approach to the framing of ethnicity and cultural background and time associated with completing a survey. In hindsight, this method is only of use if there is a strong likelihood of achieving a sizeable cohort group taking part in the whole program.

It is hoped that describing the challenges with honesty can inform not only our next attempts but yours as well.

***Engage!* Core Values**

From its early stages, the *Engage!* team used the analogy of friendship to consider engagement. This is because friendship, to us, also includes all the elements that take place in community engagement – making contact, welcoming, arranging meetings and activities, getting to know more about each other, and above all, mutual understanding. Intercultural friendships require further learning about backgrounds, cultural protocols and so on. Genuine, non-hierarchical relationships have their own dynamics - but over time through shared experiences they grow and become embedded in your own sense of identity and belonging. This process was often at odds with the more rigid and linear framework of a tour, the actual time allocated to this project, the realities of workloads, combined with the impacts of the Omicron outbreak.

Engage! sought to determine engagement practices as a set of principles and values that guide 'how' we approach the engagement process; establishing a flexible value system that could direct us toward what needs to happen next and what is possible. This ensures that conversations sustained during *Engage!* will continue beyond the project's timeframe.

THE ENGAGE! CORE VALUES INCLUDE:

1. Relationship Journey

We acknowledge and respect that all actions and reactions are part of an intentional long term relationship journey and draws on the perspective of friendship-forming.

2. Listening/Being Heard

We commit to always listening and incorporating what we hear, carefully turning these learnings into actions and decisions. People shine when they are being heard – and sometimes this takes time. We all deserve an environment where we can thrive.

3. People/Learning

We acknowledge the seen and unseen hard work of people, where knowledge, lived experience, services, conversations and social skills are valued, and of value. No matter where we are from, or what jobs we hold – we are all learning and extending our knowledge, experiences and skills, which in turn benefits our community.

4. Inclusivity

All stakeholders shall be respected. Inclusivity is about welcoming with open arms and an open heart. Everyone has a place at the table.

5. Embedding

We commit to positive changes at every level of systems and frameworks as best we can, wherever possible. This applies to evaluation, action, and decision making within the community, core business, organisations and collaborative networks we are part of.

6. Connectivity

Human connections are at the core of all that we do.

7. Be Aware of Othering

In all our work and our conversations, we are mindful about the notion of the 'Other'. Articulating difference is a way to acknowledge and understand one another, and a basis for a compassionate and harmonious society. It can also be divisive and harmful. Othering can be a powerful call to arms or a barrier to engagement. Never assume. Beware of unconscious bias. Stay curious.

THE ART HOUSE, WYONG NSW



About The Art House

Consisting of a 500-seat theatre, 130-seat studio space, a foyer exhibition space, meeting facilities, and a café/bar, The Art House (TAH) is a professional art space serving the Central Coast, New South Wales. TAH focuses on bringing nationally and internationally renowned companies and performers to its stage and providing a state-of-the-art performance space and other arts infrastructure for the Central Coast community.

Opened in 2016, TAH grew out of Wyong Civic and Cultural Precinct Master Plan (2011), with the aim of revitalising the town centre of Wyong and developing a cultural hub for the region. Owned by the Central Coast Council, The Art House is an independent, not-for-profit entity with an independent board of directors. Executive Director Anne-Marie Heath shared her philosophy for TAH with the *Engage!* Research Team:

“Let’s be different. As a new venue, we have no history. We are not reliant on traditional ‘theatre audiences’, as most people don’t think in terms of ‘names’, directors, actors, company reputations.”

This approach has paid off. In 2022, The Art House was awarded PAC’s Performing Arts Centre of the Year – in recognition of its contributions to the community, artists, the town of Wyong and the Central Coast,^[9] which was once described as “an area that didn’t have an existing theatre or audience.”

The Region

Wyong is in the Central Coast region between Sydney and Newcastle. The Central Coast has a relatively smaller proportion of overseas-born people (16.1%) compared to the NSW average (29.3%). The seven largest non-White ancestries (approximately 5.2% of the population) are Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Māori, Lebanese, Korean and Thai.

9. Gina Fairley, Where’s Wyong? Home to regional performing arts with national impact, Artshub, Aug 8, 2023; <https://paca.org.au/events/impactwards/>

Central Coast Council Population: 346,596^[10]

TABLE 1. NON-WHITE ANCESTRY

Ancestry	Population	Percentage
Chinese	5,136	1.5%
Filipino	3,679	1.1%
Indian	3,380	1.0%
Māori	2,405	0.7%
Lebanese	1,181	0.3%
Korean	1,098	0.3%
Thai	1,079	0.3%

TABLE 2. OVERSEAS BORN (NON-EUROPEAN)

Country of Birth	Population	Percentage
Born Overseas	555,675	16.1%
Philippines	2,487	0.7%
India	2,362	0.7%
China	1,893	0.5%
Thailand	856	0.2%
South Korea	810	0.2%

TABLE 3. NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGES

7.1% of people in the Central Coast Council speak a language other than English at home.

Language	Population	Percentage
Mandarin	1,953	0.6%
Cantonese	898	0.3%
Korean	881	0.3%
Malayalam	828	0.2%

The Art House Wyong and Engage!

All meetings for *Engage!* were held with the founding director of The Art House, Anne-Marie Heath. Anne-Marie Heath has a broad commitment to being engaged with the local community as she invests in future programs and initiatives. Heath’s approach to diverse community engagement is to ‘work with a whole community to engage with a diverse arts community’.

At The Art House, outreach and marketing work are conceived broadly, considering longer term change, and with the intention to attract any Central Coast residents who may not have previously engaged with TAH. TAH aims to attract a younger audience which goes counter to the reputation of Central Coast as a retirement area. Heath has instigated conversations with members of CALD communities to begin a friendship-building process, starting with coffee catch ups. TAH has been developing connections, notably with Chinese and other Asian creatives involved in local multicultural events.

Engage! Deliverables

Timeline	Activity	Lead Creative	Location	Outcome
Pre-tour (April 9 2022)	Kimchi-making workshop	<i>Double Delicious</i> Storytellers: Heather Jeong Jennifer Wong	TAH function room	Nine attendees including TAH supporters and kimchi enthusiasts who were new to the venue. The event did not attract any CALD participants
On-Tour	None	TAH engaged the Chinese, Filipino and Thai community through a multicultural group on the Central Coast – 10 seats were provided for them to allocate to the community, and they matched this by purchasing another 10 tickets.		

Summary

While *Engage!* activities were limited due to TAH's capacity to host, we note the lack of CALD participants in the pre-tour workshop. TAH's ability to focus on specific communities has been limited due to the demographic context. The participants who did attend the workshop continued to attend the performance of *Double Delicious* which is a positive outcome but does not address the focus of *Engage!*.

Heath's ability to prioritise the employment of a Creative Producer is a particular highlight which will positively impact the CALD community engagement in the future.

Utilising the skills of a Creative Producer is a great way to join the dots between your program, your community and the future you want to build.

Profile Highlight: The role of a Creative Producer in your community

At the beginning of the *Engage!* Process in 2022, Heath identified creative producing, community engagement skills, and capacity were lacking in the organisation due to lack of resources at the time. In 2023, TAH appointed Craig Bary as Creative Producer. TAH are now able to focus on building creative capacity in the region, developing quality work with a view to taking it to full production. Artist programs at TAH now include industry networking events, professional development, and residencies.

TAH's website states there are now 21 creative projects involving 130 Central Coast artists underway. The introduction of a Creative Producer to the team has enabled and encouraged activities within the venue, building longer term capacity for local artists, community engagement and new work development. Artists can access the venue's infrastructure ranging from the photocopier to the studio spaces and be supported to develop new work in partnership with other regional venues. The Creative Producer program has enabled TAH to ensure more diversity within their program, with one production in development featuring a CALD director, lead, and cast members.

Heath's view is that investing in local productions and artists creates work which is relevant to the Wyong and greater Central Coast communities, rather than relying on regional tours of productions that ordinarily exist in capital cities which are often staples of touring theatres.

TAH utilises an artist-led strategy to generate a diversity of cultural expressions. It remains to be seen what cultural content will emerge and the effects that will have on diversifying audiences and people engaging with The Art House.

As a result of the *Engage!* project, The Art House has considered more CALD performances in the program going forward, including conversations with Jennifer Wong's comedy show, as well as the following shows confirmed for 2024 by and for CALD writers and performers: *Guards at the Taj*, *The Peasant Prince*, and *In the Zone*.

BUNJIL PLACE, NARRE WARREN VIC



About Bunjil Place

Bunjil Place opened in 2017 as a major civic and cultural precinct bringing together “an unprecedented mix of facilities including an outdoor community plaza, theatre, multipurpose studio, function centre, library, gallery and City of Casey Customer Service Centre.”^[11] The Bunjil Place Theatre consists of a 200-seat studio and an 800-seat theatre.

Bunjil Place is administered by the City of Casey, which has an arts and cultural policy that broadly supports the appreciation of cultural diversity. Bunjil Place sits within the City of Casey’s structure in a department called Community Life. In consultation with the *Engage!* research team, Bunjil Place’s Head of Programming, Robin Batt, mentioned that the city’s ambitious goals are “to be a nation leading arts and cultural city” and “to be an inclusive arts and cultural experience.”^[12]

The Region

The City of Casey in southeast Melbourne is one of the most rapidly growing regions in Australia. Casey, like neighbouring Local Government Areas of Cardinia and Greater Dandenong, is a place of extraordinary cultural diversity. At the 2021 census, the most prominent of Casey’s many communities are South Asians, Afghans, Chinese, and Filipinos. The most prominent non-European languages spoken at home were Punjabi, Sinhalese, Hazaraghi, Mandarin and Dari.

11. Our Story, Bunjil Place, <https://www.bunjilplace.com.au/our-story>

12. See the City of Casey Arts and Cultural Development strategy, <https://www.casey.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files-public/2018-10/Arts-and-Cultural-Development-Strategy-2018-2022.pdf>

City of Casey Population: 365,239^[13]

TABLE 1. NON-WHITE AND NON-INDIGENOUS ANCESTRY

Ancestry	Population	Percentage
Indian	34,061	9.3%
Sinhalese/Sri Lankan	17,824	4.9%
Chinese	15,992	4.4%
Afghan	11,989	3.3%
Hazara	11,901	3.3%

TABLE 2. OVERSEAS BORN (NON-EUROPEAN): 153, 787

Country of Birth	Population	Percentage
India	32,355	8.9%
Sri Lanka	15,026	4.1%
Afghanistan	14,679	4.0%
Philippines	6,990	1.9%
China	5,859	1.6%

TABLE 3. NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGES

41.8% of people in Casey used a language other than English at home in 2021.

Language	Population	Percentage
Punjabi	16,865	4.6%
Sinhalese	12,863	3.5%
Hazaraghi	11,772	3.2%
Mandarin	7,942	2.2%
Dari	7,233	2.0%



Bunjil Place Theatre and Engage!

During our *Engage!* program, meetings were held with Robin Batt, Head of Programming, Bunjil Place Arts and Cultural Development. At the time of the project, Batt, along with Georgia Cribb, the Bunjil Place Art Gallery Manager, carried out most community engagement activities on-site. Bunjil Place Theatre is an integral part of the Bunjil Place precinct for this engagement, and *Double Delicious* was presented in the 200-seat studio.

In relation to performing arts, Bunjil Place reported building connections with emerging artists from diverse backgrounds, notably the South Asian Arts Pathways program which included a collaboration with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.^[14] They also invested in mentorships for Co-Directors of Sangam, a performing arts festival for South Asians and the diaspora, Dr. Priya Srinivasan and Hari Sivanesan, and, as a result, have established connections with people who rent various Bunjil Place venues for Indian dance rehearsals.

Engage! Deliverables

Timeline	Activity	Lead Creative	Location	Outcome
Pre-tour	Kimchi-making workshop	<i>Double Delicious</i> Storytellers: Heather Jeong Valerie Berry	Meeting Room	11 attendees 3 CALD attendees
On-Tour	None	<p>A visit by the <i>Engage!</i> research team was planned for May 2022, including meetings with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bunjil Place Team on engagement team building City of Casey Change Management Team on programming and scoping opportunities for future engagement and engagement strategies, Robin Batt and others involved with programming to scope possibilities for future engagement and engagement strategies. <p>Visits to potential community partners contacted by <i>Engage!</i> were also planned but did not progress.</p>		



Summary

Batt played a significant role in welcoming participants during the pre-tour kimchi making workshops by being present and encouraging ongoing participation. This workshop was noted by Bunjil Place as a great opportunity to build relationships with new audiences, noting that some participants of the workshop had never been in a theatre before.

Unfortunately, the Omicron outbreak within Victoria limited opportunities for ongoing relationship building as part of *Engage!*. Bunjil Place were forced to cancel all non-essential programs to allow for operational staff to assist delivering events and public facing activities in their theatres and venue.

Bunjil Theatre is a small part of the large cultural and civic hub of Bunjil Place, which has a much broader management structure. Any strategy for the theatre must be connected to that of Bunjil Place, and therefore the City of Casey. In conversation with Batt, *Engage!* learned that marketing was the largest challenge for Bunjil Place Theatre as the City of Casey's marketing team focuses on Bunjil Place as a whole and on entertainment for young families. This means there is limited scope for specific arts venues within Bunjil Place to reach out to new communities and build lasting relationships. Bunjil Place also indicated that intentional connections with CALD communities and connecting to community agencies such as settlement services are still in the early stages.

Being welcomed by the leaders of an institution is a wonderful opportunity to build relationships.

The *Engage!* research team noted the following opportunities to improve this engagement within Bunjil Place, while appreciating the size and nature of the institution would pose some challenges:

- Intra-team collaboration around engagement, between different parts of Bunjil Place programming
- More focused data to support and evaluate CALD community engagement programs

Bunjil Place has significant strengths in the dynamic programming of a major cultural hub and the energy of a rapidly growing highly diverse population. Bunjil Place is well positioned with resources and attracts audiences thanks to its central location in southeast Melbourne but faces challenges with the level of community engagement required to ensure greater diversity of both audience and cultural participation.

Profile Highlight: New Ground Commissioning Initiative

New Ground is a commissioning program for local early to mid-career creatives to develop new digital, performance, film or other projects to be presented at Bunjil Place.

The initiative is funded by the Sidney Myer Fund and resulted from consultation with artists in southeast Melbourne about the need for arts infrastructure and resources that support future pathways. This support was identified as way to address key issues of access, platforms for presentation, cultural safety, and collaboration in southeast Melbourne's creative industry.

An inaugural round was offered in 2022 where six multi-artform projects were presented at Bunjil Place – in the Studio, Digital Wall, and Library. The initiative was offered again in 2023. This initiative indicates an opportunity and willingness from Bunjil Place and the City of Casey to embrace more targeted opportunities for CALD creatives.

2022 New Ground Artists and their works developed were:

- *Amalgam: on feeling the future* by Jessica Nikitina-Li, Ben Rohy, Fathiah Raihan and Jocelyn Montecinos.
- *Cascade* by Gülsen Özer, Ania Reynolds and Vanessa White.
- *South East Collage* presentation by Nicholas Tsekouras.
- Portraits of artists in the South East panel discussion with Andrew Duong, Paulina Zamorano, Zia Atahi, Dee Wong and Corey Porter (aka Mr Congo).
- *Painfully Relatable, poetry so relatable it hurts* excerpt by Amy Mead
- *Old Sayings* by David Nguyen and PDHT (Alexandra Danielle Lim, Crystal Yap, Janelle San Juan, Jimmy Nguyen, Khenji Ang, Kunal Aggarwal, Liam House, Nancy Tran, Neeson Paterno and Long Truong Doan).

MERRIGONG THEATRE COMPANY, WOLLONGONG NSW



About Merrigong Theatre Company

Merrigong Theatre Company (Merrigong) is an independent theatre company that has an agreement with the Wollongong City Council to manage its performing arts venues. This includes: Illawarra Performing Arts Centre (IPAC)'s IMB Theatre (515 seat capacity), Bruce Gordon Theatre (206 – 234 seat capacity), and Bob Peet Studio (80 seat capacity), Wollongong Town Hall (944 seat capacity), the Music Lounge (165 capacity), and occasional spaces such as Spiegeltent Wollongong.

Merrigong as it is known now was formed in 2000 and has since built up a strong track record in theatre production and artist development, drawing on diverse local communities in the region. Merrigong has established

programs supporting theatre-making by young people, and people with disabilities, for instance, the Strangeways Ensemble, supported by a partnership with the Disability Trust.^[15] For the past six years, the MerrigongX program has been supporting artists from the region and beyond to develop new and innovative work. These efforts have enabled them to create work for touring to other regions.

Merrigong's business model combines the presentation of commercial cultural products such as theatre, music and comedy – to support other theatre production activities.^[16] In 2019, Merrigong was the largest performing arts organisation outside of Australia's capital cities with an annual turnover of round A\$6.7 million.^[17]

15. The Disability Trust, The Strangeways Ensemble stage another triumph, 27 January 2022, <https://www.disabilitytrust.org.au/news-and-events/news/the-strangeways-ensemble-stage-another-triumph>

16. Merryn Carter 2020: 68

17. McIntyre, Kerrigan and McCutcheon 2020: 19

The Region

Wollongong is 65 kilometres south of Sydney and the third largest city in New South Wales. Wollongong and the Illawarra region has long attracted significant migrant populations due to its industry, most notably the Port Kembla Steelworks, founded in 1928. Waves of migration have generated the region's diverse cultural makeup. By 1966, 60 percent of steelworkers were born overseas. These workers were initially largely European, but after the abolishment of the White Australia Policy, people from Vietnam, India, the Philippines, China, and the South Pacific came to work in the region.

The largest non-European born groups are from India, China, the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand. The Indian and Filipino population has grown significantly since 2016, although the Chinese population has fallen significantly, perhaps due to the recent decline in overseas student numbers. Significant numbers of people from humanitarian programs have settled in the Illawarra region. In recent years the largest groups include people from Iraq, Syria, the Congo, Myanmar and Ukraine.^[18] The most prominent languages of refugee groups in the past decade are Arabic (people from Syria and Iraq), Karenni (people from Burma) and Farsi (people from Iran and Afghanistan).^[19]

Wollongong City Population: 214,564

TABLE 1. NON-WHITE AND NON-INDIGENOUS ANCESTRY

Ancestry	Population	Percentage
Chinese	4,296	2.0%
Indian	2,853	1.3%
Filipino	2,167	1.0%
Lebanese	2,159	1.0%
Vietnamese	1,240	0.6%

TABLE 2. OVERSEAS BORN (NON-EUROPEAN): 45,084

Country of Birth	Population	Percentage
India	2,315	1.1%
China	1,878	0.9%
Philippines	1,332	0.6%
Vietnam	964	0.4%
Thailand	746	0.4%

18. City of Wollongong, Refugee Communities in the Illawarra 2022. <https://profile.id.com.au/wollongong>

19. City of Wollongong, Refugee Communities in the Illawarra 2022. <https://profile.id.com.au/wollongong>

TABLE 3. NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGES

15.8% of people in Wollongong used a language other than English at home in 2021

Language	Population	Percentage
Arabic	2,968	1.4%
Vietnamese	1,115	0.5%
Filipino/Tagalog	862	0.4%
Malayalam	784	0.4%
Thai	588	0.3%

Merrigong Theatre Company and *Engage!*

Due to a shortage of staff, the timing of the *Double Delicious* tour, and Covid-related impacts which caused ongoing disruptions, meetings with Merrigong were few and far between.

Merrigong’s updated Strategic Plan^[20] has diversity targets, although there are no clear plans to focus on particular CALD communities. In consultations, Merrigong expressed an interest in exploring relations with recently arrived Chinese communities and in further developing a relationship with settlement programs through the Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra (MCCI), Illawarra Multicultural Services (IMS), and SCARF refugee support.

The *Engage!* research team contacted these community organisations and confirmed their willingness to work with Merrigong. They stressed there needed to be more notice of relevant events and programs, and more focus on maintaining ongoing relationships.

Merrigong were unable to participate in pre-tour engagements due to COVID-related staff shortages. This also led to fewer meetings with the *Engage!* research team as several key positions had not been filled, including the Community Engagement Officer.

Engage! Deliverables

Timeline	Activity	Lead Creative	Location	Outcome
Pre-tour	None			
On-Tour	Ticket Donations	Merrigong, MCCI, MCCI Youth program, SCARF	Merrigong Theatre	Merrigong donated 10 tickets to <i>Double Delicious</i> for community members, some of whom were Karenni program participants and settlement workers. Four attendees had never been to a theatre before.

20. Merrigong Theatre Company, *Strategic Plan 2022-2026*.

Summary

The impacts of COVID upon the *Engage!* project and Merrigong restricted our ability to conduct more thorough research of CALD engagement opportunities for Merrigong and limited our oversight over *Double Delicious* audience engagement. We consider this a casualty of Omicron and have full faith that Merrigong have since created plans to better develop CALD audience relationships in the future.

While Merrigong was shifting towards an organisation-wide emphasis on social justice and inclusion including engagement with CALD communities, the organisation was undergoing significant capacity challenges. The re-recruitment of the Community Engagement Officer role would greatly assist engagement efforts on the ground to match the aspirations of Merrigong's Strategic Plan.

Profile Highlight: Structural change at a Strategic Plan level

Like many venues, Merrigong was highly vulnerable in the COVID lockdowns, with the company suffering a \$3 million loss in 2020.^[21] The difficulties of this period precipitated intense reflection on the company's future and its relation to the community in which it is based. This included the realisation that although Merrigong has made attempts to diversify programs and audiences they were still "far from reflecting the actual diversity of our local community and of wider Australian society."^[22]

Having realised the need to change its own organisation, Merrigong is focused on long term structural change. Diversity principles are a core element of Merrigong's program of structural change, along with many other equity issues in its 2022-2026 Strategic Plan. This is an ambitious and thorough attempt to embed cultural equity, artist-centred management and decision making and focus on theatre that is impactful and ensuring the organisation is strong, resilient, accountable, and pursuing best practices.

This ambitious structural change commits the company to developing strategies to diversify audiences, staffing and board membership which could have the effect of also diversifying audience and cultural participation. Merrigong plans to develop more effective data and evaluation processes to support ongoing community engagement with new communities.

Existing community engagement programs at Merrigong are well developed and programs such as MerrigongX, youth theatre programs, and programs with people with a disability can provide good bases to extend wider access to CALD participation.

21. D. Savage. Illawarra Mercury. How Wollongong's Merrigong Theatre Company was brought back from the brink. 21 December 2020. <https://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/7063223/how-wollongongs-merrigong-theatre-company-was-brought-back-from-the-brink/>
22. Hinton, S. Merrigong Theatre Company. Switching off the ghost light: Our commitment to do better. 15 October 2020.

WAGGA WAGGA CIVIC THEATRE, WAGGA WAGGA NSW



About Wagga Wagga Civic Theatre

The Wagga Wagga Civic Theatre (WWCT) comprises a 491-seat auditorium used largely for touring shows, local comedy and music, and a 100-seat basement space for amateur theatre, run by the School of Arts Community Theatre (SOACT). In 1959, the Wagga Wagga School of Arts sold its premises, committing the funds to the construction of the Civic Theatre as ‘the cultural hub of the town.’ Since its opening in 1963, the Civic Theatre has been a central meeting place for the people of Wagga city – as there is no town hall.^[23]

WWCT is administered by Wagga Wagga City Council under its Community Services Directorate, sitting with social planning, visitor economy and events.^[24] Wagga Wagga City Council’s current Cultural Plan^[25] demonstrates an ambitious and forward-thinking approach to renewing and

extending cultural infrastructure in the region.

The Cultural Plan notes that the Civic Theatre building lacks the flexibility to cater for diverse cultural needs as the current theatre’s design rules out intimate performances or events requiring differing configurations. (19) The Plan envisages “transform[ing] the Wagga Wagga Civic Theatre into a multi-arts centre that can accommodate a broad variety of performance genres and audiences and meet increasing demand for community use.” The WWCT would connect with a broader Civic Precinct which would include the nearby City Library, Museum of the Riverina and Wagga Wagga Art Gallery. A potential upgrade would provide a basis for much broader engagement with diverse communities in the region. At the time of writing the nature of the upgrade was still unclear, with a range of options being considered.

23. Wagga Wagga Civic Theatre. History of the Civic Theatre. <https://civictheatre.com.au/about-us/history>

24. City of Wagga Wagga. Leadership & Structure. <https://wagga.nsw.gov.au/the-council/about-council/leadership-and-structure>

25. City of Wagga Wagga. Wagga City Cultural Plan 2020-2030, <https://wagga.nsw.gov.au/the-council/planning-and-reporting/community-planning/current-community-plans/cultural-plan-2020-2030>

The Region

Wagga Wagga is the largest town of the Riverina region on the Murrumbidgee River in southern NSW. A major regional centre, Wagga has a relatively low proportion of people born overseas – 11.4 percent compared to 29.4 percent across NSW. However, this proportion is growing rapidly, increasing from 6.5% in 2006 and 9.3% in 2016.^[26] This is due in part to Wagga Wagga's role as a settlement city for refugee and asylum seeker programs. Rapidly growing groups include people born in India, Iraq and the Philippines. The most spoken non-English language in the 2021 census was Kurdish as a result of people fleeing conflict in Iraq and Syria. Other rapidly growing languages in the region are Malayalam, Punjabi, Nepali, Burmese, and Mandarin.^[27]

Wagga Wagga Population in 2021: 67,609

TABLE 1. NON-WHITE AND NON-INDIGENOUS ANCESTRY

Ancestry	Population	Percentage
Indian	1,144	1.7%
Chinese	834	1.2%
Iraqi	651	1.0%
Filipino	621	1.0%

TABLE 2. OVERSEAS BORN (NON-EUROPEAN): 7,685

Country of Birth	Population	Percentage
India	999	1.5%
Iraq	826	1.2%
Philippines	460	0.7%
China	346	0.5%
Burma (Myanmar)	224	0.3%

TABLE 3. NON-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

9.1% of people in Wagga Wagga used a language other than English at home in 2021

Language	Population	Percentage
Kurdish	707 (2016: 3)	1% (2016: 0%)
Malayalam	554	0.8%
Mandarin	381	0.6%
Arabic	339	0.5%

Wagga Wagga Civic Theatre and *Engage!*

Engage! met with the small but deeply enthusiastic team behind the Wagga Wagga Civic Theatre (WWCT) who were willing and ready to have conversations about initiatives for CALD engagement. We were also able to meet with Alison Read of STARTTS^[28] discussing the *Sharing Stories, Sharing Place* partnership with WWCT, local schools and a local arts organisation (see case study below).

WWCT does not have a specific position for community engagement or job descriptions that include engagement processes beyond marketing of shows and education programs, nor do they have dedicated staff to engage with new communities or better focus on relationship-building and collaboration.

Engage! Deliverables

Timeline	Activity	Lead Creative	Location	Outcome
Pre-tour	Kimchi-making workshop	<i>Double Delicious</i> Storytellers: Heather Jeong Valerie Berry	WWTC	10 people attended, including Victoria Lowe, Wagga City's Community Development Officer who runs an annual multicultural festival.
On-Tour	Storytelling through Comedy	Jennifer Wong (Comedian, writer, programmer)	WWTC upstairs foyer	Six attendees. One CALD participant attended, and 2 other CALD participants were unable to attend due to COVID. Two non-CALD participants travelled over an hour to attend the workshop who had never been to WWCT previously.

28. Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors, supported by NSW Health.

Summary

COVID had a significant impact on ticket-buying behaviour, which led to the cancellation of several shows of *Double Delicious*, and a reduction in ticket pricing from \$150 to \$65. Subsequently the three shows offered were sold out. WWCT were willing to talk with CAAP and Arts on Tour about this, showing how flexibility and mutuality could lead to successfully finding alternatives to allow the show to go ahead. As an outcome of the *Double Delicious* tour and the Storytelling through Comedy workshop, WWCT programmed Jennifer Wong in their 2023 Comedy Festival.

WWCT has strong community networks that include supporters such as Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga (Thom Paton), Wagga City Council (Victoria Lowe, Social Planning), Eastern Riverina Arts (Tim Kurylowicz) and STARTTS (Ali Reid), who were willing and eager for future community and creative collaborations with WWCT.

Profile Past Project Example: Sold out shows of a community-led performance 'Sharing Stories, Sharing Place'

Sharing Stories, Sharing Place was staged in the round on the main stage at WWCT in September 2021. It replaced COVID-cancelled touring performances and had strong local impact. *Sharing Stories, Sharing Place* was performed by six young people of Iraqi, African, and Indian backgrounds from three local high schools. The show grew from a long period developing stories of refugee journeys and migration, beginning with a weekly drama program.^[29] The students worked with artists Alyson Evans and Haya Arzidin to develop the play and an animator who developed projected maps to illustrate the journeys of migration. The project was produced by Create Hub Riverina, a local organisation headed by Claire Harris running creative programs and STARTTS, a program working with people and communities that are survivors of torture and trauma.

WWCT staff also reported a new energy in relation to offering and activating alternative spaces in their venue for activities and events as an outcome of *Engage!*. They were keen to explore how the existing building can be more welcoming to CALD communities by utilising the hard infrastructure in different ways to build relationships and shared experiences. They discussed activating foyer spaces and balconies for smaller, intimate events that do not involve a traditional theatre experience as an opportunity to build relationships and demystifying the venue for those that are yet to attend a performance in the main theatre auditorium.

The development of *Sharing Stories* required considerable resources, including funding from the Communities and Justice Youth Opportunities fund.^[30] Supporting such initiatives involves not only resourcing, but anticipation of the social and creative needs of the group as they develop. In conversation with the *Engage!* research team, Reid says, "you have to think ahead and predict the next stage well before it happens." This requires flexibility as well as sound knowledge of available resources, skills and experiences needed for a project of this nature. *Sharing Stories, Sharing Place* delivered a sell-out season and illustrates the potential of broad partnerships – between schools, arts organisations, social support agencies, funding bodies, local government – to realise community cultural development arts projects. Apart from its theatrical success, the program had strong effects on the participants in terms of their well-being and confidence in representing their communities at public events.

29. City of Wagga Wagga, On Stage! Young Storytellers 'Sharing Stories, Sharing Place', 30 September 2021, <https://wagga.nsw.gov.au/the-council/news-and-updates/news-articles/september-2021/on-stage!-young-storytellers-sharing-stories,-sharing-place>
30. NSW Government. Communities and Justice. Youth Inclusion. <https://www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/community-inclusion/youth.html>

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Firstly, we should note the significant differences among the four partners and their regional profiles. These differences encompass size, resources, and infrastructure, as well as varying histories — from the long-established Civic Theatre in Wagga to the recently constructed art precincts/hubs in Wyong and Bunjil Place. Additionally, there are contrasting governance models, with two partner organisations administered by councils and two independent organisations, although both of the latter are responsible for managing council-owned infrastructure. The regions they serve are very different, with differing demographics and histories of migration and humanitarian settlement. The four profiles constitute a wide spectrum of the possible contexts to examine engagement aimed at extending diversity through performing arts. Despite these large differences, there are also clear similarities. At this time of the *Double Delicious* tour and pre-tour (April to June 2022) there were significant challenges for all presenter partners. In all cases, there were capacity problems exacerbated by the impact of Omicron on staffing during the study period. Capacity shortfalls limited engagement activities, which were (understandably) perceived as being secondary to the task of marketing and presenting the show.

This pattern also highlighted problems with the design and timing of *Engage!* research programs — the demands of delivering theatre shows were at odds with the demands of running engagement programs at the same time in difficult circumstances. The *Engage!* research program had been designed around phases derived from touring schedules: pre-tour, on-tour and post-tour phases. But capacity problems affected the whole *Engage!* program, with peak impacts occurring in the on-tour phase.

This points to differing temporal frameworks for marketing and audience engagement. Marketing and audience engagement primarily target the potential audience before and during the show's season. In contrast, community engagement involves a much longer, ongoing process of building relationships with communities, without the primary focus on ticket sales. It's important to disentangle community engagement processes from the cycles of presenting shows, although there may be overlapping events.

The *Engage!* experience also showed us that the capacity for community engagement is closely linked to organisational factors including:

- **Staffing structures, job descriptions and roles** that do not include community engagement activity
- **Skills:** need for engagement experience and training
- **Local knowledge and cultural sensitivity:** need for more thorough knowledge of local communities
- Need for **adequate information about community groups** (both data and firsthand experience) for engagement planning and evaluation
- Need to improve **quality of communication** about engagement within and between organisations to inform planning, programming and events — not just an add-on events and activities
- Need to **embed engagement practices and reporting** throughout all processes of arts organisations
- **Strengthening and maintaining local networks** will extend the reach and effectiveness of CALD engagement and the possibility of strong collaborations.

Each of these items represents a necessary element in expanding engagement potential, and they all pose challenges that organisations must address. Furthermore, these elements of organisational structure and agency in engagement are interrelated, influencing one another.

Policy reports always sound neat, but the organisational reality is messy, consisting of a mixture of defined structures and individual agents who shape their roles with their personalities and passions. Who are we talking about? In some organisations it was not clear which staff could contribute to engagement activity, since jobs are often tightly defined around defined service tasks. But in spite of these constraints, some organisations had developed a team with an interest in extending engagement skills and expertise.

Community engagement work is often parcelled out to marketing staff, who may either be constrained by more transactional marketing approaches or relish the opportunity to try different approaches across longer timeframes. Where an organisation has a community engagement position, they will take the lead, but then

there is a danger of siloing engagement responsibility to that one person. Most organisations lacked clear plans and targets to inform their engagement work. Knowledge and communication about the cultural makeup of the region was patchy.

All of this will be related to the level of institutional support for diversifying audiences and expanding participation, as well as the extent to which community engagement with emerging communities can be embedded into organisations and their daily processes. One thing should flow into another if these elements are successfully integrated. However, changing institutional processes can be challenging and may require a long-term approach, depending on governance structures. Setting aside the impact of COVID, it was found that engagement aimed at diversifying audiences posed a significant challenge. Organisations will need to determine the reasons behind this challenge and the extent of their commitment to audience diversification.

Ideally, inclusive practices and welcoming strategies should be built into organisations at individual, team, and structural levels. However, this transformation won't happen overnight. Beginning with small steps and forming an engagement team that shares contacts and expands networks and partnerships is an ideal approach. The ideas and enthusiasm of the staff are the most valuable resources. Establishing an engagement team will not happen automatically; it will necessitate resources and, most importantly, trust and support throughout the organisation.

The *Engage!* process provided an impetus to encourage all those involved in producing, presenting, or touring performing arts works to consider new approaches to engaging CALD communities authentically. While acknowledging significant barriers, we also recognise the strengths within the sector, as well as the unique pathways of each theatre company or PAC.

An important shared strength was a commitment to local creative development. This commitment is evident in Merrigong's established track record of producing local productions and its dual role in producing and presenting theatre within a regional context. Additionally, the new creative development programs at TAH, Bunjil Place,

and WWCT harness local talent, stories, and cultural styles, offering exciting opportunities to explore new cultural influences and expressions unique to each region.

With each partner, we observed an expansion of community networks, whether it was through engagement with local communities or by forging connections with community agencies and council workers who tend to have a better understanding of the social needs of new communities than theatres. This aspect of community engagement involves the essential work of maintaining contacts, inviting participation, keeping communities and organisations informed, being mindful of cultural sensitivities, listening to people's preferences, and exploring opportunities for mutual programming or collaboration.

Engage! provided opportunities to begin ongoing relationships with each partner and fostered meaningful community engagement, which, in turn, aided in establishing more focused engagement programs. From this research, we have arrived at the following eight **FINDINGS** and **PATHWAYS** for thinking about **CALD** community engagement.

- 1. START NOW, KEEP GOING**
- 2. KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE**
- 3. KNOW WHO IS AROUND YOU**
- 4. GO BEYOND THE TOURING SHOWS**
- 5. BE GENUINE AND HONEST**
- 6. TAKE YOUR TIME**
- 7. TRUST YOUR COMMUNITY, EMBOLDEN YOUR TEAM**
- 8. NOTHING IS ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL**

These **FINDINGS AND PATHWAYS** form our **ENGAGE! Toolkit** which accompanies this report! Find it, read it, put it into action!

The mandate of *Engage!* was to reimagine community engagement. What is apparent from our research is that community engagement that truly aims to achieve inclusiveness and diversity is a difficult and complex task. However, one that has rich and embedded rewards when done well!

Community engagement with cultural groups who have different cultural repertoires and assumptions presents a higher degree of difficulty. It is not that emerging communities are impervious to new cultural experiences – they certainly aren't – but engagement needs to begin with what is relevant to their experiences and sensitivities.

Community engagement seeking to extend diversity of cultural participation is a complex process. It helps to think about the different kinds of activity it brings together. There are three dimensions of what we understand as culture involved in truly mutual intercultural engagement:

- **social and community-based practices** that aim to form friendships and to encourage emerging or minority communities to participate in cultural life with the aim of furthering cultural democracy
- **creative and artist-mediated practices** that seek to extend diverse expressions and cultural innovation
- **industry or sector-based approaches** that seek to promote diversity through advocacy, networking and capacity building in support of cultural sustainability.^[31]

The lesson for the sector is that the ongoing engagement work at local levels is the bedrock of engagement to extend cultural diversity in regional contexts. This needs to be more strongly established at presenter theatre level, although it is also clear that there will be no single template for how organisations will approach this. Local conditions and relations to CALD communities as well as governance structures and leadership will all be significant factors for how this is negotiated over time.

To support CALD community engagement at local and regional levels we have also developed recommendations that are related to potentials to develop partnerships and knowledge-sharing with local government, by far the largest investor in performing arts infrastructure in regional Australia. It's crucial to identify synergies between local government cultural policies, strategic planning, event planning, and the engagement and diversity activities of PACs and theatre companies. Such knowledge-sharing could also explore aligning job structures, skills development, and team building to facilitate creative and community engagement activities that mutually benefit local government and performing arts institutions, thereby expanding diversity in access to cultural services and programs.

In addition, we recommend establishing and strengthening links between regional presenters, NGOs, and organisations facilitating migrant and humanitarian settlement programs.

31. Ph City of Wagga Wagga, On Stage! Young Storytellers 'Sharing Stories, Sharing Place', 30 September 2021, <https://wagga.nsw.gov.au/the-council/news-and-updates/news-articles/september-2021/on-stage!-young-storytellers-sharing-stories,-sharing-place>

Recommendations

- 1.** There is a primary need to support capacity-building initiatives with CALD communities. We recommend developing a detailed program and funding to assist presenting venues, theatre companies and artists across the sector to build engagement capacity.
- 2.** We recommend presenting venues/ performing arts centres explore ways to share information and strategies about CALD community and audience engagement. This could be facilitated by peak bodies, touring support agencies or producers through their networks.
- 3.** Local government plays a key role in managing performance spaces in regional Australia. For this reason, we recommend the investigation of ways to develop partnerships with local councils around strategies and programs to extend engagement with CALD communities and aligning this with relevant council cultural plans, diversity plans, community plans and general strategic planning. This could take place through individual LGAs/councils or through knowledge-sharing with peak local government bodies at regional and state and territory level.
- 4.** We recommend a comprehensive policy and funding package to support slow touring and extended community engagement throughout the performing arts touring sector.
- 5.** We recommend the encouragement of partnerships between producers, presenters, performing arts centres with NGOs who run programs working with migrant services and/or with humanitarian settlement programs. Partnership and knowledge-sharing arrangements with settlement support bodies such as the Settlement Council of Australia, the Refugee Council of Australia, the Red Cross and relevant government programs would be of value in increasing access to cultural participation and in developing cultural and social programs that connect with performing arts.

PARTNER COMPANIES

About CAAP

Contemporary Asian Australian Performance (CAAP) is Australia's only performing arts company with a remit for producing, developing and enabling Asian Australian works and artists to reach main stages nationally. Through highly valued productions and initiatives, CAAP is regarded as a crucial leader and catalyst in the ongoing shift to greater cultural diversity and inclusiveness in the arts. CAAP provides the scaffolding for Asian Australian artists to thrive in a more equitable and representative industry. In all that we do, we are working to transform the Australian theatre landscape.

About ARTS ON TOUR

Arts on Tour is the largest touring service organisation in Australia and the peak body for touring in NSW. Arts on Tour works with NSW-based artists and producing companies, and presenting venues nationally, to sustainably deliver a culturally and artistically diverse annual Touring Program that reaches over 150,000 audience members across Australia. Arts on Tour is committed to diversifying the touring sector, particularly with First Nations, CALD and regionally based artists and productions, as well as leading on best practice touring initiatives such as Engage! and the award-winning Green Touring Toolkit, which provides a step-by-step guide to reducing touring emissions. Arts on Tour has committed to being carbon neutral by 2024.

KEY TERMS

"Audience engagement"

Audience engagement within this report refers to the relationship and experience that an audience member might have with an organisation and its programming. This is more transactional than community engagement, though not any less authentic.

For the purposes of this research, audience engagement is focused on building the relationships between CALD communities and uncovering what it takes to turn them into paying audience members of each venue. With both audience and community engagement, it is important to note that this work continues and is ongoing. CAAP and Arts on Tour do not consider audience and community engagement as a single-step approach. Instead, these are terms used to name the process of authentically relating with a more diverse audience-base, as well as having the arts serve the community. Both audience and community engagement in this instance aim to address those who belong to groups previously underrepresented in the performing arts.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities are the focus of this report. This “describes Australia as a culturally, religiously and linguistically diverse population.” This term is not inclusive of First Nations people. We acknowledge that this term has a broad scope and is not often preferred language. However, CALD is still the term most commonly recognised term to describe communities the research was interested in, hence we have used it in this report.

Community Engagement

“Activities undertaken by an arts organization as part of a mission strategy designed to build deep relationships between the organization and the communities in which it operates for the purpose of achieving mutual benefit. It is accomplished by developing trust and understanding through which reach can be expanded.”

—(Americans for the Arts)

In this report, community engagement includes, but is not limited to, the ongoing relational work that is essential to engage the broader population within which a venue is located.

White

The term White has been utilised as a value neutral term to refer to people who do not identify with First Nations or other CALD ancestries or nationalities. This is more accurate than terms such as “European”, which may include the CALD community, or “Anglo-Saxon”, which only refers to one part of the broader White community.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The *Engage!* project was made possible by funding from Creative Australia through the Arts Re-imagine Sector Recovery Program. We thank Creative Australia's Annette Madden for her support and flexibility.

To CAAP and Arts on Tour who were responsible for conceiving the Engage project. For administrative, emotional and logistical support we thank Annette Shun Wah (CAAP founder, OzAsia Festival), Suzanne Pereira, Jacqui Smith (CAAP); Antonia Seymour, Patrick Howard and Sara Richardson (Arts on Tour). Thanks to Joon-Yee Kwok for helping to set up the research consultations. The work of artists from *Double Delicious* were integral to the project; in particular we would like to thank Heather Jeong, Valerie Berry and Jennifer Wong.

Our partner theatre hubs were at the core of the work. We would especially like to thank: Anne-Marie Heath (The Art House); Robin Batt (Bunjil Place); Penny Watts, Rachel Francis and Simon Hinton (Merrigong Theatre Company); and Carissa Campbell, Isobel MacCallum, Monique Burkenshaw and Tracey Simond (Wagga Wagga Civic Theatre).

The project relied on the energy, knowledge and practical support of many people. Many thanks to Simon Vaughan and the team at Huber Social, Katherine O'Connor (PAC Australia), Alison Reid (NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors), Thom Paton (Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga), Allyson Pazos (Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra) and Victoria Lowe (Wagga Wagga City Council).

Alexia Derbas (Diversity Arts Australia), Yusuf Ali Hyat (Nexus Arts) and Sam Lynch (CircuitWest) gave advice and support regarding our toolkit.

This report would not have been possible without the input and writing from Haneen Mahmood Martin and ongoing support and copy editing by Tessa Leong.

Thank You!



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