



CONTEMPORARY  
ASIAN  
AUSTRALIAN  
PERFORMANCE

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# **ENGAGE!**

# **Toolkit**

**DEVELOPED BY**

Contemporary Asian Australian Performance  
and Arts on Tour

**SUPPORTED BY**

Creative Australia through the  
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**This Engage! Toolkit has a friend!**

For more context and research that lead to the contents of this document, please refer to the *Engage! Community Engagement Research Report*.  
A report on engagement with diverse communities in the performance touring sector.

# ENGAGE! TOOLKIT: A GUIDE TO CALD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**Engagement is a delivery outcome, a way of listening AND a value system.**

This Toolkit is an outcome of the *Engage!* community engagement project. It is a call to action for venues and presenting organisations to embed best practice culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community engagement within their organisations for the benefit of themselves, their local population, and touring companies and ensembles.

*Engage!* was developed by Contemporary Asian Australian Performance (CAAP) in partnership with Arts on Tour (AOT), with the aim of exploring community engagement with four partner venues, The Art House (Wyang, NSW), Bunjil Place (Narre Warren, VIC), Merrigong Theatre Company (Wollongong, NSW), and the Wagga Wagga Civic Centre (NSW), alongside the delivery of the national tour of CAAP's *Double Delicious* in 2022. Through this, we aimed to empower presenters and venues to begin and/or continue connecting with their CALD community, formally and informally, in an ongoing and sustained dialogue.

This Toolkit supports the beginning or recalibration of your community engagement journey: to spur on action within venues, performing arts centres and other community-facing organisations. Here, we promote an ongoing relational connection with individuals and groups in your community built on trust, collaboration and empowerment.

## **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.

The *Engage!* project uncovered eight Findings and Pathways which form the structure of this Toolkit. And for the purposes of this document, we consider that community engagement is an all-encompassing term for activity that builds relationship with, and connects communities to, your organisation. This may include but is not limited to audience development and engagement. For more information about how the Toolkit came to be, and the terminology used, please refer to the *Engage! Community Engagement Report: A report on engagement with diverse communities in the performance touring sector*.

# HOW TO

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***The Engage! Toolkit has been designed as a process of reflection and action.***

It is our hope that your actions evolve as your relationship with your community grows.

# START NOW, KEEP GOING

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We all start somewhere, so begin making changes today. Planning and delivering community engagement is ongoing and should not simply accompany a tour. It takes time to build trust and relationships. Co-created projects and ideas that emerge from conversation and exchange are often the most enriching, with significant buy-in and excitement from those involved. That said, those who have never had a relationship with your organisation before may be wary if your request or proposition is unclear.

Identify the activities that have some existing momentum and feel more achievable. Go there first. Tackle the more immovable barriers over time – and with assistance and in collaboration with others. What small, but impactful changes can you make today without any additional resources?

## Actions

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- Host people for cups of tea and take note of what comes up in conversation in relation to your programming, your venue and any local social, political or cultural issues.
- Invite CALD community members to work in progress showings.
- Attend community and cultural events outside your venue to build relationships and observe the context in which they are thriving.
- Talk with your team about ideas that can get you started and how you can fold what you are observing into decisions at all levels of your organisation.

## Additional Reading

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Explore [Patternmakers](#) regularly updated [Audience Outlook Monitor](#) for the most up-to-date Australian data.

**If there are gaps in your knowledge, being inquisitive can help you join the dots.**

# KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE

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Presenters must have the resources, particularly staff and programs, to deliver community engagement strategies beyond the cost and resourcing of presenting a work and its supplementary programming. Organisations have a range of existing hard and soft infrastructure resources. Utilising your existing resources presents an opportunity to create space for CALD communities to connect with your venue in new ways.

If you are looking for funding to “buy” time for your organisation to do this work, is the pool large enough to hire a new person to do this job well? What will that mean when the funding runs out? What is the legacy you hope for? Or can your organisation re-prioritise some tasks to make room for this goal across different parts of the organisation?

## Actions

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- Cultural Safety training for everyone in your organisation.
- Hiring someone to assess your current community engagement strategies and local opportunities.
- Analysing your current strategic plan for tangible goals to improve, harness resources and progress in this area.
- Set up a buddy system with another venue in a different region to share challenges and successes.

## Additional Reading

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Explore [The Cultural Equity Toolkit](#), a project run by Diversity Arts Australia and The British Council, containing resources for cultural diversity in the creative sector.

**Unlocking access to your hard and soft infrastructure can have significant impact.**

# KNOW WHO IS AROUND YOU

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Start by being curious about the demographics of your geographical communities and by working in partnership with local services to get informed. Remember these can change over time. Inviting CALD audiences to CALD productions alone is a form of unconscious bias, so consider other mutual interests that they may have with your existing audiences. If the broader community is included and addressed, this in turn better supports the touring work and your organisation's relevance in the community.

## Actions

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- Look at recent Australian Bureau of Statistics Census information.
- Check your local council resources including your library.
- Ask people in your community.
- Attend local events and observe what draws people to those spaces.
- Community Consultation - formal and informal

**Social connection is the key to community engagement.**

### CULTURAL ECOLOGY MAPPING

1. Do you know the cultural makeup of your town or geographical location?
2. Do you know where can you find this information?
3. Who in your area or location do you want to work with most?
4. Can you identify any individual cultural ambassadors in your area?
  - a. What is your current relationship with them?
  - b. What kind of relationship would you like to foster in the future?
5. How do you connect to your culturally diverse communities currently?
  - a. What method of connection/communications has the most successful response rate?
  - b. How would you like to do it in the future?

# GO BEYOND THE TOURING SHOWS

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The Engage! project found that traditional community engagement deliverables, such as Q&As, pre-tour, or on-tour workshops, as independent activities have limited capacity to build ongoing relationships with community over time. Strengthen your chances by involving the community at hand in formal and informal ways continuously, so they are encouraged to keep engaging and returning. This will build an ongoing relationship built on trust and shared experiences.

**Play the long game but be nimble and responsive where and when you can.**

**Start small. Grow organically. Be creative. Have fun with this work!**

Additional methods of engagement and relationship building require some consideration. Where is energy and focus best directed in, and from, your organisation to cultivate audience development? How does audience engagement and development sit within a broader community engagement context in your scenario? How do they speak to each other?

## Actions

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- Reach out to community leaders to gauge interest in having ongoing conversations.
- Offer to host existing events at your venue, or share what have at hand like a PA system, use of your printer for posters, meeting rooms etc to help build informal relationships.
- Ask communities what they want, and be prepared for the answer to be different than what you think.

## Additional Reading

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Explore the [Centre for Cultural Value](#), a UK resource, which provides a toolkit on how to reflect and evaluate failure, turning it into opportunities to learn and grow.

# BE GENUINE AND HONEST

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Relationships must be genuine and ongoing. Moments of heightened activity and contact, scattered amongst less frequent contact is to be expected. Audiences are clever and will opt to not engage if they do not feel respected or included. Be honest about where you are on the journey. Some organisations have a deep history of engagement within their communities, and others are still at the beginning. No matter the journey – we must embrace the fact that we always have more to learn.

We have to be comfortable with sitting in the vulnerability of not knowing – so that we remain inquisitive and responsive. Discovery is what happens when there are gaps in our knowledge and experiences.

That said, it is essential to make your expectations clear. A common misstep in the racial equity space involves rushing to include voices without consideration of the impact, unpaid labour, and time that it involves. Consider why someone from an underrepresented community might answer your call or email – it is most likely from a position of good faith that they will be listened to and respected.

When reaching out to community members, consider:

- Does their community have a holiday coming up? Consider waiting and not prioritising your own timeline, but theirs.
- Are you able to pay them for their time? If not, make that clear. If yes, pay them on time.
- Thank them for their time.
- Credit them for their work.
- Update them on your progress.

## Additional Reading

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**The Relationship is the Project** by Jade Lillie, Kate Larsen, Cara Kirkwood and Jax Jacki Brown is a book that features short and accessible essays that illuminate specific aspects of engagement from industry leaders. Go out and find a copy!

**Community engagement is an ongoing process of learning.**

### PLACE AND BUILDING ECOLOGY: VENUE FRIENDLINESS

1. When you think of culturally vibrant events and activities in your town, what are the connections across your community events?
2. How could you bring new people into your physical building outside of performances?
3. Where do your culturally diverse communities currently gather? What is distinct about these gatherings?
4. Acknowledge and discuss the barriers your venue may have towards building relationships with diasporic communities.



# TAKE YOUR TIME

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Building relationships can be as easy as having a cup of tea as a means to share ideas, exchange and foster friendships. Once you have established trust and respect, you can ask about barriers to engagement experienced by individuals and groups in the community, and what your organisation might be able to do to overcome these.

Consider your engagement strategies and activities as a continuum. There may be projects and activities that have a finite beginning, middle and end – but these relationships can remain strong outside of specific projects or touring productions.

Connect the spaces between people, teams, programs, activities, roles and responsibilities. The more shared responsibility up, down, across and through your organisation the more embedded the change will be.

## Additional Reading

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Explore **Regional Arts Australia's** [slow touring approach on how to leave a lasting legacy](#).

Explore **Changing organisations to diversify arts audiences: Summary of Findings from National Survey** by Hilary Glow, Anne Kershaw, Katya Johanson, Abbie Trott, Tracey Margieson, Mark Taylor and Wesley Enoch, [2023](#)

**Joining the dots can be as effective as developing new dots.**

### GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGY

1. What strategic documents and/or KPI's does your organisation work under that relate to community cultural engagement?
2. How do your organisational aims match with the broader policy aims of Council or your strategic plan?
3. What is your long game and what are the attitudes of the leaders in your organisation?

# TRUST YOUR COMMUNITY. EMBOLDEN YOUR STAFF.

Communities are clever, well-connected, and are not often waiting for opportunities to come along. If you want to engage them, respect that there is high competition of time and disposable income spending and what you see as a wonderful opportunity for your organisation to grow may not be seen as essential for them ... yet!

There are complex and varied ways that racism and unconscious bias may unfold as you develop these relationships.

Relationships thrive when there is an equal flow of energy, ideas and exchange in both directions. It may take some time and effort to develop this. If in doubt, ask and notice what is not being said.

**Being seen and heard is a felt response. Action speaks louder than words.**

## SKILLS AND CAPACITY AUDIT

1. Training - what is it and what would help?
2. Who is inquisitive and has natural talent for building relationships?
3. How do you build the conversation into your 'daily' activity and/or team meetings?
4. How can you place these skills, activities and engagement responsibilities within someone's job description?

## Training

Explore [\*\*Diversity Arts Australia's\*\* range of diversity and inclusion services, tailored to the specific needs of arts, screen and creative organisations.](#)

## Additional Reading

Explore this [\*\*More than a Moment\*\* pledge which indicates to Black creatives, staff or contractors, an organisational commitment to anti-racism.](#)

Explore the open access book [\*\*Understanding Cultural Non-Participation in an Egalitarian Context\*\* by Riie Heikkilä, 2022, which contains research from Finland and in Western societies, aiming to "find out what the leisure of the supposedly disengaged people looked like and how they reacted to the normative demand that everyone 'should' participate."](#)

# NOTHING IS ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL

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Multiple activities, including specific marketing strategies, community-led projects, and artist development strategies are required to pursue ongoing engagement. Take your learnings from everyone you have met with and use your strategies to keep speaking with them directly.

Keep going. These efforts can often have little uptake and feel challenging at the best of times. Take good notes, gather advice from those who did attend/participate, and then turn them into action. How do you hold onto your curiosity and fold this information into your actions?

## Actions

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- Has our organisation done anti-racism and access and inclusion training?
- What practices have we taken from this and implemented within, across and through the organisation?
- Is our organisation aware of holidays, celebrations, notable days for the communities with which we are trying to engage?
- Can we make changes to our events to incorporate diverse beliefs and choices? Eg. Rather than marking food as simply Gluten Free, Vegan, and Vegetarian, consider expanding labels to include Kosher, Halal. Explore non-alcoholic options that are not zero alcohol alternatives.
- Are we hosting our events at times that are suitable for these communities?
- Do we fully understand and acknowledge barriers to attendance, engagement and involvement?

**Small and sustained efforts can take a while to be noticed, but if maintained will reap rich rewards.**

## EVALUATION

1. What evaluation tools do you find most useful? Why?
2. What evaluation do you think your decision makers find most influential?
3. Do you invite your Board, or Councillors, to community events? Do they attend?

# SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

No matter the journey – we must embrace the fact that we always have more to learn.

Don't try and do it all at once. Play the long game. Start small and build. Fold what you are learning into new actions and conversations. Joining the dots can weave new and exciting patterns and opportunities around you.

Think of something you can action swiftly (even tomorrow) from the above conversation. What help do you need, or can you harness something to action immediately? Can you articulate a long-term vision?

No worries if you can't, remember that a series of small steps make big leaps.

# Thank You!



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