




Arts & Cultural Exchange

2025-2028 Strategic Plan: building on four decades of impact

A photograph of a smoking ceremony. A pile of dry leaves and sticks is burning, with white smoke rising from it. The scene is set against a brick wall. The entire image has a reddish-brown tint.

We work on the lands, skies and waters of the Baramadagal of the Dharug and we pay our respects to their Ancestors and their Elders, past, present and emerging. Their ceremonies, stories, traditions and spirit live and remain. We honour their custodianship, seen and unseen.

We strive to leave our environment stronger than we found it, by embracing the environmental wisdoms of our communities.

"A SHINING EXAMPLE OF
HOW, WHEN ARTS AND
COMMUNITY COLLIDE,
THEY CREATE AN
UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
TO BE RECKONED WITH"

OUR FOUR-YEAR COMMITMENT



Community is essential to thriving societies, and community-based arts and cultural work is valued for its singular capacity to catalyse social change.

Western Sydney boasts an abundance of grass roots artistic and cultural talent that while often unseen and unsupported by the mainstream, is our primary focus. Over the next four years ACE will continue to address inequalities, and unseen potential, supporting marginalised individuals to unleash their creativity and share their cultures. Why? Because creativity, culture and the arts are key to healthier communities. Communities who are seen and heard offer a powerful antidote to the pressing problems of now. Self-expression is essential to well-being and the creative industries offer a huge range of employment opportunities.

Western Sydney is home to 10% of the nation's population and a fifth of the country's First Nations people. It is Australia's fastest growing and most diverse region (representing 170 countries), and third largest economy. These factors, alongside the socio-economic precarity experienced by too many, shape the area's unique cultural ecology. Within this unique context sits ACE, a longstanding Western Sydney community arts organisation with deep organisational knowledge and expertise in diverse and intersectional communities. We understand there is greater strength in collaboration. As we look to the next four years, we will strive to maintain the best practice in CACD for which we are known, so marginalised people are seen, heard, understood, fulfilled and living lives of improved socio-economic stability.

ACE will be peerless and unparalleled in drawing on art, creativity and culture to fuel Western Sydney's creative opportunism, acceptance, and multicultural vibrancy. We will deliver social impact and artistic excellence at an astonishing scale, and with enthusiasm and cheer.

Our programs will be delivered to First Nations peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse people, the LGBTQI+ community, frail and dementia affected seniors, neurodiverse people, people with a disability and at risk youth.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

First Nations first, diversity and equity are our guiding principles

Purpose

We draw on art, creativity, and culture to reverse disadvantage experienced by marginalised communities

Values

INCLUSIVITY

Everyone welcomed and valued

CONNECTIVITY

Collaborate deeply and spark connections; connecting to and with cultural practitioners and communities

SELF-DETERMINATION

Ensure individuals own their successes, control their futures, and thrive

TRUTHFULNESS

To work honestly, transparently and with integrity

FEARLESSNESS

Be brave in the decisions we make, organisation-wide

Vision

A society whose mainstream is flooded with self-determined creative work by historically underrepresented peoples

Goals

CREATIVITY

Create relevant, excellent, people-focussed work

CULTURAL SAFETY

Lead in providing safe, accountable, inclusive spaces and frameworks to work within

AMBITION

Be bold and ambitious for our work, artists, communities, and organisation

FLOURISH

Grow a healthy, robust, future-fit business

WHO WE ARE

ACE is a Western Sydney cultural organisation with a 40-year legacy of impact working on Dharug Country in Western Sydney.

ACE, which started in 1984 as the Holroyd-Parramatta Information Van, has a longstanding reputation for three things: we are committed to social justice, we use creativity to reverse disadvantage experienced by marginalised communities, and we produce ground-breaking interdisciplinary, intergenerational collaborative projects co-devised with the communities with whom we work.

We deliver creative programs, up-skilling initiatives, innovative artistic works and high calibre public outcomes. Our projects are shaped to meet community needs. Utilising the transformative agency of artistic and cultural forms, we work with our cohorts to meet needs which otherwise would either be unaddressed, or inadequately met.

Alongside technological and digital avenues, we employ a vast array of art forms – including screen, music, embroidery, dance and performance art.

We have five program pillars, each led by a specialist Creative Producer:

- * **First Nations**
- * **Youth Engagement**
- * **Multicultural Women**
- * **Artists with Disability & Aged Care**
- * **Screen**

At ACE, the starting point of any work is community consultation. We place excellence and cultural safety at the heart of all we do, starting with deep listening, respect and trust.

Our venue provides a safe, creative hub in central Parramatta, home to development spaces, music and recording studios, digital/VR/screen labs, training facilities, performance spaces, office and meeting rooms. We accommodate two resident companies: Diversity Arts Australia and Sweatshop (on peppercorn rents).

ACE is passionately committed to Western Sydney and its diversity, uniqueness and spirit, and the opportunity to unleash its creative capacities. Our work is synonymous with the region's global art and culture, from the traditional to contemporary. With 2.6 million people, Western Sydney is home to 10% of the Australian population and the nation's fastest growing and most culturally diverse region.

HISTORY TIMELINE





Holroyd Parramatta Information Van, c. 1990. Photographer unknown

RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS AND MILESTONES:

- * Finalist, Outstanding Community Organisation, 2023 Western Sydney Awards for Business Excellence
- * Winner of FBi Radio's 2022 'SMAC of The Year', for 'Biggest contribution to Sydney's cultural fabric'
- * Club Weld – program for neurodivergent musicians: features on FBi, 2SER, ABC Rage, WFMU (USA), ABC Arts and The Guardian
- * Embroiderer's Collective: 233 embroideries of First Nations plants created by ACE's Multicultural Women's Hub, led by First Nations Artist Jonathan Jones are exhibited *untitled (transcriptions of country)* at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris 2021-22 and Sydney's Artspace 2023
- * ACE commissions first full-length work in Dharug language by Jannawi Dance Clan, *Garrigarrang Badu* 2021
- * Curatorial Partner for 23rd Biennale of Sydney 2022: Hosting exhibitions, public artworks and public programs
- * Sydney Festival 2022 – Jannawi Dance Clan, ACE and City of Parramatta partner to deliver outdoor performances of *Garrigarrang Badu*
- * ACE delivers Cultural Safety Masterclass to City of Sydney staff and partners/tenants
- * Awarded a RISE grant of \$481K for 2021/22 First Nations programming.
- * Club Weld's Nina Gotsis track 'Listen to the Bird' features in the streaming series BUMP on Stan in Australia, UK, Canada, India, USA
- * 2021 customer value proposition review which led to new logo, look and name
- * 2020-21 completed major strategic, governance and screen program reviews
- * Re-established First Nations Program/ Producer 2020
- * 100% West: 2020 fashion event showcasing early career Western Sydney practitioners
- * Partner with Film Independent (Los Angeles) to deliver Screen Cultures workshop series for Western Sydney diverse film creatives

2022 RESULTS



60
PROJECTS



1,069,782
ATTENDANCES
(IRL & DIGITALLY)



225
PROFESSIONAL
ARTISTS EMPLOYED



391
UPSKILLING SESSIONS



634
ARTWORKS CREATED



93%
OF PARTICIPANTS
CULTURALLY DIVERSE

W S

91%
OF PARTICIPANTS
FROM WESTERN
SYDNEY



108
PERFORMANCES/
EVENTS



78
PARTNERSHIPS



10,800,000
DIGITAL REACH



76,100,000
MEDIA CIRCULATION



26,000
WEB SESSIONS



532,000
FACEBOOK AND
264,000 INSTAGRAM
ENGAGEMENTS



233
WORKS
EXHIBITED
INTERNATIONALLY

CONTEXT: INTERNAL & EXTERNAL FACTORS

WESTERN SYDNEY

Western Sydney's economy continues to thrive and the cultural context is being radically transformed by the ever-growing Western Sydney University, the imminent arrival of Powerhouse Parramatta and an influx of new migrant populations. Nonetheless, at the granular scale of individuals experiencing disadvantage, the need in Western Sydney for community work is greater than ever.

FIRST NATIONS

With our Dharug Knowledge Holders advisory group and Dharug Board member, ACE has its Black Governance in order. We stand with the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters on which we work, the Dharug speaking people, and strive to walk alongside First Nations people as allies.

POLITICAL SHIFTS

A shift from Liberal to Labor leadership comes with a new cultural agenda, with NSW embarking on its first-ever Cultural Policy and the National Cultural Policy. 'A place for every story and a story for every place' echoes what we do at ACE, placing us in a strong position to align with government policy and funding, alongside a revived focus on contemporary music.

DIGITAL

Many in our communities reported digital fatigue post Covid. Maintaining in-real-life engagement is critical for many of our cohorts. Conversely, digital forums were favoured by some of our neurodivergent artists, and further they enabled invaluable international connections - especially for our Screen cohorts. Going forward, the offerings of technology in our programs are ample, as we forge connections overseas, and re-connect people with their homelands.

REPRESENTATION

ACE has been working in the diversity and inclusion space for decades. The sector now needs leaders in this area more than ever, and ACE has an opportunity to share 40 years of knowledge, and lift our own practices. We influence the arts sector to embed diversity and inclusion at every level.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is here – the 2020 bushfires, 2021 floods and record temperatures are undeniable. This will deeply impact ACE as anxiety in our cohorts rises, insurance/business costs rise exponentially, and as local weather patterns impact our daily operations.

LEGACY AND LEADERSHIP

With a four-decade legacy of arts leadership, ACE is one of the most significant organisations in Western Sydney. This presents us with an opportunity to lead our sector, communities and attract investment and kudos. We also must ensure our longevity and wisdom is balanced with vigour, invention and relevance.

WORKPLACE CHANGES

The work force is radically shifting. More people are working from home and seeking better work/life balances. The arts saw an exodus of experienced workers during Covid, driving recruitment pressures further; while burnout is a real challenge for the sector. Next generation millennials and Gen Z workers moving into the workforce are unprepared to work unpaid overtime. ACE has a rigorous time in lieu policy, and is mindful of staff wellbeing, but nonetheless, securing and maintaining skilled, exceptional artswriters is a growing crisis for the NFP sector.

GOAL ONE

CREATIVITY



CREATE RELEVANT, EXCELLENT, PEOPLE-FOCUSSED WORK

WHY?

Self-expression and self-determination, nurtured by CACD and artistic professionals, creates extraordinary art that changes mindsets.

HOW:

1. Collaborate with high calibre artists, particularly Western Sydney artists
2. Develop working models that respect, value and build on the multiple knowledge systems of the people we work with
3. Tell local stories that reflect our communities and resonate universally
4. Work critically and independently, to produce projects of the highest standard
5. Embrace multi-artforms across our five work pillars i) First Nations ii) Youth iii) Multicultural Women's Hub iv) Disability & Aged Care v) Screen

KEY ACTIONS:

- * 50% of lead artists are from Western Sydney; 50% from across Australia
- * Adopt multiple art-forms led by our communities, informed by their cultures
- * Secure pathways to respected mainstream venues and platforms for ACE's major commissions
- * Deliver annual program (see 2024/25 Artistic Plans)
- * Ensure Producers and cohorts access appropriate training

CASE STUDY:

Jerrah Patston

Club Weld, for neurodivergent musicians, honed Jerrah's innate abilities as a singer-songwriter. 'Some Food Courts Are Better Than Others' celebrates a little acknowledged truth, while 'If Spring Could Sing' reflects on a profound proposition. Jerrah's 'Falling For You' featured in the film *Head Over Wheels*, starring Dylan Alcott. His tracks play on FBi Radio, 2SER & Spotify and he has featured in The Guardian and ABC 7:30 Report.

GOAL TWO

CULTURAL SAFETY



LEAD IN PROVIDING SAFE, ACCOUNTABLE, INCLUSIVE SPACES AND FRAMEWORKS

WHY?

Respect and trust are foundational to healthy relationships and environments in which people thrive.

HOW:

1. Consult with Dharug Knowledge Holders so that First Nations First is a living principle
2. Build lasting relationships with our communities based on deep listening and reciprocal trust
3. Prioritise cultural proficiency and accountability at every stage of every undertaking
4. Respect, value and build work based on the multiple knowledge systems of the people with whom we work
5. Acknowledge that this work is ongoing and that we will make mistakes, and learn from them

KEY ACTIONS:

- * Present/support an annual truth-telling session led by our Dharug Knowledge Holders Group
- * Conduct pre, during and post debrief/evaluation sessions on all projects
- * Conduct bi-annual staff & board cultural proficiency training
- * Over 80% of events/showings are free to attend
- * Annual review of company values

CASE STUDY:

Westie with my Bestie

In our role as partner for SoundWest 2022, ACE's Youth Engagement Program hosted Westie with my Bestie, a nightlife party celebrating local queer youth. This was the first time Father Xander Silky has presented one of his iconic culturally safe dance parties for queer youth in the Parramatta area. The sell-out event was hugely valued by local LGBTQI+ youth.

GOAL THREE

AMBITION



BE BOLD AND AMBITIOUS FOR OUR WORK, ARTISTS, COMMUNITIES, AND ORGANISATION

WHY?

Because we see extraordinary talent, potential and opportunity in all our communities and cohorts.

HOW:

1. Share work beyond Western Sydney; nationally and globally
2. Be unafraid to find new ways to instigate change and social justice
3. Foster independence through creative training, upskilling and connections that leads to enterprise and employment
4. Cultivate the next generation of Western Sydney artists
5. Partner with extraordinary, high-profile organisations – arts and non-arts
6. Be boldly outward facing – to our audiences and to our sector

KEY ACTIONS:

- * Conduct a min. of 400 upskilling sessions annually
- * Grow national/international networks & partnerships that echo our global community
- * Advocate for local issues and injustices
- * Increase our marketing resources and capacity by 28%
- * Connect emerging artists with professional networks

CASE STUDY:

untitled (transcriptions of country) by The Embroiderers Collective and Jonathan Jones
From 2020 to 2021 Aboriginal artist Jonathan Jones collaborated with embroiderers from ACE's Multicultural Women's Hub to create the heart of Jones' *untitled (transcriptions of country)*, commissioned by Artspace, Sydney and the Palais de Tokyo, Paris. The Embroiderers Collective stitched 233 of a suite of 308 embroideries based on a French colonial archive of plants from the Sydney basin.

GOAL FOUR

FLOURISH

GROW A HEALTY ROBUST, FUTURE-FIT BUSINESS

WHY?

We need strong business and infrastructural scaffolds for our people and work, if we are to deliver full throttle on our purpose and vision.

HOW:

1. Diversify and build our income streams
2. Balance fiscal opportunities with strategic priorities without compromising standards and values
3. Build partnerships that bolster our resources and capacity
4. Constantly seek to build our human resources to best support our people and their well-being
5. Maintain strong, robust governance structures and processes through rigour and best practice management
6. Secure and transition to a new home – an enhanced, vibrant, creative venue for Western Sydney
7. Annual monitoring of KPI's detailed in our Business Plan

KEY ACTIONS:

- * 1-2 partners secured on all projects
- * Conduct annual strategic planning days
- * Conduct bi-annual board skills matrix and policy reviews
- * Appointment a Development Manager (0.8 FTE), grow our donations, philanthropic grants and sponsorship
- * Explore two new venue business case options, enhancing spaces, assets and hire income
- * Provide staff flexible working models

CASE STUDY:

A New Constitution

As an NFP, ACE relies on its Board of Governance, which in turn relies on its Constitution. In 2022 ACE's board realised its 1992 Constitution was no longer reliably efficient or all-encompassing as a governing document. Acknowledging the high legal costs to redraft the constitution, ACE Secretary Adelyn Koh reached out to Gilbert + Tobin, who offered to rewrite the Constitution pro bono. The revised draft is currently being reviewed by ACE Executive and Board.



SUCCESS MEASURES

Stronger communities- more resilient, proud, tolerant, connected

Western Sydney- enhanced liveability through inclusive creativity

Happy company- our people thrive and stay

Representation- changing who is seen and heard

Transformation- more individuals enriched by creative life

New home- new spaces, facilities and a homeland garden

Intersectionality- of stories, cultures, histories and differences

Precarity to sustainability- more individuals assisted out of economic hardship

Exceptional art- more art and artworks

Export- our work taken to the world

More money- more programs, more staff, more sustainability

Our impacts- deeper, broader, longer across communities



OUR PROGRAM METHODOLOGIES

FIRST NATIONS

We prioritise Western Sydney's First Nations communities, and acknowledge the Dharug as the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we work.

We take the Four R's - Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility (Barnhardt, 2001), a step further cultivating three T's into our programs - Truth Telling, Transformation and Time.

Truth telling is crucial to all our programs. With the community, we acknowledge the shared history of our Country, confronting the disposition of our land and reclaiming our stories and strength as one. We have a responsibility and an accountability to our community to make sure we allow the time for deep listening and meaningful change through truth telling. This engenders transformation within the participants of our First Nations programs and also within our First Nations staff.

We have a Blak governed body, our Dharug Knowledge Holders who help to mould the way our programs evolve.

Our programs focus on creative original work, showcasing what some artists would call their 'personal dreaming' of the now, challenging what First Nations art looks like today.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

We deliver invigorating creative programs that bring together Western Sydney-based youth from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and equip them with skills to establish themselves as upcoming professionals in the arts and creative sectors.

We encourage our young people to explore their unique voices while building their self-confidence in an encouraging, safe space.

Key focus areas are 1) Vulnerable young people who are considered 'at-risk', and 2) Young female and LGBTQIA+ people.

The core of our programs is connection to community and positive encouragement of self-expression through creative education. This reinforces independence, self-empowerment, builds confidence, creative thinking/problem solving.

We aim to bring the obvious talent in Western Sydney to light and look to shape positive futures where young people are acknowledged and represented, and determine and control their creative pathways, all while making social networks.

MULTICULTURAL WOMEN'S HUB

We engage with newly arrived, migrant and refugee women from diverse backgrounds in Western Sydney regardless of residency status, welcoming them into a safe, inclusive, accessible, friendly space.

Our projects develop from culturally appropriate consultations where women express their needs and aspirations. Engaging culturally adequate and bilingual facilitators is a priority. Workshops are offered for free at convenient times for the participants, with childcare services when needed.

We develop our cohorts' existing - and substantial - skills in diverse mediums such as embroidery, weaving, designing and storytelling while offering a contemporary lens on traditional creative practices and supporting pathways to tertiary education and employment.

We are a 'conduit' for women to connect with one another, build social networks to develop self-confidence and community ties. The program prioritises wellbeing, mental health, self-confidence and self-care.



DISABILITY & AGED CARE

Our flagship disability program Club Weld sees neurodiverse musicians and facilitators collaborate in musician-directed sessions, recording & distribution activities, mainstream performance and professional development opportunities. Outcomes include income generation and social inclusion for vulnerable, isolated musicians and inspiring, safe, friendly environments.

We have long term partnerships with media, arts organisations experts. We employ talented, kind facilitators, 60% of whom are neurodiverse.

The Aged Care program addresses the physical, intellectual, creative and emotional isolation of frail and dementia affected people in residential aged care.

It is based on the beliefs that contemporary arts are flexible, effective forms of engagement in aged care settings, and that creative engagement, delivered in tandem with clinical care, improves the lives of people in residential aged care, and of care staff, volunteers and residents' families. We build the capacity of aged care facilities to deliver engaging creative projects.

SCREEN CULTURES

More than any other organisation in NSW, ACE is changing the representation of marginalised people in screen - in front of and behind the camera. We do this by engaging with entry-level, early and mid-career screen practitioners from underrepresented communities.

We build relationships between the screen industry and our practitioners and design programs for writers and producers to:

- * Develop craft and skills,
- * Produce projects and proof-of-concept material that demonstrate talent and unique stories told from authentic experience, and
- * Engage with the screen industry to create pathways for careers in the screen industry

We design programs with industry partners for Below-the-Line practitioners (crew, technical and admin roles in the screen industry), to:

- * Recruit and inform people about opportunities in BTL roles
- * Provide industry-focused skills development

We ensure training environments and workplace partners adhere to culturally safe best practice. All our programs are provided free, recognising the socio-economic reality of our cohorts.



Nina Gotsis, Club Weld 2023. Photo: Lyndal Irons

EVALUATION

Across all activities, we undertake deep evaluations and data analysis, capturing formal and informal feedback to guide our work. Informal feedback is garnered through pre-planning to post finalisation, through conversations with participants, artists, partners, stakeholders, and with audiences. We count attendance, media/social media coverage, peer reviews.

Our Producers apply learnings to future projects from case studies, partner and participant testimonials, reports, quantitative and qualitative metrics, anecdotal commentary and correspondence/feedback via email, letters of support and informal conversations. Debriefs with partners and key creatives are used to evaluate collaborative projects. All teams check in with ACE's Dharug Knowledge Holders. The Multicultural Women's Hub, Youth Engagement and Screen Cultures programs use surveys throughout their work. The Youth Engagement program is evaluated by NSW Department of Communities and Justice on a semi-annual basis. Club Weld's evaluation methodologies include music sales and sync.

ACE is committed to transparency and accountability. All producers report on participants' demographic and socio-cultural backgrounds, quantitative data re attendances, workshops and so on. Each year our substantial holdings of data are published in our annual report. In other words, we are diligent about measuring our impact.

PROGRAM TARGETS

No. of Projects:

2022: 60
2028: 80

% of participants from CALD communities:

2022: 93%
2028: 95%

Performances/Events:

2022: 108
2028: 130

No. of partnerships:

2022: 78
2028: 100

No. of paid professional Artists:

2022: 225
2028: 270

Attendees (IRL & Digital)

2021: 167,929
2022: 1.069m (due to Biennale/Palais de Tokyo exhib)
2028: 300,000+ annually

No. of upskilling sessions:

2022: 391
2028: 430

Artworks created:

2021: 421
2022: 634 (high in 2022 due to activities)
From 2025: 450-650 annually (vary depending on programs)

No. of industry events /networking opportunities:

2022: 59
2028: 80



PARTNERS

Partnerships are ingrained in everything we do. They make us strong. We couldn't do what we do, to the level we do it, without partners who value the criticality of what we deliver. Our partnerships are a complex and emboldening matrix of relationships developed over years - **a galaxy of friends - vast, diverse, and enduring.**

To deliver our deft and agile work successfully to the high-standards worthy of our communities, in 2025 - 28, whilst nurturing our existing relationships, we actively seek new creative, community, industry, business, government partners and stakeholders. They will **fund** our work, **boost** our resources, **stimulate** our thinking, **connect** us to new communities, so we can continue to meet needs that would otherwise remain unmet. Our partners will range from grassroots to major, local to global, First Nations to new migrants, internal to external and in-kind to financial.

Our future partners will range from the high school principal who understands we can bring to their students creative learning experiences not offered by the education system, through to large government service providers who understand how ACE can play a profoundly effective role in meeting their portfolio priorities.

In 2022 ACE had 97 partners, including four Trusts and Foundations and nine public sector funders.

Details on our organisational, financial and risk strategies are available to key partners and stakeholders on request.

STAKEHOLDERS

Our stakeholders can be put into five distinct groups:

Community: Program Participants, Dharug Knowledge holders, community groups & leaders. Arts sector community: Festivals, venues, service orgs, Western Sydney Arts Alliance. **Key priorities 2025+:** Grow local participation (min. 90% CALD), grow school programs, enhance in-venue training/upskilling, engage with and grow industry profile.

Artists: Local to international, emerging artists, multi artform practitioners, next generation of WS creatives. **Key priorities 2025+:** Engage exceptional Australian artists, increase artist budgets/fees, connect, and expose next generation artists to professional development/mentors/industry.

Partners: Incl. Community groups, arts orgs, businesses, media partners, schools, landlord. **Key priorities 2025+:** Min 2 partnership for projects, grow mental health partnerships, secure new venue, grow in-kind collaborations, remain acutely relevant.

Attendees: Local to international digital engagers, irl audiences/attendees, venue hirers and visitors, partner's patrons. **Key priorities 2025+:** Expand attendees/audiences for public art outcomes, screen productions, performance works and live music, grow national/international digital viewers, increase marketing resources, re-activate venue hirers, grow media profile.

Financial Supporters: Government funders, donors, sponsors, trust and foundations, investors, in-kind supporters. **Key priorities 2025+:** Strong Govt partnerships, strengthen City of Parramatta partnership, grow sponsorships and donor circles, actively pursue T&F's, loudly and clearly promote our successes/impacts/awards, promote our alignments, reach and relevance.

