

Melbourne Fringe Community Guidelines



Melbourne Fringe champions a vision of cultural democracy – empowering anyone to realise their right to creative expression. We proudly produce an open access festival, at the core of which is an uncurated program of independent work presented by over 3,000 participants each year. This is open to anyone to register an event: Melbourne Fringe does not assess or control this program and there is no quality judgement on work accepted into it. Our participants have a broad range of experience in the arts – from established professional artists to everyday creative people – and demonstrate an equally broad representation of social, cultural and political backgrounds.

Participation in Melbourne Fringe’s programs is guided by two key principles: Freedom of Expression and Ensuring Community Safety.

Principle One: Freedom of Expression

Freedom of artistic expression is vital to our culture, our democracy and our artistic practice, and allowing a diversity of viewpoints opens powerful, difficult and important conversations to take place.

We believe that access to the arts and creative expression are fundamental rights of our citizenship and vital to a creative and empathetic, healthy culture. Article 27 of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that “everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, [and] to enjoy the arts”.

We work to support all citizens to express themselves, democratising artistic expression, removing artistic hierarchies and creating a platform for people to express themselves with a diversity of viewpoints, artforms and cultures. We support work that is risky, difficult and political. We may platform work we don’t agree with, we don’t like and we don’t know, because the alternative is to stifle civic participation. We believe it is important to have complex and nuanced conversations and we believe passionate disagreement is an acceptable and sometimes an important outcome, opening our minds to different ways of seeing our world.

Principle Two: Ensuring Community Safety

No freedom is absolute nor without consequence, and we are committed to creating culturally safe spaces for self-expression in order to champion artistic freedom for all participants.

We particularly celebrate and support minority or marginalised voices, shifting power structures and removing barriers to access, creating a platform for self-empowerment and therefore for social and artistic change. To ensure that Melbourne Fringe’s values of justice and human rights align with our democratic ideals, we work to eradicate racism, ableism, ageism, misogyny, transphobia and homophobia from our community. We do this by celebrating, profiling and nurturing diversity, by educating and by supporting artists as they learn. Creating culturally safe spaces allows all participants to take greater artistic risks, because they are presenting work in a context free from violence and vilification.

On occasion, some work in our programs may be considered extreme and unacceptable by the values of this guiding principle if it contains:

Content or behaviour that is likely to incite in a reasonable audience member: hatred against, or serious contempt for, or severe ridicule of, a group of persons because of age, ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, sexuality, religion, or disability.

Organisational Policy

There are legal bars pertaining to hate speech and vilification that must be met in all walks of life, but many other sectors, such as the television and radio broadcast industries, self-regulate with a higher code of conduct that must be met. Melbourne Fringe believes that live events should similarly be held to a higher standard than the minimum legal requirement, and that although every individual has the right to be heard, not every message has the right to receive the organisational and community support that comes from being a part of Melbourne Fringe.

We recognise that some groups are systemically disadvantaged and in extreme cases, become the target of vilification. We prioritise the safety of these structurally marginalized groups over the discomfort of the dominant majority, bearing in mind the intersectional complexities of power dynamics that may be involved in each situation that may arise.

We don't believe offensiveness should be the guide to what voices should and shouldn't be heard. History has shown that "offensiveness" arguments have been used to silence minorities or alternative viewpoints, and we know that sometimes provocative and challenging art can walk a fine line between stimulating thought and offending someone. The line drawn by these Community Guidelines is when offence crosses into the realm of compelling hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule towards a community of people. It takes the question out of the subjective view of a person and puts it into the objective experience of a group of people.

Organisational Action

In the rare situation where participants cannot or will not meet the guidelines and the intention of the participant is to use their freedom of artistic expression as an excuse to spread hate, to violate others' dignity or to create an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or unduly offensive environment, Melbourne Fringe will seek advice where required and work with the artist on a resolution, which may result in excluding the event from our program. We believe that while every individual has the right to expression, not every intended message deserves the Fringe's public platform. We cannot and will not cancel an event, we can only withdraw it from the Festival; the producer of the event may choose to continue the season independently of Melbourne Fringe.