MELBOURNE FRINGE

EQUITY ACTION PLAN
2021-2025

Always Was, Always Will Be

Melbourne Fringe works on the unceded lands of the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land where we live, work and play.

We acknowledge that the oldest living culture in the world has been kept alive by a rich and continuing history of storytelling, music, dance, art and language.

We pay our respects to the people of the Kulin Nation and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present, who maintain an enduring spiritual and cultural connection to the land.

Kalkadoon, Arkie Barton, Deadly Fringe, Melbourne Fringe Festival 2019. Photo by Michael Jalaru Torres.

Introduction

Melbourne Fringe's vision is cultural democracy – empowering anyone to realise their right to creative expression. We believe that equitable access to the arts and creative expression are fundamental human rights and vital to a creative, cohesive, optimistic and empathetic society.

Melbourne Fringe is committed to driving social and artistic change, and has a range of initiatives aimed at removing barriers to access and amplifying voices from the margins. However, we recognise that there is still much work to be done.

This Equity Action Plan aims to build on the successful cultural equity work Melbourne Fringe has conducted over recent years to drive systemic change and position us as a leader in the sector.

We aim to improve the representation, visibility and cultural safety of our communities of focus in our sector leadership programs, our annual Festival and Fringe Common Rooms venue. We want to increase the diversity of our team across all levels of the organisation so that it reflects the broad range of stakeholders we work with. Internally, we will strive to create a safe cultural environment for the team through the implementation of best practice policy, training and professional development programs. Externally, we aim to build deep and rich relationships with communities through self-mobilising engagement strategies.

This plan will detail five key goals for the organisation's equity work over the next five years in the areas of employment, programming, training, policy and consultation and engagement. Each goal outlines a number of short- and long-term actions, with desired outcomes and evaluation for each section.
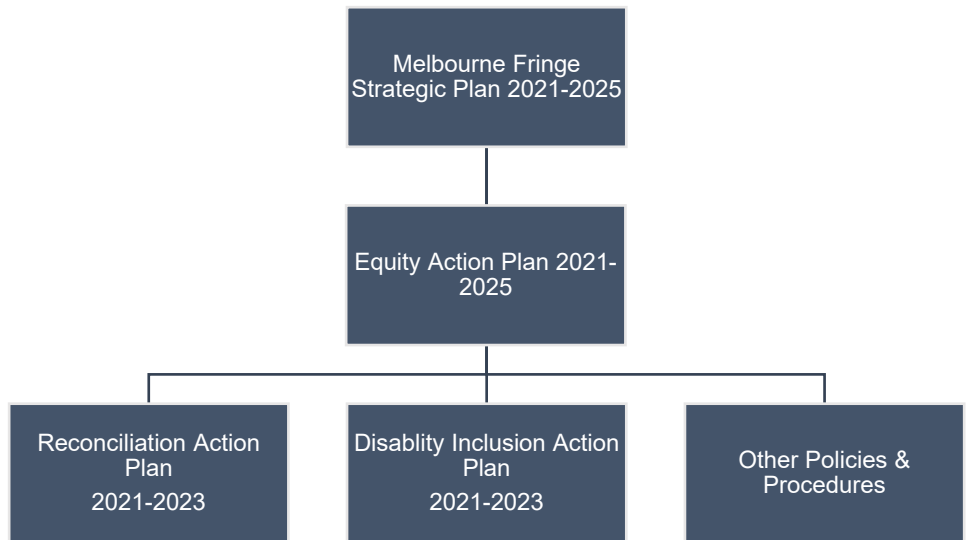
Organisational Context

Melbourne Fringe Festival 2019. Photo by Duncan Jacob.

This Equity Action Plan sits underneath the organisation's Strategic Plan (2021-2025). The strategic plan identifies five goals to drive change:
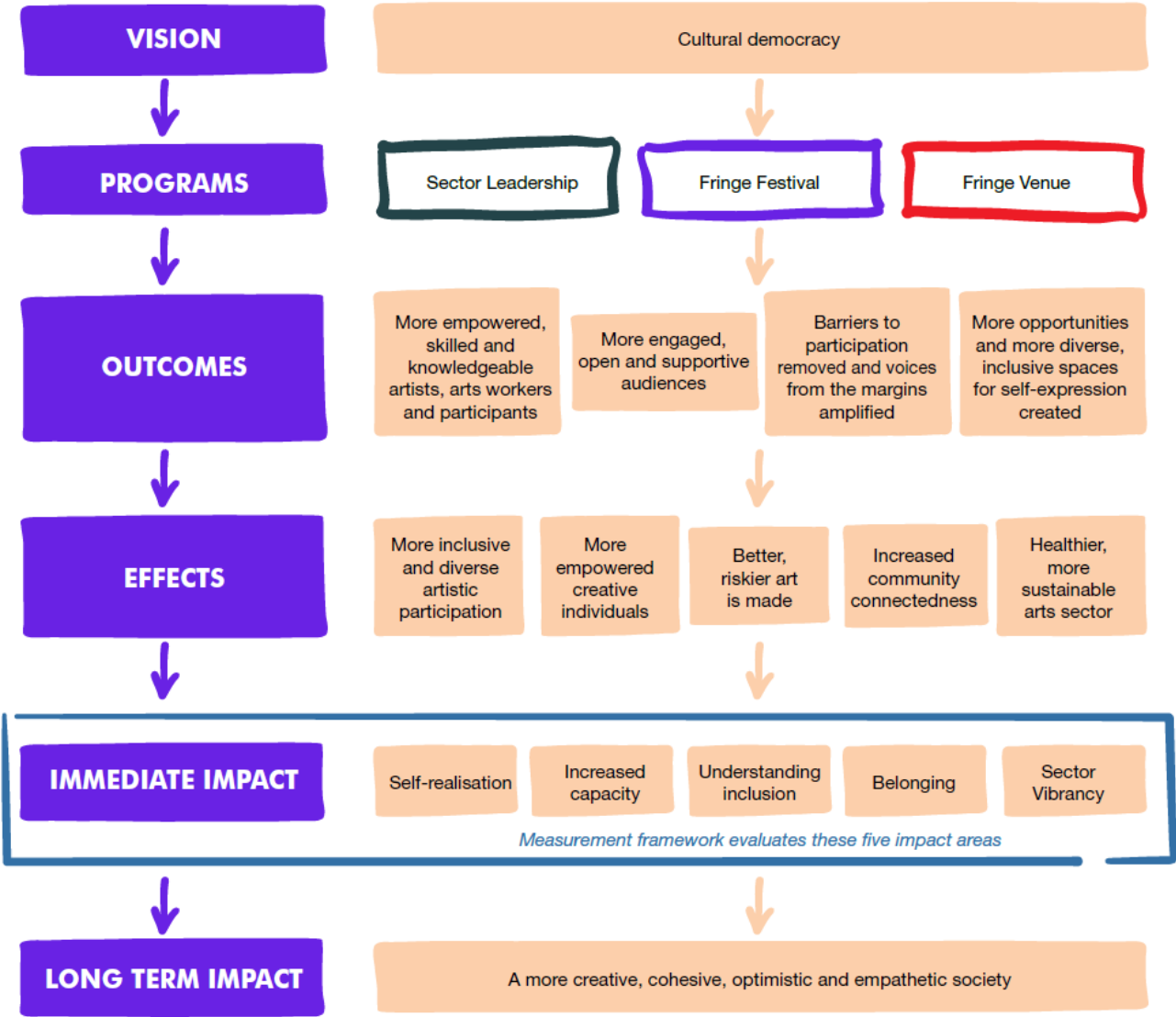
- Democratise artistic participation
- Provoke social change
- Inspire artistic risk-taking
- Strengthen Melbourne's independent arts community
- Sustain our artists, our organisation and our planet

Under this sits nine strategies and hundreds of actions to ensure we are continually working towards achieving our goals.

Recognising that cultural equity is intersectional and covers a broad array of identities, experiences and backgrounds, this plan will sit above existing policies, plans and special measures, informing their work and the everyday activities of the organisation. The actions in this plan are designed to be relevant to all of Fringe's work, while actions specific to any one community will sit in the relevant policy or action plan (for example, Deadly Fringe actions will sit in the Reconciliation Action Plan).

Melbourne Fringe Strategic Plan 2021-2025

Equity Action Plan 2021-2025

Reconciliation Action Plan 2021-2023

Disablity Inclusion Action Plan 2021-2023

Other Policies & Procedures

MELBOURNE FRINGE THEORY OF CHANGE

VISION	Cultural democracy

PROGRAMS

Sector Leadership	Fringe Festival	Fringe Venue

OUTCOMES

More empowered, skilled and knowledgeable artists, arts workers and participants	More engaged, open and supportive audiences	Barriers to participation removed and voices from the margins amplified	More opportunities and more diverse, inclusive spaces for self-expression created

EFFECTS

More inclusive and diverse artistic participation	More empowered creative individuals	Better, riskier art is made	Increased community connectedness	Healthier, more sustainable arts sector

IMMEDIATE IMPACT

Self-realisation	Increased capacity	Understanding inclusion	Belonging	Sector Vibrancy

Measurement framework evaluates these five impact areas

LONG TERM IMPACT

A more creative, cohesive, optimistic and empathetic society

As part of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025, Melbourne Fringe has developed a **Theory of Change** evaluation model with the end point of enabling a more creative, cohesive, optimistic and empathetic society:

To understand our immediate impact, we measure **five impact areas:**

Self-realisation
Is there greater creativity, potential and acceptance of self through creative expression?

Knowledge
Has greater personal capacity, skills and knowledge been developed?

Inclusion
Has an understanding of the value of diversity and inclusion been increased?

Belonging
Have participants developed an enhanced sense of community belonging or civic pride?

Sector Vibrancy
Has a healthier, more vibrant arts and creative sector been enabled?

Communities of Focus

Neon Corroboree, Amos Roach, Melbourne Fringe Festival 2019. Photo by Alexis Desaulniers-Lea.

As part of the strategic plan, the organisation has identified five communities of focus for the next five years: First Nations, Deaf and disability, people of colour, women and non-binary people, and the LGBTIQA+ communities.

Over recent years, Melbourne Fringe has developed a strong track record of support for the First Nations, Deaf & Disability and some segments of LGBTQIA+ communities, and will continue to build and refine on this work in 2021-2025. We recognise that more focus can and should be placed to support people of colour, women and non-binary people, and the trans community, and this will be the primary focus of this Equity Action Plan. Each year the statistics below will be reviewed to ensure that we are retaining equity across communities of focus, with additional resources applied to improving representation in identified areas as required.

A note on CALD vs. POC

Historically, Melbourne Fringe has collected data on Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, in line with the Victorian Government's definition of CALD as people of non-English speaking background, as well as people born outside of Australia and whose first language is not English. While CALD is still regularly used in government and policy circles and is a requirement for the many funders we report to, we recognise that the definition does not always accurately reflect people and communities who face ongoing discrimination on the basis of their race. Furthermore, while our data for CALD engagement has been relatively strong, anecdotally this has included a significant portion of culturally and linguistically diverse Caucasian people (such as people from European backgrounds), obfuscating our intention to provide better support for communities who are facing greater and more sustained structural disadvantage in the arts.

Therefore, from 2021 the organisation will collect data for both CALD and People of Colour (POC), with the latter the focus of Fringe's cultural equity work. While not perfect, the term People of Colour goes some way to identify those who experience structural disadvantage or exclusion on the basis of their race. We acknowledge that not all people agree with this definition, and that no single term can adequately capture the plethora of experiences, identities and backgrounds of these communities.

Disability Definition

Disability includes but is not limited to visible and invisible disability, chronic illness, Deafness, mental illness and neurodiversity; and other barriers, identifiers and experiences that people may have as part of the disability communities.

Language

At Melbourne Fringe, we say 'disabled people'. Many people in the disability community prefer identity-first language. This positions disability as part of a person's identity and belonging to a cultural group. Another preferred term is 'people with disability' – this term puts the person before the disability, and it acknowledges that disability is caused by societal barriers.

We use 'Deaf people' to refer to people who are culturally Deaf – that is, people who were born deaf, or became deaf early in life, and who use Auslan sign language to communicate.

Further information is available in our Deaf and Disability Inclusion Action Plan, which can be viewed here.

Current Situation

These statistics represent the percentages of Fringe's communities of focus in the organisation's key programs. Please note 2019 data has been used due to COVID-19 skewing data in 2020.

Area	First Nations	Deaf & Disabled	CALD*	Gender	LGBTQIA+
Number of Fringe-produced events	20%	20%	30%	75%	Not collected
Number of Fringe Hub events	4%	8%	23%	46%	49%
Artists receiving microgrants, bursaries or commissions	10%	15%	30%	61%	46%
Artists in the Open Access Program	2%	4%	8%	41%	5%
Artists in Design Fringe	0%	4%	8%	41%	5%
Melbourne Fringe Awards Judges	3%	4%	17%	68%	40%
Staff (contract and casual)	8%	8%	Not collected	60%	Not collected
Volunteers	0.38%	4%	Not collected	80%	20%

*NB: Until 2021 the organisation has collected data on CALD, not POC.

Process

This plan was developed by a working group of Fringe staff as part of the organisation's participation in the Fair Play program run by Diversity Arts Australia. For six months in 2020 the team worked with Diversity Arts Australia staff and mentors to audit the organisation's activities and brainstorm equitable strategies in the areas of training, policy, leadership, employment, consultation, programming and marketing.

The results of the audit identified key strengths and areas of improvement for the organisation. Of particular note was the strength of Fringe's First Nations and Deaf & disabled engagement, programming and marketing, embedded through the organisation's Deadly Fringe and Access & Inclusion programs. The organisation's current policies and training programs were also rated highly.

Areas in need of improvement were primarily focused on POC engagement, consultation, employment and marketing. Representation of the communities of focus in the organisation's staff and board was low, particularly in senior management. While some progress has been made recently in this area, this will be a key focus for the Equity Action Plan.

Evaluation & Review
This plan is intended to be a living document that will be regularly updated to ensure Fringe is achieving its goals. Each year the organisation will undertake a formal evaluation and review process to assess progress against the actions in the plan, using existing measurement frameworks and KPIs. The *Progress to date* section of each goal will be updated at this time to reflect the work undertaken in the previous year.

Goal 1: Employment

Ensure the Fringe workforce reflects the diversity of our community at all levels of the organisation

Club Fringe, Melbourne Fringe Festival 2019. Photo by Duncan Jacob.

	Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Budget Required	Consultation
Short-term	Set diversity targets for the composition of Melbourne Fringe staff, particularly in artist-facing roles	CEO, General Manager	March 2021		
	Create an equity checklist to ensure the organisation adheres to best practice for recruitment and selection of new staff members	General Manager	March 2021		
	Refine position description & job application process (including selection panels) to increase focus on actively encouraging diversity	General Manager	March 2021		
	Create recruitment plan at the start of each year to allow ample time for outreach	General Manager, Business & Systems Manager	March 2021, reviewed annually		
	Support cultural leadership talent through sector-leading staff professional development programs	CEO, General Manager	March 2021, reviewed annually	✔	
	Refine Stepping Stones professional development program to build capacity for contract staff	CEO, General Manager	April 2022	✔	
Long-term	Set targets for representation at senior levels of the organisation, and revisit Board targets	CEO, General Manager	April 2023		Board for Board targets
	Design and implement outreach plan (including maintaining a list of potential candidates) to increase applications from communities of focus	HODs	2023	✔	Cultural partners
	Devise a scheme to support staff from communities of focus to debrief, network and build connections with other members from their community (internally and externally) throughout their employment	HODs	2023	✔	Cultural partners
	Work to increase staff salaries, ensuring ongoing industry benchmarking to attract and retain the best staff.	CEO & Board	End 2025	✔	

Outcomes
- More applications and subsequent employment of people in Fringe's communities of focus
- Melbourne Fringe is a first-choice employer for arts workers from communities of focus
- Staff from the communities of focus have the skills and pathways to senior positions in the organisation
- Good retention of staff from communities of focus
- The makeup of Melbourne Fringe's staff (incl leadership) and Board reflects the diversity of Melbourne and Australia

Measurement
- Targets set for Board, core/contract and casual staff, reviewed annually
- Demographic data collection via bi-annual anonymous survey of core, contract and casual staff, volunteers and interns
- Annual salary benchmarking against other arts organisations of similar size/structure
- Review of feedback recorded in annual reviews for ongoing staff and exit interviews for contract staff

Progress to Date
- Stepping Stones professional development program created in 2019 for contract staff to develop their skills
- As part of the Deadly Fringe program, the organisation has had identified positions for emerging First Nations producers since 2017
- The organisation has employed an Access & Inclusion Coordinator since 2017, and has had an identified entry-level programming/producing role for a Deaf/disabled person in 2019 and 2021.
- Creation of a new senior role for a First Nations Creative Advisor in 2021.
- Targets implemented for Board diversity in 2020, with a review due in 2022.

Goal 2: Programming

Build cultural safety, equity and visibility for Fringe's communities of focus in the organisation's artistic programs

	Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Budget Required	Consultation
Short-term	Set quotas for communities of focus in Fringe-curated artistic programs	Head of Programs and Projects, CEO	March 2021		
	Review selection criteria, panels and process for Fringe-curated programs and spaces	Programs and Projects Team	March 2021		
	Refine existing and build new commissioning and mentorship programs for artists from communities of focus	CEO, Head of Programs & Projects	June 2021	✔	Arts Access Victoria, Koorie Heritage Trust, Footscray Community Arts Centre
	Improve representation in the Festival Awards program in the make-up of judging panels	Program Manager (Independent Arts)	August – October 2021		
Long-term	Develop storytelling methods to communicate the structural improvements around cultural safety in Melbourne Fringe's programs as achieved in the short-term goals	Head of Programs & Projects	2023		
	Audit current programming partnerships and develop formal partnerships with community organisations to advance the visibility and participation of communities of focus	CEO & Programs and Projects Team	March 2023	✔	Consultation with organisations or communities of focus, if required
	Develop programs for skills building and provide seed funding to facilitate the development of works of scale by artists from the communities of focus	CEO, Programs & Projects team	March 2024	✔	Communities of focus
	Secure funding to continue the Cash For Creatives fund, to reduce the financial risk for artists to participate in the Open Access Program	CEO, Head of Development	2023	✔	

Outcomes
- Improved representation of artists from communities of focus in Melbourne Fringe curated spaces and programs
- Increased audience numbers from communities of focus
- Improved representation from communities of focus in Melbourne Fringe judging panels
- Increased pathways for artists developing works of scale for Fringe's signature events program

Measurement
- Distribution of cash from Melbourne Fringe going to focus communities in microgrants, bursaries, commissioning funds (quotas)
- Demographic data collection via Festival and Common Rooms artist and audience surveys
- Demographic data collection of Festival judges
- Annual review of programming data against quotas
- Percentage of artists from communities of focus as lead artists in Fringe signature events (quotas)

Progress to Date
- Formal partnerships with Koorie Heritage Trust and ILBIJERRI Theatre Company for Deadly Fringe, and with Arts Access Victoria for Radical Access
- Programs to facilitate participation in communities of focus, including microgrants to cover registrations, commissions, mentorships and other support
- Fringe Furniture for Gender Equality program running from 2019-2021
- Cash for Creatives fund created in 2020 for the organisation to strategically support artists to participate

Goal 3: Training

Develop a strategic and embedded cultural competency training program for Fringe staff, Board and participants

	Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Budget Required	Consultation
Short-term	Conduct audit of staff & Board competencies to identify focus areas for annual training	Business & Systems Manager	March 2021		Staff and board input
	Create schedule for monthly all-staff training sessions, including intermediate and advanced training for experienced staff	General Manager, Business & Systems Manager	April 2021, reviewed annually	✔	
	Design plan for artist info sessions and workshops (including cultural competency training)	Program Manager (Independent Arts)	March 2021, reviewed annually	✔	Consult with partners to find workshop hosts
	Overhaul artist resources on Fringe website to create dynamic and responsive Resource Hub (including links to external equity resources)	Program Manager (Independent Arts)	March 2021, reviewed annually	✔	Accessibility consultants
Long-term	Develop a framework for the ongoing tracking of individual and organisational training	Business & Systems Manager	February 2023		
	Develop a library of equity resources and add to staff handbook and induction checklist	Business and Systems Manager	February 2023		Consult with partners for best practice resources
	Develop a training plan for independent venues – particularly in the areas of access and inclusion	Program Manager (Independent Arts)	February 2023	✔	
	Develop a training plan for artists to offer to the independent sector more broadly – particularly in the areas of cultural safety and competency	Program Manager (Independent Arts)	February 2024	✔	

Outcomes
- Melbourne Fringe staff, Board and artists report greater cultural competency across organisation's communities of focus
- Staff are able to access tailored training based on their pre-existing competency levels
- Staff/artists from communities of focus reporting that Fringe is a culturally safe environment

Measurement
- Annual audits of staff cultural competency levels
- Artists reporting cultural competency levels in artist surveys
- Review of feedback from staff via annual reviews and exit interviews reporting safe cultural environment
- Review of feedback from informal mechanisms that support Fringe staff from communities of focus (ie mentors, yarning circles, speaking and listening circles and ambassadors)

Progress to Date
- Artists surveyed on areas of training/assistance they would like
- Melbourne Fringe Staff attend ad-hoc cultural competency training run by external providers, including Auslan, Deaf & disability awareness, First Nations cultural awareness
- Board invited to all staff PD sessions on cultural competency
- Access & Inclusion standing agenda item in staff meetings

Goal 4: Policy

Identify and dismantle systemic privilege and exclusion in Fringe's current policies and practices.

	Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Budget Required	Consultation
Short-term	Formalise organisational policy schedule to ensure timely updating of policies	Board, Business & Systems Manager	March 2021		Board
	Conduct audit of policy manual to ensure it supports an inclusive work environment	General Manager, Business & Systems Manager	June 2021		Board
	Update and finalise the organisation's Disability & Inclusion Action Plan and Reconciliation Action Plan	DIAP & RAP committees	June 2021		Arts Access Victoria (DIAP) and Reconciliation Australia (RAP)
	Formalise ethical procurement policy (including ensuring accessibility standards are met when working with external suppliers)	General Manager, Business & Systems Manager	March 2022		Board
Long-term	Create an anti-racism action plan to replace current Cultural Diversity policy	General Manager, Business & Systems Manager	June 2023		CALD communities
	Formalise gender equity plan, including a gender equity audit of the organisation's activities and procedures.	General Manager, Business & Systems Manager	June 2023		
	Implement and regularly review community guidelines to ensure content reflects contemporary standards, including in open access programs	CEO, Head of Programs & Projects	Ongoing		Artists
	Refine organisation's Health Plan to ensure specific needs of communities are being addressed	CEO, General Manager	Annual review process		Staff

Outcomes
- Policy documents are regularly updated to support an inclusive work environment for communities of focus
- Action plans implemented to drive the organisation's work for particular communities
- Artists feel safe to explore and participate in the organisation

Measurement
- Audit employment manual annually (including consultation from First Nations and POC Board members, and an HR consultant)
- Review results of KPIs for RAP and DIAP annually

Progress to Date
- Melbourne Fringe has drafted and is in the process of finalising our Disability and Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP)
- We are in the process of drafting our first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)
- Cultural leave for First Nations staff included in Policy Manual
- Cultural Diversity Policy has been operational at Melbourne Fringe since 2015

Goal 5: Consultation & Engagement

Develop and embed self-mobilising engagement strategies with communities of focus

	Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Budget Required	Consultation
Short-term	Expand ambassador program to create an 'Artist Council' with representatives from communities of focus, to consult with the organisation and promote Fringe's activities to their communities	CEO, Head of Programs & Projects	May 2021	✔	Community leaders
	Identify appropriate peak bodies and partner organisations likely to want to begin a reciprocal relationship with us; particularly for CALD communities	Heads of Department	End 2021		
	Re-establish connection and communication with Fringe alumni from communities of focus in conjunction with 40th birthday celebrations	Head of Marketing, Head of Development	End 2021	✔	
	Develop a communications plan to engage language-specific audience development (beginning with Mandarin-speaking communities, especially students (both artists and audiences)	Head of Marketing, Marketing Campaigns Manager	March 2022	✔	Mandarin-speaking communities
	Formalise organisational engagement plan with specific strategies for each focus community	Heads of Department	March 2022	✔	Consultation with communities
Long-term	Conduct review of success of strategies for individual focus communities; identify emerging focus communities	Heads of Department	March 2024	✔	
	Develop relationships with CALD peak and community organisations to increase engagement with language-specific communities	Heads of Department	2025	✔	
	Establish a fruitful Fringe Alumni program	Head of Marketing, Head of Development	2025		
	Build relationships with the trans community, with a view to formalising engagement for next iteration of EAP.	CEO, Heads of Department	2024-2025		

Outcomes

- Melbourne Fringe builds formal partnerships with organisations led by communities of focus
- Melbourne Fringe develops strong relationships with leaders from within the communities of focus and learns from their expertise
- An artist council with strong representation from communities of focus that provides guidance and expertise
- Increased audiences from Mandarin-speaking communities

Measurement

- Number of partnerships held with organisations led by communities of focus
- Review data collected from Alumni survey delivered at the end of the 40th birthday celebrations
- Informal feedback from Artist Council program
- Review of audience data for communities of focus
- Number of procurements from businesses led by communities of focus

Progress to Date

- Formal partnerships with Koorie Heritage Trust and ILBIJERRI Theatre Company for Deadly Fringe, and with Arts Access Victoria for Radical Access
- Informal partnerships with the Wilin Centre and other organisations for Deadly Fringe
- Cultural ambassadors for Deadly Fringe program from 2019 onwards