



Melbourne Civic Commission FAQs

Presented by Melbourne Fringe and the Naomi Milgrom Foundation

I'm excited! How do I apply?

That's great! You can review the application form or submit an Expression of Interest [here](#) before 11.59pm on **Tuesday 12 March 2024**.

What do you mean by 'Civic Commission'?

Good question. We wanted a term that that was open to interpretation and could encompass ideas such as public art, participatory work, the people, and the activation of public and other civic spaces (there's that word again!) like streets, town halls, city squares, public libraries and galleries, and other such things. We landed on 'Civic Commission' because it put the people at the heart of the project and that's what this commission is about – it must be something that engages the people of Melbourne in a really active way in the spaces that they own. It's all part of our vision for 'cultural democracy'. In short, if it's not a genuinely participatory work, and it's not in public space, we reckon it won't make the cut.

For some inspiration, check out our previous commissions [Groundswell](#) and [Swing](#), but also don't let these limit your ideas. These are just examples of what we've supported in the past. We're up for anything in the future.

Is this work the centrepiece to the 2025 Melbourne Fringe Festival?

In short, yes! This will no doubt be the biggest thing happening in the Melbourne Fringe Festival 2025. We're really looking for ideas that can be delivered at scale. It'll lead the messaging for our festival, and we'll likely put other complementary programming and imagery around the ideas that come from this work, in a really connected way.

A good test for yourself to ask is – Will this project hit the front page of *The Age* when it happens? We're looking for a project that is exciting artistically, and that will spark excitement for other artists in the festival, for media and most importantly, for the people of Melbourne. It's not just another event in the festival – it's got to be an idea that's something special, to really stand out amongst 450-odd shows. Speaking of which – there's 449 other shows in the festival and not just this one, and our team need to work on those too, so while this is a big deal for us, we're still pulled in 449 other directions simultaneously, which is why we have our list of who is responsible for doing what in this document also.

How visible does the work have to be?

We are looking for something visible and high profile. But that can take many forms. Think about the famous 2001 Spencer Tunick Melbourne Fringe nude photo (Google it if you weren't in it) – it happened once at 5.30am but it was on every news channel in the country and people are still talking about it more than 20 years later.

What is the application process?

It's a two-stage process. First, there is the EOI form. This process aims to be streamlined and artist-friendly and to encourage applications from diverse artists and creatives.

A handful of applicants will then be invited to make a presentation and have a conversation with the Fringe and Naomi Milgrom Foundation teams – at which stage they may be asked to provide some more detail about the project.

A finalist will then be chosen, and we will commission their project for the Melbourne Fringe Festival in 2025.

Can I talk to someone about my idea?

We don't have time to meet everyone for a coffee to talk about their ideas but if you want, you're welcome to book in for a short Zoom chat with us. Please email eilysh@melbournefringe.com.au to arrange a time.

Please note that the Fringe office will be closed between mid-December and mid-January, however we will endeavor to set up a time with you asap on our return if you request a meeting during this time.

What is needed from me in stage two if I make it that far?

We will definitely be asking all stage two participants for a detailed budget, as well as more detailed information (think drawings or designs, and more detail about how the program or project will work), along with some particular questions we have based on your application. This will be customised with specific questions we have for you.

We'll ask you to send through this information to us and we'll have an interview to talk it through too.

But don't worry about that now – concentrate on stage one!

Are there any criteria for the project?

The selected commission will respond to the three provocations of participation, place and design. Things to consider in relation to the provocations include:

Participation

How do audiences participate with the artwork and how do they actively help realise it? How can the public contribute to the artwork through their voices, bodies or ideas? What is the nature and quality of the audience participation? How does the artwork realise Melbourne Fringe's commitment to cultural democracy? Does the work enable increased access to culture and support diversity and inclusivity? To be clear, the work needs to have participation as central to its premise. Just being in public space isn't enough.

Place

How is the artwork responsive to site or place? How will the work be situated within its site?

What kind of place does the work relate to? Is it a specific site or landmark? Does it consider specific people, histories, cultures, or institutions? Is it related to the urban context or to water, land, or sky? Does it contend with a place's past, present or future?

Design

Does the project entail artistic excellence and bold creative risk-taking? Does the project represent an exciting opportunity for an artist to create an ambitious artwork? Is the design of the project innovative and exciting? How does visual design play a key role in the realisation of the artwork? Does the project have scale and impact? Will it be highly visible and easily accessible to a diverse public in Melbourne? Will it take over Melbourne's civic space and time in bold and exciting ways?

We will also be considering the inclusivity and sustainability of the work, as well as the project's ability to reflect the Melbourne Fringe ethos of cultural democracy.

I have just become an artist – do you think this could be my first project?

Hey, congratulations! That's exciting news and good for you. Unfortunately, however, no – this would not be a good first (or even third) project. We imagine that this commission will be awarded to an artist with a few runs under their belt (sorry for the sports metaphor). This commission is suited to established artists to make a work of scale.

Do I need to have my venue confirmed?

No. We'll work with you to find a venue. We have a great relationship with people like Fed Square and the State Library Victoria which have been great public spaces we've used in the past, and we can get in touch with most people in this great city of ours!

Do I have to be from Victoria?

At least one artistic lead must be from Victoria. You can collaborate with people from other places. And, no, you cannot just grab a random Victorian to stick in your application – we will totally see through that ploy. So artistic lead = Victorian = OK by us.

Can I apply with an arts organisation, collective or auspice body?

Yes, you certainly can! We encourage independent artists and small teams to consider reaching out to other arts organisations to partner on their project. We recognise that pulling off a commission of this scale can seem daunting and having an organisational partner or collaborator can help with securing venue space, finding experienced producers/production managers and creating a strong artistic vision for the project. It's not compulsory by any means and artists can also work on their own if they have the skills and experience (and an appropriately skilled producer). We do not expect artists to have all these details confirmed at this stage either, don't worry!

Does my outcome need to be in Melbourne?

Your outcome needs to be accessible and visible to a large and diverse crowd, so a central and visible public site in Melbourne is preferable. Hosting it down a wombat hole at the Back of Burke may be interesting but also too hard for many people to access. Audience accessibility is a priority.

When does my project take place?

Your project must take place in the 2025 Melbourne Fringe Festival in October. It doesn't have to run for the whole time. Depending on the nature of the work, Melbourne Fringe might be able to help develop further presentation opportunities in other places after the premiere in the Melbourne Fringe.

What sort of artform or outcome are you looking for?

We are open to your ideas! The commission can take any form. It might be a sculpture that is visible for the 20-days of the festival or, alternatively, it could be a one-off performance. Or, something else!

Can I plonk a sculpture down and walk away?

No, the project is designed to inspire the participation of a large crowd of locals and blow-ins. It's possible, but unlikely, that plonking a sculpture and walking away would do that.

Can I take the money and run?

No, this commission is designed to be made in collaboration with Melbourne Fringe. Melbourne Fringe is not an arm's length funding body; we are a commissioning partner who wants to be in dialogue with you as you make the work.

Can I charge an entry fee?

The project must be free or extremely low cost for entry.

What does inclusion and access mean?

Inclusion means enabling equal access to opportunities and experience for diverse participants, especially those that are easily excluded or marginalised from arts experiences. Access means enabling disabled and Deaf audiences (and artists) to participate. Examples of accessibility include Auslan interpreting, Relaxed Performances, Audio Description, captioning, or Tactile Tours. We encourage artists to think about 'embedded access' in your applications. This means artistic practices that include accessibility provisions within them, such as an Auslan interpreter as a character, captions projected onto the work, or audio description as part of the soundscape. Check out our [Producers Guide to Access](#) for more information.

How can you ensure cultural safety?

Organisations like Melbourne Fringe that produce and present artworks often involving bold, artistic risk-taking have to tread a difficult line between freedom of artistic expression and managing cultural sensitivities and safety. To help artists navigate this we have created the [Melbourne Fringe Community Guidelines](#), to which all projects must adhere.

Ensuring cultural safety is also an ongoing project and one taken seriously by Fringe. For any artists who prefer to speak directly to someone with a shared cultural experience, our staff includes people who are disabled, First Nations, and Persons of Colour. In the spirit of continuous learning, we are also open to your suggestions around how to better manage cultural safety for you. You can email info@melbournefringe.com.au.

Does the project have to be a brand new idea?

The commission seeks to support a bold new undertaking by an artist, so it can't be something you have done five times before. However, it's fine if the work has had previous creative developments or if it has happened outside Melbourne and/or in a somewhat different scale or form and you're now undertaking substantial development to consider this a premiere.

Who owns the work?

The artist owns the work. Melbourne Fringe owns the right to premiere the work as part of the 2025 Melbourne Fringe Festival and to capture images and/or video of the work for documentation, acquittal and marketing purposes; but the work belongs to the artist. We may require a royalty for future tours of the work.

If I'm shortlisted, then I reckon I can bet on being successful?

This is a competitive process. If you are shortlisted, it means we are excited by the potential in your idea – but we will be excited by a bunch of other ideas too. It will be a hard decision, but only one project can be commissioned. We may also reach out to you while EOIs are open if there is anything in your submission we'd like to discuss in more detail.

What can I expect if I am successful?

- A commissioning budget of \$100,000 and a 'Signature Event' in the Melbourne Fringe Festival 2025.
- A collaborator. We are here to co-create the vision and plans for this work with you. This isn't like a grant where you get the money and see us at the other end. We are here to help and support you every step along the way.
- A whip-smart team of artistic and organisational Fringe staff members that can provide some support and advice as you navigate the process of creating a large-scale public project.
- A contract that gives you the ongoing intellectual property and moral rights over the work, with a world premiere at Melbourne Fringe Festival 2025.
- A professional publicist and marketing campaign to ensure the work has a high-profile outcome.
- Opportunities to promote the commission during its development and for its final presentation.

What will Melbourne Fringe expect from me?

We ask that you be willing and excited to:

- professionally envisage, plan, produce and deliver a participatory public artwork of scale and of the highest calibre for presentation within the dates of Melbourne Fringe Festival 2025.
- enjoy collaborating with Melbourne Fringe and be ready to undertake a creative process that will be exciting, fun, and supported – but, yes, also sometimes stressful (like all big projects are).
- work within the available budget and time. We can help you fundraise for additional funding; however, we expect that you can conceive a version of your project that will be ready for final presentation using the available budget during the Melbourne Fringe Festival
- ensure the work is safe and that it complies with all relevant laws, insurances and permits. Also – if necessary, but hopefully not! – ensure that your project is delivered in a COVID-safe manner.
- create a work that places accessibility and inclusivity at its heart, working with the Melbourne Fringe Access Advisor to ensure best practice accessibility is included in all aspects of the work.
- ensure that best practice cultural protocols are followed, especially if you are working with First Peoples.
- participate in regular meetings and status reports about the development of the work.
- share documentation of your creative developments as they unfold that we can share with our audiences and partners.
- help us promote the commission and to undertake media appearances
- acknowledge Melbourne Fringe, Naomi Milgrom Foundation and the Victorian State Government – and any additional future partners that may contribute – as the supporters of the work.
- participate in our debriefs and formal evaluation processes during the creative process and also at the end of the project.

What does the commission money need to be used for?

The budget for the commission is \$100,000 per project (excluding GST). This generous commissioning budget will enable the creation of a unique signature civic project on a scale unusual in the Victorian independent arts sector.

This fee will need to consider:

- artist fees – please be considerate of how much time you will be spending on delivering this project and adjust your fee accordingly
- any production or fabrication costs – these will vary according to the nature and context of the project, but might include production materials, labour costs, costumes and props, staging, engineer assessments or other structural reports, prototype testing, etc
- presentation costs – this will vary according to the nature and context of the project, but might include venue costs (including public space reinstatement costs), permit applications, front of house, overnight security, power provisions, equipment hire (including lighting, sound and AV), first aid, bump in crew, freight, administration costs such as auspicing, vehicle hire, etc
- payment for a producer and a production manager for project management of the development and presentation of the work
- access costs to ensure best practice inclusivity – see the [Fringe Guide to Access](#) for ideas
- artist's own insurance including public liability insurance

Melbourne Fringe will also contribute:

- project management from the perspective of the Festival – we will work closely with your producer to manage the delivery of the work for the 2025 Melbourne Fringe Festival
- risk management
- assistance with applying for permits in the form of advice on what will be required, collaboration in writing the applications, and facilitation of the application process itself (including auspicing the submissions through Melbourne Fringe if needed)
- publicity and marketing support
- photographic documentation of the project by the Fringe photographer
- dramaturgy in collaboration with Melbourne Fringe artistic staff members

Melbourne Fringe will support applications from the artist to other funding bodies to supplement this budget. However, the commissioned project must be able to be realised within a budget of \$100K for the 2025 Fringe Festival, regardless of whether other funding applications are successful. We understand scalability and this should be carefully considered.