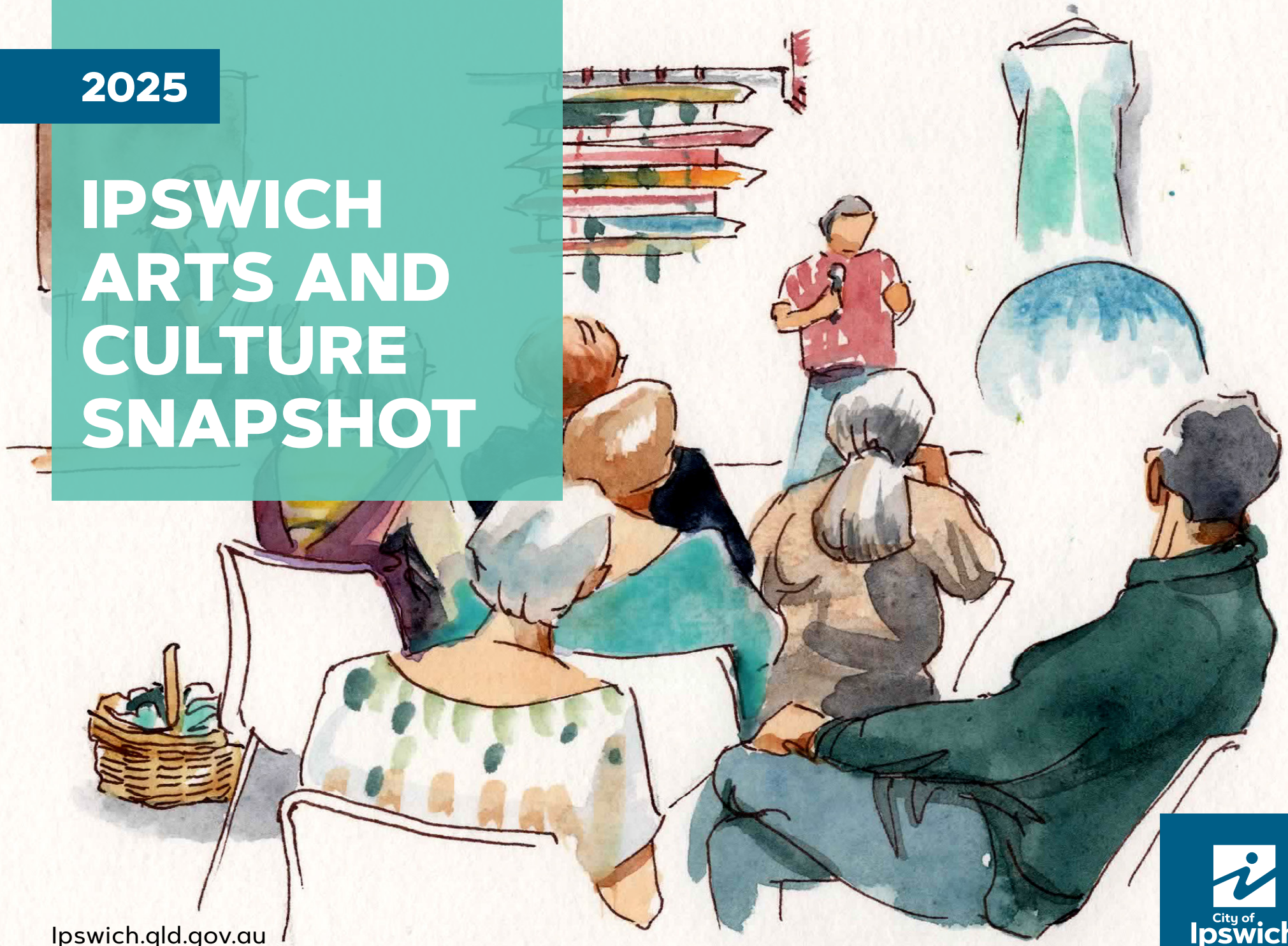
2025

IPSWICH ARTS AND CULTURE SNAPSHOT



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City of Ipswich

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Ipswich City Council respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Ipswich region, the Jagera, Yuggera and Ugarapul People as custodians of the land and waters we share. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, as keepers of the traditions, customs, cultures and stories of proud people.

DISCLAIMER

This report has been prepared by Fieldworx for Ipswich City Council.

The report draws on a desktop analysis of publicly available information and records from the Ipswich City Council (council), research sources such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics and insights from workshops with the local arts and cultural sector.

The consultant, Fieldworx, acknowledges the reliance on the documentation provided by council and takes no responsibility for any findings resulting from source document omissions. The report is provided for context, as a foundation for future planning, and does not commit the council to a particular course of action.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

The *Ipswich Arts and Culture Snapshot 2025* offers a-point-in-time reflection on the Ipswich arts and cultural landscape, with a focus on the role Ipswich City Council (council) plays in supporting creativity across the city. It highlights recent initiatives, investments and areas of strategic focus that reflect council's commitment to nurturing community creativity and the broader creative ecosystem.

While the primary focus of this report is on council's role and the impact of its initiatives, it also acknowledges the broader creative community and sector that enriches Ipswich. Independent artists, organisations, venues and creative businesses play a vital role in the city's cultural life. Their contributions are recognised as essential to the vibrancy and diversity of Ipswich's arts and cultural identity, even though they are not explored in detail within this Snapshot.

This report is based on the information and data available at the time of writing and serves as an information resource to inform future planning. Over four sections, this report presents insights from data analysis, sector trends and community perceptions to inform council as it enters the next phase of visioning and strategic development for the city's creative identity.

Ipswich is well placed to leverage major international events such as the Brisbane 2032 Olympics and Paralympics and the increasing national focus on cultural inclusion, local storytelling and First Nations leadership. This report offers a foundation for imagining that future; combining local data, national insights and the lived experiences of community and cultural stakeholders across Ipswich.

INTRODUCTION

Council has made deliberate and steady investment into the city's cultural life focusing on inclusion, accessibility, civic identity and infrastructure. More recently, council's strategic initiatives have created the foundation for a more visible and engaged creative sector through investment in creative pathways, professional development opportunities and profile building.

Ipswich is at a pivotal moment in its cultural journey. As one of Queensland's fastest-growing cities, its population is projected to more than double over the next 20 years. This growth brings both urgency and opportunity to embed arts and culture in the city's everyday life, to foster professional pathways for creatives and to shape a distinctive cultural identity that reflects Ipswich's heritage, diversity and future ambition.

Council's strategic initiatives over the past eight years have been stepping up to this moment. In preparation, council has built upon and maintained successful legacy facilities and programs such as the Regional Arts Development Fund, Ipswich Community Gallery, Studio *188*, Ipswich Civic Centre, Ipswich Art Gallery and Ipswich Art Awards.

From this long-established base, council has progressed through planning and implementation stages of a new citywide network of libraries – including Australia's first stand-alone Children's Library – positioning Ipswich as a leader in accessible, future-focused cultural infrastructure.

At the same time, council has launched and continues to grow a suite of regionally significant events that build audiences, showcase local talent, and provide platforms for arts and culture to be experienced and celebrated by the broader community. This long-term, layered approach has evolved over time through distinct phases of planning, learning and delivery, as outlined below:

- **2018–2019:** positioning the arts as a renewed strategic focus
- **2020–2021:** refining concepts, engaging stakeholders and learning from initial results
- **2022–2024:** introducing programs to drive transformation
- **2025 onwards:** enhancing impacts now and into the future.

Example initiatives within each of these strategic stages, are presented in the following timeline diagram.

As council looks to the future, this report serves as a reflection and an invitation to shape a cultural identity that celebrates Ipswich's unique strengths. It offers an evidence base to inform next step planning, investment and initiatives that advance a resilient and inclusive creative city.

IPSWICH CITY COUNCIL STRATEGIC INITIATIVE TIMELINE

STRATEGIC INTIATITIVES

PRE 2018	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Continued delivery ▪ Regional Arts Development Fund ▪ Ipswich Community Gallery (est 2015) ▪ Studio 188 Creative Space (est 2012) ▪ Ipswich Civic Centre (est 1975) ▪ Ipswich Art Gallery (est 1951, relaunched 1999) ▪ Ipswich Art Awards (est 2000)	▪ Adopted Arts and Culture Strategy 2018-2023	▪ Ipswich Art Awards transitioned to delivery by council. ▪ Developed the City Events Plan ▪ Ipswich Central Revitalisation community consultation commenced	▪ First Creators of Ipswich Summit and Report	▪ City Events Plan launch including regionally significant festivals SPARK Ipswich and Galvanized Festival of Heritage ▪ Opening of Ipswich Children's Library	▪ Established Ipswich Arts Advisory Group ▪ Adopted Creative Industries Action Plan	▪ Launch of the ARTiculate program: arts industry workshop series ▪ Live & Local music pilot and report ▪ Launch of annual NAIDOC month exhibitions at Ipswich Community Gallery	▪ 25 years Ipswich Art Gallery ▪ Developing Cultural Heart Report ▪ Relaunched Fire Station 101 as a multi-arts hub ▪ Opened Ipswich Arts Workshop ▪ Launch of First Nations performing arts series	▪ 50 year anniversary Ipswich Civic Centre ▪ 25 year anniversary Ipswich Art Awards ▪ Awarded funding for design and development of Ipswich Central Heart ▪ Established Public Art Advisory Committee	

STAGE

POSITIONING	REFINING	TRANSFORMING	ENHANCING
Recognising arts and culture as a strategic focus	**Engaging stakeholders, testing ideas and assessing impact**	**Broadening reach, building profile, investing in artists and industry development**	**Working together to achieve vision and capitalise on opportunities**

CONTEXT – WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

Drawing on data from Ipswich City Council (council), ABS Census statistics and wider industry trends, this section provides a contextual foundation for understanding the city's current arts and cultural environment. It highlights who lives and creates in Ipswich, and the social, economic, and structural conditions shaping participation, production, and sector potential.

The data reveals a city marked by a rapidly growing, young and diverse population, above-average First Nations representation, and expanding base of active creatives working across both professional and community levels.

While the arts play a strong role in placemaking and local identity, there is significant momentum and untapped opportunity for Ipswich in terms of creative employment and infrastructure. National and global arts trends, such as increasing demand for First Nations leadership, cross-sector collaboration, and sustainable, hyper-local programming, are particularly relevant to Ipswich as it navigates growth and defines its future cultural identity.

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

Ipswich stands out as one of Queensland's most dynamic and fastest-growing communities. As of June 2024, its estimated resident population was 259,886. This represents a growth rate of 3.5%, well above the state average of 1.9%. Projections forecast that by 2046, the population will more than double to approximately 533,000, positioning Ipswich as Queensland's fastest-growing city.

The city's demographic profile is notably younger than the Queensland average, with a median age of 32 (compared to 37 for both Queensland and Australia). Children aged 5–9 form the largest age group, reflecting a strong family presence, while adults aged 35–39 are the fastest-growing segment since 2016.

Ipswich boasts economic vitality, with a median family income of $72,696, higher than many nearby coastal regions. The city offers growing employment hubs in health, manufacturing, defense, and logistics.

A defining feature of Ipswich is its rich cultural diversity. Residents come from 163 countries and speak over 150 languages. Although the 21.7% of residents who were born overseas is slightly below the South East Queensland average of 26.7%, this diversity is deeply woven into the city's identity.

Ipswich is also home to a significantly higher proportion of First Nations people compared to the broader region. At 5.5%, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population here is almost double the proportion found in South East Queensland (2.8%) and above the state average (4.6%). Between 2016 and 2021, this population grew by 48.5%, far outpacing overall growth. Areas like Leichhardt and One Mile report First Nations populations as high as 10.9%. Known traditionally as Tulmur in the Yagara language, Ipswich has a deep and ongoing connection to its Indigenous culture, shaping both its history and its future.

Geographically, Ipswich combines urban centres such as Springfield with semi-rural townships like Rosewood and Grandchester across its 1,090 square kilometres, offering a unique mix of lifestyles. As the Ipswich Local Government Area continues to evolve, its youthful, culturally rich and rapidly expanding population will be central to shaping a vibrant and inclusive future distinct from its neighbours and Queensland more broadly.

Rapid population growth

- 259,886 residents as of June 2024 – 3.5% growth, well above QLD's 1.9%
- Projected to more than double by 2046 to over 533,000
- Ipswich is Queensland's fastest-growing city.

Young and family-oriented

- Median age: 32 vs 37 (QLD/AUS)
- Largest age group: 5–9 years
- Fastest growing cohort: 35–39 years
- Higher median family income ($72,696) than many SEQ coastal regions.

Cultural and linguistic diversity

- Residents from 163 countries, speaking 152 languages
- 21.7% born overseas (vs 26.7% in SEQ)
- Rich cultural makeup supports a vibrant, inclusive identity.

Strong First Nations presence

- 5.5% of population identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Higher than SEQ (2.8%) and QLD (4.6%)
- Grew 48.5% from 2016–2021
- Deep roots in Yagara Country – Tulmur.

Urban-rural blend

- Covers 1,100 sq km – urban centres + rural townships (e.g. Rosewood, Grandchester)
- Unique character compared to neighbouring regions.

IPSWICH CREATIVE SECTOR AND PARTICIPATION

Ipswich's creative sector is a vibrant and evolving ecosystem. It is characterised by a blend of professional practitioners and a network of community-based independent creatives and businesses.

According to the *Creators of Ipswich* report (2000), the city is home to an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 active creatives, with approximately 800 to 1,200 identifying as professionals who derive income from their practice. The remaining participants, while not necessarily earning a living from their work, contribute substantially to the cultural fabric of the city through high-quality independent practice across disciplines including visual arts, music, performance, writing and digital media.

This rich mix contributes to a diverse creative economy, aligning with national trends. Data from Creative Australia's *Blair Electorate Profile 2022* shows that 31% of residents engage in creative participation, with 13% actively creating art. These figures mirror national averages.

The profile also highlights that First Nations participation in the arts in this electorate is higher than average, an important reflection of Ipswich's cultural identity and history.

Employment figures reveal that 1.3% of the Ipswich labour force works in cultural and creative occupations, according to ABS Census 2021 data. This is slightly below the Queensland average (1.6%) and national average (1.8%), suggesting that while Ipswich has a strong creative base, there is untapped potential for growth, especially in nurturing professional pathways and infrastructure to support emerging talent.

The creative sector in Ipswich also plays a pivotal role in place-making and community identity. Local events and collaborative hubs reflect a strong DIY culture and growing appetite for grassroots creativity.

Who's creating in Ipswich

- Estimated 2,000–3,000 active creatives
- Around 800–1,200 professionals earning income from their practice
- Strong base of independent and community creators in visual arts, music, writing, performance and digital media
- 13% of residents in the electorate are active art-makers
- Above-average First Nations participation.

Creative employment

- 1.3% of Ipswich labour force in creative/cultural occupations
- Slightly below Queensland (1.6%) and national (1.8%) averages
- Indicates opportunity for sector growth and professional pathways

Key strengths

- Strong DIY and grassroots culture
- Vibrant place-making role in community life.

CURRENT STATE – ARTS AND CULTURE NOW

Ipswich's arts and cultural landscape is evolving with renewed energy and ambition. This section outlines the city's current cultural strengths, key infrastructure and contribution of local artists and creative organisations in place-making and local identity. It highlights how council's ongoing investment is shaping a more confident cultural identity, while also identifying areas of growth, opportunity and emerging challenges.

COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC FOCUS

Council has made steady and strategic investment in the city's cultural life, guided by a commitment to inclusion, accessibility and local identity. These investments have helped to position the importance of creativity, provide support for professional and emerging practitioners and introduce initiatives to strengthen community participation across artforms.

Involving the sector in decision making

Council has committed to actively engaging the sector in decision making processes through the establishment of:

- the Ipswich Arts Advisory Group (IAAG) which meets regularly to promote arts and culture and to provide strategic advice to council on arts and cultural priorities
- the Public Arts Advisory Group which provides advice and recommendations to council in relation to public art proposals and initiatives.

Purposeful infrastructure

Council's most visible and enduring commitments to arts and culture are Ipswich Art Gallery and Ipswich Civic Centre. In addition, council also maintains other key cultural spaces – the Ipswich Community Gallery, Ipswich Art Workshop, Studio *188* and Fire Station 101. This is further enhanced by council's network of six public library branches and community centres.

Ipswich Art Gallery is one of the state's most visited regional galleries, which continues to offer free entry, local and touring exhibitions and nationally recognised children's programming. This long-standing civic asset has had a measurable impact on arts accessibility, audience development and cross-generational cultural engagement. Thanks to the Ipswich Arts Foundation, $530,000 in historical and contemporary artworks were acquired for the Gallery Collection in 2023–2024.

Ipswich Civic Centre, the city's largest performing arts and functions venue, celebrates its 50th birthday in 2025. Ipswich Civic Centre provides multiple spaces, from the 740 seat auditorium through to smaller meeting rooms. The annual music and performing arts program brings local, national and international acts to the heart of Ipswich.

Ipswich Community Gallery has been repositioned as an incubator space, offering emerging visual artists a platform to exhibit, receive feedback and connect with audiences. The Ipswich Art Workshop provides space for artists to create work and generate income by facilitating their own public workshops and masterclasses.

Studio *188* enables emerging musicians, theatre makers and live performers to experiment, take risks and create work for smaller audiences. This flexible space, located in a repurposed church, is known for its live music events, open mic nights, spoken word and grassroots theatre. It plays a vital role in nurturing early-career creatives and alternative programming in Ipswich.

Fire Station 101 operates as a flexible, open-access space for a wide range of artists and creative practitioners. It plays a key role in addressing the gap in dedicated performing arts infrastructure, with many creatives using

it for rehearsal, development and events. Council is continually learning from the way the space is being used and is working towards equitable access across artforms.

Council delivers a network of six libraries across the city, including an extraordinary children's library, as well as a self-service library pod. Three libraries include a Makerspace that provide support and access to technologies such as virtual reality, 3D modelling and printing, coding, and audio/video editing. In 2024 there were over 72,300 visitors to the Makerspaces, an increase of 35% from 2023.

Council continues to explore adaptive reuse models for heritage buildings to increase the availability of cultural spaces for creating, presenting, showing and touring work. In early 2025 council secured $3.8 million to fund designs for the expansion of Ipswich Art Gallery and the redevelopment of Ipswich Civic Centre together with public space amendments to connect these facilities.

Building artist pathways and sector capacity

Council is actively supporting the development of artists by supporting pathways from early exploration through to professional practice. In 2023–2024 council delivered formal professional development, capacity building and networking opportunities to 668 artists and arts workers through:

- **ARTiculate:** a workshop series for emerging and established creatives about how to earn an income from their art. It includes preparing artist briefs, developing artist statements, writing winning proposals and securing grant funding
- **The Creators' Summit:** a regular event for artists, cultural practitioners and arts workers to connect, learn and explore through a series of workshops, networking opportunities and keynote speakers
- **Live and Local:** a pilot program to build the capacity of local music industry, supported over 100 musicians and 15 venues through curated programming, industry development and community engagement activities. The program also considered the impact of council policies and local laws. Live and Local demonstrated the latent strength of Ipswich's local music scene and provided a blueprint for future investment in grassroots performance, venue capacity and audience-building.

Other significant artist and arts worker development programs include:

- **Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF):** a collaborative initiative with the Queensland Government. RADF is a grants program that includes funding for professional development and arts projects. Between the financial years 2022–2023 and 2024–2025 both council and Arts Queensland doubled their combined annual investment in RADF – from $132,500 to $265,00 for grants
- **Hatchery 4305:** a creative development incubator offered through Ipswich Civic Centre, Studio *188* and Fire Station 101. In 2025 it includes an Artist in Residence Program and an Ipswich on Stage series for emerging and established artists
- **Writing Monday:** a partnership between Ipswich Libraries and the Queensland Writers Centre to provide a weekly gathering for writers to focus on their writing projects
- **City-Wide Events Artist Opportunities:** council sought expressions of interest from artists to perform at major community events, design visual elements for the SPARK Ipswich festival program, and create works for the DeLight art projection series. These opportunities provided direct paid engagements while enabling artists to showcase their work to large audiences, strengthen their professional portfolios and expand future career pathways.

Council supports a wide range of artist development pathways, from entry-level participation to more professionalised practice. This includes informal opportunities such as venue access, curatorial guidance and mentoring from professional staff, alongside a commitment to supporting artists who are open to growth, feedback and community connection. Artists may begin by exhibiting or performing in community settings and be invited to progress into more prominent opportunities across council-supported platforms.

In 2024–2025, council produced and supported 1,142 arts and cultural activities and recorded 1,521 local artist engagements across Ipswich Civic Centre, Studio *188*, Ipswich Art Gallery, Ipswich Community Gallery, regionally significant events and through creative industries capacity-building programs. This layered, city-wide approach ensures development opportunities are embedded throughout the creative ecosystem, not confined to a single venue or artform.

Engaging First Nations cultural practitioners and community

Ipswich City Council's Indigenous Accord 2020–2025 serves as a strategic framework for reconciliation and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In relation to arts and culture the following has been achieved:

- **integration of First Nations content in festivals:** the SPARK Ipswich festival and Galvanized Festival have featured First Nations artists and cultural elements, such as projections of First Nations artwork and performances
- **cultural enhancements in public spaces:** council-owned libraries and Ipswich Art Gallery have incorporated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artwork and design elements to create welcoming environments
- **community engagement and storytelling:** programs like Picture Ipswich have been expanded to include Indigenous histories and narratives, developed in collaboration with Elders and community leaders
- **sharing stories through public art:** new public artworks by Kalkadoon/Kuku Yalanji artist Kim Ah Sam and her niece, Quandamooka artist Kyra Mancktelow, were created for Tulmur Place as part of the Nicholas Street Precinct.

Council also seeks to actively include First Nations artists, cultural practitioners and communities in all creative programming. Programs and events designed for and with First Nations people include the annual Ipswich Community Gallery NAIDOC exhibition launched in 2023, and the First Nations On Stage performance series launched at Ipswich Civic Centre and Studio *188* in 2024.

The Ipswich NAIDOC Family and Cultural Celebration continues to be delivered in partnership between the Ipswich NAIDOC Committee and Ipswich City Council.

In 2023–2024 over 9,600 people attended First Nations cultural events across the city and 29 First Nations artists and cultural practitioners were engaged.

Heritage foundations

Picture Ipswich is a digital archive hosted by Ipswich Libraries, showcasing over 19,000 images, oral histories, maps and stories that document the city's history. It invites community contributions and includes programs like Picturing Your Past and a retro-themed corner in the Ipswich Children's Library to help children engage with local heritage.

Having an accessible heritage archive allows Ipswich to preserve and share the diverse stories, identities and experiences that have shaped the city. This connection to the past enriches local arts and culture by inspiring creative expression, informing public programs and supporting cultural continuity across generations. It helps build a stronger sense of community and belonging.

Liveable and engaging local communities

Council's work in arts and culture is ultimately about strengthening the sense of place and enhancing the community's experience of living in Ipswich. In the financial year 2023–2024, 52% of visitors to Ipswich Art Gallery and 71% of tickets purchased for council's performing arts venues were Ipswich residents; with a satisfaction rating of 95%.

Council's arts and cultural programming is guided by a commitment to diversity and inclusion. In 2023–2024 over 14,000 people attended cultural events featuring LGBTQIA+ artists and creatives.

Ipswich Libraries place significant importance on engaging children early. Across the library network children are actively supported to connect and explore through a range of programs including *Baby Rhyme Time*, *Toddler Time* and *Story Time*. These programs incorporate singing, dancing and reading to nurture early literacy development, curiosity and interaction. Additionally, First 5 Forever offers community-based events such as *Story Time at the Park* and *Dive Into Books*, bringing storytelling experiences to local neighbourhoods.

There are also specific initiatives council is implementing to enhance place-making and promote liveable communities. For example, in 2025 council was allocated $810,000 for new public art as part of the SEQ City Deal, a collaboration between the Australian Government, Queensland Government and the Council of Mayors (SEQ).

Festivals for community, culture and economic outcomes

Ipswich hosts a diverse calendar of festivals that serve a range of purposes across community, cultural and economic goals. Council plays a number of roles in festivals – as producer, attractor and sponsor.

SPARK Ipswich significantly contributes to the city's cultural identity and supports artistic expression. SPARK is designed to showcase and elevate local creative talent, offering opportunities for artists, performers and producers from the region to present new work and connect with audiences. SPARK commissions new works, activates public spaces and shares the voices of local creatives across multiple artforms. At the same time, the festival programs high-profile artists and acts that resonate with the Ipswich community and appeal to a broader visitor market. This balance of homegrown creativity and headline experiences strengthens local pride while positioning Ipswich as a vibrant cultural destination.

There are a number of other festivals that place arts and creativity at the centre of their programming such as the **StoryArts Festival Ipswich**, a nationally respected biennial event that champions children's literature and storytelling run by the Ipswich District Teacher Librarian Network and supported by council.

Other festivals, while not exclusively arts-focused, incorporate creative elements that build civic pride and foster cultural participation.

- **Galvanized – A Festival of Heritage** uses performance, storytelling and visual arts to bring Ipswich's rich history to life
- **Christmas in Ipswich** includes light-based installations, music and performances that activate public spaces and celebrate Ipswich
- The **Ipswich NAIDOC Family and Cultural Celebration** features traditional and contemporary First Nations arts and cultural practices, creating important spaces for cultural recognition and shared learning.

Council also supports other significant arts festivals such as **CMC Rocks Qld**, recognised as Australia's biggest international country music festival. An estimated 23,000 people attended CMC in 2024 which generated more than $14m for Queensland businesses. These regionally significant events attract significant local attendance as well as visitors to Ipswich. These events deliver significant community, cultural and economic return and raise the profile of the city as a destination and increase the region's profile and appeal.

Festivals such as the **Festival of Horsepower** and **Venture** are primarily focused on sport and recreation but contribute to the broader cultural calendar by drawing visitors and energising the city. Events like the **Ipswich Sustainable Living Festival** and the **Peaks to Points Festival** occasionally intersect with the arts through workshops and community-led creative programming.

While Ipswich's festival calendar has grown in scale and ambition, there is still opportunity to diversify formats. Suggestions emerging from the *Citywide Programming Report* include more hyper-local, precinct-level events, First Nations-led festivals and more inclusive programming for young people and LGBTQIA+ people. The community has also expressed interest in more frequent and niche offerings outside the annual festival cycle.

Supporting creative enterprise

Council plays an important role in enabling the local creative economy and partnering locally based arts companies. Support includes subsidising production costs and providing access to spaces and equipment to help artists present their work and generate their own income. Where possible, council also engages local suppliers and contractors who contribute to the arts and cultural ecosystem.

While the full value of this investment is hard to quantify, in the 2023–2024 financial year almost $1.1 million was paid directly to performing artists through council programs and partnerships; of which 61% went to local artists and arts organisations.

Ipswich Art Workshop provides studio space for visual artists to practice, as well as a space for artists to deliver fee-for-service creative workshops to the public as a means of income generation.

This highlights council's role as both a driver and enabler of cultural economic activity.

Council capability

Council's commitment to Ipswich's creative industries and the arts and cultural sector is largely driven by a small team of professionals with significant experience and expertise. Their combined knowledge and complimentary values drive strategic approach to inclusivity, ambitious programming and sector development.

Council plans to review and update key policies over the coming year to ensure they reflect inclusive practice, community expectations, a commitment to local creatives and audience development. Ongoing investment in internal capability and industry development is supported by strong partnerships with state and national networks.

While gaps remain, particularly around resourcing and dedicated curatorial, programming and development roles, council is committed to learning and evolving to provide community with a flexible and responsive approach.

IPSWICH ARTS AND CULTURE SCENE

Ipswich's creative identity is shaped by a mix of heritage storytelling, family-friendly festivals, a strong grassroots arts scene and growing recognition for local professional practitioners.

Cultural life is anchored by accessible civic institutions like the Ipswich Civic Centre and Ipswich Art Gallery; enriched through public art, community theatre and live music in commercial, private and community spaces. Ipswich's creative community demonstrates resilience and energy, creating and participating in new opportunities across artforms, neighbourhoods and generations.

Visual arts

Ipswich's visual arts sector is characterised by both heritage and contemporary practice. The Ipswich Art Gallery plays a pivotal role in connecting residents with nationally significant exhibitions, profiling Ipswich's professional artists and providing pathways for local talent. The gallery's free entry ensures high accessibility, drawing consistent visitation across age groups.

Emerging and established artists contribute to a vibrant local scene, supported through initiatives such as artist-in-residence programs, public mural commissions and exhibitions. Located in d'Arcy Doyle Place alongside Ipswich Art Gallery, the Ipswich Community Gallery and Ipswich Art Workshop include exhibitions, workshops and masterclasses that form part of the community and visitors' perception of the overall offering of Ipswich Art Gallery.

Local businesses and artist-led organisations are playing a critical role in shaping the city's cultural life. For example, local business Arttime Gallery and Fine Art Supplies not only exhibit and support local artists, but they also act as a creative hub that builds connections between local creatives. Ipswich Art Society continues to offer opportunities for artists from its home in the historic Old Courthouse.

Artist Run Initiatives (ARIs) such as IPSARI and Creative Hearts are providing valuable platforms for collaboration, exhibitions and workshops through entrepreneurial partnerships with local businesses and developers. Council supports these initiatives through advocacy, capacity-building and facilitating funding opportunities.

Music, theatre and live performance

Ipswich's live music scene is undergoing a period of regeneration. While once considered peripheral to the state's major touring circuits, Ipswich is seeking to cultivate a more self-sustaining local scene. The *Live and Local* program piloted in 2023–2024 demonstrated strong demand for small-scale, curated music events. Key genres included country, rock, indie and blues.

The live music and performing arts scene are bolstered by a network of independent venues and organisations. Local businesses such as the Springfield Tavern, Racehorse Hotel, Banshees Bar and Artspace, The Witch Hotel and the Commercial Hotel Redbank provide regular platforms for music and live performance. There is growing interest in developing a more connected, city-wide approach to programming and venue partnerships.

Challenges still remain around noise regulations, promotional support and consistent programming. Musicians interviewed during the Live and Local research expressed a need for better pathways for committed creatives to grow professional careers, and for better access to equipment, rehearsal spaces and paid gigs.

Music, theatre and live performance is supported by council's infrastructure – Ipswich Civic Centre, Studio *188* and Fire Station 101. In combination, these venues represent complementary ends of the programming spectrum for live performance.

Ipswich Civic Centre offers large-scale performance options for touring productions, community events and civic functions. Its calendar includes professional theatre, music, dance, comedy and family-friendly shows.

Ipswich is well known for its history in delivering high-quality eisteddfods. For example, the Ipswich Junior Eisteddfod Society is the longest-running eisteddfod group in Ipswich, offering competitions in music, dance, speech and drama. The Eisteddfod provides a platform for emerging local talent and experienced artists, bringing families and communities together.

Local artists are continuing to creatively work together and enliven the city. For example, in 2023 the inaugural Queerswich Festival was held to celebrate inclusion and raise queer visibility in Ipswich. Held again in 2024, Queerswich aims to become a biennial festival.

Another notable example is Ipswich Little Theatre which also plays a longstanding role in nurturing local talent, particularly young performers and directors, through affordable access to space and a strong volunteer base.

Literature

The Ipswich Writers Circle and the Ipswich Writers Group each serve the local writing community. The Ipswich Writers Circle meets weekly at the Ipswich Central Library where participants share creative ideas, engage in discussions and access writing resources.

The Ipswich Writers Group is a separate community writing group that focuses on providing a supportive space for local writers to enjoy and improve their craft.

First Nations arts and culture

First Nations culture is a recognised pillar of Ipswich's identity, though reports suggest its visibility in the arts sector could be strengthened. Local Traditional Owners have identified a desire for deeper collaboration in place-based programming, not only in consultation, but in leadership roles. There is a recognised opportunity to support Indigenous-led festivals, public art, language revitalisation and intergenerational cultural sharing.

Night-time economy and cultural impact

Ipswich's night-time cultural activity has traditionally been concentrated in areas of Ipswich Central, where music venues, small bars and Ipswich Civic Centre are. The night-time offering however continues to face challenges around public perception, transport and consistency of programming. Stakeholders have called for a coordinated night-time strategy that brings together arts, hospitality and placemaking, with a shift toward regular, high-quality programming rather than one-off events.

It is also important to recognise that night-time culture in Ipswich is not confined to the city centre. Suburban and district hubs like Booval, Goodna and Rosewood contribute meaningfully to the city's after-dark vibrancy through local venues, restaurants and community gatherings. Recognising and supporting this decentralised network of activity will be essential to building an inclusive, city-wide night-time economy that reflects the diversity and character of Ipswich.

PERCEPTIONS – INSIGHTS FROM CONSULTATION

This section presents an overview of how the current state of Ipswich arts and culture is experienced and considered. It draws on consultation insights from six sector and community workshops, a dedicated First Nations workshop, an online survey and a series of targeted interviews.

Together, these forums captured reflections on a creative community rich in grassroots participation, cultural pride and emerging diversity. Stakeholders spoke candidly about the city's strengths, challenges and untapped potential. At the same time, participants identified systemic barriers related to access, infrastructure, equity and strategic leadership.

The insights gathered through this process affirm the vibrancy and resilience of Ipswich's creativity and also point to the structural supports needed to ensure sustainable and inclusive growth into the future.

WHAT MAKES IPSWICH ARTS AND CULTURE UNIQUE

Consultation insights reveal a city with a strong sense of cultural character, grounded in community participation, rich heritage and creative spirit. These insights provide a foundation for articulating Ipswich's unique cultural identity and shaping its future strategic direction.

Community-led creativity

- A vibrant grassroots arts scene, underpinned by loyal, long-standing community groups
- Creative activity is seen as accessible, familiar and embedded in everyday life
- Numerous local events throughout the year foster broad participation and intergenerational engagement.

Welcoming and inclusive cultural infrastructure

- Civic venues like Ipswich Art Gallery, Studio *188* and Ipswich Civic Centre were commonly cited as much-valued assets
- Survey respondents highlighted free and family-friendly programs, particularly in libraries and galleries, as essential to early engagement
- Walkable access between venues contributes to a cohesive cultural precinct in the city centre.

Heritage and identity

- Ipswich's cultural character is seen as strongly linked to its industrial and rail history, as well as its working-class roots
- Respondents noted a proud First Nations presence and expressed a desire for further celebration through arts and storytelling
- The city's blend of old and new was frequently cited as a point of pride and creative inspiration.

Diversity and evolving creative voices

- Perceptions indicate an increasingly diverse and energetic creative scene, particularly among younger artists and underrepresented communities
- Ipswich is seen as a place with cross-cultural energy and space for experimentation, offering an alternative to larger cities.

A sense of untapped potential

- Across responses, there was a strong belief in Ipswich's unrealised cultural potential
- Many expressed optimism about the city's future as a distinctive cultural destination, with room to grow without losing its community-centred essence.

These insights suggest that Ipswich's cultural identity is not only defined by its history, physical assets and programming, but by a sense of belonging, creativity and possibility.

FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVES

A focused workshop with First Nations artists and cultural practitioners highlighted the importance of embedding First Nations perspectives in the development of Ipswich's arts and cultural vision. Participants brought unique insights and experiences, enriching the conversation and underscoring the need for a culturally inclusive, healing-centred arts ecosystem. Key themes from the discussion included:

Cultural preservation and healing

- The important role of art in healing, especially for individuals and communities impacted by the Stolen Generations, deaths in custody and intergenerational trauma
- Dedicated spaces for healing, cultural workshops and community-led arts initiatives.

Inclusivity and accessibility in arts events

- Improvements have been made over the past few years
- More proactive public arts programming would increase the perception of inclusion for First Nations families.

Arts and business integration

- Several artists and business owners have successfully combined art with business ventures, supporting both cultural preservation and economic sustainability
- Expand this approach through dedicated support for local First Nations businesses and artists.

Cultural representation and collaboration

- Increased representation and collaboration between local First Nations artists and council owned spaces
- Provide equal opportunities for showcasing and selling First Nations art.

Young people and healing

- A need for arts-based programs that focus on young people, identity and healing, particularly in working with young people in care and those affected by trauma
- Workshops, mentorships and youth-led projects to support younger generations to engage with their cultural heritage.

Priorities for shaping the future

Workshop participants identified seven priorities for shaping the future of arts and culture in Ipswich:

- leverage the Brisbane 2032 Olympics and Paralympics opportunity for First Nations creatives and businesses e.g. through Supply Nation
- establish a significant cultural space that includes the spectrum of arts where community can come, share and learn
- First Nations cultural practitioners know, understand and follow cultural protocols
- First Nations people are proactively included in programming of events and festivals
- involvement of families, children and young people in programming – including programs for healing trauma
- healing Country by acknowledging sites such as Deebing Creek
- cultural education for the broader community.

STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Ipswich's creative landscape is marked by strong grassroots participation, historical richness and an increasingly diverse and dynamic arts scene. Consultation revealed a city with a solid cultural foundation, energised by community-led initiatives and growing support from council.

A loyal and inclusive community arts base

One of Ipswich's greatest cultural strengths lies in its community arts scene. Long-standing, volunteer-led groups foster a strong sense of inclusivity and continuity across generations. Survey respondents consistently praised the accessibility of community-led arts, noting the loyalty and passion of participants and the ease with which residents, particularly families, can engage with local activities. This was mirrored in consultation workshops, which also acknowledged the critical role of informal, grassroots creative expression as the heart of Ipswich's cultural identity.

Survey respondents highlighted the value placed on purpose-built family programming through libraries and galleries. These accessible, low-cost programs encourage early engagement with the arts and build long-term community connections.

Civic assets and placemaking potential

Ipswich boasts a number of cultural institutions that provide essential platforms for both participation and presentation. Venues such as Ipswich Art Gallery, Studio *188* and Ipswich Civic Centre were frequently cited in survey responses as valuable assets. The city's walkable cultural precinct and free public programming, particularly for children and families, were also appreciated. These institutions not only support the visibility of arts and culture but also contribute significantly to civic pride and placemaking.

Consultations further revealed an appetite for more visible cultural infrastructure in neighbourhoods beyond Ipswich Central, suggesting an opportunity to decentralise programming and activate neighbourhood precincts. The increase in public art, street art and interactive public art noted during consultations reflect this move toward hyper-local creative placemaking.

Cultural identity, heritage and First Nations pride

Ipswich's cultural identity is enriched by its industrial heritage and proud First Nations presence. Groups consulted recognised this as a unique cultural asset, with many survey participants referencing the city's rich history in rail, manufacturing and eisteddfod performance traditions. The consultation process also highlighted important First Nations cultural sites celebrated through arts and storytelling.

There is an emerging opportunity to embed First Nations culture more visibly in the city's creative infrastructure, leadership and programming toward more active inclusion. The desire for more First Nations led events and intergenerational cultural sharing was strong in survey comments and workshops.

Growing diversity and new creative voices

Both the workshop sessions and the survey pointed to an energised, increasingly diverse creative scene. Young creatives are bringing new forms of expression to Ipswich, including fashion arts, fusion artforms, queer-led projects and experimental performance. This evolution is contributing to a more collaborative and contemporary arts identity for the city.

Creative initiatives such as That Production Company and the Live and Local music program were identified as examples of this positive shift, offering platforms for both established and emerging artists. Support for LGBTQIA+ and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse representation is also growing, although many participants highlighted the need for greater visibility and leadership from within these communities.

Opportunities for strategic growth

There is widespread recognition of Ipswich's untapped creative potential. Survey responses reflected strong community aspiration for:

- more fit-for-purpose cultural spaces
- expanded professional development and artist career pathways
- stronger strategic leadership from council.

The survey highlighted opportunities to elevate Ipswich's profile as a cultural destination through better marketing, stronger audience development and more integrated cultural tourism strategies. In parallel, consultation participants emphasised the role of arts in wellbeing and community connection, suggesting that investment in the sector could support not only economic outcomes but social cohesion as well.

With a foundation of committed creatives, unique cultural assets and emerging voices ready to lead, Ipswich is well positioned to grow its reputation as a vibrant, inclusive and resilient creative city.

CHALLENGES

Ipswich's creative sector is growing; however it also faces a number of challenges. Key challenges identified through the consultation workshops and survey include limitations in infrastructure, funding, leadership and perception. Council and the creative sector have the opportunity to unpack these challenges, identify their level impact and work together address them.

Access to infrastructure and space

Across the workshops and survey, a key theme identified was the lack of accessible, affordable and flexible venues. Many survey respondents and workshop participants noted existing spaces were difficult to book, expensive or underutilised. Artists, particularly emerging, independent or wellbeing-focused practitioners, reported feeling "shut out" of key venues or unable to access suitable spaces for rehearsal, exhibition or collaboration.

This is particularly important for some visual artists, who find the options for exhibition and studio space limiting because of changes in council policy and priorities. Survey data reinforced these concerns, with calls for new ARIs, suburban creative hubs and co-working studios to broaden access across the region.

Professional careers

Ipswich's creative ecosystem includes community and volunteer energy. While this is a strength, it has also meant that professional artists and creative workers reported feeling unsupported or undervalued. Survey participants called for more equitable support between grassroots and professional creatives, pointing to inconsistent funding processes, lack of mentorship opportunities and a limited number of paid professional gigs or commissions.

This challenge was reinforced in workshops, where artists expressed concerns about career sustainability in Ipswich. Some reported needing to travel to Brisbane for meaningful creative opportunities, citing limited access to income-generating platforms or long-term pathways within the city.

Perception and visibility

A longstanding challenge for Ipswich is its external cultural perception. Participants across both datasets referenced outdated views of the city, often seen as secondary to Brisbane's arts scene. This perception is felt acutely by younger audiences and artists, many of whom travel to Brisbane for events, exhibitions and creative careers. Survey respondents also noted low visibility for local events and exhibitions, compounded by limited promotion and poor cross-platform communication.

Public transport issues and lack of evening programming further limited participation. As noted in the workshops, even small barriers like finding a coffee or meal after 2pm can reinforce the sense that the city lacks vibrancy and nightlife, affecting both cultural identity and economic activity.

Equity and representation

While diversity is increasingly celebrated, real equity in access and representation remains a challenge. First Nations and LGBTQIA+ artists as well as artists from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds continue to face barriers to leadership, funding and programming. Several survey respondents raised concerns that emerging or underrepresented groups struggle to gain visibility or access to key platforms.

Workshop participants also called for more inclusive curatorial practices and broader community engagement, particularly in outer suburbs and lower-income neighbourhoods. These concerns were closely tied to perceptions that arts funding and decision-making remain centralised and opaque.

Proximity to Brisbane and Regional Funding Barriers

Ipswich's location presents a unique challenge: while geographically distinct from Brisbane, its proximity to the capital often excludes it from both touring circuits and regional funding opportunities. Contractual restrictions with touring producers can prevent performances or exhibitions from being staged within a certain radius of Brisbane, limiting Ipswich's access to major shows. At the same time, Ipswich is not consistently classified as a regional area, meaning it often cannot access funding programs available to centres like the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast or Cairns. This dual constraint affects the city's ability to attract high-profile work, compete with state-backed cultural institutions and secure investment for locally driven initiatives. As a result, local venues are often forced to keep ticket prices low, while working harder to draw audiences and activate spaces without the same level of external support afforded to other regional areas.

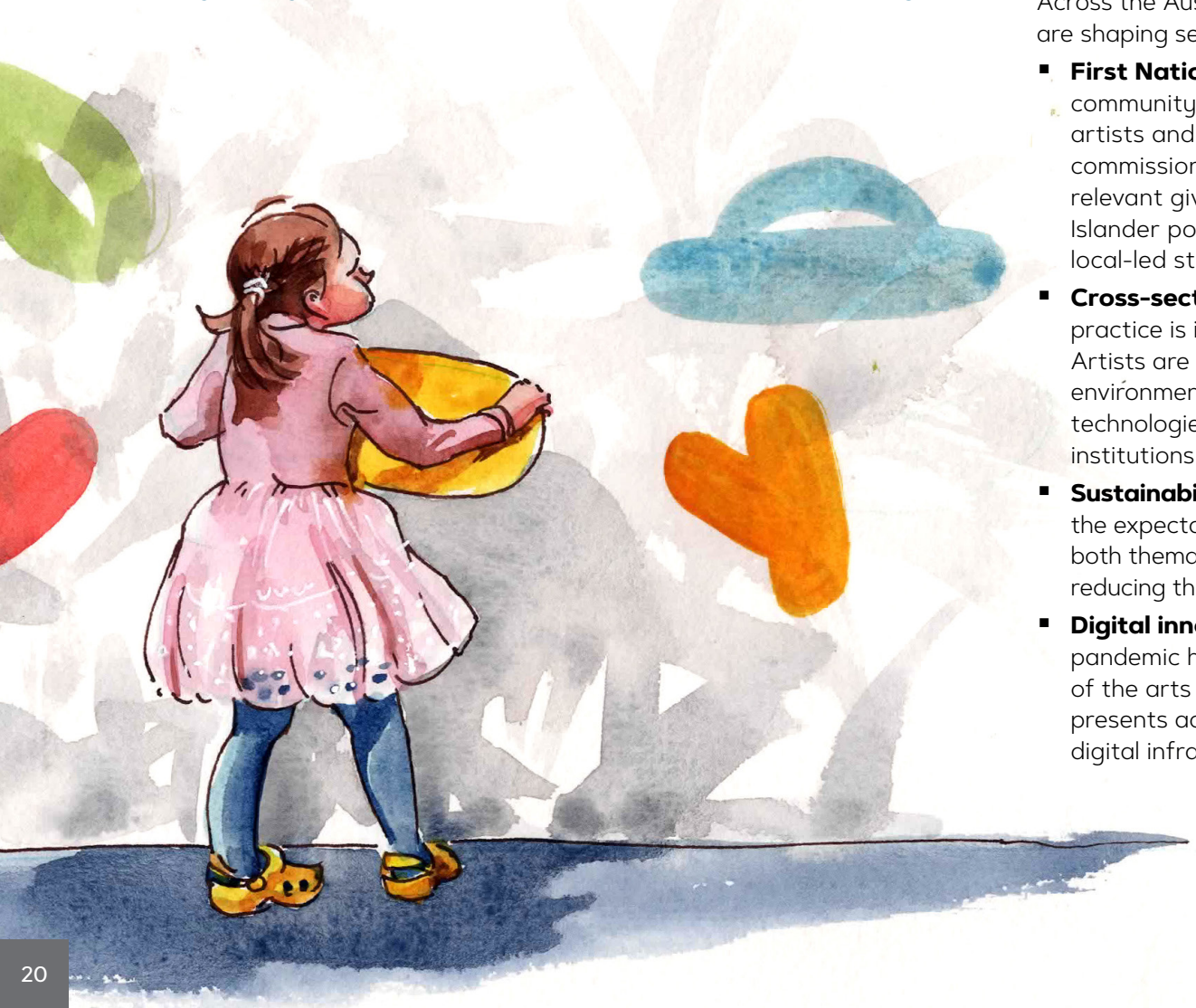
Leadership, process and strategic direction

Consultation feedback highlighted a desire for more consistent leadership, clearer strategic direction and stronger follow-through on previous engagement efforts. Some local creatives shared that bureaucratic processes can unintentionally create barriers for smaller or grassroots initiatives, making it harder for new ideas to gain momentum.

Across surveys and workshops, participants expressed interest in a more transparent and coordinated approach to cultural planning. Without clarity in process and leadership, there is a risk that creative momentum may slow and trust in long-term delivery could be impacted. Strengthening communication, simplifying processes and maintaining a steady vision will be important steps to sustaining sector confidence.

NATIONAL PICTURE – TRENDS FOR AWARENESS

National arts trends, such as increasing demand for First Nations leadership, cross-sector collaboration and sustainable, hyper-local programming, offer valuable insights for Ipswich as it navigates growth and defines its future cultural identity.



THE NATIONAL ARTS AND CULTURAL SECTOR

Across the Australian arts and cultural landscape, a number of national trends are shaping sector practice, identity and relevance.

- **First Nations cultural leadership:** There is a growing national and community appetite for deeper engagement with First Nations stories, artists and practices. This interest is reshaping mainstream programming, commissioning and public art narratives. In Ipswich, this is particularly relevant given the city's strong and growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and the opportunity to champion culturally grounded, local-led storytelling and arts leadership.
- **Cross-sector collaboration and hybrid work:** Increasingly, creative practice is intersecting with science, technology, education and health. Artists are engaging in co-creation, often addressing social and environmental challenges, while also using emerging tools such as immersive technologies. This collaborative mindset is likely to influence how Ipswich institutions and creatives work, fund and produce future content.
- **Sustainability in practice:** As environmental awareness grows, so does the expectation that arts production considers sustainability. This includes both thematically through environmental storytelling, and practically through reducing the ecological footprint of events, touring and materials use.
- **Digital innovation and access:** The shift to digital during the COVID-19 pandemic has persisted, with hybrid and online experiences now a key part of the arts and cultural sector offering. While this extends reach, it also presents access challenges, particularly for communities without strong digital infrastructure or skills.

PRESENTATION AND PRODUCTION

The financial landscape for producing and presenting arts and cultural programs has shifted substantially in recent years.

- **Rising production costs:** Across the country, producers report sustained increases in costs associated with outdoor infrastructure, staffing, security, insurance and fabrication. These increases began with the COVID-19 pandemic and have accelerated with broader inflationary pressures. A 2023 case study from the Woodford Folk Festival reported a 40% rise in key operational costs.
- **Increased risk and cancellations:** Changing audience patterns, combined with higher production expenses, have contributed to the cancellation of several major Australian festivals in 2024, including Groovin the Moo, Spilt Milk and Splendour in the Grass. This highlights ongoing structural challenges for public arts programming.
- **Local impacts:** For Ipswich, this financial climate underscores the importance of strategic programming; favouring scalable, locally grounded models and diversified revenue approaches. Consideration should be given to affordability for audiences, with ticket prices, transport and incidental costs all impacting participation. Cost-effective programming solutions and strategic partnerships will be critical to supporting a thriving and resilient local sector.

AUDIENCE AND ENGAGEMENT

Across the arts and cultural sector, COVID-19 restrictions significantly impacted audience attendance and participation behaviours. While audiences have returned, there are enduring legacies to consider in programming.

Shift to hyper-local participation: People are more inclined to attend events and programs closer to home. This reflects increased hybrid work, heightened appreciation for local areas and rising cost-of-living pressures.

Last-minute and low-commitment attendance: There has been a notable shift toward shorter lead times in ticket sales and increased cancellations. For programmers this reinforces the value of flexible, drop-in, or free/low-cost models to encourage spontaneous engagement.

Digital engagement as a parallel channel: Digital and hybrid cultural participation remains strong. Local arts initiatives may benefit from continuing to offer accessible digital elements that complement live events and support inclusivity.

Desire for connection and meaning: There is increasing interest in arts experiences that foster connection, belonging and dialogue – particularly those that celebrate diverse identities and local creative voices.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

This table highlights key findings of the Ipswich Arts and Culture Snapshot 2025 and proposes priorities to build on, harness and consider in the next planning cycles.

		CREATIVE PRIORITIES
1 KEY STRENGTHS TO BUILD UPON	Map all local creative organisations, businesses, groups and collectives	Building Connected Communities
	Develop a calendar of annual events	Growing the Creative Economy
	Distinctive identity grounded in heritage and First Nations culture	Creative spaces
	Amplifying First Nations Leadership	Creative Identity
	Ambition of First Nations creatives to partner in agenda setting	Amplifying First Nations Leadership
	Inclusive programming across generations	Empowering the Next Generation
	Diverse and inclusive participation in the arts	Building Connected Communities
	Existing models for artist support and engagement	Building Connected Communities
	Promoting arts and cultural experiences to attract visitors	Growing the Creative Economy
	Professional pathways and career development	Backing Creative Careers
2 OPPORTUNITIES TO HARNESS	National focus on First Nations leadership and cultural inclusion	Amplifying First Nations Leadership
	Reputation for engaging children and young people	Empowering the Next Generation
	City growth and demographic change	Building Connected Communities
	Momentum from major upcoming events and regional collaborations	Growing the Creative Economy
	Community appetite for tourism through culture and heritage	Growing the Creative Economy
	A desire for vibrant, year-round public arts and night-time economy	Growing the Creative Economy
	Recognition of local professional artists, cultural practitioners and arts workers	Backing Creative Careers
	Comparative SEQ housing affordability to entice creative professionals	Backing Creative Careers
	Spaces across the city that could be activated for creative use	Unlocking Creative Spaces
3 FUTUREPROOFING FOR CHANGE	Continued First Nations visibility and leadership	Amplifying First Nations Leadership
	Responsive to digital access, hybrid models and audience behaviours	Empowering the Next Generation
	Understanding aspirations and priorities at the neighbourhood level	Building Connected Communities
	Integrated cultural planning to support growth and resilience	Growing the Creative Economy
	Ongoing adaptation to economic and environmental pressures	Growing the Creative Economy
	Continued engagement with the national arts and cultural sector	Backing Creative Careers
	Technology that supports innovation and experimentation	Unlocking Creative Spaces

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