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# FLASH FORWARD - CREATIVE LANEWAYS PROGRAM



## AGENDA 2030 - SDGs



## CULTURE 21 ACTIONS - COMMITMENTS

5. CULTURE AND ECONOMY
6. CULTURE, EQUITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION
7. CULTURE, URBAN PLANNING AND PUBLIC SPACE

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**DEVELOPMENT, SUSTAINABLE, ECONOMIC,  
SOCIAL, EMPOWERMENT, RESILIENCE, PUBLIC  
SPACE, HERITAGE, EMPLOYMENT**

# 1. Melbourne and culture

Metro-Melbourne has a population around 5m. Consistently recognised as one of the world's most liveable cities, Melbourne's greatest strength comes from its diversity with thirty-four per cent of the city's residents born outside of Australia. This melting pot of experiences and perspectives gives rise to a vibrant creative output. Its creative industries have also traditionally been jobs powerhouses, which in turn have created a vibrant city.

Since the late 1990s, Melbourne has had a tradition of creative activity in its laneways, driven by the mixing of diverse cultural scenes. This project, "Flash Forward", builds on this history linking diverse artists and extending the tradition of art in the laneways. Its genesis was guided by the [Creative Strategy 2018-28](#) and the [Public Art Framework 2021-31](#).



**FLASH FORWARD FOCUSED ON ENHANCING AND STIMULATING THE SOCIAL AMENITY, VISUAL PRESENTATION AND ECONOMIC POSSIBILITIES OF MELBOURNE'S WORLD-RENOWNED LANEWAYS.**

## 2. Project goals and implementation

### 2.1. Main goal and specific objectives

In the renewal process post Covid-19, the City of Melbourne understands that the creative industries play a key role in our social activation and economic recovery. With "Flash Forward", the city contributed to a creative-led recovery, in which a diverse range of creative practitioners built on the energy and popularity of Melbourne's beloved laneways to draw residents, workers and visitors back into the city and its businesses. By so doing, it is hoped that Melbourne can reaffirm its position as the world's most liveable place and build a new chapter in the story of Australia's cultural capital. The programs goals were to:

Employ at least 165 creative professionals; enhance the social, economic and cultural qualities of 40 of Melbourne's laneways to draw people back to the city; improve public safety, amenity and increase business participation; and enhance pedestrian connectivity.

### 2.2. Project development

"Flash Forward" focused on enhancing and stimulating the social amenity, visual presentation and economic possibilities of Melbourne's world-renowned laneways.

The program delivered the following creative outcomes:

- 40 major artworks commissioned over 18 months, which will remain in situ for a minimum of 2 to 5 years. They respond to the physical locations in scale and type but also the concept of looking forward to a post pandemic Melbourne.
- Of the major artworks, 15 works have integrated lighting or are stand-alone lighting installations. These add a dynamic element to the program and support night-time engagement.
- 40 new music albums have also been produced as part of this program. This new work showcases musicians who would otherwise not seek out or be eligible for many of the funding opportunities available, thus significantly elevating the profile and future opportunities for many.



In addition, the program provided a pop-up store to sell artist merchandise and albums. Also, the Town Hall visitor centre gave away more than 1000 maps to date, therefore extending the engagement with the public.

For Melbournians, the program offers a new network of accessible creative projects – free, out-door, day and night experiences – connecting us all together and drawing us back to the city we love. For the city’s creatives, it offered an opportunity to develop a fully supported creative project. For delivery staff, it offered a minimum of six months full time employment and a chance to build capacity, learning about public art and local government methodologies.

The program highlighted the diversity of creative methods and approaches, with artists that work outside or across established institutions, and who were representative of the broad range of ethnic, cultural, gender/sex diversity of Melbourne.

**FLASH FORWARD FOCUSED ON SUPPORTING THE CREATIVE RESURGENCE OF MELBOURNE – RECONNECTING PEOPLE AND RE-ENERGIZING THE CITY.**

## 3. Impacts

### 3.1. Direct impacts


By prioritizing Flash Forward, the City of Melbourne has:

- Hired 168 creative industry professionals;

- Supported artists whose personal identifiers included disabled, LGBTQI, Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse;
- Delivered 40 laneways commissions;
- Commissioned 40 new music albums;
- Installed 15 lighting commissions to enhance the nighttime economy and improve safety and amenity;
- Reduced anti-social behavior in these places by 85%;
- Opened a dedicated Flash Forward store to sell artists merchandise direct to the public with 100% of sales going directly to the artists; and,
- Garnered national and international media including The Guardian, NME and Rolling Stone.

A survey of the program participants found that all reported significantly improved economic, mental and physical well-being as a result of their involvement in the program.

The most significant action we are currently undertaking is increasing the recognition and representation of Aboriginal culture and people in the determination and vision for the city.



**INCREASED ECONOMIC WELLBEING, SUPPORTING THE LOCAL ECONOMY AND THE ACTIVATION OF PUBLIC SPACES ARE THE KEY OUTCOMES OF THE PROGRAM.**

### **3.2. Assessment**

The "Flash Forward" program measured the three following key outcomes:

- Increased economic wellbeing.
- Supporting the local economy.
- Activating public places.

Methodology was via surveys with artists and delivery staff, as well as on the ground surveys with pedestrians and business owners, and observational data documenting the pre and post laneways environments.

### **3.3. Key factors**

The budget allowed for more resources, and the ability to share the load normally held by creative practitioners. This also opened up capacity to better enable the desires of creatives and producers, especially within a short timeframe, and produce something that is world standard. Moreover, there has been a culture and ethos that has enabled the project to realise the vision and deliver world class works.

The culture within the project leadership is inspiring, and based in the Creative Urban Places methodology for enabling exceptional outcomes by creatives. It seeks to model a better way of being and working, much more closely collaborative and based in ongoing dialogue, and which generates a very hopeful atmosphere amongst the team.

### **3.4. Continuity**

"Flash Forward" has been an international success, which results have warranted further funding to continue developing this program. With additional funding, a second phase of the program will involve more laneway and music commissions across the municipality using the same commissioning model, applying lessons learned, and building on already established stakeholder relationships.



The emphasis for a second phase will be on shifting into the communities surrounding the CBD linking and connecting their stories back to this first body of work. It is expected that this will take longer and deserve the added engagement with local communities.

Also, management is exploring partnerships with festivals to use the laneways for temporary artwork and events, and seeking funding to partner with filmmakers for a chance to showcase the program via IMAX.

## 4. Further information

Melbourne was a candidate for the fifth "UCLG – Mexico City – Culture 21" International Award (February – June 2022). The jury for the award drew up its final report in September 2022, and requested that the Committee on Culture promote this project as one of the good practices to be implemented through Agenda 21 for culture.

This article was written by Justine Hyde, Director Creative City, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

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