

# women\*scircus

## **Submission for Creative State Strategy (2020-2024)**

My name is Devon Taylor and I am the Executive Director of Women's Circus, a feminist community circus and performing arts organisation based in West Footscray, Victoria. I have been a theatre maker, community practitioner and culture junkie for over 20 years. I have lived and created in both regional Victoria and Melbourne, working across performance modes and mediums and with communities of all ages, backgrounds and experiences. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to a Creative State Strategy and a collective vision for a dynamic, culturally rich and empathetic society in Victoria.

Since 1991, Women's Circus has been offering and honing a unique circus and training program that is underpinned by the values of empathy and imagination, risk and inclusion. The organisation successfully delivers high quality programs and provides opportunities that support the personal and professional development of hundreds of women, trans and gender diverse community members annually. We are leading the way in intersectional feminist arts practice and community and cultural development to redress gender inequity in society. We know that Women's Circus changes lives and is deeply valued by members, stakeholders and the broader creative community. Women's Circus has a focus on developing self-confidence, skills and creativity using circus, training and performance as modality to achieving a more just and equitable society.

Over the years, thousands of women, trans and gender diverse community members have trained, performed, worked and played at Women's Circus and tens of thousands of audiences have experienced our magical and fiercely political shows. Our community and members continue to intrinsically shape the culture, vision and the creative outcomes of this significant organisation. The ideas and prompts below are insights pulled together from the staff, Board and members of Women's Circus:

### **Why isn't circus a funding category?**

#### ***Make Circus Visible by including it as a category for funding***

Australian circus arts are strongly represented by small companies such as Women's Circus and energetic independent artists and companies. Circus works originating from Australia are highly regarded internationally and in demand as much for their innovation as their excellence. Circus is not currently an artform on any Creative Victoria funding opportunities including VicArts or the Operational Investment Program funding (OIP). This means the assessment panels are made up of individuals who are not necessarily familiar with the form. Make CIRCUS an artform category and fill the assessment panels with circus artists and peers so as to ensure industry knowledge is driving rigorous funding selections and providing relevant opportunities for the artform to develop and grow.

### **Annual CPI affects organisation operating costs and wages- why does multi-year funding not include CPI in their agreements?**

#### ***Indexation for multi-year funding***

For any multi-year funding agreements, embed an annual increase to funding that aligns with the Consumer Price Indexation as set by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

## **What happens when we outgrow our facilities?**

### ***Invest in Infrastructure***

Women's Circus is growing and our services are in demand by local councils, community groups and community members from the Western suburbs (and beyond). Our current home, The Drill Hall in West Footscray, is not capable of responding to our growth and is not flexible enough to manage the many activities taking place within its walls every week. Invest in a state of the art social circus training and performance facility in Melbourne's west that employs and creates community circus practitioners, supports the creation of new community driven circus works to new and loyal audiences and develops the next generation of circus artists. We need proper heating and cooling to be safe and creative!!

## **How to elevate the voices of First Nations people and artists?**

### **First Nations First/ Grow First Nation Allies**

Elevate and support the voices, artists and culture of Victoria's First Nations people. Create programs with a de-colonised lens that results in First Nations connecting and exploring their culture in their way and on their terms. These initiatives need to include an understanding of the intergenerational cultural amnesia that has occurred due to the settler invasion and subsequent (and ongoing) acts of genocide on First Nations people. Support non-indigenous arts organisations to articulate their role as allies in this cultural fight.

## **How do you ensure that we approach program development using a de-colonised lens?**

### **How do we encourage people to listen?**

#### ***Nothing about us, without us***

Women's Circus is committed to working with and alongside underrepresented communities to create change at a grassroots organisational level and to initiate systemic change at a policy and institutional level. We feel this can primarily be achieved through deep listening and learning with these communities, working collaboratively to identify our shared and evolving stories and through representation of the lived intersections of communities at all levels of our organisation. A Creative State understands that change takes time and it is essential to invest in long-term programs that can enact this change and elevate the voices and perspectives of all Victorians.

## **How do we nurture the next generation of circus artists?**

### ***Fund an Inclusive Circus Ensemble***

Women's Circus has been working with and supporting performance and circus artists with disabilities for the past four years, learning new ways of engaging with the artform informed by these artists, developing our skills as an inclusive arts organisation and researching, refining and evaluating our approach to inclusive practice. We have a committed team of emerging artists, with and without disabilities, who are ready to create Australia's first disability-led inclusive circus ensemble and require the funding to undertake this journey.

## **How can we work together for a more equitable world?**

### ***Gender Equity and Feminism***

Fund and continue to fund organisations that are leading the way in gender equity and applying inclusive and/or feminist theories, models and approaches to engaging with artists and communities. Seek out these organisations to provide guidance to other sectors on how to create collaborative projects and develop cultures of inclusion that acknowledge the intersectional effects of systemic oppression. Support their capacity to articulate their unique and progressive models of community engagement that generates positive social and cultural change.

## **The threat to our national culture is real- how will a Creative State work to protect our right to cultural expression?**

### ***Sustainability- The biggest threat to the sustainability of Victoria's creative industries is political ideology interfering in creative freedom***

The biggest threat to the sustainability of Victoria's creative industries is the sustained culture war being undertaken by our Liberal government at a federal level. Women's Circus loudly proclaims that the articulation of a national culture free from the kneading hands of any current political ideology is intrinsic to the notion of rigorous and robust creative freedoms. Neo liberal ideologies where culture and creative thinking and problem solving is not prioritised and, in fact is silenced, will not be tolerated. The ongoing pernicious and punitive grabs at Australian stories and voices through the reduction (and diminishing) of national arts & culture funding and the attempt to thwart the multiplicity of creative and cultural perspectives will be a massive roadblock on the path to a more compassionate and humane and abundant society. The federal funding changes will have long-lasting and drastic effects to the cultural, artistic and economic ecologies of our community and networks. Women's Circus has applied for Australia Council funding every year for the past five years and has never been a recipient of any funding from our national arts agency. This is not reflective of the quality of our applications or work but rather indicates how competitive the process is for organisations due to the small pool of funds available. If our Federal government can spend 50 million on a statue of Captain Cook, surely they can increase our arts funding by a few million?

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute our unique perspective and we hope you carefully consider our submission. We look forward to working together to articulate a flourishing Creative State.

Yours sincerely,



Devon Taylor

**Executive Director**

**Women's Circus**

Preferred pronouns: she/her, they/ them

We acknowledge the Kulin nation and the traditional custodians of the land on which the Women's Circus meets, trains and creates. We pay our respects to local Elders and to the Elders, past and present and emerging, of all communities and cultures across Victoria