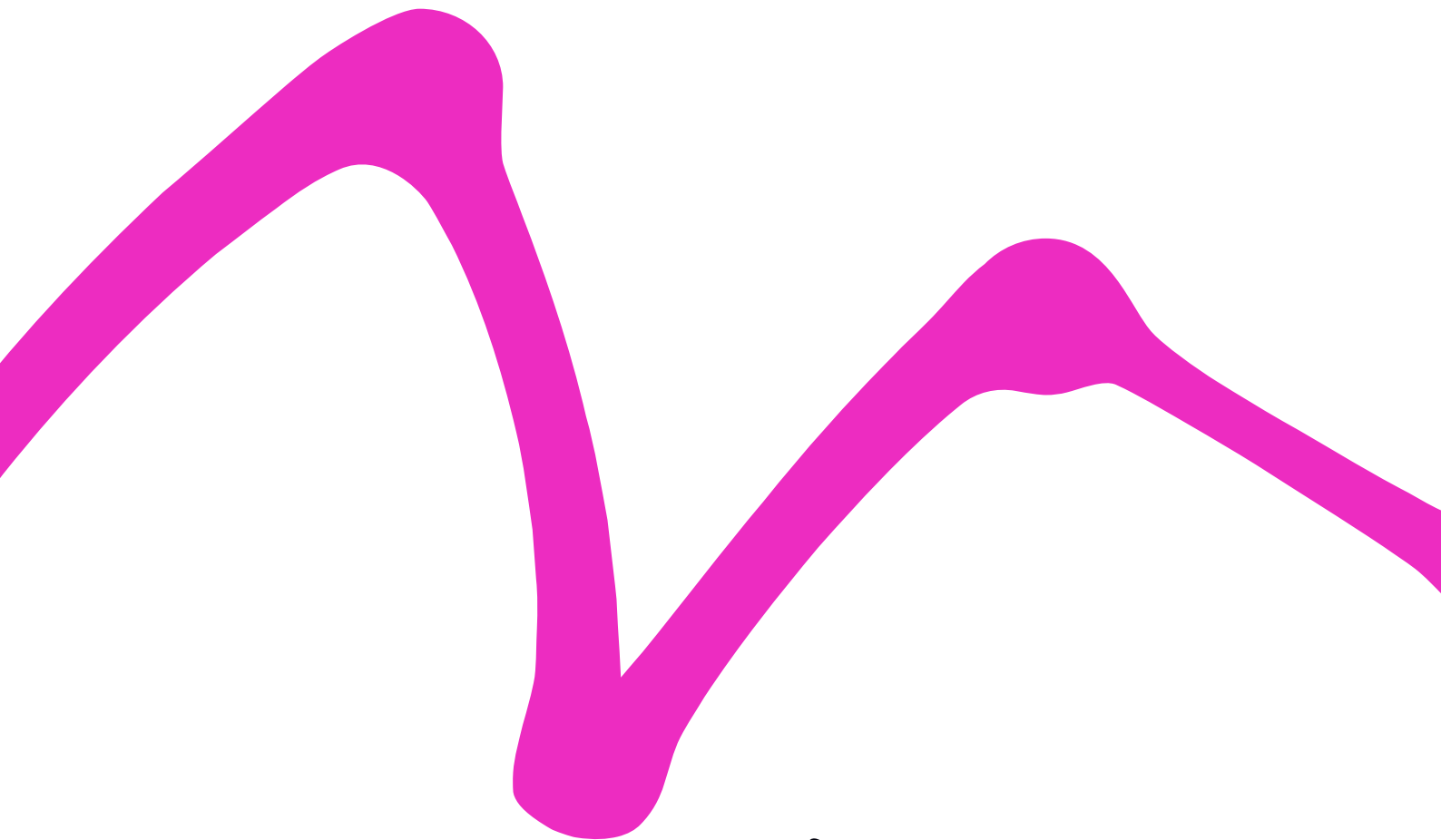


Framework
Position Paper

Addressing the Technical Production Workforce Shortage Crisis



Victorian
Association
of Performing
Arts Centres

Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres
www.vapac.org.au

Registered # A0005511W
ABN: 82 578 774 451

VAPAC acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we live and work and upon which our member venues are situated across Victoria. We pay our respects to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present. Always was, always will be.

This project is supported by

STUDIO ENTERTECH

Major Industry Partners



About the Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres (VAPAC)

VAPAC is a peak body and membership organisation supporting a network of 95 professional performance venues across Victoria, Tasmania, NSW, and ACT, representing a major part of Australia's cultural infrastructure. We support this network through dedicated professional development programs and events for venue managers, technical managers, and box office and marketing staff. We drive the touring of performing arts product through the delivery of our annual marketplace Showcase Victoria and represent our members to government at all levels through strategic advocacy. We also work closely with other state and federal peak bodies to address sector challenges.

The Need for Urgent Support

The performing arts sector in Australia is currently facing the greatest challenge in our history. Following years of venue closures and disruptions due to the pandemic, the industry is now faced with a chronic shortage of appropriately skilled and experienced technical staff to meet the operational demands of our theatres and performing arts centres. This issue is systemic, impacting the capacity and safety of venues both large and small across metropolitan and regional contexts, and extends into contexts such as festivals and outdoor productions. This crisis is causing unprecedented stress and burnout in existing technical staff and raises serious concerns around the ongoing physical and mental safety of our workers. A recent survey of VAPAC members discovered that 84% of venues have found it difficult or impossible to fill all types of technical roles in the last twelve months, and that 46% of organisations have lost half or more of their technical workforce since the start of 2020.

With these concerns in mind, VAPAC has developed the [Industry Development Initiative](#) to address this issue through a systemic response, guided by an expert taskforce. This work has involved extensive consultation with our member venues and our Technical Managers Network, and collaboration with key stakeholders such as Arts Centre Melbourne's RTO. Consultation has also been undertaken with other industry peak bodies through the Arts Industry Council Victoria, and with interstate venue bodies such as Stage Queensland and Circuit West. We have identified the areas of greatest need, as well as clear and actionable strategies for addressing them. To date, this work has been entirely driven and funded by VAPAC, with support from our industry partner Studio Entertech.

Opportunities for Government Investment and Collaboration

Urgent action is required from state and federal government bodies to address this crisis. VAPAC proposes investment in a number of key initiatives to not only ease the current pressure on the sector, but to also drive long-term growth in workforce participation in our industry. The initiatives outlined below illustrate a model that could be piloted in Victoria by the VAPAC network, and then replicated across other states through collaboration with their state peak bodies and flagship venues in either a staged approach or a more accelerated rollout.

Pillar One: Training & Education

1. Targeted investment to support the rapid uptake of traineeships in performing arts venues, and utilisation of new subsidies to incentivise the employment and training of new technical staff.

To address the short-to-medium term staff shortages, it is imperative that venues are supported to employ new staff and grow their skills through structured, accredited programs. Government support is required to rapidly increase the uptake of available subsidy for venues to offset the cost of employing a new worker in a traineeship, facilitated by Arts Centre Melbourne's RTO. Traineeships provide a minimum of 20 hours per week experience across a full year, with supervised training and practical experience both within their venue and at Arts Centre Melbourne.

The foundation for this work has already been undertaken by VAPAC and ACM, with a major training exercise undertaken in February 2023 as part of a VAPAC Tech Managers Conference. Through this initiative, 60 technical managers across the state completed RTO training at ACM in supervision and mentorship, laying the foundations across VAPAC venues to support employment of future VET based traineeships in Live Production and Technical Services. Seven trainees are now employed through Hothouse Theatre, Horsham, Sale, Bass Coast, Wonthaggi, Bendigo, and Bunjil Place. However, greater support for VAPAC and Arts Centre Melbourne is required to implement further traineeships at speed and scale.

Industry research shows that many technical workers who have remained in the industry post-Covid have had to learn new skills on the job, often filling gaps at higher levels and adopting roles in team leadership, production and stage management, production specific safety and event risk management together with advanced technical roles in entertainment specific rigging, lighting, sound, audio visual and staging areas. To further strengthen operational capacity of the state network, support is required for existing workers to undertake professional development through accredited programs and on the job mentoring to ensure standards are upheld and workers are supported.

Outcome

- ▶ Technical traineeship roles established in performing arts venues across the VAPAC network.

Action required

- ▶ Provision of state and federal government investment into Arts Centre Melbourne's RTO to increase capacity to facilitate new traineeships in venues and professional development for existing workers across the state.
- ▶ Provision of state and federal government investment for VAPAC to actively promote traineeships and available subsidy to industry, and work with our members to overcome barriers to implementation, particularly for those in a local government context.

2. Investment in VAPAC's Industry Development Initiative to rapidly expand our work in the education sector, creating stronger training pathways for young people in secondary and tertiary education to gain skills and qualifications, before then entering the workforce.

VAPAC has a significant number of members across the secondary and tertiary education sector, and we are rapidly growing this part of our operation. With the support of government investment, this work will result in:

- Support for technical managers working in the growing number of theatres being built in schools.
- A clear pathway for VAPAC to support the rollout of the Certificate 3 in Live Production and Technical Services by Arts Centre Melbourne's RTO (or other training providers as appropriate). Young people entering the industry will then have access to best-practice training delivered by well supported technical managers and teachers, and a pathway into employment in our professional venues in their local community. This work will leverage existing mechanisms such as the Victorian Government's School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships Program.
- VAPAC working with tertiary providers such as Deakin University, Federation University, RMIT, Melbourne Polytechnic, and the VCA to establish greater opportunities for graduates in our venues through placements and mentorship.
- Promotion of our industry to the education sector through collaboration with organisations such as Drama Australia and Drama Victoria, and through connection with career expos and school drama programs to highlight career opportunities and training pathways in our industry.
- Capacity to undertake ongoing research and assessment of workforce challenges in our sector in partnership with industry, universities, and government.

3. Support First Nations led organisations to design and deliver technical training programs for emerging technical workers.

Ongoing government investment to support First Nations organisations such as Ilbjerri and Bangarra Dance Theatre to design and deliver training that meets the needs of emerging workers. This work can be supported by peak bodies, venues, and training organisations as requested by the organisations, following a self-determined approach.

Outcome

- ▶ Greater connection between the secondary and tertiary education sectors with the professional performing arts industry, establishing stronger training and career pathways and increased participation.

Action required

- ▶ Investment in VAPAC's Industry Development Initiative by Creative Victoria and Service and Creative Skills Australia (SaCSA) to undertake this work, which could be used as a pilot program and then shared and replicated in other states.
- ▶ Collaboration between VAPAC, the Victorian Skills Authority, and the Victorian Department of Education to establish formal pathways for young people to access formal training and career opportunities in technical roles. These organisations will also collaborate on addressing funding and structural barriers to participation.
- ▶ Adding technical production courses to the Victorian Government's Training Needs List.

Outcome

- ▶ Creation of technical training courses/programs, led and designed by First Nations organisations with support from government and industry.

Action required

- ▶ Investment from state and federal governments for First Nations organisations interested in working in this space.

Pillar Two: Health & Wellbeing

4. Better understand the health and wellbeing challenges of workers in the performing arts technical workforce through the development of research and resources by specialist organisations such as Support Act, Creative Australia, and Creative Victoria.

- Invest in research into the causes and prevention of mental health issues experienced by technical workers, and the development of appropriate resources to address these issues.
- Increase dialogue and collaboration across the broader arts industry to ensure a coordinated approach to supporting technical workers across performing arts centres, live music venues, festivals, and events.
- Development of best-practice guides to specifically address the structural causes of stress and fatigue in technical roles.

5. Strengthen collaboration with Support Act, VicHealth, and other industry bodies to support the technical workforce.

Remove barriers for technical workers across the entire arts industry to undertake training programs to support the health and safety of themselves and their teams, with a focus on mental health and fatigue.

Outcome

- ▶ Delivery of targeted research, resources, and projects by the organisations best placed to address health and wellbeing issues for the technical workforce.

Action required

- ▶ Investment from state and federal governments for expert organisations to collaborate with state peak bodies on research and resource development.
- ▶ Data collation, review and management led by Creative Australia and Creative Victoria in collaboration with peak bodies and service organisations, to ensure findings are easily accessible by industry.

Outcome

- ▶ Government and industry establish partnerships to deliver programs to improve the mental health and wellbeing of technical workers.

Action required

- ▶ Provide subsidy for technical workers to participate in industry specific health and wellbeing support training programs.
- ▶ Provide support for VAPAC (through the Industry Development Initiative), and other peak bodies as appropriate, to promote these initiatives to industry and work with our members to overcome barriers to participation.

Pillar Three: Workplace Culture & Industrial Relations Reform

6. Rates of pay, job security, and conditions.

Prioritising measures to attract, develop, and retain skilled and experienced technical workers is vital for sector viability. Greater collaboration between industry and government at all levels is required to address the structural and cultural issues impacting the experience of technical workers in the arts. Areas needing further focus include:

- Ongoing research and benchmarking of income and job security levels for technical workers in the arts against other industries, with a focus on casualisation and instability.
- Greater dialogue between industry bodies with an industrial relations focus such as Live Performance Australia and the Municipal Association Victoria to address issues around standards and pay.
- The development of best-practice resources and standards to address workplace culture issues leading to burnout (“the show must go on” culture).

7. Support more venues and arts organisations to develop and implement Equity Action Plans to address systemic barriers to participation in the industry for people from historically marginalised communities.

Utilising the process and methodology developed for the Fair Play Initiative by Diversity Arts Australia, arts venues and organisations should be supported to remove barriers to participation and improve the experience in the workforce for people from diverse communities including:

- First Nations
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)
- Deaf and Disabled
- LGBTQIA+

8. Add technical production roles to the Australian Government’s Core Skills Occupations List to attract skilled workers from overseas to fill workforce shortages in the industry.

VAPAC to lobby Jobs and Skills Australia to include technical roles to the Core Skills Occupations List, including:

- Sound Technician
- Lighting Technician
- Performing Arts Technician

Outcome

- ▶ More stable and appropriately remunerated employment opportunities in the technical workforce, met with more sustainable and equitable employment conditions.

Action required

- ▶ Investment and resources from federal, state, and local government agencies to undertake targeted research and reform relating to technical roles in the performing arts, in collaboration with industry peak bodies.
- ▶ Investment in VAPAC’s Industry Development Initiative to facilitate ongoing conversations between key stakeholders to strengthen collaboration and reform delivery, and the rollout of best-practice resources and standards.

Outcome

- ▶ A greater number of venues and organisations with appropriate policies and procedures to attract and retain a more diverse workforce in technical roles, providing a culturally safe environment where people are empowered to do their best work.

Action required

- ▶ Investment from Creative Victoria to further fund venues and organisations to undertake the development of an Equity Action Plan.

Outcome

- ▶ Industry can attract appropriately trained and experienced workers from overseas to fill vacant roles in the sector.

Action required

- ▶ VAPAC to lobby Jobs and Skills Australia to add technical production roles to the CSOL.

Pillar Four: Peak Body Investments

9. Support the existing workforce through investment in the state-based Technical Managers Networks of VAPAC, Stage Queensland, Circuit West, NAPACA, and Country Arts South Australia.

Government can support the existing workforce in the performing arts through investing in the existing professional development and peer support structures provided by the state-based venue industry bodies. Subsidy to support the delivery of events promoting safety, wellbeing, and skills development will assist in retaining our current workers and promote positive change in the sector. Given the extent of the current crisis, it is vital that barriers to delivery and participation for these cohorts are removed as a matter of urgency, and each of the above industry bodies currently has very limited resources.

10. Strengthen dialogue between industry and local government by establishing an arts industry dedicated role within either the Municipal Association Victoria or Local Government Victoria.

Create greater collaboration between LGA's and state government agencies on this and other arts focussed issues through establishing a dedicated role with appropriate levels of experience and expertise, breaking down silos and accelerating progress.

11. Support ongoing research and evaluation of investment, and ongoing collaboration with government.

Evidence is needed to plan strategically through investment in capabilities to gather and produce data of scale reflecting industry advancements, current needs, and future challenges. Current information is insufficient and there are significant gaps in data that has previously been collected.

Outcome

- ▶ Greater connection, wellbeing, and sharing of knowledge and skills amongst existing workforce.

Action required

- ▶ Investment from state and federal government agencies in state peak bodies to strengthen support structures and grow existing Technical Managers Networks.

Outcome

- ▶ Improved collaboration between levels of government to embrace a whole-of-government approach to policy reform on this issue.

Action required

- ▶ Victorian Government to fund the establishment of a dedicated arts focussed role within either MAV or LGV.

Outcome

- ▶ Improved harmonisation in the collection of workforce data across state and federal bodies, with a focus on cooperation between the arts, health, education and training sectors.

Action required

- ▶ Invest in state peak bodies to strengthen intersectoral collaboration on research projects.
- ▶ Led by Service and Creative Skills Australia, develop industry reliable data and forecasting by:
 - Stronger collection, analysis, and reporting of workforce development data that is timely, comprehensive and context specific.
 - Improving forecasting and planning for rates of pay, job security and conditions (or IR reforms).
 - Monitoring and evaluating progress and the impacts of other measures outlined in this framework.

Conclusion

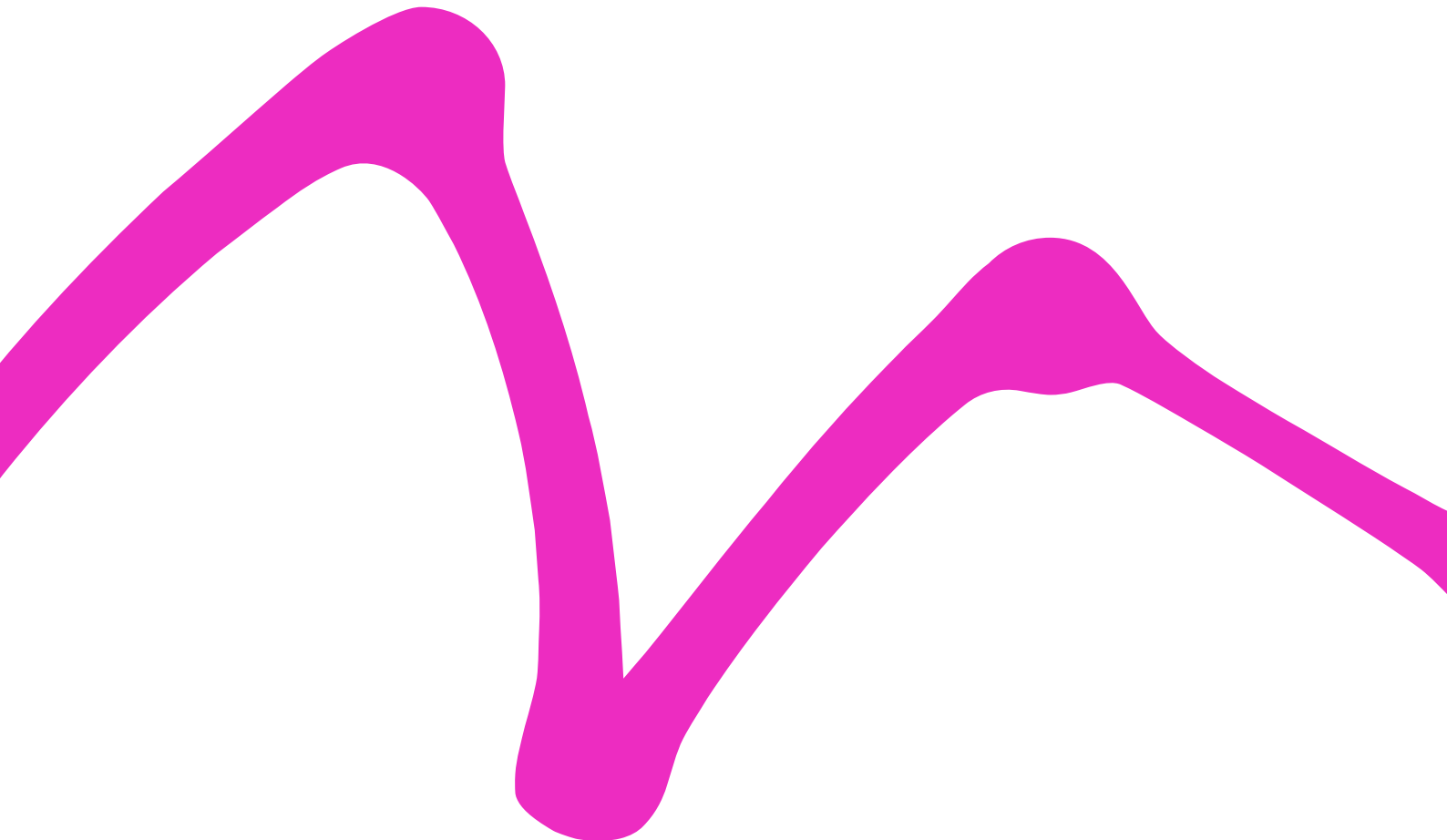
The significant shortages in our technical workforce highlight a crisis in the sustainability of careers, exacerbated by gaps in opportunity and access. Immediate action is imperative to rectify the absence of suitable policy settings, education and training, and career pathways. It is incumbent upon all stakeholders, encompassing local, state, and federal government, to promptly adopt the strategies outlined in this paper, aimed at enhancing working conditions for all current and future technical workers in the arts and entertainment industry. Urgent financial support is crucial to ensuring the ongoing viability of venues and productions, and the safety of all workers in our industry.

Government and industry action is needed, requiring a multifaceted approach targeting key areas.

This is not a crisis that can be solved overnight, it requires ongoing support and investment from government alongside greater collaboration between industry stakeholders. By implementing targeted strategies across training and education, health and wellbeing, workplace culture and industrial relations reform, and peak body investment, we can ensure a vibrant and sustainable future for our industry.

	Actions	Outcomes
<p>Pillar One: Training & Education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provision of state and federal government investment into Arts Centre Melbourne’s RTO to increase capacity to facilitate new traineeships in venues and professional development for existing workers across the state. ▶ Provision of state and federal government investment for VAPAC to actively promote traineeships and available subsidy to industry, and work with our members to overcome barriers to implementation, particularly for those in a local government context. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Investment in VAPAC’s Industry Development Initiative by Creative Victoria and Service and Creative Skills Australia (SaCSA) to undertake this work, which could be used as a pilot program and then shared and replicated in other states. ▶ Collaboration between VAPAC, the Victorian Skills Authority, and the Victorian Department of Education to establish formal pathways for young people to access formal training and career opportunities in technical roles. These organisations will also collaborate on addressing funding and structural barriers to participation. ▶ Adding technical production courses to the Victorian Government’s Training Needs List. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Investment from state and federal governments for First Nations organisations interested in working in this space. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Technical traineeship roles established in performing arts venues across the VAPAC network. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Greater connection between the secondary and tertiary education sectors with the professional performing arts industry, establishing stronger training and career pathways and increased participation. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Creation of technical training courses/programs, led & designed by First Nations organisations with support from government and industry.
<p>Pillar Two: Health & Wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Investment from state and federal governments for expert organisations to collaborate with state peak bodies on research and resource development. ▶ Data collation, review and management led by Creative Australia and Creative Victoria in collaboration with peak bodies and service organisations, to ensure findings are easily accessible by industry. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide subsidy for technical workers to participate in industry specific health and wellbeing support training programs. ▶ Provide support for VAPAC (through the Industry Development Initiative), and other peak bodies as appropriate, to promote these initiatives to industry and work with our members to overcome barriers to participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Delivery of targeted research, resources, and projects by the organisations best placed to address health and wellbeing issues for the technical workforce. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Government and industry establish partnerships to deliver programs to improve the mental health and wellbeing of technical workers.

	Actions	Outcomes
Pillar Three: Workplace Culture & Industrial Relations Reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Investment and resources from federal, state, and local government agencies to undertake targeted research and reform relating to technical roles in the performing arts, in collaboration with industry peak bodies. ▶ Investment in VAPAC's Industry Development Initiative to facilitate ongoing conversations between key stakeholders to strengthen collaboration and reform delivery, and the rollout of best-practice resources and standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ More stable and appropriately remunerated employment opportunities in the technical workforce, met with more sustainable and equitable employment conditions.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Investment from Creative Victoria to further fund venues and organisations to undertake the development of an Equity Action Plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A greater number of venues and organisations with appropriate policies and procedures to attract and retain a more diverse workforce in technical roles, providing a culturally safe environment where people are empowered to do their best work.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ VAPAC to lobby Jobs and Skills Australia to add technical production roles to the CSOL. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Industry can attract appropriately trained and experienced workers from overseas to fill vacant roles in the sector.
Pillar Four: Peak Body Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Investment from state and federal government agencies in state peak bodies to strengthen support structures and grow existing Technical Managers Networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Greater connection, wellbeing, and sharing of knowledge and skills amongst existing workforce.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Victorian Government to fund the establishment of a dedicated arts focussed role within either MAV or LGV. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Improved collaboration between levels of government to embrace a whole-of-government approach to policy reform on this issue.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Invest in state peak bodies to strengthen intersectoral collaboration on research projects. ▶ Led by Service and Creative Skills Australia, develop industry reliable data and forecasting by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Stronger collection, analysis, and reporting of workforce development data that is timely, comprehensive and context specific. ▶ Improving forecasting and planning for rates of pay, job security and conditions (or IR reforms). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Improved harmonisation in the collection of workforce data across state and federal bodies, with a focus on cooperation between the arts, health, education and training sectors.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Monitoring and evaluating progress and the impacts of other measures outlined in this framework. 	



This project is supported by

STUDIO ENTERTECH



Victorian
Association
of Performing
Arts Centres