



# Making it in Sydney

Actions to provide  
more creative  
production space



Committee  
for  
Sydney

# Executive summary

**When our creative culture is thriving, Sydney is lit up with colour, movement and meaning. Imagination spurs innovation and with it jobs and economic power. Deep connections enable more than just social cohesion, they're the makings of a good life.**

As our city grows, with historic investment in urban renewal, we must ensure Sydney's neighbourhoods – new and old – have that creative energy.

That's not where we are right now. Creativity is being priced out of Sydney, due to chronic housing unaffordability, the cost of living and, importantly, the cost of rehearsal spaces, art studios, recording facilities and other creative workspace.

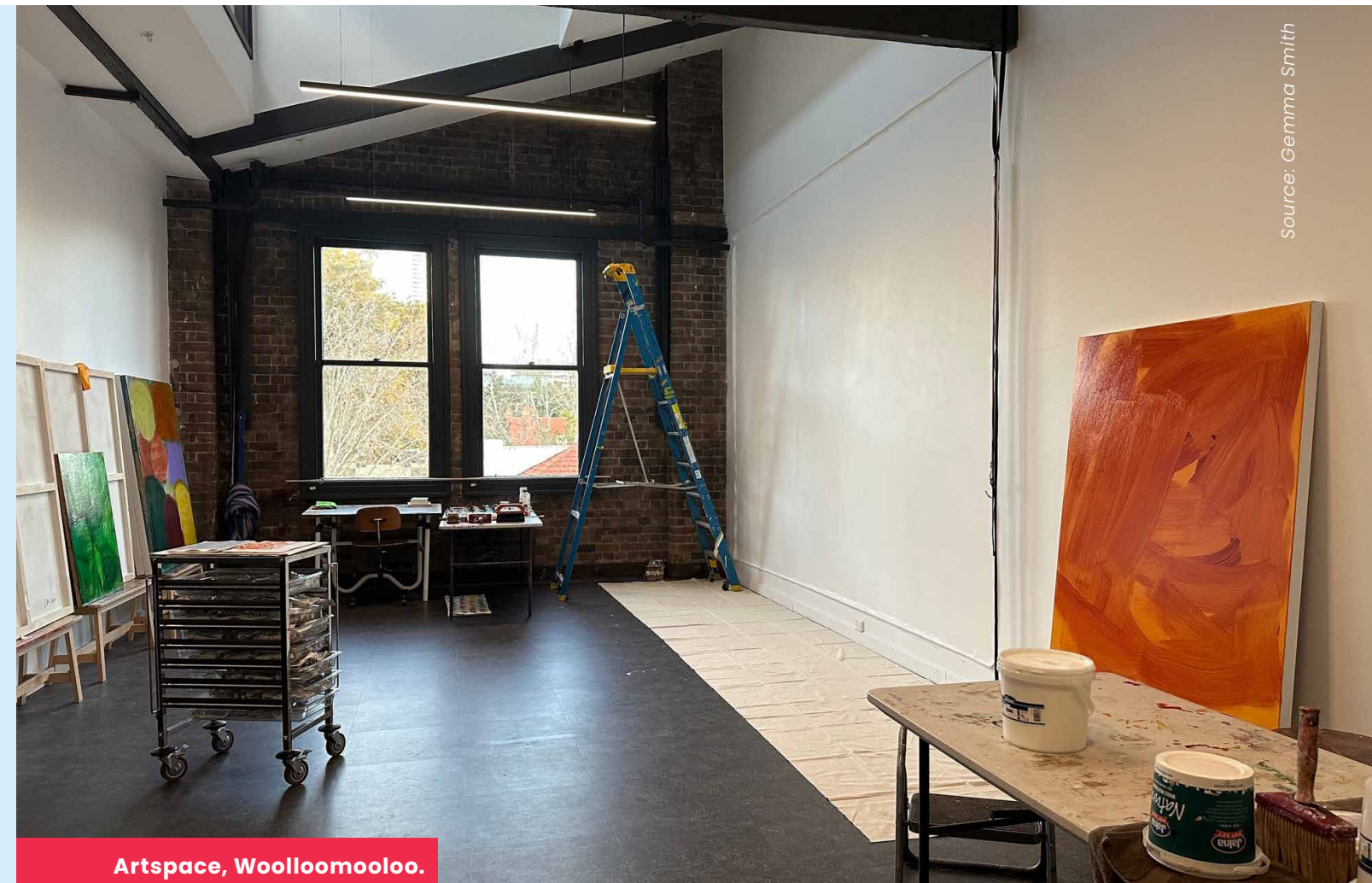
There is less space than ever for making creative work. While there is no source for Greater Sydney, the City of Sydney's comprehensive Floorspace and Employment Survey shows space occupied by 'Creative Artists, Writers, Musicians and Performers' dropped close to 30% in the decade from 2012 – a period in which overall supply of floorspace increased 15%.

This is taking a toll on the workforce. Census data shows Sydney's cultural and creative industries workforce contracted 6% against a national drop of 1.37% over the decade to 2021 – four times greater than the national trend. That's likely an under-estimate, given the concentration of the nation's creative industries in Sydney – remove Sydney and the nation's creative industry workforce actually grew slightly.

Despite the obvious challenges, this is also a time of great policy reform and action – with federal, state and local governments resetting their approaches to culture and creativity, particularly the state's 'vibrancy reforms' packages and cultural programming investments – and we are putting forward this paper to encourage continued reform and action to build on the work that's been started.

Some challenges facing the creative sector are challenges faced by many Sydneysiders – particularly the cost of living and chronically unaffordable housing – and we're not going to duplicate efforts to address them here.

But a key solution to this problem has to be protecting and making more space for creative work – that's our focus in this paper,



Artspace, Woolloomooloo.

Source: Gemma Smith

and we've identified four key moves to drive change:

- **Protect what we've got.** Because it takes a long time to properly establish affordable creative workspaces, the best spaces are the ones that already exist – and where they exist, we should protect and support them.
- **Back creative space operators to succeed.** There's no boom in creative workspace without a pool of viable operators to run those spaces.
- **Plan for what we will need.** We need clear and specific guidance on what creative workspace is needed and where, to translate goodwill and good intentions from public and private sector actors into opportunities to address identified gaps.

- **Provide new creative workspace.** Three key actions will help: the NSW Government's review of under-utilised property, the creation of a Greater Sydney Creative Land Trust, and the opportunity to deliver creative infrastructure where growth is underway through development.

This is not a challenge for state and local governments alone, though they hold many important levers.

To make significant change, private companies, philanthropists, creative space operators and others must be deeply involved in coming up with the solutions, and our recommendations are focused on unlocking their potential to drive this change.



# Acknowledgment of Country

The Committee for Sydney acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples as the traditional custodians of the land.

Sovereignty of this land was never ceded.

Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.

Cover image: Parramatta Artist Studios, Granville

# Innovation Fund Partners

We would like to thank our Innovation Fund Partners for their support of the Committee for Sydney's research.

Our Innovation Fund Partners are future focused, and outcome driven. They are leaders of change. Their combined investment underpins our annual research program and together with our members, enables us to grow our impact and output – striving to create a better Sydney that offers unparalleled opportunity and quality of life for everyone.





Source: Brand x / City of Sydney / Isobel Markus-Dunworth

Lorcan Power in rehearsal, Bathurst Street Studios, Sydney CBD.

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Parramatta Artist Studios, Rydalmere.

Source: City of Parramatta

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Committee for Sydney  
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# Why should we care about creative workspace?





# Creativity is being priced out of Sydney

**Creativity is being priced out of Sydney, with the rising cost of workspace for creatives meaning less people can afford to make creative work in this city. If we let the trend continue, all of us will pay the price.**

The situation we face is one in which original local work – by set designers, illustrators, musicians, video producers, dancers, actors, game developers and so many other creative people, work that tells our stories and is inherently risky – gets put on the backburner.

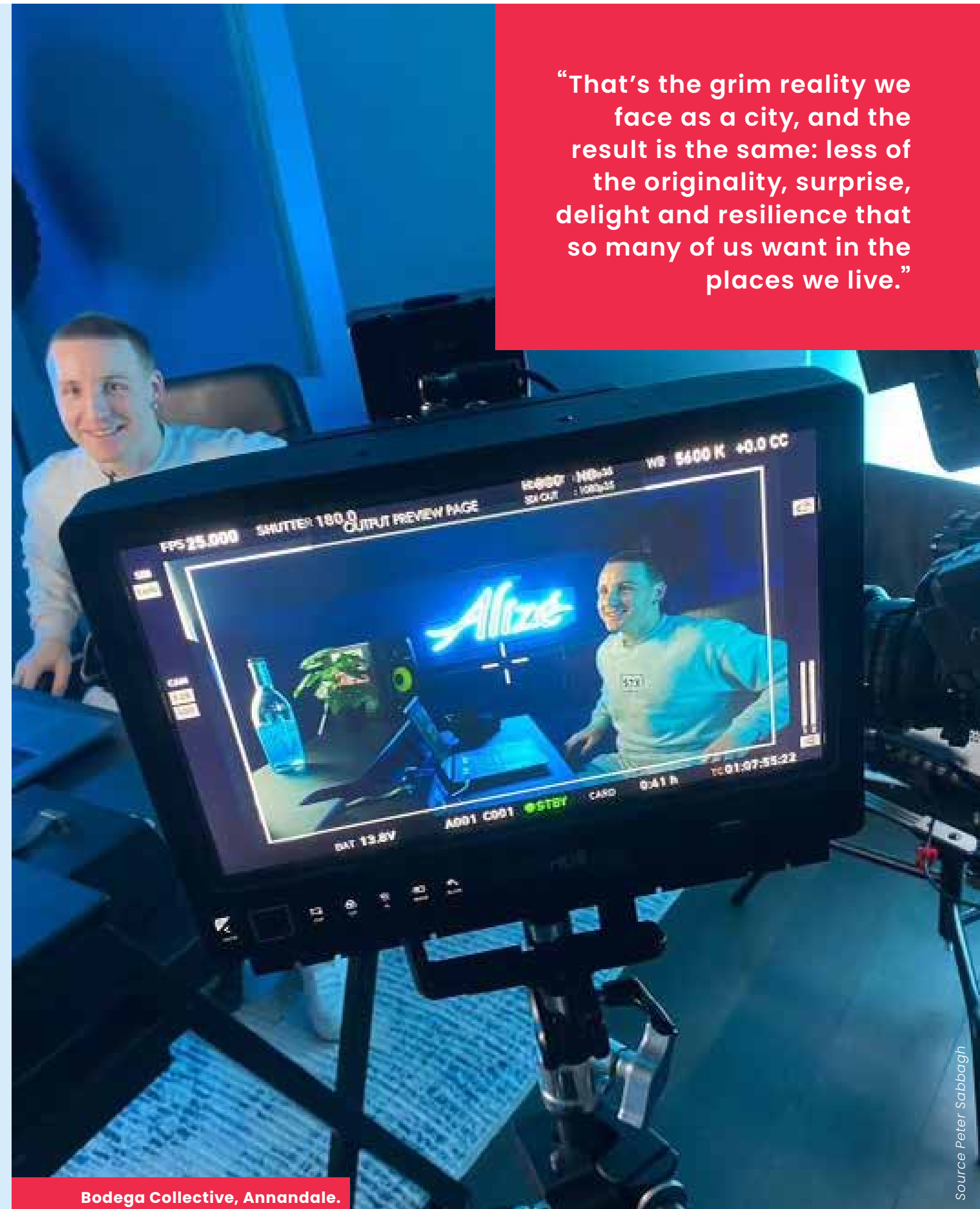
Some of those creatives may opt for more stable jobs in other sectors or other places. It may be that curators, programmers, producers or bookers choose more often to go with a proven global or legacy production that comes with an inherently lower risk profile.

That's the grim reality we face as a city, and the result is the same: less of the originality, surprise, delight and resilience that so many of us want in the places we live.

The implications go further than creative expression. Sydney's creative culture provides jobs, attracts visitors and investment, and fires up the nightlife. Creative activity helps make local areas feel safe and liveable, builds a sense of community and joy, and, of course, it inspires creativity and innovation.

Without it, our neighbourhoods lose a lot of their buzz and energy. The Committee for Sydney is first to argue for more homes, especially around transport hubs, to address chronic unaffordability issues. But if creativity is priced out (or never priced in), we miss out on the opportunity for increased economic activity, community cohesion, and simply the good life new residents aspire to.

It's not just local communities. Another cost of lifeless new places is a loss of confidence in urban renewal and development, reducing the social license we need to keep delivering the housing Sydney so urgently requires.



**“That’s the grim reality we face as a city, and the result is the same: less of the originality, surprise, delight and resilience that so many of us want in the places we live.”**

**Bodega Collective, Annandale.**

Source Peter Sabbagh



# The problem is the cost of everything, especially creative workspace

The cost of housing, the cost of living, and the costs of the business of creativity – especially paying for space to do the work – are making it much harder for talented creatives and creative space operators to do their work here in Sydney.



Knuckles Animation Studio.

Source: Woodburn Studios

## Major factors putting pressure on creative space:

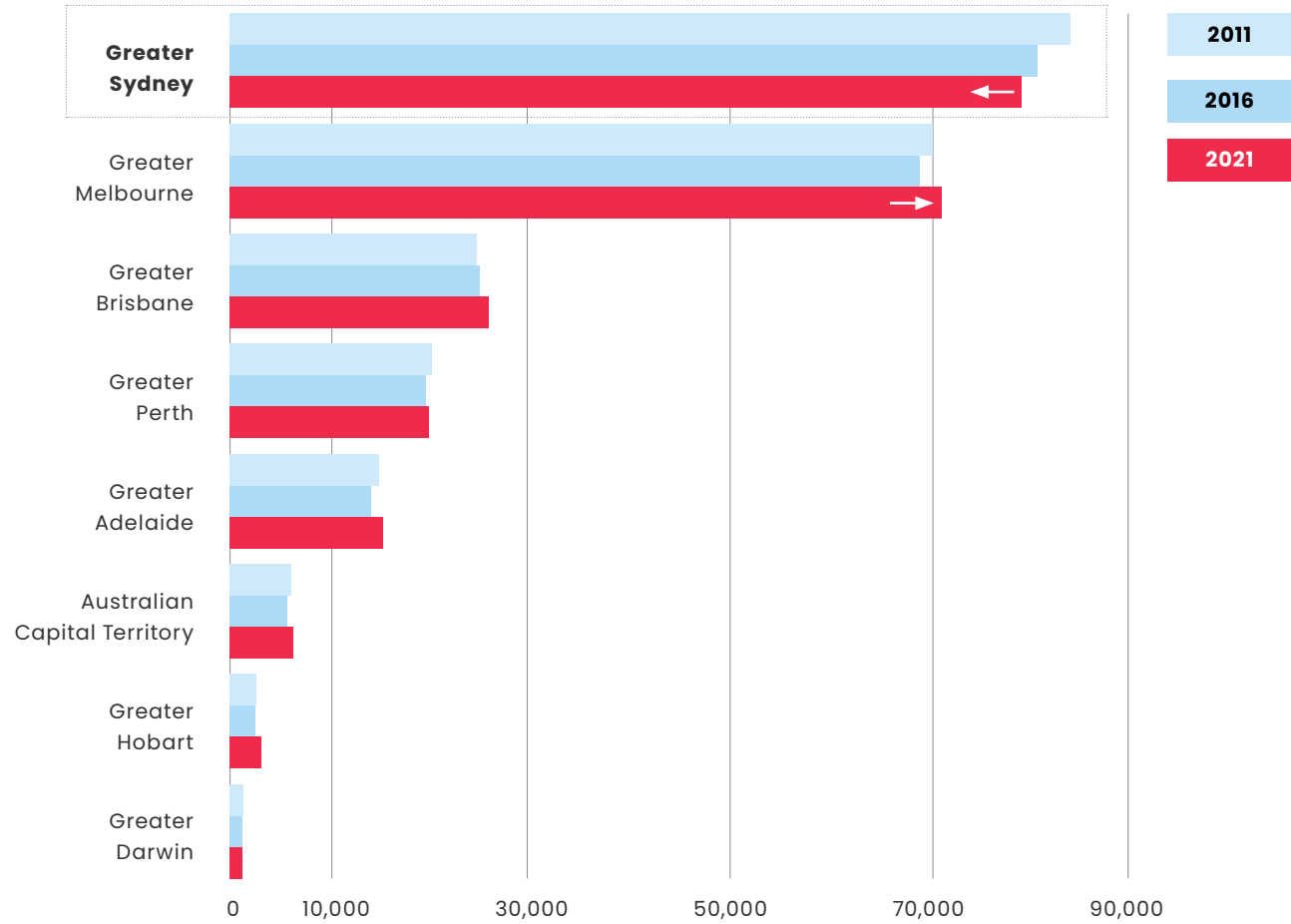
- Cost of housing across the board
- Cost of living directly on creatives
- Cost of the business of creativity, especially paying for space to work
- Reduced demand for products due to cost of living impacts on audiences and buyers

37%

Australia's cultural production workforce in NSW

Source: ABS 2021 / Creative Australia / Creative employment counts

## Although Greater Sydney still has the largest creative industries workforce in the country, it is retracting.



Cultural and creative industries over time by city (square metres)

Source: City of Sydney / Australian Census 2011, 2016 and 2021



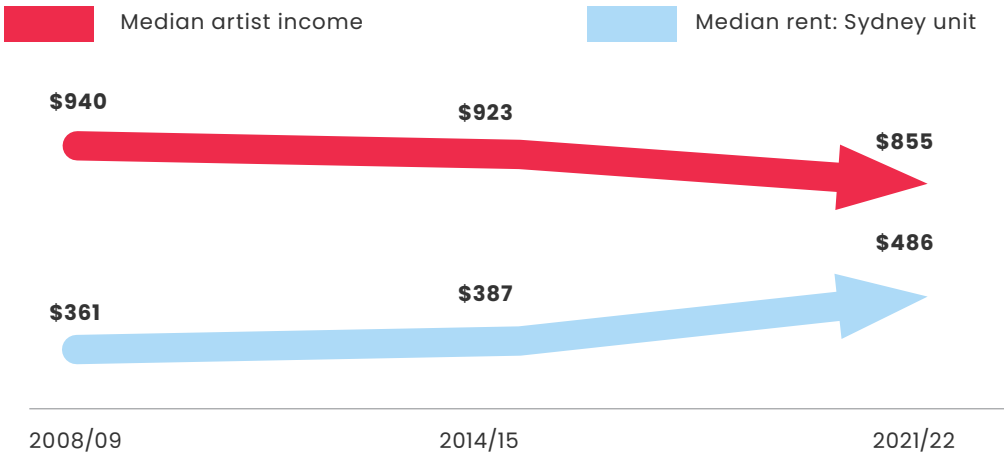


Creatives spend more than 60% of their income on rent – Creative Australia / Macquarie University research shows median rent was 38% of median creative income in 2008, while now it makes up a huge 62%. They’re generating more income through their work, but not enough to keep pace with housing and living costs.

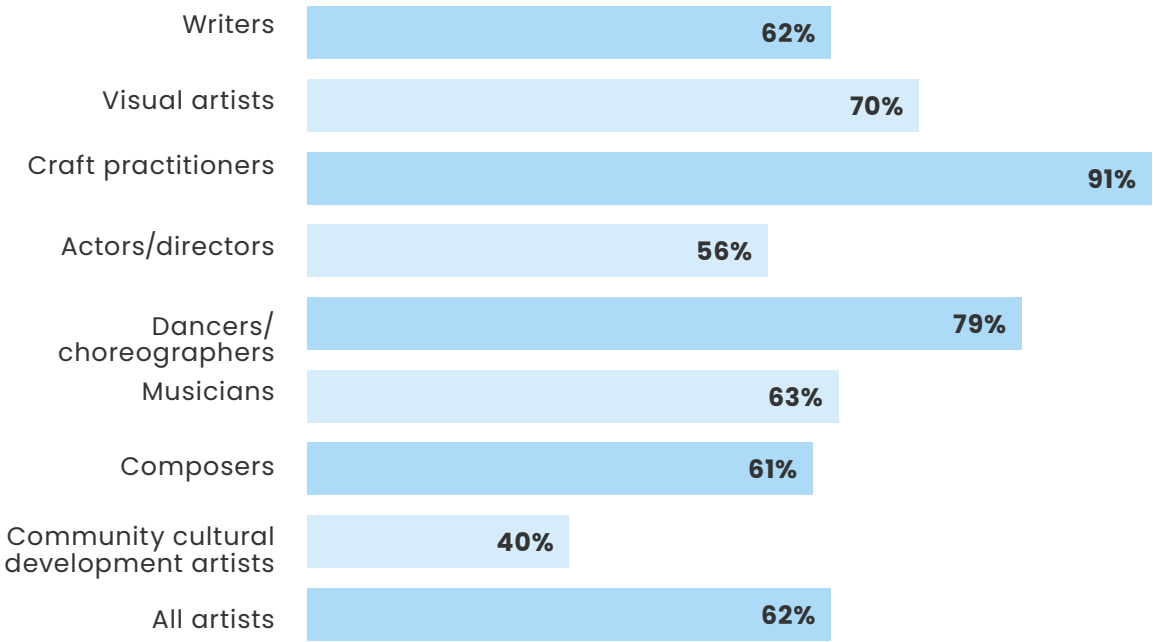
There is less affordable workspace for creatives – while there is no source for Greater Sydney, City of Sydney’s comprehensive Floorspace and Employment Survey shows space occupied by ‘Creative Artists, Writers, Musicians and Performers’ dropped close to 30% since 2012 – while overall supply increased 15%. A factor

The cost of rent is impacting creative careers

Median rent on a Sydney unit vs median artist income

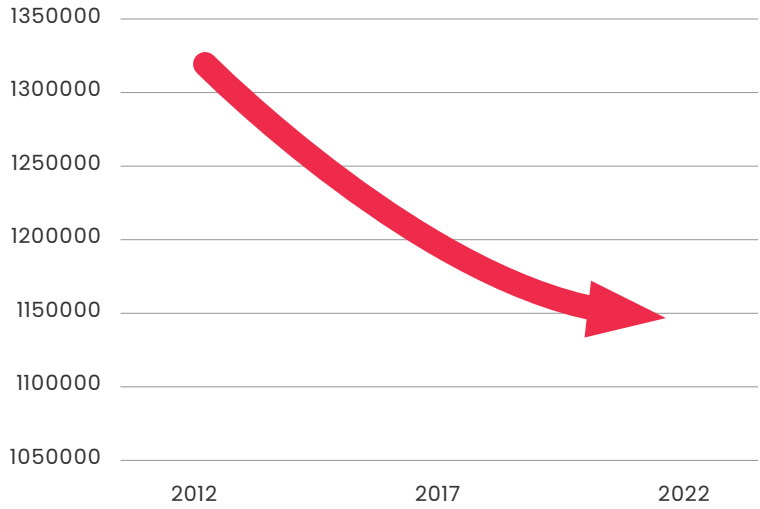


Median weekly rent as a percentage of median artist income across all sources 2021/22



Source: Creative Australia/Core Logic/City of Sydney

Creative space by square metres in City of Sydney



Source: Floorspace and Employment Survey, City of Sydney

is rent for industrial property due to growing demand for industrial land.

For those with the initiative to create new spaces, the issues are compounded by the risk, cost and challenge of navigating planning constraints and legislation, and it’s stamping out the possibility of creativity blooming. With many of our global competitors taking ambitious action to turn these conditions around, we need to ensure we are not left behind.

It would be easy to think of the government’s huge and very welcome investment in creative infrastructure – such as Powerhouse Parramatta, Art Gallery of NSW’s Sydney Modern, Artspace, Riverside Theatres and so many others – and think, job done. The problem is, if no one can afford to make the work to start with, we won’t have the home-grown content Sydneysiders love so much.





# A key solution is protecting and making more space for creative work

**We recognise the need to address cost of living and housing – citywide challenges that are impacting this sector more than most – and we’re advocating strongly for change using a range of levers.**

**This paper, however, focuses on protecting and making more affordable space for creative work, a critical enabler that allows the sector to take risks and try new things.**

Of course, providing space for creatives to build cultural expression in our city has its own intrinsic value. Beyond this, affordable creative workspace opens up the potential of creative projects to:

- Meet demand for cultural goods and experiences, and increase creative exports
- Provide talent and content for major events and festivals
- Generate new IP and innovation, with income that contributes to GDP
- Drive neighbourhood demand and liveability, attracting buyers and tenants.

When you look at it like that, creative Sydneysiders make a huge contribution. What they need to be able to do this is adequate access to workspace, and that’s what we are focusing on here, affordable space for making creative work.



One Off Traks at Offbeat Collective, Marrickville.





Source: Woodburn Creatives

Jasmine Miikika Craciun, a proud Barkindji and Malangapa woman, at Woodburn Creatives, Redfern.

We need to agree on a working definition of what ‘affordable’ means in this context so we can hold spaces to providing it. That’s crucial because creatives’ incomes tend to spike and dip at different times and most have day jobs – providing affordable workspace can be about encouraging them to focus on their riskier creative projects instead of their day jobs.

Of course, these are big challenges, but there is also a strong momentum for policy reform and effective action.

We are in the middle of a major policy refresh, with federal, state and local governments resetting their approach to culture and creativity with new plans and policies.

The NSW Government’s recent focus on major events, live performance, late night venues and precincts has helped, with a fortunate by-product being a reminder that one of the big reasons we spend our time in the city is to experience culture, and we really do value it – even if we don’t always see the supply chain behind the culture we’re consuming.

At a time of high commercial vacancies, with underutilised government, university, council and private lands due to changing market conditions and constraints – such as bringing low grade buildings up to standard – we have an opportunity to deliver creative and cultural floorspace across the city.

There is some good news in the data too – the relatively small scale of the creative workspace problem makes it one we can solve. The City of Sydney LGA, among the hardest hit, lost 14,000 square metres of creative floorspace to redevelopment and other uses – a lot, but also the kind of scale we can influence with targeted reform.

It’s clear that creativity’s being priced out of Sydney, that it’s important for the present and future of our city, and that we need to take action to price creativity back in to our plans.

We’ve identified four key actions that should be taken do just that:

1. Protect what we’ve got
2. Back creative space operators to succeed
3. Plan for what we will need
4. Provide new creative workspace.

### Changing the definition of creative industry

The NSW planning framework provides the following definition: “Creative industry means a building or place the principal purpose of which is to produce or demonstrate arts, crafts, design or other creative products, and includes artists’ studios, recording studios, and set design and production facilities. Creative industries are a type of light industry.”

Defining ‘creative industries’ as a type of light industrial use means it is not usually permitted in town/local centres. A small tweak to planning controls could mean that creative industries were included as a permitted use in business zones and open up a lot of new opportunities. The proliferation of craft breweries (another type of light industry) in town/local centres is an example.



# What do creative spaces look like?



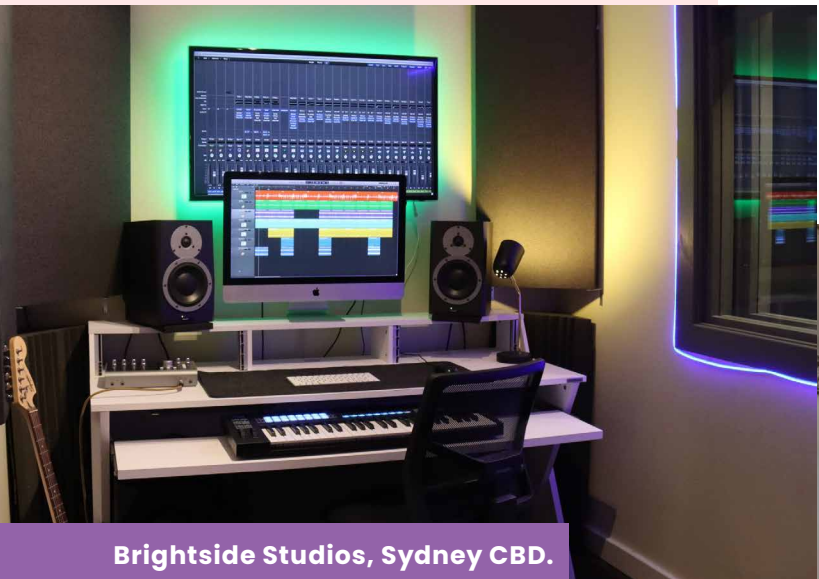




# Creative spaces come in all shapes and sizes, but they must be tenure-secure, fit for purpose, functional and affordable



Eramboo Studios, Terrey Hills.



Brightside Studios, Sydney CBD.



The Playground, Balgowlah.

To be clear, we’re talking about places where creative products are made, by craftspeople, music and theatre producers, visual artists, dancers, choreographers and many others. Their work might result in direct-to-consumer products and services, and it generally involves developing ideas, testing them out, and creating. Historically, this kind of cultural production has often happened in flexible warehouse spaces.

Creative spaces come in all shapes and sizes because creatives come in all shapes and sizes, from animators who might be able to work at a desk (mostly), to set designers and painters who need big floorplates or spaces that can get messy.

The type of space (shape, size, configuration), tenure (short, long term), location (clustering, town centre, edge of town, industrial centre) and other characteristics (loading bay access, ventilation, quality of the light, sound

proofing, 24-hour access) will define what kind of work a space is suited to. While it might seem self-evident a music recording studio would be a loud addition to a neighbourhood, the reality is rooms are sound isolated to record – as soon as you shut the door there’s nothing getting out.

Due to the interconnected nature of design of a space and how that impacts use and operations, a set number of square metres is not enough to plan around – we need to know how it will be run, and what the business model will require. If we don’t get all this clear upfront, the risk is earmarking spaces for creative uses that are not fit for purpose, or where the decision-making is based on unrealistic expectations about returns. These all affect long-term viability.

The result is something we see all too commonly in new developments across Sydney now: low ceiling, fixed floorplate ground floor spaces suitable for convenience stores or small offices. With effective planning, we can guide developers to delivering more versatile spaces that open a far wider array of creative and commercial uses.





# Better access helps everyone

**Creative spaces are often put in hard-to-reach and otherwise unwanted places, primarily because they're cheaper, but accessibility is an important consideration – every pain point along the way to accessing a creative space means a few people who might have used the space don't.**

They might be people who have physical or cognitive disabilities, and there are more people like that in the art world than you might think. But the reality is this affects everyone to a greater or lesser extent – and actions to improve accessibility benefit everyone.

We should be doing everything we can to improve accessibility, but we shouldn't use access as an excuse for stopping new spaces being opened – a tiny fraction of spaces would qualify city-wide now. We should think about access standards as an achievable baseline, not an unreachable bar.

Some rules of thumb:

- **Accessible inside and out** – e.g. table heights, toilets, corridors with space for a wheelchair to turn round, single level or lifts/ramps (and careful about features like cobblestones or flashing lights)
- **Easy to get to** – carparking outside makes it easier to bump in and out, wheelchair-accessible public transport nearby is vital for people on low incomes (and good storage reduces lugging back and forward)

- **Long tenure** – moving puts a huge burden on low margin operations; for artists in new migrant communities, it takes time to get to know a place, and artists from the disability led We Are Studios report health flare-ups when it's shut
- **Flexible hours** – disability is dynamic, you never know when you'll be hit hard by access needs. If you're feeling unwell in the morning or working a shift, flexible hours mean you can come by later or when a support worker can drop you off
- **Easy to find out about accessibility** – whether it's online, talking to someone on the phone or front desk, or clear signage in the space
- **Paying people is important** – people are riding on their pay, so make it a priority (and get them an Uber too – they're likely taking time off from paid work)
- **Extra challenges** – if you've got people with polio, partial paralysis and the like, it's not always possible to share the load. Instead of ruling out grant applications for being more disability support or more arts focus, we need to get more intersectional.



Source: Ebony Wightman / We Are Studios Blacktown, Matt Levinson



We Are Studios, Blacktown, is 100% disability led.



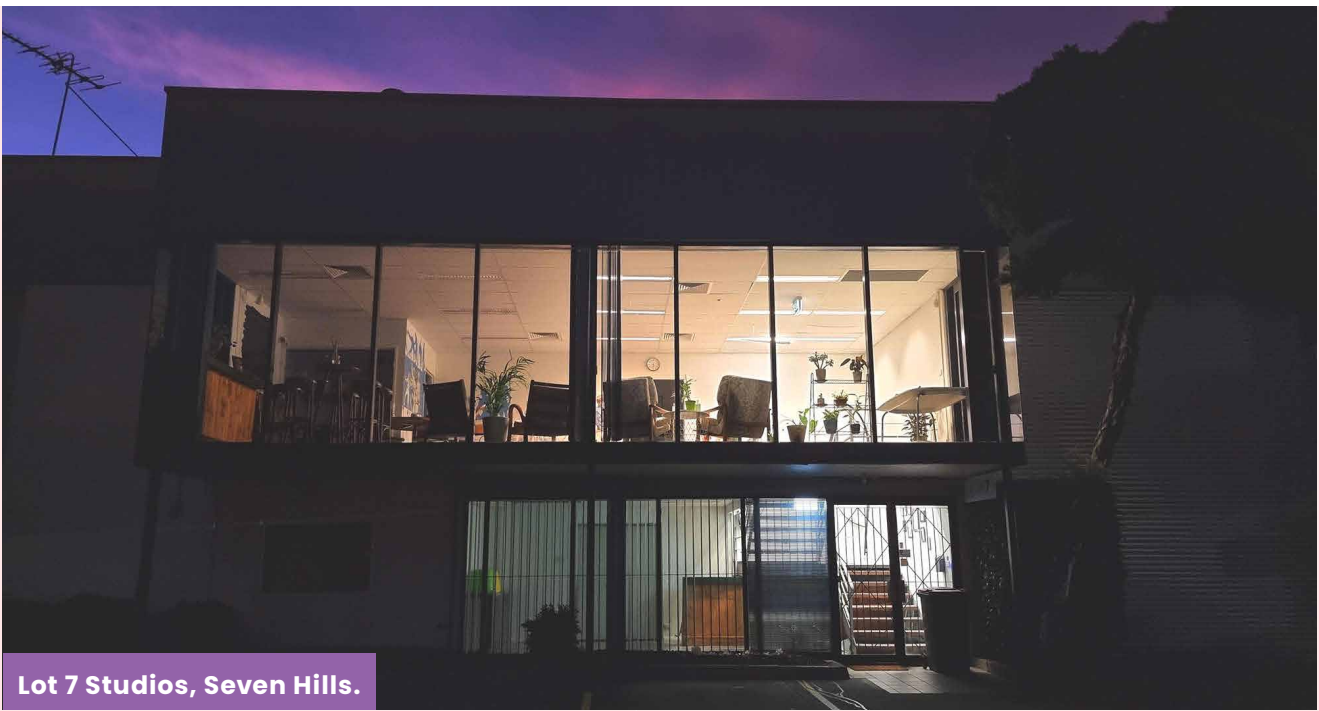




# Creative spaces are shaped by the actors that bring them to life



Bathurst Street Studios, Sydney CBD.



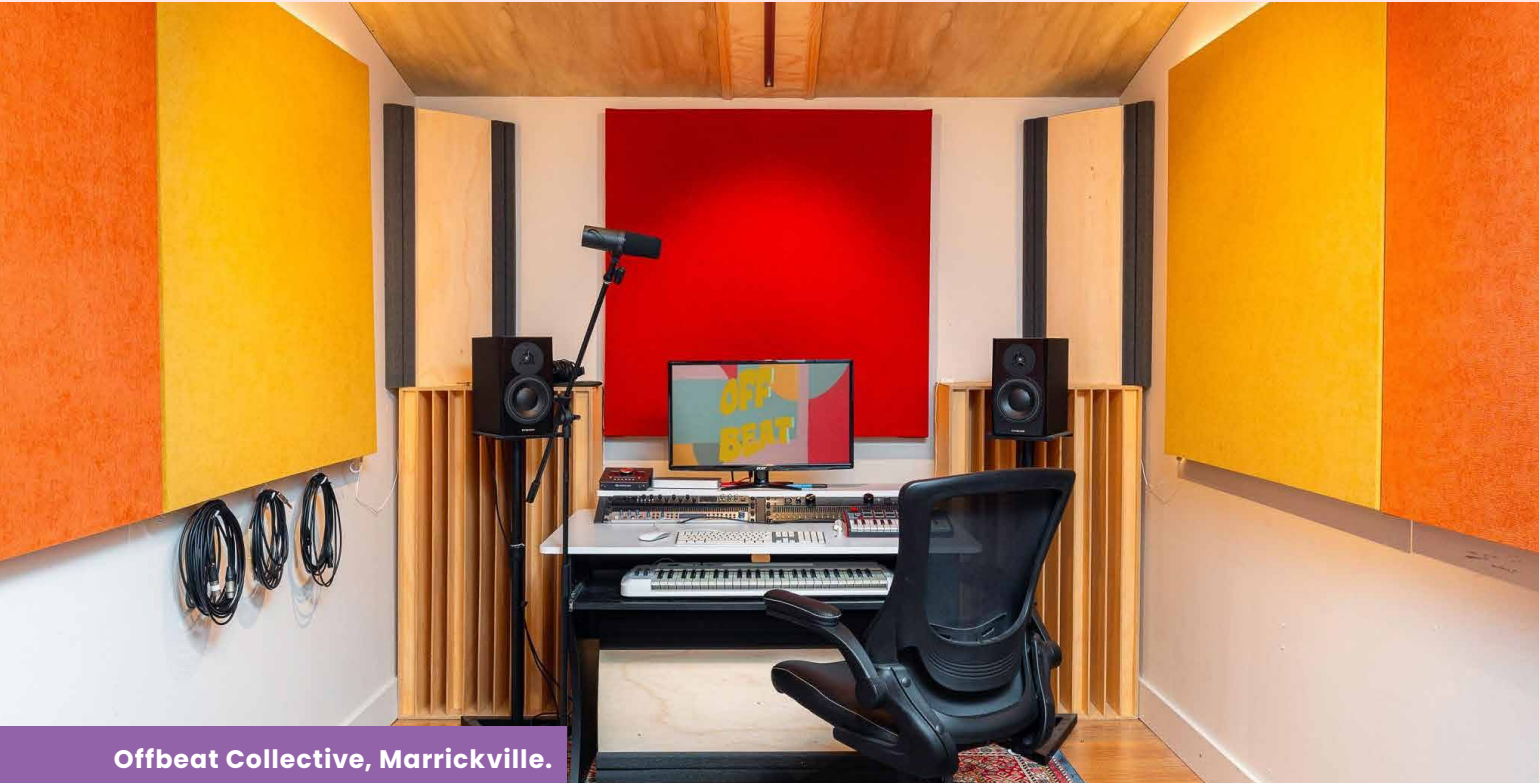
Lot 7 Studios, Seven Hills.

**What spaces are viable and how they take shape is clearly a direct result of the different actors who bring them to be – the people setting up and operating creative spaces, land owners and property developers, local councils and state agencies. These groups are critical players in delivering creative space, so let's get to know them:**

- **Creative space operators** – manage creative spaces and build community, with a spectrum of operational and administrative skills from self-taught to expert. May lack knowledge, relationships and power to negotiate deals. May be able to pay commercial rates, but not upfront fit-out and long-term lease conditions (even if they can pay market rate, owners may prefer to keep a building empty for historically higher rates or string operators along lease to lease).
- **Property sector** – own, operate and develop land, with huge potential for impact through development. They face

deep challenges with project feasibility. There is a willingness and appetite to work with the creative sector, but limited relationships and a lack of understanding of what affordability means in this context, with management structures that don't allow for smaller entities to take on leases or even buy space.

- **Governments** – landowners, funders and operators, regulatory and compliance actors, as well as long-term strategic planners. Councils have on-the-ground knowledge and relationships, with direct oversight of local planning decisions. State and federal governments make planning and investment decisions that can shift the needle at a regional or even larger level.
- **Public institutions** – education providers (TAFE, universities), public libraries and other cultural institutions are a major owner of fit-for-purpose creative space, that in some cases is under-utilised outside standard hours, including kilns, audio, photographic and video studios, and the like.



Offbeat Collective, Marrickville.





# Off the shelf design guides are pretty much ready to go



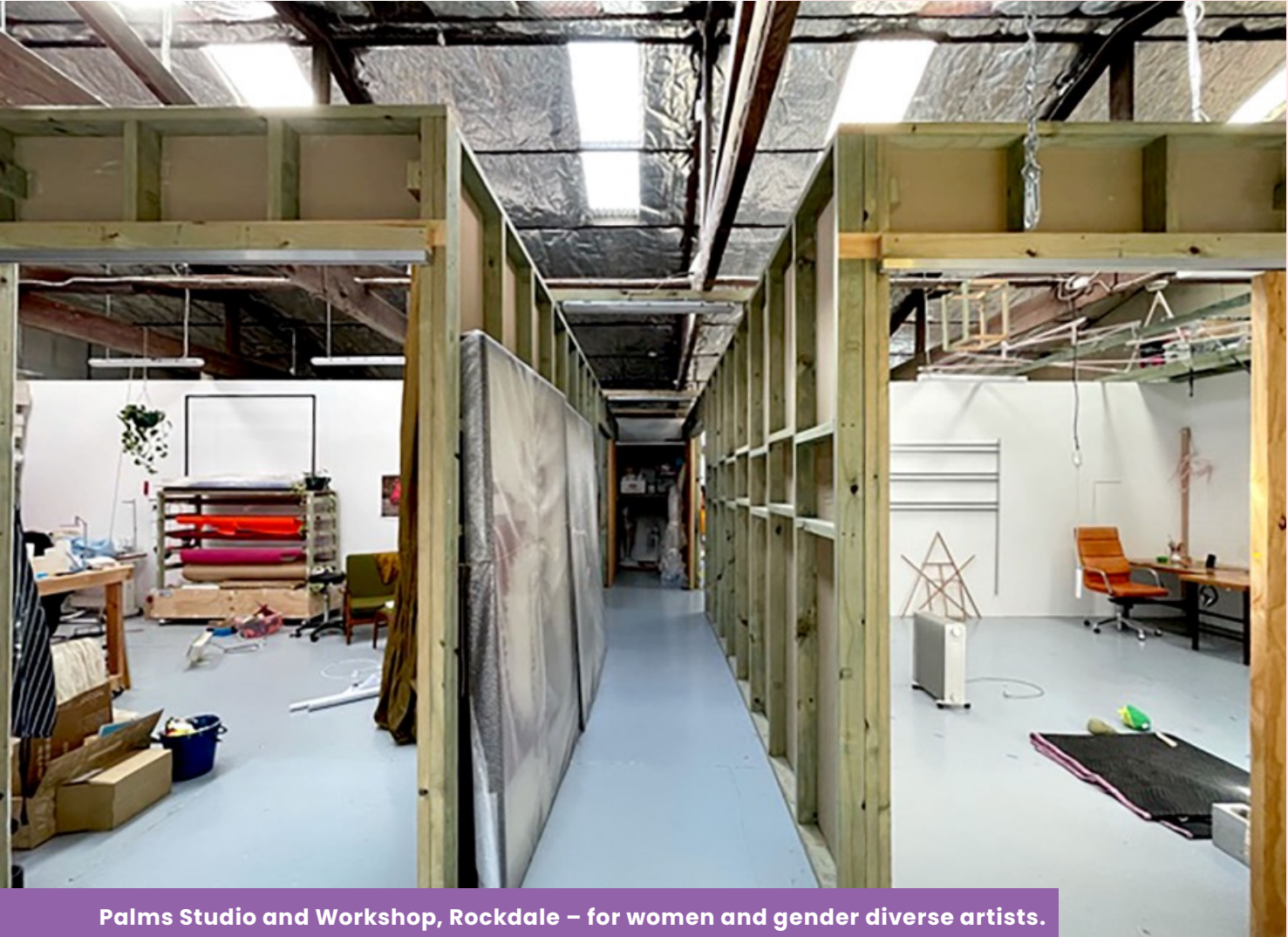
A good model is the creative space design guides developed by City of Sydney with Arup and Left Bank Co, and expanded with Creative Victoria, City of Melbourne and the Victorian Government Architect.

Designed to give creative practitioners, property owners, developers, architects, local councils, designers and builders expert advice on how to establish a creative space, the guides include detailed information on how to design and build creative spaces that are fit-for-purpose, reflect global best practice and have a long and sustainable lifespan.

This includes specific guidance for a range of creative space types, including: creative office space, digital games studio, creative studio space, photography studio, sound recording studio, TV and film studio, fabrication, exhibition space, rehearsal space, small multi-use theatre, a rehearsal space for music.



Odd Assembly, Redfern.



Palms Studio and Workshop, Rockdale – for women and gender diverse artists.





# What do we need to do?





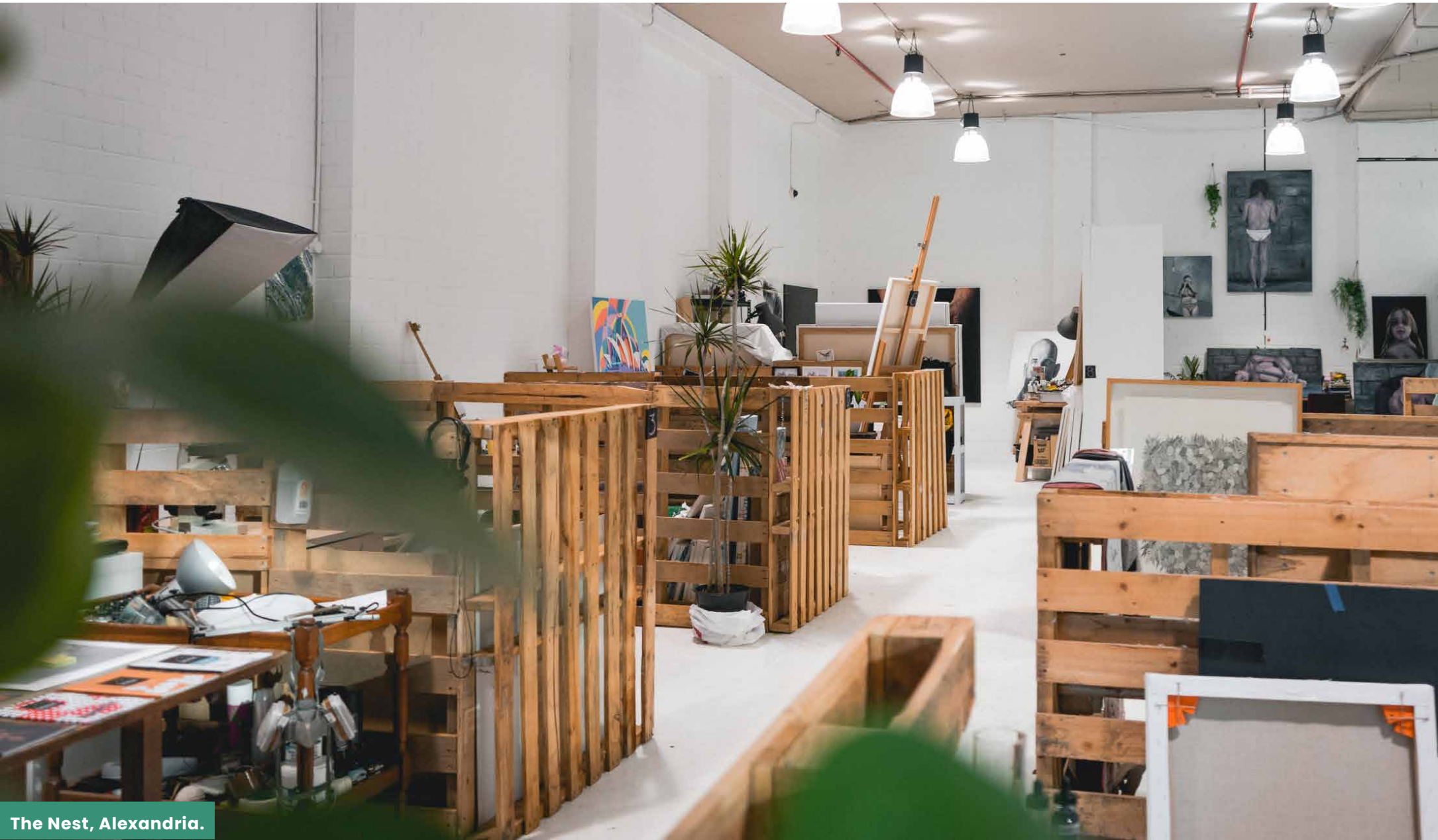
# 1. Protect what we've got

**Because it takes a long time to properly establish affordable creative workspaces, such as rehearsal spaces, art studios and recording facilities, the best spaces are the ones that already exist. So, where they exist, we should protect and support them.**

The time it takes to establish a space is not just fitting it out and getting it open, more than anything it's about building a sense of community around the space. Over time, creative spaces become deeply embedded and connected into communities, building social, creative and economic value, and becoming essential social infrastructure.

Planning considerations are a big part of it – to allow the creative use, and to protect that use from more lucrative development pathways.

These spaces may have once been restaurants, printing or electronics factories, rag trade buildings full of sewing machines – and those legacies may still live on in the building's approved use, even if it's now being used as to shoot video, record music or produce fashion. Many operators rely on flying under the radar – as far as they're concerned, if they had to get through approvals, they probably wouldn't be able to.



The Nest, Alexandria.

More importantly, creative culture has a track record of making the surrounding area more desirable for residential and commercial uses, which alongside renewed demand for industrial property, puts a lot of pressure on the amount of space available for creative use.

**Key steps here:**

- **'No net loss' planning and regulatory provisions** that recognise the value of creative space and aim to retain as much of it as possible. By reflecting on the approach taken with industrial lands,

we could create a comparable 'no net loss' measure for creative workplaces, via state planning direction that would become part of the assessment process for rezonings. It would mean new developments need to retain existing creative floorspace or deliver equivalent new space in the development – space that meets or exceeds the existing space on function, accessibility and affordability.

- **Direct support for operators** to ensure affordability and long-term viability – more on this to come.





# Ask the library

**Public libraries play an increasingly important role, and with more than 100 locations across metropolitan Sydney, they should be considered as a key resource and partner on this work.**

Libraries are free to use, with high quality Wi-Fi and technology access, and collections and staff are on hand to support creatives. Some suburban libraries (such as Forestville) have introduced 24-hour swipe card access for inducted members, which has great potential to expand.

Examples of libraries providing creative space:

- Burwood, Granville, Parramatta, Green Square, St Leonards, Wentworth Point and Cabramatta libraries provide studios, recording facilities, video edit suites and multifunction rooms that can be booked at no or little cost.
- In Granville, the library is a multipurpose facility with art space and a wide range of rooms for use.
- Maker spaces or digital labs are provided by libraries in Sutherland, Darling Quarter, Bonnyrigg and Rhodes.
- While not all libraries have studio facilities, almost all have multipurpose rooms and good digital facilities, while

writers use the general spaces as work space.

- Quite a few libraries offer musical instruments for loan, and have soundproof space onsite to use them.
- Bankstown and Parramatta (among others) offer sewing machines and other equipment.
- Many creative workers use the State Library and other public library spaces for teleworking, research and desk space.

This is a growth area for libraries, and more space is needed. Some public libraries in their current form can't meet demand, but libraries have the potential to be part of the solution.

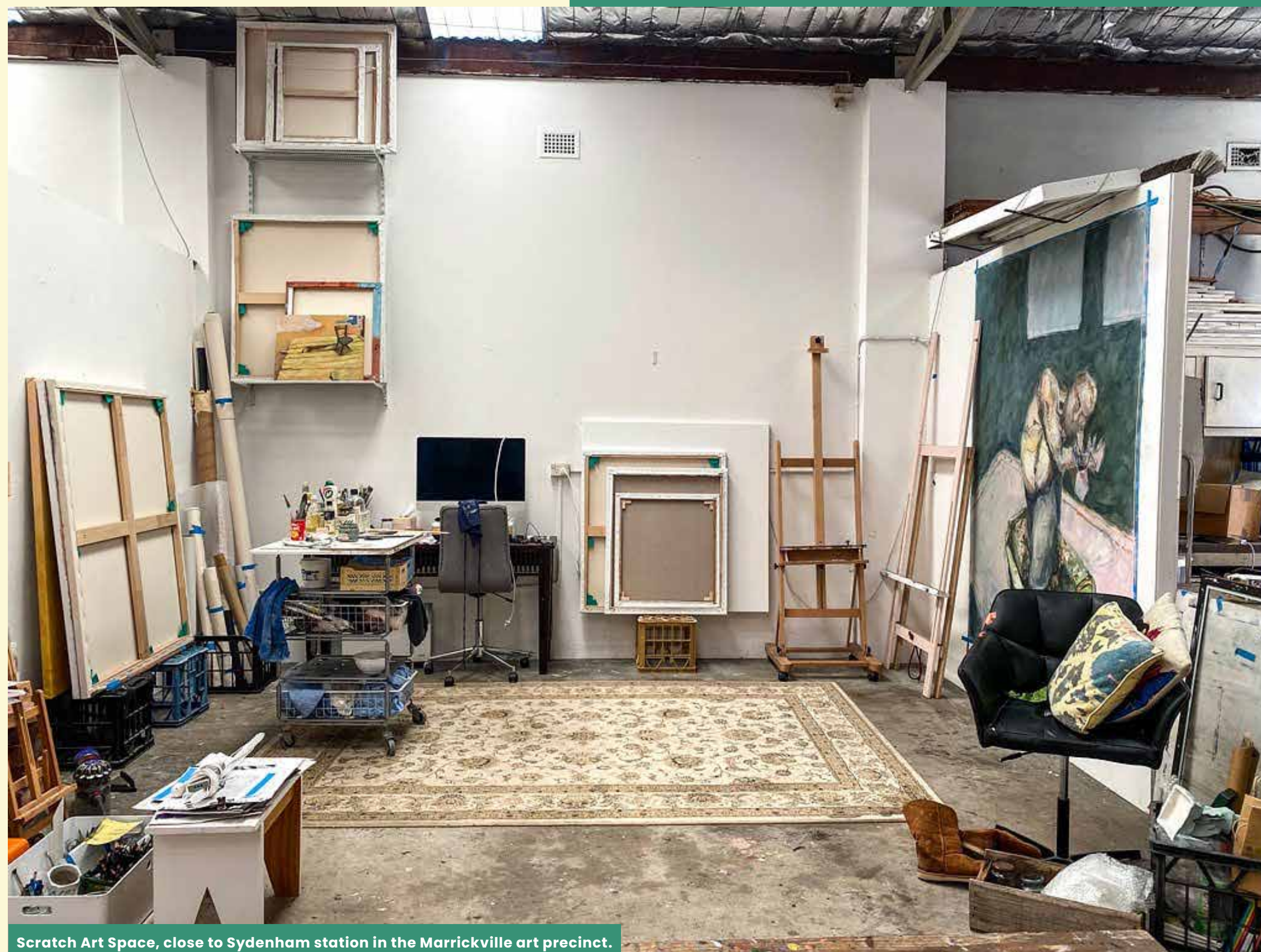
The State Library of NSW is a key funder of libraries – including infrastructure and internet access – and it has adjusted public library standards to recommend more variety in desk and meeting room arrangements, and a higher number of seats per capita, to cater for this trend. More. Support is likely needed – particularly in urban growth areas where populations are growing fast.

Schools, universities and TAFE campuses offer the potential of a similar boom in functional creative space, and should be seriously investigated.



Studio 2166, Whitlam Library, Cabramatta.





Scratch Art Space, close to Sydenham station in the Marrickville art precinct.

**In Marrickville, which has the highest density of cultural producers in the country, industrial land has been protected from rezoning by Inner West Council – in doing so, protecting the supply and availability of suitable building stock for creative spaces.**

However, creative spaces continue to shut their doors. Landlords of privately owned warehouse-style spaces keep increasing rents and the business model is becoming untenable for creatives.

There is a strong nexus between protecting what we've got with no net loss measures, and retaining these spaces for creatives through measures such as subsidies, affordability and so on.

Affordability is increasingly the key issue in terms of protecting creative spaces in this area.





# 2. Back creative space operators to succeed



Netball musical Nails Must Be Kept Short in rehearsal at Bathurst Street Studios.

Source: Brand X / City of Sydney / Joseph Mayers

## There’s no boom in creative workspace without a pool of viable creative space operators.

They run the gamut from commercially ambitious businesses to not-for-profits that require ongoing support; in some cases, key staff are volunteers, in others they’re paid, or some mix of the two. Whether they come to the job with strong business experience or fell into the job by accident – artists who stepped up to run a space when no one else would or tenants who gradually took on more responsibility – this is a tough and precarious business environment that would test anyone.

For operators that got through Covid-19 and beyond, 2024 is proving toughest by far. Rent keeps going up and people have to keep moving house, the cost of living is high, studio time is first to go. It’s not government’s job to bankroll businesses that aren’t run well, but steps can be taken to set these pivotal operations up for success – financially, operationally and culturally.

### Management support:

- Training and mentorship – especially access to culturally relevant experienced mentors on business planning, structure and operational challenges – e.g. Campbelltown Arts Centre’s Conscious program, Creative Australia’s Creative Leadership program.
- One stop shop for skilled advice and support navigating compliance and other government processes – e.g. Create NSW’s new cultural concierge, Creative Australia’s new governance hub.
- Shared learning about what works (such as viable scales of operation, negotiating long term leases, email databases, effective use of terms and conditions, automated replies, standardised contracts, listings, waiting lists, and so on).
- Focus in under-resourced areas – especially where local government doesn’t have the policies or budget in place to work with creative spaces.

### Getting the space right:

- Longer tenures – operators are pressured by short-term rolling lease (“they drip feed us years”). Longer tenures would boost confidence to invest for the long term.
- Think small – while it’s tempting to think big, smaller spaces are often the right scale for building fertile creative spaces. Bigger spaces come with bigger overheads, which inevitably translate to rents that are out of range. Bare bones is fine too, sometimes the alternative is nothing.
- Maintenance and fitout support – spaces are run-down, prone to flooding with poor thermal insulation; they get hot, cold and wet, and rarely have maintenance or building support (many actually hope the owners have forgotten they exist). Operators use second hand equipment and materials and fix things themselves. ‘Make good’ provisions leave operators fearful. Any help would go a long way.

### Boosting income streams:

- Brand partnerships can be a win-win – the creative energy of spaces can be irresistible for brands, and the brands’ financial clout can help spaces be viable – tapping into talent in-house, creative operators can deliver commercial projects (such as curating and producing events, producing public art or creative campaigns, or programming in-store music) and return benefits back to the artists and space.
- Maximise use of facilities – one way to improve income streams is simply making the most of the facilities available, including looking for increased opportunities for use of venues or public spaces, as well as access to specialist facilities (e.g. workshop, recording spaces, etc).
- More flexible grants – grant programs can rule out creative operators who are by necessity intersectional, straddling creativity, migrant culture, disability, entrepreneurial and other applications. Location can be an issue too, ruling applicants out if they move frequently; or embedding a bias to operators of cheaper spaces that can provide greater ‘value’ than operators with higher costs. Grants should recognise mixed models of commercial, community and creative projects.
- Other financial incentives include tax and rate benefits.





# 3. Plan for what we will need

**Sydney needs more affordable creative workspace – but there is a lack of clear and specific guidance on what creative workspace is needed and where, which means although there is goodwill and good intentions from public and private sector actors, we’re missing opportunities to address the gaps.**

Planning pathways to deliver creative space are opaque, with a lack of clarity on the use of funding mechanisms to deliver public benefit in line with development, such as developer contributions.

Where creative space is delivered without strategic planning and research, what we can see is generic mixed-use spaces or facilities that are not fit for purpose. There’s a missed opportunity cost, of course, and the results can add unintended costs and complexity, without delivering on the needs of the community.

Where this new creative space is not handed over to public, not-for-profit or other entities to administer, it can be difficult to enforce undertakings that the affordable creative workspace will be delivered long-term.

**What we really need is:**

Guidance on different spaces, with research and advice on delivery:

- Workspace types – size, design, location, standards, with flexibility to changing needs and diverse uses over time, and guidance on how to go about defining affordability.
- Best practice case studies to guide property actors and decision makers on the what and how of delivering creative infrastructure, including what to include, how to go about it, and short, medium and long-term benefits for developments and communities.

A clear plan prioritising what creative infrastructure is needed at LGA or regional scale:

- As with other types of social infrastructure, prioritising which spaces and uses are most necessary for an area would support more effective use of existing funding and incentive mechanisms, and help property developers deliver useful assets, and help meet the needs of creatives and councils.



- Requires local / regional research on creative production, performance and participation to guide what infrastructure is needed and where.
- Could underpin provision ratios for creative space, along the line of other social infrastructure (such as libraries and schools).
- Create a regulatory mechanism to support long term creative space in useful locations – e.g. the community housing sector provides ‘affordable housing,’ supported by inclusionary zoning schemes and incentives through the planning system. While it would be useful to improve clarity on voluntary planning agreement (or VPA) schemes, they tend to be an ad hoc mechanism. When there is a clear and expressed sub-regional need, inclusionary zoning is the most effective approach. Should be considered in line with other requirements being imposed on development to ensure projects remain viable.

**Strategic planning reforms and initiatives:**

- More opportunities for creative workspaces as permitted uses in a range of productive land use zones. The aim would be to reduce unnecessary startup approvals and simplify change of use as the space evolves over time, without the need for onerous applications and compliance.





# 4. Provide new creative workspace

**We just need more creative production space across Sydney, and three key actions will help: the NSW Government’s review of under-utilised property; the potential for a Creative Land Trust; and the current wave of major development, which offers an opportunity to deliver creative infrastructure where growth is underway.**

The latter provides an opportunity to embed creative spaces and industries as urban spaces evolve in response to structural changes over the coming decade – as with the renewal of industrial warehouses in the 1980s, creative spaces can be a cornerstone of the adaptive reuse of old commercial towers or tired shopping centres.

Significant movement is expected in shopping centre leasing and vacancies over the next few years, and while the sector is conditioned to favour certainty and compliance rather than creativity and uncertainty, it offers the opportunity to not just invigorate inner city precincts, but also to embed creativity in suburban centres and spur their reinvention.

But let’s be clear, every step of the property development cycle carries risk. To catalyse more secure and affordable creative space, instead of more immediately profitable residential, commercial or industrial uses, we need to make it easier to do, with more understanding of its value.

Some key steps here:

- Review, streamline and where necessary expand incentives for creative space. While powerful, there have been issues with collecting and applying these contributions to creative infrastructure. Another potential mechanism is vacancy taxes to activate forgotten spaces.
- Run a pilot study on the conditions that support creativity to flourish in new growth areas. While development in Sydney’s west, including Bradfield, could provide new workspace, we need to better understand the sorts of economic, spatial and social considerations that support creative industries to flourish in some new communities and not in others. Make it easier (or unnecessary) to get approvals for creative space, with clear guidance on what’s needed, and what it should look like.
- Make it easier for developers to work directly with creative industries and stakeholders on projects – including scoping, design and construction, fit-out and finishes – to ensure they are fit-for-purpose and reduce costs. Could be an opportunity for the Creative Land Trust, alongside existing programs like Making Space for Creativity.
- Identify and make accessible publicly owned land and assets to support creative spaces – governments and public institutions should lead by example and open up these assets, including universities, TAFE colleges,



**Peckham Levels: Seven levels of an under-used public carpark in South London reinvented as a creative hub, with parking bays converted into studio spaces alongside food and entertainment areas, with the entire space operated by a social enterprise.**



libraries, councils and state agencies. When public land is sold, it should include mandated creative/cultural floorspace.

- Increase understanding of the value creative infrastructure provides to development, short and long term. Besides the inherent value for communities and the city at large, the evidence from London’s Creative Places Create Value report is that affordable creative space contributes to property and economic value creation throughout the development cycle and beyond in footfall, job creation, place brand and authenticity.





# Creative land trusts: one big idea to shift the needle

Creative land trusts are the most effective solution we have seen to providing affordable creative workspace – the City of Sydney and NSW Government’s decision to explore this model offers the potential for a significant step change beyond traditional leasing models.



Cell Studios, backed by London’s Creative Land Trust.



CAST’s 447 Minna St site, San Francisco.

A creative land trust is an asset-holding property entity dedicated to owning and managing creative space in perpetuity. This approach to bridging the gap between the property sector, creative operators, government and philanthropic actors has been shown to deliver more creative space:

- **Community Arts Stabilization Trust (CAST), San Francisco** – a real estate not-for-profit committed to ensuring artists and cultural workers can stay anchored where they create. Second decade and now involved in bigger projects across San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose, including affordable artist housing and large-scale arts centres.
- **Creative Land Trust, London (2020)** – aiming to provide secure affordable workspace for 1000 or more artists and makers, available for studio providers to rent. Aiming to create a sustainable and replicable model, ready to expand across London and the UK.

- **Cultural Land Trust, Austin (2022)** – acquisition and preservation of arts, culture and music spaces. Accepts philanthropic donations, uses revenue bond financing, manages private investments, and engages in public real estate and public/private partnerships for City of Austin.

Create NSW and City of Sydney have asked the Committee for Sydney to run a feasibility study and, if considered feasible, establish the new entity, and we will do this with the support of a transitional steering committee and advisory reference group. To ensure the new entity is geared for long-term sustainability and growth, it must be independent, with resources to engage skilled property, finance, law and culture specialists, and the property or financial seed funding to establish, sustain and scale a viable financially secure model.





# What needs to change?





# Recommendations:

plan, prioritise and incentivise new creative space



La Creme Creative, Brookvale.

## 1.

Assess and document the economic and social value benefit of creative workspace, so proponents and government can make informed decisions about provision or retention of creative workspace.

- Develop guidance on how to best model economic impact and community benefit for creative spaces, in partnership with NSW Treasury, to ensure that evaluation methods align with accepted standards.
- See ‘Creative spaces creative value’ as an example.

Proposed lead:

Create NSW and potentially the Creative Land Trust

## 2.

Develop a design guide for creative spaces in Sydney – to enable local governments, educational institutions, property owners and development teams to understand how to design and/or manage these spaces.

Governments should use this resource in briefs and tenders, particularly state significant projects, as well as to help inform DCPs at the local government level. Modelled on the approach taken with NSW’s Greener Spaces Guide, it should set clear principles, without being overly prescriptive, to become industry accepted. It should include:

### A. How to provide creative workspaces:

- What planning incentives or processes are available to help facilitate delivery of creative workspace in new development? (development contributions, VPAs, bonuses etc).
- What financial instruments or models can be used? How to maximise sustainability.
- What are the management options for creative workspace?
- What tenure models work?
- Include templated creative leases as an industry standard to streamline property searches

### B. What creative workspace could look like?

- A framework that outlines the typologies available
- how to make spaces functional and accessible for creatives of different disciplines, diverse backgrounds and people with disabilities
- Design specs and rules of thumb around the design of different types of creative workspaces
- Advice on adaptive reuse of existing buildings, including technical guidelines to help small creative enterprises negotiate building safety, accessibility and compliance at a reasonable cost (i.e. adaptive reuse guidelines, see draft technical guidelines reference #10 and City of Sydney’s new ideas for old buildings)
- Add creative production as a floorspace typology and add to the NSW Government’s Common Planning Assumptions (Workspace ratios)

### C. Best practice case studies to highlight real world examples of how projects have been provided and delivered.

Proposed lead:

Government Architect NSW, Create NSW (building and formalising work led by Left Bank Co, City of Sydney and others)





# Recommendations: plan, prioritise and incentivise new creative space

## 3.

### Conduct a creative workspace census of Greater Sydney.

- This should be a practical, cost-effective assessment of where creative infrastructure gaps are. Already delivered at different scales of accuracy and detail, would benefit from more consistent application across the region, to deeply understand and identify shortfalls.
- Supply-side analysis: Map creative workspaces across Sydney
- While City of Sydney’s Floorspace and Employment Survey delivers high quality data, this does not need to be an expensive exercise, a range of global cities (including Berlin and London) have taken more of an opt-in approach to mapping creative space – inviting creative spaces, public libraries and other potential locations to self-nominate in order to access government support.
- Demand-side analysis: Map participation / demand trends for creative workspace across Sydney
- This is a vital piece of work to underpin all creative investment across the city, and a necessary complement to the workspace map.
- Draw on datasets such as the ABS’s Participation and Attendance surveys – there’s a real opportunity to investigate disparities between regions, ethnicities and other demographic indicators.

### Proposed lead:

Create NSW and  
potentially the  
Creative Land  
Trust

## 4.

### Develop a clear needs assessment for creative workspaces

- Gaps and growing opportunities identified in action three should guide and help prioritise investment and developer contributions to creative infrastructure at the local, sub-regional and metropolitan scale
- Tie in cultural space requirements with councils’ cultural strategic plans and then clearly map out across regions so future developments know clearly what needs to be designed where. Cultural space needs and census should be closely linked through to local planning and then into DA constraints
- This will allow easy identification of what is needed to be provided in certain places, allowing developers to come up with VPA proposals suited to need
- Could also be used to identify regionally significant creative workspace that could be funded via the State Housing and Productivity Contribution schedule.

### Proposed lead:

Local councils,  
regional  
organisations of  
councils, or  
Create NSW



Windowsmiths, Potts Point.



# Recommendations: get the planning system working to support creative spaces

## 5.

### Apply ‘no net loss’ planning directions to creative floorspace

- No net loss provisions are common approach when protecting lower value uses from higher value use encroachment, such as in industrial lands, in recognition of the scarcity and need to ensure sufficient zoned land and available floorspace is retained citywide.
- Because creative industries is not a specific zoning, it’s not straightforward to apply a ‘retain and manage’ style policy in the way it’s applied to industrial lands – the intention is to ensure no loss of creative industries, but because creative floorspace exists across a range of zoned lands, incentives should encourage councils to apply a ‘no net loss’ mindset to creative floorspace.
- This would likely be instituted via state planning direction that becomes part of the assessment process for rezonings – meaning new developments retain existing creative floorspace or deliver equivalent functional space across all zones that creative floorspace is permitted.

#### Proposed lead:

Create NSW,  
Department of  
Planning,  
Housing and  
Infrastructure,  
and potentially  
the Creative  
Land Trust

## 6.

### Relax planning limitations on creative industries – explore options to update ‘creative industries’ as defined in the NSW Local Environment Plan Standard Instrument

- Currently defined as a subset of ‘light industries’ in the LEP Standard Instrument definition, which limits the range of zones that creative industries are permitted and without consent
- This should be reviewed carefully to avoid unintended consequences, but we believe in most cases ‘creative industries’ should be a use that is allowed without consent in commercial centres or light industrial precincts, and with consent in mixed use contexts or sensitive precincts where there are higher chances of land use conflicts.
- A relatively easy fix for most councils would be to amend their LEP to add ‘creative industries’ in some or all business zones
- This would shift the onus to permitting more creative space without consent.

#### Proposed lead:

Local councils,  
regional  
organisations of  
councils, Create  
NSW, Department of  
Planning, Housing  
and Infrastructure



## 7.

### Review whether contribution mechanisms are fit-for-purpose for creative workspace provision

- Review and build on planning incentives to ensure they are fit for purpose across Greater Sydney
- Ensure that regional creative workspace can be funded by the State Housing and Productivity Contribution
- Ensure that local creative workspace can be captured by local contributions plans
- Where creative space is provided in the planning system, there should be pathways available to ensure the conditions remain in place in perpetuity – either by handing over to third party actors like government or trusts, or with covenants or other conditions.

#### Proposed lead:

Department of  
Planning,  
Housing and  
Infrastructure,  
NSW Treasury





# Recommendations: get the planning system working to support creative spaces

8.

Make it easy for councils to insert clauses in LEPs to allow planning bonuses where developers provide creative workspaces

- Allow councils to tie development consents and conditions to the need to provide cultural floorspace in areas of need – consider providing a streamlined or templated method to enable councils to do this outside the existing costly and time-consuming planning proposal process. Likely these would be place specific (see Oxford Street provisions)

Proposed lead:

Department of  
Planning,  
Housing and  
Infrastructure

9.

Require creative workspace to be provided within strategic precincts

- Make the provision of creative workspace a requirement on developments above a certain scale, particularly in identified precincts, such as transit-oriented development precincts, uptown precincts and special entertainment precincts, where the mix of transport, vibrancy and population density will support and benefit from creative culture.
- Governments to lead by example and identify potential sites in their portfolios to be opened up for creative space, drawing on insights from the current audit of vacant properties. Local governments and other public institutions, such as universities, could be encouraged to follow suit. This could be managed under the creative land trust or a new authority under Create NSW. This offers significant potential impact.
- Ensure creative workspace is incorporated into future strategic plans for Sydney.

Proposed lead:

Create NSW,  
Department of  
Planning,  
Housing and  
Infrastructure

# Recommendations: get programs and initiatives in place to support creative operators

10.

Review cultural grants and other support available to creative workspace operators to ensure they are fit for purpose

- a. Review deductions, exemptions and credits available to creative operators to ensure they're widely understood and used
  - Consider GST, tax and rate benefits and other support that could or should be available
- b. Review cultural grants to ensure they are fit for purpose
  - Consider grants designed to deliberately consider the intersectional needs of the community – deliberately designed to include innovative solutions, especially where historical inequities exist – for women, people with disabilities, queer, non-binary, new migrant communities and so on
  - Consider grants or other support designed to encourage or support longer lease terms – to provide stability of tenure,
  - Consider tailored grant support for fitout and maintenance of spaces

Proposed lead:

Create NSW,  
local councils



Lot 7 Studios, Seven Hills.



# Recommendations: get programs and initiatives in place to support creative operators

## 11.

### Establish a program to support existing and potential operators

- a. Identify and create a pool of pre-approved creative workspace operators
- b. Establish a program of training and mentorship tools for potential or viable operators
  - Training and support on business planning, management and operational practices including potential for brand partnerships, maximising use of facilities
  - Programs that support and facilitate access to experienced and culturally relevant mentors and networks
- c. Ensure creative workspace operators know and are able to access the creative frontdoor
  - Create NSW’s creative concierge / one stop shop for skilled advice and help navigating government processes is a major step forward, that was advocated for as part of the Committee’s submission on the government’s creative communities strategy – the key step remaining is to get the word out.
- d. Maintain and invest in key programs that are supporting this sector
  - Commit to the Making Space for Creativity incubator as an ongoing driver of innovation and partnership between government, property and creative sectors
  - Support expansion of Melbourne’s Creative Spaces website as a truly national resource and platform for connecting creative operators and land managers

### Proposed lead:

Create NSW,  
Creative  
Australia,  
Creative Land  
Trust, local  
councils



Source: BrandX

Artist in residence program at City of Sydney Creative Studios, Sydney CBD.





# Background reading

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6. [Artists’ workspace consultation report](#), 2022 – King’s College London, Creative Land Trust

7. [Creative enterprise zones, impact report 2018-2021](#) – We Made That

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10. [Creative Spaces Design Guides](#), 2022 – City of Sydney, Arup

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12. [Draft Technical Guidelines: Small scale cultural activities occurring in spaces less than 500 square metres](#), 2020 – City of Sydney

13. [Making space for culture in Sydney, cultural infrastructure study](#), 2020 – City of Sydney

14. [Making Space for Culture Incubation Program, Program Report 2022](#) – Left Bank Co.

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16. [Making Space for Culture, Handbook for City Leaders](#), 2020 – World Cities Culture Forum

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18. [Mental health and wellbeing in the creative industries Australia 2024](#) – Centre for Social Impact

19. [Oxford Street Cultural and Creative Precinct](#), May 2021 – City of Sydney

20. [Planning Cultural Creation and Production in Sydney](#), 2018 – City of Sydney, Western Sydney University

21. [Planning Proposal – Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012: Open and Creative Planning Reforms](#), 2020 – City of Sydney

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