



Impact Stream: Embracing opportunities for children to inform creative programs



Quick note

This impact stream and included resources and examples focus on children. Some actions are suitable for young children if they are supported by their families or their educator. The 'ambitious' action is better suited to children in the upper primary years – around ages 9 to 12. We acknowledge that councils may have differing definitions for 'children' or may prefer to focus on a specific age range within the 0–12 year old group.

Arts and culture help children to:

- enhance their self-esteem
- find new ways to express themselves
- build social and intellectual skills
- prepare for the future – both socially and in terms of their career opportunities¹¹.

Children are enthusiastic attendees and participants in creative programs, highlighting the potential demand for these types of activities to be made widely available in local communities. Children aged 5 to 14 are more likely to attend creative events during their leisure time than adults (94% vs 82%)¹². In addition, 96% of children in that same age bracket participated in a cultural activity outside of school hours in 2017–18¹³.

This impact stream focuses on embracing opportunities for children to inform the way creative programs are developed by, or supported through, council. Giving children and young people a voice to contribute to and lead programs ensures that activities are genuinely focused and designed for and by young people. It shows them respect and increases the success rate for participation.

Intended outcomes

Councils undertaking this impact stream can expect to:

- increase children's input in the development of council's creative programs
- increase opportunities for children in their community to creatively participate outside of school hours
- strengthen networks with key partners working with children in the community
- reduce barriers preventing children from attending or participating in creative events
- showcase and support the creative endeavours of children in their community.

11. [A New Approach \(ANA\): A view from middle Australia: Perceptions of arts, culture and creativity](#)

12. [ABS: Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues and Events, Australia](#)

13. [ABS: Participation in Selected Cultural Activities](#)



Minimum deliverables

To complete the impact stream ‘Embracing opportunities for children to inform creative programs’, councils will have:

- identified existing council and council-supported programs that support children as audiences or creators
- adopted policies that allow for children to be involved in the development of creative programs
- supported the delivery of creative programs that involve children’s voices during selection or development
- demonstrated succession planning outlining how the activity will contribute to the outcomes of current and future Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans.

Creative organisations working with children

ArtPlay (City of Melbourne) is a program for children and families that is challenging, creative and meaningful. Children explore their creativity and self-expression and share unique artistic experiences with professional artists.

100 Story Building is a unique organisation for young writers in Footscray, Melbourne. It uses storytelling as a tool to foster imagination, creativity and confidence in children and young people.

Kids Thrive partners artists with specialists in children’s education, health, welfare and social justice to create ground-breaking programs promoting child-led change, including cultivating children’s local social action, leadership and positive celebrations of diversity in schools and other child-friendly locations. Kids Thrive can help with evidence-based approaches to engaging children aged 0–12 in decision-making, community engagement and child voice so that you can co-design with children and adults for creative solutions to community issues.

Recommended resources

A number of additional resources are useful when designing creative projects for children and young people.

- Australia Council for the Arts: [Protocols for Working with Children in Art](#)
- Arts Law: [Information sheets > children in the creative process](#)
- NAPCAN: [What role can local government play?](#)
- Australian Early Development Census: [User Guide: Local Government](#)





The quick win

Audit and promote creative programs for children

In this action, councils will audit local provision of council's creative and non-creative activities within the community and identify opportunities to promote or increase creative strategies.

Knowing where you are starting is critical before determining what you want to do. An internal review of your existing programs, funding initiatives and strategy documents will assist in identifying gaps that require attention. For example, your council may lack policies and/or programs that are tailored for, engage or appeal to children.

Some common children's programs at councils include:

- [Storytime at libraries](#)
- [Council gallery workshops](#)
- [Cushion concerts](#)
- [School holiday hang outs](#)

There may be an overlap between this audit and audits your council may be undertaking for other VicHealth community partnership modules. This is a good thing, as we are aiming for the benefits of creativity to be included throughout your community programs and services, not just in arts contexts.

Crossover Opportunity

The [Connected and Supportive Communities](#) module includes implementation actions that outline baseline audits of council practice to support and include a number of priority cohorts. The following are included under the 'Building proud and inclusive community practices' impact stream:

- Quick win: Undertake a cultural inclusion snapshot
- Quick win: Assess Rainbow readiness
- Step up: Conduct a disability inclusion audit from a children and young people perspective

The steps outlined below are similar to those outlined in 'The quick win: Audit and promote creative programs for young people'. You'll need to consider the changing needs and interests of children and young people over different stages of life and include different activities and communications in your creative programming.





How-to guide to: **Audit and promote creative programs for children**

Involving people

Council teams to involve in this action include arts and culture, children and family services and community development. Other teams who may be well placed to embed creative programs in children's activities include: economic development, tourism, libraries, parks, and sport and recreation.

This action requires co-design with children. Aim to engage with children who are participants or visitors at the sites and services identified in the audit, including arts and cultural facilities, community centres, early years services, kindergartens, primary schools, sports clubs, libraries and disability services.



Plan

Form a working group and appoint a project champion

Establish a working group including the relevant council and community representatives to drive the project. Appoint a project champion who will lead meetings, follow up on actions, and ensure the project aligns to other community partnerships modules and approaches being developed.

Develop a project plan outlining:

- terms of reference detailing roles of the working group
- the goals of the project and work to be completed
- timelines and milestones for completing the work.

Determine how you will engage and seek an authorising environment from council leadership for the project, ensuring the project champion has a mandate to deliver and respond quickly when needed.



Assess

Develop an auditing tool

The audit should include creative and non-creative activities, strategies and programs in which children are the focus. Some examples include community or health services such as maternal health, child health and wellbeing, education and sport.

Confirm the questions for consideration to determine public-facing programs that council already delivers which are accessed by children as audience members or participants, and the community-based programs, organisations and projects that are engaging with children. This detail will: inform programs that can be highlighted and celebrated; and identify gaps in internal programs for children and programs that are being delivered externally that could meet council objectives if adequately supported.



Develop an auditing tool cont.

Consider:

- identifying council and community-based programs and organisations that currently have children as confirmed or potential audience members or are the focus of services
- programs that currently have children as confirmed or potential creators or participants
- strategies or policy documents that mention children
- any council support being provided to other community-based programs involving children
- the types of content being developed and shared on council communication platforms that children and families use
- how engaging and appealing these are for children
- any noticeable gaps in services or creative programs.

Determine the audit method depending on the size and capacity of the council. This could range from a simple survey collection tool through to a full creative strategy development exercise, such as the [South West Victoria Creative Industries Strategy](#) using a combination of focus groups, one-on-one interviews and community surveys.

Consider surveying:

- council staff involved in the delivery of creative programs
- children and their families
- providers and community groups who are involved in creative activities where children are part of an audience or a participant.

Collate the results

Collate findings. Prepare a complete list of existing creative programs and strategies that explicitly target or mention young people. The list can be broken down into:

- programs or activities that explicitly target children as audiences or participants
- programs or activities that do not explicitly target, but still benefit, children as audiences or participants (e.g. family focused creative festivals or events).

Also prepare a complete list of existing 'non-creative' programs, services and strategies that explicitly target or mention young people, broken down into:

- programs or activities that explicitly target children as the focus of or participants in services
- programs or activities that do not explicitly target, but still benefit, children.

Create a 'highlights' summary that can inform the Design step and showcase the existing highlights for children from programs delivered by your council. Highlights could include children-led programs or programs where children actively participated.



Case study - Gannawarra Shire Council – ReSpark the Park

Children were central to the redesign of a local community park in Gannawarra Shire. Consultation with the local community took the form of a festival where children were encouraged to dream up a new future for their under-utilised park in McCann Crescent, Kerang.

All activities on the day – from the fun art play activities to the casual chats with the parents enjoying the food together – added to the understanding of what was important to the local community and how they wanted to use their park in the future.



Council kept residents updated about the progress of improvements via their newsletters, website and Facebook page.

The park is now a thriving community asset and a place that will bring joy for many years to come. The rejuvenation also achieved Australia-wide recognition at the National Awards for Local Government.

Design

Present the findings to children for feedback

Prepare a presentation focused on gaining children's responses to, and recognition of:

- which existing programs and events in the highlights summary are attended by children and what they like about them
- other programs they participate in or like to attend in their community
- creative programs they wish they could see more of in their community
- gaps, programs that are missing, what the children want to have access to.





Hot Tip!

Co-designing with children

Confirm council's protocols for working with young people or children if under the age of 18. Use a guide such as that developed by the [Australia Council for the Arts](#) to ensure that any engagement follows appropriate guidelines.

Engage with children in their familiar and safe spaces, with their trusted adults present. The aim is to ensure you garner responses from the breadth of your children's community, considering social demographics, cultural and gender mix, mixed abilities, educationally engaged and disengaged. This way you will develop an audit that is truly reflective of the children in your community. By creating this broad opportunity, you will be surprised by the responses and ideas children bring!

It is highly recommended that your council engages an experienced, child-focused, creative professional or organisation to lead these consultative and engagement processes with children, with the experience to create safe, fun, creative atmospheres and environments fostering children's trust, curiosity and honesty.

Children's consultation is NOT about asking children to behave as adults – expecting them to sit around a table and respond to information. This may result in getting the responses you want or expect but will not give you what you might need.

Consider adapting the resource provided in the [Kids Co-designing Healthy Places](#) toolkit to create a co-design workshop.

Design actions

Work with the children and working group to determine the next steps. This might involve promoting existing programs or noting the feedback from children on new programs which might be developed.



Deliver

Publish a creative, child-friendly report to promote the findings and highlight creative programs

Prepare a public version of the summary report based on the audit findings, highlights report, children's preferences and ideas.

Promote existing creative policies and strategies targeting children, and a contact point should people like more information, and any actions to be taken next.

Produce a visual, child-friendly report and circulate it among the children who have participated. Effective child engagement treats children as equals and honours them with access to the knowledge they have been party to creating.



Review and embed

Review the activity

Use the report to guide, update or write internal policies, strategies, plans and processes to ensure children's priorities are included in creative planning, strategies and processes across council departments.





The step up

Work with children to develop a vision for a child-friendly creative community

To complete this action, councils should first complete the steps outlined in 'The quick win: Audit and promote creative programs for children', with a particular focus on the Assess and Design steps. Once you have identified creative and non-creative child-focused policies, programs, organisations and artists in your community, this action requires councils to find out what children might want in their community and what they can bring through their creative participation.

In this action, councils will plan and deliver a creative process program in which children are invited to contribute to developing a vision for a child-friendly, creative community, including creatively sharing their ideas for new programs or projects in your community (based on the gaps identified in the Quick Win).

With children's input, develop a vision and ideas for a child-friendly, creative community. You can take inspiration from how others have done this. There are a range of programs and organisations that run creative projects that support children to develop and pitch their ideas. Some outline actual programs while others explain ways in which to engage children effectively. These include:

- [Art Attack](#) – film projects
- [100 Story Building](#) – student-led writing programs
- [Rebel Stepz](#) – art and dance classes for kids of all ages
- [Finglesin](#) – visual arts projects for kids, from comic art to sculptural woodwork
- [Kids Thrive](#) – community arts and cultural development projects



How-to guide to:

Work with children to develop a vision for a child-friendly creative community

Involving people

It is recommended that councils undertaking this action continue to build on the working group, project champion and governance structures established through the delivery of 'The quick win: Audit and promote creative programs for children'.

Depending on available resources, it is recommended that councils engage services from practitioners in child-led creative processes or from local creative facilitators, community development artists, child-focused arts organisations or creative teachers.





Plan

Plan the creative process to create the vision

Prepare a project plan outlining:

- the goals of the project and actions to be completed
- timelines and milestones for completing the work
- processes for working with the creative facilitators
- council's protocols for working with children
- resources required to deliver the creative vision design process
- resources available to deliver creative programs and ideas to achieve the vision.

Prepare a project brief to engage services from creative facilitators who can lead the design process with children in line with the goals of the project.

Prepare a communication strategy

Include the following:

- questions that will help develop a vision, e.g. 'What would you like in our child-friendly, creative community?'
- an outline of council networks you can use, e.g. schools, libraries, childcare centres
- strategies required to engage with children of different ages, locations and interest groups.



Design

Work with the creative facilitators to develop a fun, engaging advisory process that honours children's experience, wisdom and creativity. This might take the form of a creative program advisory/working group comprising children, artists and parents – or another creative idea or process might emerge.



Deliver

Run the creative vision process

Implement the creative program, inviting children to participate in an advisory capacity or provide submissions, noting protocols in the Quick Win. Ensure you give children a range of ways they can engage and submit ideas if this is not able to be done face-to-face. For example, you can ask their teachers and carers to run a simple drawing or writing project with students to elicit ideas via drawings, stories and poems.

Deliver your program or project. Make your creative, child-friendly vision and plan public.



Deliver cont.

Establish a pitch process for program ideas

Once you have determined the creative vision, consider how children might submit their ideas for programs and activities that achieve the vision.

Based on the children's vision, submissions and project plan, deliver a public outcome or component of the children's creative visions and ideas for a child-friendly, creative community. This might, for example, feature:

- a publication of children's creative responses
- videos featuring children's responses
- drawings
- songs
- games.

Invite members of the community, council and community leaders to the public outcome or event. Invite discussion of the children's creative vision and how creative strategies can be supported and amplified across other areas of community life.

Review and embed

Evaluate your program

Create a children's evaluation tool. With support from your creative expert and children who have participated in your project, develop some creative tools for children to share what they thought about their participation and outcomes.

[Regional Arts Victoria's Arts & Education program](#), for example, asks children to rate performances out of 5 by colouring in a number of stars, and allows them to draw their favourite part of the performance.

Kids Thrive uses simple questions including coloured bubbles and comparative drawing sheets: 'Before this project I saw my community like this.' 'After this project I see my community like this.'

Create a public version of the evaluation report. This should clearly demonstrate how the creative ideas from children have been incorporated in existing, or led to new, programs for children.

Identify next steps and embed in council practice

Identify opportunities to embed the vision through council work, e.g. by updating existing programs or using the ideas from children for new programs or projects which might be developed.

Include children's creative ideas in council's broader child-focused programs. Creativity is an excellent way to engage children in informing your other children's services.





The ambitious one

Appoint children to supported decision-making roles

The Quick Win and Step Up actions under this impact stream involve decision-making around budgets and program design that ultimately rests with adults alone.

In this ambitious approach, councils will relinquish some of this control in a supported environment by appointing children to roles as decision-makers, such as through funding or programming panel appointments within council's existing or new creative programs.

The collaborative, creative and engaging nature of creative programs provide a strong opportunity for councils to place trust in and empower children as active citizens who can make decisions with and for their peers.



How-to guide to:

Appoint children to supported decision-making roles about creative programs

Involving people

It is recommended that councils undertaking this action refer to the steps to build a working group, project champion and governance structures established through the delivery of 'The quick win: Audit and promote creative programs for children'.

Council teams to involve in this action include arts and culture, children and family services, and community development. Other teams who may be well placed to embed creative programs in children's activities include: economic development, tourism, libraries, parks, and sport and recreation.

This action requires the inclusion of children. It is recommended that councils are familiar with the steps and resources outlined in the foundation module *Leading the Way: Engaging young voices for change* to build council's capacity in empowering and amplifying children's contributions.



Plan

Prepare a project plan outlining the rationale, goals, key timelines and success measures for this project. If available, refer to any strategic or policy commitments already have in place, e.g. commitments to children's participation and child-friendly city statements. Seek in-principle support from relevant council leaders for the rationale and goals of the work.



Assess

Identify opportunities to increase children’s decision-making roles about creative programs

Identify council programs that directly target children. This could be done by reviewing and completing the relevant steps outlined in the Quick Win and Step Up.

Review the decision-making methods applied within these programs. Determine what opportunities exist within decision-making processes – for example, are programming or funding panels formed to review programs or decide outcomes?

Design

Research approaches that are used to engage children in decision-making processes. Some examples include:

- [ArtPlay](#) in the City of Melbourne invites children to participate as assessment panel members
- [100 Story Building](#) have children as part of their editorial panel
- [Kids Thrive](#) uses evidence-based approaches to engage children in decision-making.

Draw on the skills and experiences of creative expert partners to ensure the model you develop is conducive to children’s participation and is not simply expecting children to slip into a (boring) adult model.

Hot Tip!

Ensure children consent to participate in panels or other decision-making processes as equals alongside other key community members¹⁴. It is most empowering for children to engage as equals with key adults in the community, rather than being relegated to a separate process. Ensure the adults participate in the child-friendly approach – rather than vice versa.

Update your project plan with your recommended approach and highlight how this approach will contribute toward the goals of the project. Get endorsement from relevant council and department leaders.

14. [Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People: Consent](#)



Deliver

Pilot and test

Some examples of how this could be done:

- run the decision-making process you identified for a targeted grants program
- ask children to review an element of the program for a community festival
- have young people curate programs/workshops for your council's performing arts centre or gallery.

Review the pilot with the children and others in your working group. Evaluate what worked and what didn't.

Develop a policy to support the approach

Develop a children's decision-making policy to support the implementation of these roles over the long term. Use information from the pilot activity to define when, how and which programs might draw upon children as decision-makers. Adopt the policy in line with council's processes.

Update relevant program guidelines and celebrate the work of children who have contributed to the process through public celebrations. For example, invite children to be formally recognised for their work through council meetings or plan a community BBQ to share and celebrate the children's work.

Review and embed

Review the approach annually through evaluations to allow for continual improvement to the program.

