



Arts Matter

Evaluation Report

November 2025

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Executive summary

Background and approach

Auckland Council plays a key role in shaping the arts and culture landscape of Tāmaki Makaurau through investments in programmes and infrastructure to support the sector. Amid growing scrutiny over public spending and critiques of the economic return and cultural value of such investments, the case for sustaining investment in arts and culture has become a pressing policy consideration.

Auckland Council commissioned Dovetail Consulting to carry out a Value for Investment evaluation of Auckland Council's investment in arts and culture. The purpose of this evaluation is to capture and explore the impact of Auckland Council arts and culture investments and the value they offer for Auckland communities. The evaluation draws on a series of six case studies that profile the value of arts investment by Auckland Council across Tāmaki Makaurau.

The case studies

The following case studies were developed to illustrate the different ways Auckland Council's investment in arts and culture is experienced across the city. Each example highlights a distinct type of investment and demonstrates how these contribute to outcomes such as community cohesion, cultural expression, sector capability, and local economic vitality. The case studies cover the following key investment areas:

- **Pride Fest Out West:** A festival that celebrates Rainbow communities in West Auckland, supported through Auckland Council's investment in programming.
- **Te Manu Ka Rewa:** A public artwork created by an emerging mana whenua artist Jacy Flavel, demonstrating Auckland Council's role in transforming public spaces through public art, uplifting Māori identity and culture, and embedding iwi narratives in the built environment.
- **Stand Up Stand Out:** A free, region-wide secondary school performance competition, exemplifying investment in rangatahi and talent development that nurtures emerging artists and creative pathways.
- **Basement Theatre:** An independent theatre supported by Auckland Council venue subsidies and strategic grant funding, representing investment in spaces that sustain independent arts and provide pathways for emerging talent.
- **Te Oro:** A purpose-built rangatahi (youth) and community arts facility in Glen Innes, reflecting investment in infrastructure that provides access to creative programming, creative residencies, and community events.
- **Dragon Boat Festival:** A celebration of Chinese tradition and an investment in culture, heritage and identity that fosters intercultural connection and belonging.

In what ways does investment in arts deliver value for Tāmaki Makaurau?

Auckland Council's investment in arts and culture takes many forms and moves beyond funding to include staff resourcing, venue provision and subsidisation and capacity building. These investments are made into festivals and creative programming, rangatahi and talent development, infrastructure and spaces, public art, and initiatives that celebrate cultural

heritage and identity. These investments, ranging from full funding through to small subsidising and grant contributions, generate wide-ranging benefits. They bring communities together in safe and inclusive ways, enable cross-cultural connections, create platforms for cultural storytelling, and nurture emerging talent through pathways into sustainable arts careers. Infrastructure and public art build enduring taonga and vibrant communities, while festivals and cultural programmes strengthen cohesion, support local economies, and make creativity accessible to all.

To what extent does Auckland Council's arts investment demonstrate value?

Through the design process, we established a set of criteria and standards, detailed in rubric tables (Appendix 1: Evaluation rubric). A rubric outlines levels of performance for the programmes that were just good enough or excellent. We found that performance against criteria is generally strong with all meeting expectations, and most either on a pathway to excellence or reaching excellence.

Lessons for future investment

This evaluation has highlighted that the success of Auckland Council's arts and culture investment relies on more than funding. Integrated and tailored support which can include sector expertise, subsidised venues, and capacity-building were all investments that were important in achieving outcomes. The council's role in brokering relationships helped connect initiatives with wider networks. Council funding often acted as a foundation that enabled other funders to contribute, making co-investment a key factor in ensuring long term sustainability. Cultural responsiveness was another key enabler, with co-design approaches and the uplifting of ngā toi Māori being central to outcomes.

There are also several opportunities to strengthen future investments, including ensuring that operational funding keeps pace with programme growth, providing additional capacity-building support for fledging initiatives, and embedding culturally responsive contract and accountability mechanisms. Guidance on Te Tiriti-centred practice, continuity of Council staff expertise, and developing simple outcome monitoring tools could also strengthen delivery.

Through the lens of case studies, Auckland Council's arts investments contribute to key strategies and frameworks, including Toi Whītiki (arts strategy), Auckland Plan 2050, Ngā Hapori Momoho/Thriving Communities Strategy, and Tāmaki Ora 2025-27.

Conclusion

Auckland Council's investment in arts and culture generates cultural and social value for communities across Tāmaki Makaurau, with modest economic benefits also captured through this evaluation. Through an exploration of six case studies this evaluation has explored how council's investment in arts and culture activities can foster increased community engagement and participation, uplift diverse communities, strengthen cohesion and build pathways for artists to sustain careers in the creative industries.

Investment sites show that value is not achieved through operational funding alone, but through a mix of resources, relationships and culturally responsive approaches. Looking to the future, the opportunities to generate further value from investment hinges on a number of areas for improvement that have been outlined in this report.

Introduction

About this report

Arts and culture in Tāmaki Makaurau

Recent studies highlight several benefits of the arts and culture sector for the Auckland community, such as enhancing community well-being, supporting the local economy, and fostering a sense of identity and belonging for residents.¹ Research also highlights that Aucklanders highly value the arts and support its investment. For instance, 68% of Aucklanders surveyed believe that arts facilities are important for creating a vibrant place to live, 66% feel that it is important for their wellbeing, and participation in the arts is higher than in previous years.²

Auckland Council plays a key role in shaping the arts and culture landscape of Tāmaki Makaurau through investments in programmes and infrastructure to support the sector. Amid growing scrutiny over public spending and critiques of the economic return and cultural value of such investments, the case for sustaining investment in arts and culture has become a pressing policy consideration. It is timely to explore the impact and value of these investments for communities, residents and the region as a whole to help inform future decision making. This includes understanding how investments advance Auckland Council's broader strategic objectives, strengthen the arts and culture sector, and deliver wide-reaching benefits for those who live, work, or spend time in Tāmaki Makaurau.

This evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to capture and explore the impact of Auckland Council arts and culture investments and the value they offer for Auckland communities. The evaluation draws on a series of six case studies that profile the value of arts investment by Auckland Council in Tāmaki Makaurau.

The evaluation explores the extent to which Toi Whītiki (Auckland's Arts and Culture Strategic Action Plan) and other council strategies are evident through each investment, including participation by Māori and reflection of Māori aspirations for the region. It also identifies insights to support ongoing development of each project or programme, and the broader arts and culture sector.

Approach

Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs)

The Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) guide the evaluation and provide a structure for reporting. Answering the KEQs enables the Theory of Change and Value Proposition to be tested, alongside identifying potential improvements. The following KEQs guided this evaluation:

1. In what ways does investment in arts deliver value for Tāmaki Makaurau, and for whom?

¹ Creative NZ. (n.d.). [Arts and culture: part of your community's future](#) *Ngā Taonga Toi: ngā taonga pāpori āke āke*.

² Verian. (2023.) [Aucklanders and the Arts](#)

2. To what extent does Auckland Council's arts investment demonstrate value (through the lens of case studies)?
3. What have we learned for future arts investment so that it can maintain and deliver increased value?

Design Process

The evaluation was underpinned by a robust design process with arts and culture leads and policy teams from Auckland Council. In this process, we collectively:

- Agreed overarching key evaluation questions (KEQs).
- Developed a theory of change and a value proposition for how arts and culture investment creates outcomes and value for the people of Tāmaki Makaurau.
- Established criteria for assessing the extent to which the intended value is being realised across the case studies.
- Agreed on six case studies representing a range of Auckland Council investments, selected to reflect cultural diversity, geographic spread, artistic setting (e.g. music, theatre and public art installation), scale of operations, number of funding partnerships and diversity of the populations for which the programmes are intended to generate value. The timeframe of the data collection phase also shaped which programmes were suitable for inclusion, limiting the number of calendar events aligned to take part.

Value for Investment

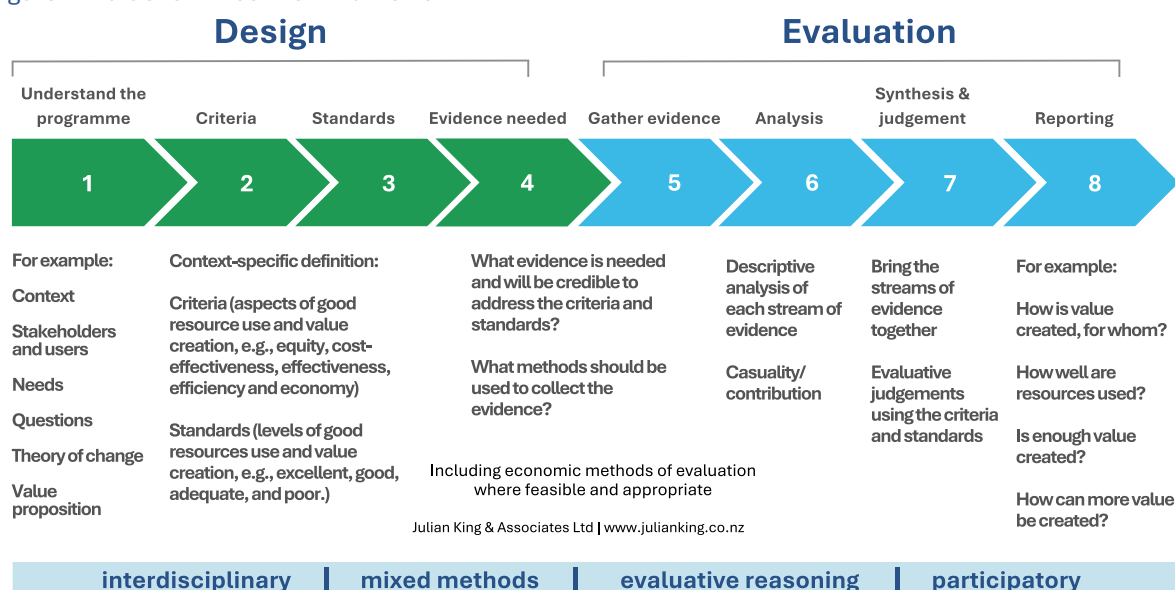
Value for Investment (Vfi) is an evaluation system, designed to bring clarity to answering evaluative questions about how effectively resources are used, whether enough value is created, and how more value could be created from the resources invested. The Vfi system is underpinned by four principles:

- **Inter-disciplinary:** (combining theory and practice from evaluation and economics)
- **Mixed methods:** (combining quantitative and qualitative evidence)
- **Evaluative reasoning:** (using explicit criteria and standards to make sense of the evidence)
- **Participatory:** (giving stakeholders a voice in evaluation co-design and sense-making).

There are eight steps in the Vfi framework: four design steps and four evaluation steps. These steps centre on building a shared understanding of the programme, establishing clear criteria and standards, and identifying evidence needed, followed by evidence gathering, analysis, synthesis, and reporting. This framework considers the *value* generated by the programme, including but not limited to the delivery of intended outputs and outcomes. These steps:

- Define how the programme creates value, and for whom
- Define what good value would look like for the investment in the programmes
- Organise evidence of performance and value
- Interpret the evidence on an agreed basis, and
- Present a clear and robust performance story.

Figure 1: Value for Investment framework



Theory of change and value proposition

A **theory of change** was co-designed for this evaluation. A theory of change describes how we think a programme or policy will bring about change. It shows how resources and inputs such as funding, staff and knowledge support the activities undertaken. A theory of change also shows how these activities create outcomes that in turn, may support wider impacts for participants, communities and society.

A **value proposition** was simultaneously developed for this evaluation. A value proposition describes what *value* we think the programme will generate. Value is about what matters to people in the programme, and therefore is informed by a range of perspectives. It details the ways an intervention, programme or service is intended to use resources efficiently and effectively and create sufficient value to justify the resources used across the spectrum of programme design, resourcing, implementation and outcomes.^{3,4}

In this evaluation, the three key areas of the value proposition are:

1. Stewardship of resources to enable arts and culture in Auckland
2. Building artistic, social and cultural capital
3. Generating social and economic value.

The Theory of Change and Value Proposition for the case studies are detailed in Figure 2 on the following page. The evaluation process with case studies has enabled testing of both the Theory of Change and Value Proposition, and each case study reflects directly on the delivery against these two foundations of the evaluation.

³ King, J. (2021). Expanding theory-based evaluation: incorporating value creation in a theory of change. *Evaluation and Program Planning*.

⁴ More information on theories of value creation can also be found at <https://www.julianking.co.nz/vfi/tovc/>

Figure 2: Theory of change and value proposition

Theory of Change and Value Proposition | Value of Arts and Culture

Theory of Change

Impact	Belonging and participation All Aucklanders will be part of and contribute to society, access opportunities, and have the chance to develop to their full potential.		Opportunity and prosperity Auckland is prosperous with many opportunities and delivers a better standard of living for everyone.		Māori identity and wellbeing A thriving Māori identity is Auckland's point of difference in the world - it advances prosperity for Māori and benefits all Aucklanders.		Environment and cultural heritage Aucklanders preserve, protect and care for the natural environment as our shared cultural heritage for its intrinsic value, and for the benefit of present and future generations.			
Impacts for Auckland										
Long term outcomes	Arts and culture are built-in to Auckland's placemaking		Auckland values and invests in arts and culture		Auckland has a robust and flourishing creative economy		Auckland celebrates a unique cultural identity		All Aucklanders can access and participate in arts and culture	
Impacts for the creative sector										
Medium-term outcomes	A&C are embedded as a core consideration in council decision-making processes, with consistent investment		The diversity of Auckland is celebrated and seen as integral to the city's cultural identity		Communities take ownership of cultural initiatives that are diverse and reflect shared values		Auckland is seen as a vibrant cultural hub, attracting visitors and contributing to the economy		Public and private organisations use AC generated evidence for decision-making	
We will know we're achieving the right things when...										
Early outcomes	Decision makers see the value in and prioritise arts and culture in planning and strategy		A&C activities and planning reflect the diversity of Auckland, and local identities and stories are represented		Communities actively participate in shaping the A&C sector, with a range of events and initiatives engaging diverse audiences		A&C offerings are high-quality, highly visible, and reflect the interests and needs of communities		Auckland Council funding and activity decisions are guided by robust evidence	
We will know the activities are running well when...										
Activities	Policy, strategy, and framework development		Strategic investment and funding		Sector development and capacity building		Community engagement and consultation		Event and programme delivery	
The things we do with our resources and inputs...										
Resources & Inputs	Strategy and mandate, strategic guidance and elected member direction		Internal resources including time and infrastructure		Knowledge and expertise including advice and research		Economic resourcing including funding and infrastructure		Communication and marketing resource	
The things we need to carry out our mahi										

Value proposition

Generating social and economic value

- Te Ao Māori embedded in Tāmaki Makaurau and contributes to Māori identity and wellbeing
- Fostering economic growth
- Cohesive communities
- Healthy, well, engaged and informed citizens
- Sense of place, identity and vitality

Building artistic, social and cultural capital

- Mana enhancing, authentic and equitable relationships across communities and iwi in Tāmaki Makaurau
- Catalysing creative activity
- Ngā toi Māori is thriving
- Artistic development, storytelling, self-expression and leadership are fostered in the arts
- Communities are enabled to participate and engage in the arts
- Taonga for future generations

Stewardship of resources to enable arts & culture in Auckland

- Transparent and strategic investment that is aligned with priorities, needs and evidence
- Relational integrity and working in partnership
- Te Ao Maori and Te Tiriti honoured and prioritised
- Protection of mātauranga

Data collection

A tailored data collection process was undertaken across the six case studies, comprising a mix of qualitative interviews, surveys, observations and documentation analyses. Data collection approaches were designed in partnership with key case study personnel and were undertaken over April to July 2025.

Data collection for each case study to date is detailed in Table 1 below.⁵

Table 1: Case study data collection

Case study	Data collected
<i>Te Manu Ka Rewa</i>	Interviews: Artist Jadya Flavell, Auckland Council Arts & Culture Project Manager - Public Art, Artist's supporter/administrator, Manurewa Library Staff, Ngaati Te Ata Waiohau artist mentor. Review of documentation: Online materials.
Basement Theatre	Interviews: Staff (n=4), artists and producers (n=2), strategic partners (n=2). Focus groups: Basement Mates members (n=5). Survey: Basement Theatre artists (n=123), administered by Dovetail Consulting on a pro bono basis since May 2022 and distributed after a production period as a monitoring tool. Review of documentation: Review of funder reporting documentation from 2023 to the present. Included a review of survey of Basement Theatre audiences (n=110), distributed via Basement Theatre's 2024 ticket holder email database and promoted through a QR code displayed in the theatre's bar area.
Pride Fest Out West	Interviews: Auckland Council programme lead, community partners (n=6), staff from three participating Proud Centres and one member of Auckland Pride Festival. Review of documentation: Online materials and metrics provided by Auckland Pride Festival.
Dragon Boat Festival	Interviews: Corban Estate Director, West Auckland Chinese Association Leads, stallholder and performers (n=5). Observation: Attendance, observation and brief interviews at the 2025 event. Review of documentation: Including reporting/expenditure data.
Stand Up Stand Out	Interviews: Programme and Production Lead (n=2), teachers (n=2), judges (n=2), alumni (n=5). Review of documentation: From 2018 to the present.
Te Oro	Interviews: Place Manager and Programmer (at the time of interview), artist in residence Villa Junior Lemanu, Director of Pacific Dance New Zealand, Glen Innes Business Association representative, Rise Group representative and Ngāti Pāoa representative. Review of documentation: Programme data and documentation.

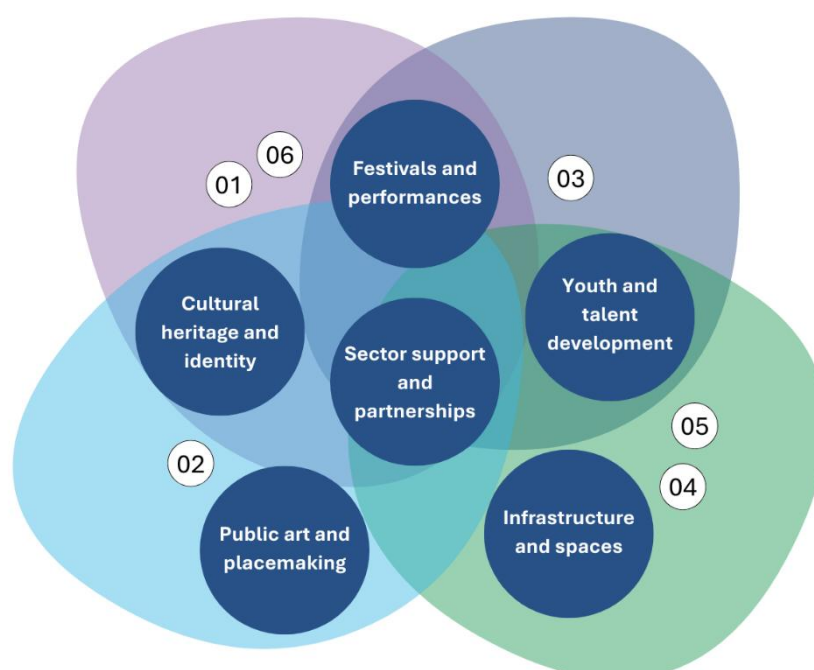
⁵ Due to a constrained data collection timeframe, some methods such as participant feedback surveys yielded small response rates and were not included as formal data points in this evaluation. However, these methods can be used as ongoing monitoring tools to support future data collection in cases where community or participant feedback mechanisms are not in place.

Section 1: The Case Studies

The following case studies have been developed to illustrate the different ways Auckland Council's investment in arts and culture is experienced across the city. Each example highlights a distinct type of investment and demonstrates how these contribute to outcomes such as community cohesion, cultural expression, sector capability, and local economic vitality. The case studies cover the following key investment areas:

01. **Pride Fest Out West:** A festival that celebrates Rainbow communities in West Auckland, supported through Auckland Council's investment in festivals for Rainbow community creative practice.
02. **Te Manu Ka Rewa:** A public artwork created by an emerging mana whenua artist, demonstrating Auckland Council's role in placemaking and embedding iwi narratives in the built environment.
03. **Stand Up Stand Out:** A free, region-wide secondary school performance competition, exemplifying investment in rangatahi and talent development that nurtures emerging artists and creative pathways.
04. **Basement Theatre:** An independent theatre supported by Auckland Council venue subsidies, representing investment in spaces that sustain independent arts and provide pathways for emerging talent.
05. **Te Oro:** A purpose-built rangatahi and community arts facility in Glen Innes, reflecting investment in infrastructure that provides access to creative programming, residencies, and community events.
06. **Dragon Boat Festival:** A celebration of Chinese tradition and an investment in culture, heritage and identity that fosters intercultural connection and belonging.

The map below illustrates the diversity of the selected case study sites and the types of arts programming that have received investment.



Case Study 1: Pride Fest Out West

01 About

Pride Fest Out West is a community-led initiative that offers a range of events to West Auckland communities during Pride Month each February. The festival has been running since 2021 and takes place across 20 community venues, including libraries, hubs and community centres across the West Auckland area.

02 Working in partnership to deliver value through investment

Financial resources, Proud Centre library and community centres hub infrastructure and the programming knowledge and expertise of Auckland Council staff are leveraged to deliver impact across West Auckland. The relationship between Auckland Council and Auckland Pride Festival is a highlight of this collaboration, demonstrating true partnership in delivering Rainbow programming to communities.

03 Building artistic, social and cultural capital

Pride Fest Out West looks to build artistic, social and cultural capital within West Auckland communities by creating safe spaces where all communities are welcome to engage in the arts. The programme amplifies Rainbow artists and small businesses and brings communities together to create social connection as a result of shared experiences.

04 Delivering value for the people of Tāmaki Makaurau

Pride Fest Out West fosters local economic growth by offering opportunities for community partners to share their small businesses and create connection across the community. The significant value delivered by the festival is its contribution to supporting residents to be informed and engaged citizens in their communities. By embedding Rainbow visibility in everyday spaces, building networks of support, and affirming diverse communities, Pride Fest Out West strengthens the social fabric of West Auckland.

01

About Pride Fest Out West

Pride Fest Out West is a community-led initiative that offers a range of events to West Auckland during Pride Month each February. The festival has been running since 2021 and offers free activities aimed at a range of ages and audiences, including children's book readings, markets, drag performances, games and fitness classes, and information sessions. In 2025, there were a total of 61 events run over the month.

Pride Fest Out West events take place across 20 Proud Centres - community venues such as libraries, community centres, and hubs in West Auckland. Auckland Council teams from the three main hubs, where the three largest libraries are located, coordinate the programme and support Proud Centres to facilitate and host events across West Auckland. Expressions of interest for events aligning with the festival's values are open to the community from September to November.

Once community members have had an event accepted for the festival, they become a community partner and work with Proud Centre staff to plan and programme their own event.

The festival hosts large, day-long events such as Geek out for Pride and market days which bring together a range of local artists and community members. There are also smaller events, such as yoga classes and book readings run at multiple locations, allowing the events to be experienced by whānau in different parts of West Auckland.

Pride Fest Out West was built upon the concept of Proud Centres, which are community spaces across Auckland that are activated during the Auckland Pride Festival to host inclusive, LGBTQIA+ focused events, but are also safe, inclusive spaces where all communities are welcome year-round. Pride Fest Out West was developed in response to structural and funding changes within Auckland Council to reignite the kaupapa in West Auckland.

Proud Centres started with a bang, it was really abundant and full, and there was all this free programming across the city. Then it dwindled and Pride Fest Out West was a real bastion of keeping the kaupapa alive. – Auckland Pride Festival

The festival brings Pride to the suburbs by hosting events in familiar neighbourhood venues like libraries and community centres. This reduces barriers like distance and travel cost, and creates inclusivity by offering small, close and familiar settings to engage with Pride events. Events are also free, and venues have free parking, which removes cost as a barrier to participation. The scheduling is flexible, with events offered at different times to suit people with various commitments. By activating local spaces and working closely with the community, the festival ensures a broad mix of people can take part and feel included.

Pride used to be very central Auckland-based, and a lot of the families didn't feel like they had the ability to celebrate. – Community partner



Working in partnership to deliver value through investment

Pride Fest Out West is an example of responsible and collaborative stewardship of resources, bringing together the knowledge, skills and resources of various groups across the West Auckland community to deliver the festival each year. Pride Fest Out West is community-led, with community partners bringing events together in ways that they know will work for their specific communities. The financial resources, Proud Centre infrastructure and programming knowledge and expertise of Auckland Council staff are leveraged to deliver impact across West Auckland. The authentic partnership between Auckland Council and Auckland Pride Festival is a highlight of this collaborative approach.

A collaborative approach with community partners

Pride Fest Out West is, first and foremost, a community-led festival. Proud Centre staff highlighted the importance of ensuring that community partners are enabled to deliver initiatives that they want to see in their own communities. The expression of interest process is an intentional way of bringing together local creatives and small business owners to contribute ideas for the festival and potentially become community partners in delivering events.

Community partners who worked with Proud Centres to plan and run events in the festival this year described this as an easy, collaborative process, removing a number of barriers to running

events such as cost and coordination while allowing them to control the content and delivery of the events. All community partners in this evaluation shared positive experiences working with Proud Centre staff across Auckland and many described a values connection with the team that was an important aspect of this relationship.

They were really lovely, I loved it. It was my first event ever, and honestly, the team made it so easy. There was a lot of support for all the questions that I had, they answered quickly and with a lot of respect. – Community partner

Leveraging Auckland Council resources for greatest impact

The Pride Fest Out West structure strategically leverages the programming resources of the three main West Auckland Hubs (New Lynn Community Centre, Te Atatū Peninsula Community Centre and Te Manawa in Westgate) to deliver value across West Auckland during the month of Pride. The festival uses a connected marketing approach that brings all Proud Centres under the bespoke Pride Fest Out West banner. The event has its own look and feel that ties into the overall Auckland Pride Festival celebrations while maintaining a unique West Auckland identity. Participants in this evaluation were often surprised by the impressive event turnout, and this was in part due to the marketing power of the central hubs boosting awareness and interest in events across smaller centres in West Auckland.

The shared marketing meant that a whole lot of people got amplified. They got a whole new audience. – Proud Centre staff

Proud Centres are also able to leverage Auckland Council infrastructure across the area to host events. The spaces were described by evaluation participants as “beautiful”, “welcoming” spaces that bring together different generations and people from across the community. Leveraging these locations means events can be run efficiently and at no cost to community participants.

It's a beautiful space. I think everyone is welcome regardless of if they're queer or not. – Community partner

Building connections and capability across Proud Centres

Pride Fest Out West was praised for building connections across the Proud Centres in West Auckland and building the capability and capacity of smaller Proud Centres to run events for their local communities. There was practical value in collaborating. For example, central hubs were able to negotiate bulk rates with community partners, enabling them to run events that they wouldn't have been able to with their own programming budgets. Proud Centres were also able to collaborate on programming to ensure events were offered in multiple locations, creating an accessible and cohesive experience for communities.

It was a really collaborative approach that was kind of headed by the three main hubs with the organisation and planning and bringing us all together. We could bounce ideas off each other. That was really beneficial. – Proud Centre staff

This approach also leveraged the programming knowledge and expertise of teams within the hubs to upskill smaller Proud Centres to run their own events, for Pride Fest and beyond.

Smaller Proud Centres appreciated having access to this knowledge and expertise and forming connections with staff across the area that they may never have connected with otherwise.

The event also created opportunities to learn from challenges and create resources that would support Auckland Council staff networks more broadly. As one Proud Centre team member explained, pushback from a small portion of the public around drag events in previous years had prompted the team to create resources and tools to help staff feel more confident managing these conversations.

We've built the pride and beyond toolkit, which are resources that anyone within Council can access when running Pride (or similar) events. – Proud Centre staff

Working with Auckland Pride Festival to deliver Rainbow programming

Pride Fest Out West was described as an example of genuine partnership and collaboration with the communities being uplifted and supported. The mahi is carried out in partnership with Auckland Pride Festival every year, who provide support to Proud Centre staff to create spaces authentically and meaningfully for Rainbow communities. Initially, Pride Festival undertook a process of engaging face to face with community venues across West Auckland to understand staff levels of comfort, competency and relationality with Rainbow programming for Rainbow communities. Through this process, they encouraged teams to connect with each other and understand who they could lean on for support throughout the festival planning and delivery process.

There were less experienced Rainbow programmers and more experienced Rainbow programmers and then Pride and the arts and culture team at Council in that dialogue, we are an interconnected network. – Auckland Pride Festival

This was seen as a valuable process for ensuring Pride Fest Out West is carried out safely and in service of Rainbow communities. This process also supports Proud Centres to operate this way year-round. Through creative programming such as Pride Fest Out West, the West Auckland Proud Centres are building up the capability and capacity of these organisations so they can hold Rainbow communities safely in future. The relationship between the Auckland Council Proud Centre staff and Auckland Pride Festival staff was described as “symbiotic, authentic and genuine” by Auckland Pride Festival. The organisation reflected on the coordinated disruption of a Pride Fest Out West storybook reading at Te Atatū Peninsula this year, describing the experience of standing side by side with Auckland Council team members in service of their Rainbow communities:

We stood side by side with venue staff at Te Atatū Peninsula Community Centre. We were physically assaulted alongside the staff, and this shared experience binds us together. Whilst it's not ideal to be bound by trauma, there's something really beautiful in the acts of solidarity that unify us. It demonstrates how through artistic programming Council and Pride staff stand committed together in service to Rainbow communities. I cannot think of a more courageous act of partnership. – Auckland Pride Festival



03 Building artistic, social and cultural capital

Pride Fest Out West looks to build artistic, social and cultural capital within West Auckland communities by creating safe spaces where all communities are welcome to engage in the arts. The event amplifies Rainbow artists and small businesses and brings communities together to create social connection as a result of shared experiences.

Creating safe spaces for communities to participate and engage in the arts

Representation and visibility are at the core of Pride Fest Out West programming, with events, facilitators and performances that are selected to reflect the diversity of Rainbow and wider communities. Community partners commented that events and festivals like Pride Fest Out West play an important role in maintaining visibility of and celebrating Rainbow communities. A number of participants reflected on how much public attitudes have changed since they themselves were growing up and saw initiatives like Pride Fest Out West as contributing to these attitudinal changes within societies over time.

I think now the kids are like, it's okay to be queer, it's okay to be a drag queen, you can be trans. All that accessibility now, I never had that. - Community Partner

Responsive and inclusive content and programming is an important aspect of the festival. Expressions of interest are assessed against the core values of the programme to ensure values alignment and avoiding events that could look like they've "had a rainbow slapped on them." Events range from fun and engaging sessions run by members of Rainbow communities or Rainbow organisations through to informative sessions to provide information and advice to those in the community.

We had someone with her mum talking about her transition. There were four or five whānau there and these were parents that just wanted to talk to someone and who had been through that journey. Being a connector means they've now got their own safe community. – Proud Centre staff

Pride Fest Out West was seen as a celebration of the increased access that young people have to Rainbow role models and artforms, as well as a recognition of the value of the work that older members of Rainbow communities have achieved. Participants described how meaningful it was to be able to attend an event with the knowledge that nobody would judge them or treat them as different to others in the space. Proud Centre staff report that effects of this are felt well beyond the event itself:

The older community are quite quiet, but we get emails saying, I'm a trans woman and I love knowing that I can come here and be safe. – Proud Centre staff

I meet so many rangatahi who have been unsure about being their authentic selves and events like this give them the confidence to know they will be accepted. – Community partner

Catalysing creative activity and amplifying local creatives

Pride Fest Out West provides opportunities to platform existing creatives, as well as first-time, emerging talent in the community. Some of the community partners in this evaluation have

been participating in Pride Fest Out West from its very first year, using the opportunity to showcase their creative talents while aligning their work with values systems they believe in. One community partner explained that they had a business idea that they wanted to pilot, and Pride Fest Out West offered them the opportunity to run a series of events at Proud Centres. The business has now launched online, and the partnership continues with ongoing programming outside of the festival.

Having a chance to test the business out before jumping straight in. I still have a lot of the people that originally came in February coming to each session. It kick-started what I'm passionate about. – Community partner

The variety of events and locations throughout Pride Fest Out West created a platform for diverse local artists and creatives from Rainbow communities to share their talents and engage with their communities. The events also make spaces for alternative artforms or artistic expression. The Zine fest and markets run as part of the month are opportunities for smaller crafters to showcase and share their talents with the wider community. Drag performances were another example, with one participant noting that although this artform is often not given the legitimacy it deserves, Pride Fest out West actively affirms its value by purposefully programming drag events.

Exposing communities to different artistic expression and amplifying Rainbow artists in the community was seen to have the potential to inspire future generations of artists. Having people speak power to their own narratives and sharing this with broader audiences was seen as an important way of catalysing future creativity across West Auckland.

Who knows... in 5-10 years' time what that pathway will lead our communities on. Poetry workshops, clay making workshops, author talks at libraries. – Auckland Pride Festival

Creating community cohesion through creative spaces

Pride Fest Out West looks to create spaces where communities can come together and connect in the moment, and community partners reported that they could see this happening at their events. Ensuring spaces are safe, inclusive and bringing together diverse communities creates opportunities that may not be possible in other spaces.

I've had mums who've come to me and said thank you I never really felt accepted when I went to other mums and bubs classes because I was the only lesbian or gay there. – Community partner

I know from being there and seeing people interact it's actually one of the best things for parents and tamariki to have a sense of community with other people from the local areas. – Community partner

Some evaluation participants reported witnessing connections in the community go beyond the event itself, such as parents forming groups. There were also examples of community partners making connections that turned into ongoing friendships.

Having a space where people are already accepted and accepting of different communities is a great way to create that sense of belonging. So, a bunch of people now have group chats with others in the area. – Community partner



Delivering value for the people of Tāmaki Makaurau

Pride Fest Out West has become an important social connector, drawing large audiences from across Auckland and beyond, boosting local businesses, and fostering collaboration among community partners. The festival provides inclusive, creative spaces where people can learn, share, and celebrate Rainbow communities in West Auckland.

Fostering economic growth, locally

The Pride Fest Out West events are popular and well-attended. Despite it being a local festival, some attendees had travelled long distances from other parts of Auckland and from as far as Hawke's Bay to take part. Many events sold out quickly due to high demand and community partners were surprised by the number of event attendees well-exceeding what they had anticipated.

We had someone who travelled six hours and a few people took flights to Auckland. As soon as it was over, I had people in my comments section asking "when's the next one? I'll fly from Australia". – Community partner

I've never been to a Pride event out West that hasn't had heaps of people. We went to the drag bingo this year and it was chocka and the other two were also sold out. – Community partner

This created opportunities for community partners to share their small businesses and connect across the community, contributing to the local economy. Community partners described making connections that led to future growth in their business and social media followings. There was a reciprocal relationship across businesses involved who described promoting the other events and businesses through their own mahi. Community partners also noted that free event space hire made the events particularly accessible.

I'm getting about 100 new followers a day and that's been consistent since February. – Community partner

Informed and engaged citizens in the community

Pride Fest Out West has created opportunities for the West Auckland community to engage with arts and culture, as well as learn about different communities and topics. Events included panel discussions and storytelling sessions that explored issues like identity, inclusion, allyship, and feeling comfortable in your own skin, helping people understand the lived experiences of Rainbow communities and encouraging tamariki and rangatahi to explore these themes.

I do a reading and talk to some of the themes in the book, which are about accepting difference and celebrating your own uniqueness and kindness and a little mental health. - Community partner

The festival also acts as a conversation starter in the Proud Centres both during and outside of the events. Proud Centre staff reported that the public would ask about Pride month and broader questions about Rainbow programming and the community. Creating a safe space to ask questions like this can be important for communities who have not had opportunities to engage like this in the past:

It might just be somebody saying at the front desk, I've never thought about that, what is Pride month? – Proud Centre staff

The Proud Centre event staff have made their stance on inclusion and creating safe spaces for Rainbow communities clear, and this stance sends a message to Rainbow staff and broader communities that they are seen and valued by Auckland Council. Following the planned disruptions in Te Atatū, the Proud Centres posted on Facebook inviting the community to karakia to reset the wairua of the space, and in less than 24 hours had a number of community members join to stand with them in solidarity, demonstrating broader community and civic engagement.

We had over 150 people turn up. Most aren't from the Rainbow community, but they wanted to show their support. It was powerful for people to say they were standing up for our whānau. – Proud Centre staff

Some of those who took part in this evaluation signalled that Pride Fest Out West achieves the outcomes it sets out to in terms of creating safe spaces, uplifting local talent and bringing people together. However, these participants also stressed that events like Pride Fest Out West go beyond this, contributing to systemic outcomes that support long-term community wellbeing, inclusion, and social change. By embedding Rainbow visibility in everyday spaces, building networks of support, and affirming diverse communities through creative expression, Pride Fest Out West strengthens the social fabric of West Auckland.

Pride Fest Out West clearly demonstrates the value of [Auckland] Council supported arts initiatives. It builds belonging, encourages expression, and brings people together in ways that are both creative and deeply human. It felt like we were part of something bigger, and that, I think, is the point of both creating and attending these events, and why it is so important to continue. – Community partner, survey feedback

The impact of Pride Fest Out West is beyond just making Auckland a liveable city. It's beyond beautifying Auckland through arts, culture and programming. It's systemic, it's relational, it's bound in the interweaving of community. – Auckland Pride Festival

Case Study 2: Te Manu Ka Rewa

01 About

Te Manu Ka Rewa is a semi-permanent public art sculpture located at Manurewa Library in South Auckland. It was created by emerging Ngaati Te Ata Waiohua mandated artist Jacy Flavel. *Te Manu Ka Rewa* took two years to come to fruition and was unveiled in December 2024 with a dawn ceremony and blessing from Ngaati Te Ata Waiohua.

02 Working in partnership to deliver value through investment

Te Manu Ka Rewa demonstrates a partnered approach to public arts investment, with Auckland Council providing financial, in-kind, and capacity-building support alongside the cultural leadership and creative contributions of Ngaati Te Ata Waiohua. Together, these investments highlight the depth of relationship-building and often unseen layers of support required to realise meaningful and enduring public artworks.

03 Building artistic, social and cultural capital

The commissioning process for *Te Manu Ka Rewa* shows how council investment can build artistic, social, and cultural capital by strengthening an emerging artist's practice, deepening iwi storytelling, and embedding whakapapa into the public realm. The artistic process itself developed capability for Jacy and his collaborators and also created a lasting expression of toi Māori that affirms mana whenua identity and presence in place.

04 Delivering value for the people of Tāmaki Makaurau

The new public artwork exemplifies a high-quality and highly visible arts and culture offering that genuinely reflects the needs and aspirations of the Manurewa community. As part of Ngā Kaupapa here Toi Tūmatanui, Auckland Council's Public Art Policy, the sculpture brings cultural specificity and depth to its surroundings, turning a public space into a site for storytelling, reflection, and intergenerational exchange.

01

About Te Manu Ka Rewa

Te Manu Ka Rewa is a semi-permanent public art sculpture located at Manurewa Library in Manurewa, South Auckland. The sculpture was created by emerging Ngaati Te Ata Waiohua mandated artist Jacy Flavel and took two years to come to fruition. The work was unveiled in December 2024 with a dawn ceremony and blessing from Ngaati Te Ata Waiohua and is currently open to the public.

Te Manu Ka Rewa was commissioned, and project managed by Auckland Council's Public Art team and spearheaded by a public art project manager. Investment has included commissioning, strategic planning, project management, iwi relationship-building, artist upskilling and capability building. Through partnering with Auckland Council, significant investment was also brought to the project by iwi Ngaati Te Ata Waiohua, who supported and guided their mandated artist Jacy Flavel throughout the creation of *Te Manu Ka Rewa*.

Te Manu Ka Rewa is inspired by the puuraakau of Tamapahore and his kite, from which Manurewa received its name. Flavell hand-carved the central figures using Takaanini kauri gifted to him by his late grandfather George Flavell, who mentored Jadyn through the process of creating the work until passing away before it finished. Each carved figure represents a tuupuna; Waiohua chief Huarangi is at the base of the pou, his first son Tamapahore is in the middle, and his second son Tamapahore is at the top.

The ancestors are encased by a Corten steel frame in the shape of a matuku (bittern bird) which lived on Waiohua paa sites Matukutuureia and Matukutuururu. The paa sites are represented on either side. A manuaute depicting Te Atua Uenuku (rainbow god) is located at the top of the artwork as if taking flight into the sky.

The face of the manuaute shows Tāwhirimātea, the God of weather. The patterns depicted on the underside of its wings represent the communities of Manurewa which are guided and uplifted by ngā Atua. There are also ten stars: Rehua (Father), and the Matariki stars according to Ngaati Te Ata - Matariki (Mother) and the eight children. Programmable lighting picks up different elements of the artwork, giving it a depth and unique presence at night.

Te Manu Ka Rewa (the bird that is elevated) was named by Huia Cowell (Ngaati Te Ata Waiohua). It was inspired by the whakatauki 'Mā te kahukura ka rere te manu' - 'it is through the feathers that the bird takes flight.' This is a metaphor for how people can work together. Like a bird in flight, every feather works in harmony to create the lift needed to soar. This cannot be achieved by a single feather, but together, feathers carry the bird to greater heights.

02

Working in partnership to deliver value through investment

Te Manu Ka Rewa demonstrates a partnered approach to public art investment, with Auckland Council providing financial, in-kind, and capacity-building support alongside the cultural leadership and creative contributions of Ngaati Te Ata Waiohua. Together, these investments highlight the depth of relationship-building and often unseen layers of support required to realise meaningful and enduring public artworks.

A collaborative approach with mana whenua

Te Manu Ka Rewa utilised a partnered approach to investment between Auckland Council and iwi Ngaati Te Ata Waiohua. Auckland Council played a key role in bringing the artwork to life through both financial and capacity building support. The council invested directly in the project and provided specialist guidance, resourcing, and coordination to ensure it could be delivered to a high standard. Auckland Council partnered with mana whenua throughout the process, recognising the cultural significance of the work and embedding local iwi perspectives in its design and delivery.

The investment from Ngaati Te Ata Waiohua in the project extended far beyond the creative contribution of its artists. Central to this was the legacy of iwi carvers, with artist Jadyn Flavell and his grandfather, master carver George Flavell, bringing intergenerational skill and artistry to

the work. The iwi contributed cultural and site knowledge, maatauranga Maaori, and tikanga Maaori. Support for the artist was also a defining feature, with mentoring, pastoral care, and administrative assistance provided through the iwi and through an arts administrator. Tangible contributions included taonga materials and the sourcing of specialist expertise, such as lighting designer David Eversfield, and support carvers Matt Brown and Tony Pecotic.

Te Manu Ka Rewa is an exemplar of the diverse forms of investment required to bring a public artwork to life, including deep relationship building across multiple stakeholders, capacity-building support from Auckland Council, and significant contributions from Ngaati Te Ata Waiohua. It highlights the often unseen layers of investment in arts and culture that align to ensure the success of the creative work.

Leading with relational integrity

Auckland Council intentionally lead with relational integrity by working in partnership with iwi to ensure that the resource allocation process honoured and prioritised Maaori. This intention from Auckland Council was met with enthusiasm by Ngaati Te Ata Waiohua, and together the partners worked in alignment to equitably identify and usher an artist into the project.

With Mana Whenua Ngaati Te Ata Waiohua, they really want to share their history, their stories, their connection to place. They really want to develop their artists and capability of their artists. - Project Manager, Auckland Council

03

Building artistic, social and cultural capital

The commissioning process for *Te Manu Ka Rewa* shows how council investment can build artistic, social, and cultural capital by strengthening an emerging artist's practice, deepening iwi storytelling, and embedding whakapapa into the public realm. The artistic process itself developed capability for Jadyn and his collaborators and also created a lasting expression of toi Maaori that affirms mana whenua identity and presence in place.

Artistic capability building

Auckland Council's intentional decision to commission an emerging mana whenua artist and harness the process as a capability building exercise meant that Jadyn was able to strengthen and expand his practice. Jadyn spoke about the opportunity to deepen his skills within a specific toi Māori form while also acquiring knowledge of public art production processes, including engineering and risk management. The experience provided a greater understanding of his own whakapapa and the stories and maatauranga held within his iwi, grounding his work in cultural identity. The process provided the emerging artist with the opportunity to work in the arts as a career:

Now I've got a framework of how this kind of thing works and now I'm working on a few other projects at the moment, doing a kid's playground...and a few other pou that I'm working on. - Jadyn Flavell

The process also provided opportunities for those supporting Jadyn to learn and grow in their own artistic capabilities. Lydia Rasmussen, who provided administrative support through the project, spoke about gaining skills that enabled her to continue to facilitate public artwork of this nature. Both spoke with great appreciation for the investment made by Auckland Council's project manager to support and provide artistic capability building through the process.

Getting skills out of it for both of us is... it's a tangible art ... but what stops that from being the full stop and just a comma is the skills that we both acquired to be able to continue the mahi post this project. - Lydia Rasmussen, Administrator

The patience, the tenacity, the advocacy for Jadyn, for us, was incredible. We couldn't have asked for better. She really, really, really went above and beyond. - Lydia Rasmussen, Administrator

Fostering artistic storytelling and expression of toi Maaori

The process of creating *Te Manu Ka Rewa* became a form of cultural reclamation for Jadyn; it deepened his understanding of ancestral narratives and solidified his role as a kaitiaki of iwi stories. Through his artistic storytelling and embedding whaanau history into the fabric of the artwork, *Te Manu Ka Rewa* contributes to a wider movement of Maaori visibility and pride in public spaces.

It just put me on a kind of trajectory to really deepen my understanding of my history and my identity. It's been life changing... If I'm going to do it, I have a responsibility to be able to tell these stories. That's been really significant for me. - Jadyn Flavell

This partnership approach to investment and resource stewardship has resulted in a work that embodies the principles of toi Maaori. By weaving whakapapa, ancestral narratives, and tikanga into its form, *Te Manu Ka Rewa* stands as a striking artwork and a living expression of Maaori identity and presence in the public realm. Now proudly held within Auckland Council's collection, the toi Maaori is available for all of Auckland to engage with.

We've now got an amazing work in our collection. In terms of the result of this, it's quite successful...we feel like we've got a really beautiful work that really answers the brief, so that's great. - Project Manager, Auckland Council

Working in partnership with iwi

The sculpture, which is situated on land of ancestral significance, draws on iwi stories and embeds these narratives into its design, ensuring that these stories are literally and symbolically inscribed in place. A significant benefit for iwi so far is the sense of pride, belonging and identity that the pou activates.

When we launched the work, a lot of Jadyn's family came, and you could see they really enjoyed the fact that their ancestors were represented. - Project Manager, Auckland Council

The work by Auckland Council and Ngaati Te Ata Waiohewa to upskill and support Jadyn means he now has the skills to be able to take on future iwi work. *Te Manu Ka Rewa* has been a process that has readied Jadyn to serve his iwi as a mandated artist.

They've now got another artist who's really capable of doing more work to represent the iwi. - Project Manager, Auckland Council

Running centrally within the pou is a series of ancestor depictions that are carved from Takaanini kauri gifted to Jadyn specifically for this project by his late grandfather, master carver George Flavell. The investment of this taonga from Jadyn's koro not only elevates the mauri of the work but also solidifies and strengthens the mana and toi Maaori presence of iwi within that specific area.

The wood that it's carved from is from the area, it was excavated from a housing development site. It's swamp kauri and carbon dated to around 500 to 5,000 years. It ties in with the history, it's a part of this whenua, so it's significant. - Jadyn Flavell

Community participation and engagement

Given that *Te Manu Ka Rewa* is in its first six months, there isn't yet a body of evidence to support an understanding of community engagement and participation. However, it is worth noting the launch and unveiling of the sculpture, which again involved a co-investment of resource and support from Auckland Council and Ngaati Te Ata Waiohua. The dawn event brought together approximately 100 people.

The opening was a dawn ceremony. We had the Local Board, Mana Whenua, iwi did an official blessing and then after that there was an opportunity to network and have breakfast. The arts team, along with us, had arranged some activities with the kids. A beautiful poster and booklet were put together... talking about the story and its making, and this was mainly targeted towards our tamariki. - Community Library Manager

The launch event also catalysed further activations of creativity, including a poi-making workshop, a graphic booklet, and an art display. Short term goals for more community participation include a Matariki activation for 2025, and educational engagement with local schools:

That's one of the goals this year is to be able to bring schools in to see the sculpture... We can get schools looking at the sculpture and even possibly hoping to get Jadyn in for some talks with schools. - Community Library Manager

The Community Library Manager of Manurewa Library walked alongside the creation and launch of *Te Manu Ka Rewa*. In the case study, she spoke to the ways that she had observed how the process of artistic storytelling had been transformative for Jadyn:

Being able to talk to Jadyn about that has been incredible... and the significance of the sculpture to him and that opportunity, and the links to his grandfather... it's of huge value for him and us. - Library Manager



04 Delivering value for the people of Taamaki Makaurau

The new public artwork exemplifies a high-quality and highly visible arts and culture offering that genuinely reflects the needs and aspirations of the Manurewa community. By contributing to Auckland Council's placemaking approaches, the sculpture brings cultural specificity and depth to its surroundings, turning a public space into a site of storytelling, reflection, and intergenerational exchange.

Embedding local communities and stories

By being semi-permanently installed in a central public location, the work embeds arts and culture directly into the city's infrastructure, helping to shape the cultural fabric of Manurewa and signalling that creativity and storytelling belong in everyday spaces. The representation of local communities and stories, and the reflection of Auckland's diversity are embedded in the work:

Te Manu Ka Rewa is a representation of the diversity... obviously Manurewa is made up of all types of different groups of people and communities, different cultures, and so that's kind of what I'm trying to depict in that...and it's about working together... they're working together to create unity and to come together to take flight into the future. - Jady Flavell

While you can't see it from in the library, you can see it from Hill Road as you come down and it's got a real presence to it... So, it really adds value, huge value. It's a really great beacon. - Community Library Manager

Through its collaborative development process with local iwi and whaanau, the community has taken ownership of the artwork, not just as an object, but as a living symbol of ancestral pride and self-determination.

Having this here helps share some of these stories that are not so commonly known and gives us a space or some identity in this area. Knowing our tupuna who's name that we carry, that she was actually born here and she's from here. - Jady Flavell

By contributing to Auckland Council's transformation of public spaces, the sculpture brings cultural specificity and depth to its surroundings, turning a public space into a site of storytelling, reflection, and intergenerational exchange. In doing so, it contributes to Auckland's unique cultural identity, offering an artwork that is unmistakably rooted in local whakapapa, language, and histories.

I think any work anywhere that is designed to represent and uplift the people of the community in which it is positioned, is a worthy investment... Rather than this deficit thinking about places but more of this celebration, celebration of diversity, celebration of the past and look to the future. - Lydia Rasmussen, project administrator

Case Study 3: Stand Up Stand Out

01 About

Stand Up Stand Out (SUSO) is an annual secondary school performance competition led by Auckland Council, welcoming a wide range of performing arts disciplines. In operation for over 35 years, SUSO has grown into a regional programme that remains deeply rooted in South Auckland, with competition heats held in Auckland Council venues across the city.

02 Working in partnership to deliver value through investment

SUSO demonstrates how relatively modest but well-targeted council investment can be maximised through strong partnerships, enabling high production value and meaningful pathways for young artists. Its growth over time reflects a responsive design approach that keeps the programme relevant to the evolving interests of rangatahi.

03 Building artistic, social and cultural capital

SUSO builds artistic, social, and cultural capital by bridging secondary education with the creative industries, providing young people with professional-level experiences and networks often unavailable in school settings. The programme develops artistic skill and confidence while also fostering community, inclusivity, and pathways into creative careers for the next generation of artists.

04 Delivering value for the people of Tāmaki Makaurau

SUSO's alumni culture contributes to Auckland's broader cultural vitality by fostering pride, visibility, and long-term engagement in young musicians. As part of Auckland's designation as a UNESCO City of Music, SUSO reinforces the city's commitment to preserving and investing in its musical and cultural identity and brings communities together to celebrate artistic expression.

01

About Stand Up Stand Out

Stand Up Stand Out (SUSO) is an annual secondary school performance competition led by Auckland Council that welcomes a wide range of performing arts disciplines. Performances include vocal, instrumental, band, dance, original compositions, and more recently, electronic music. SUSO started as one of the foundational programmes developed by the Ōtara Music and Arts Centre (OMAC), driven by the advocacy of Māori and Pacific students from Hillary College in South Auckland. The programme continues to champion the Māori and Pacific cultural values it was founded on: mātauranga, whakawhanaungatanga, and manaakitanga.

Now in operation for over 35 years, SUSO has grown into a regional programme that remains deeply rooted in South Auckland, with competition heats held in Auckland Council venues across south, east and west Auckland districts. The competition runs annually, opening entries in May, with preliminary heats in August. To generate school engagement, SUSO opens entries each year by reaching out to music teachers and Heads of Departments through its school

database and uses social media to improve visibility and access for schools without existing ties to the programme.

Alongside its reputation as a platform for Māori and Pacific rangatahi, the programme also serves as a space for creative exploration, fostering a culture of excellence among young performers, including those who may face barriers to pursuing their artistic aspirations. Participants gain live performance experience during heats and finals, building technical skills, emotional regulation, and confidence in engaging with audiences. All performers receive immediate, practical feedback from the judging panel to guide their creative progression, while those presenting original compositions may be selected for professional recording opportunities at Auckland Council's OMAC studios.

Alumni are regularly invited to paid performance opportunities at Auckland Council and Auckland Live run festivals, including Music in Parks and the dedicated SUSO performance in the Summer in the Square events, which help them transition into professional creative practice. Students are also connected with organisations such as the Pacific Music Awards and others aligned with their artistic practice, strengthening their networks and supporting continued development beyond the competition.

The programme's long-standing coordinator sees SUSO as more than a competition, offering a formative 'arts experience' that nurtures creative growth and experimentation, and scaffolds participants into creative careers as performers, musicians, technicians, and educators.

I grew up in South Auckland, so I knew talent was abundant... this concentration of elite talent... and largely what I've done in the last 13 years is introduce things that hopefully increases the likelihood of more young people converting to successful careers in the creative sector. - Gene Rivers, Programme Lead



Working in partnership to deliver value through investment

SUSO demonstrates how relatively modest but well-targeted council investment can be maximised through strong partnerships, enabling high production value and meaningful pathways for young artists. Its growth over time reflects a responsive design approach that keeps the programme relevant to the evolving interests of rangatahi.

Operational funding

Stand Up Stand Out operates on an annual Auckland Council investment of \$84,000, which covers its full operational budget and enables the programme to be delivered free of charge to all participants. Investment in SUSO has grown significantly since 2012, when the programme received just \$8,000–\$12,000 in funding and relied on participant entry fees to meet fiscal demands.

The gradual increase in financial investment reflects both the rising number of students and schools participating and the programme's expanding reputation as a 'must-do' competition on the secondary school calendar. This is supported by the annual review and widening of its categories to reflect the changing interests of young creatives.

Strategic partnerships

Coordinators emphasise the importance of SUSO's ability to maintain high production value within a constrained fiscally responsible environment by activating key partnerships across the arts and music ecosystem. Venue partnerships with Auckland Live ensure high-standard production values in central city venues such as the Auckland Town Hall and Concert Chamber, while heats are hosted across Auckland Council-owned facilities including Te Oro, Ōtara Music and Arts Centre, and Roskill Youth Zone. Resource partnerships add further value, with Serato providing free software licences for electronic music participants and RockShop contributing equipment and prizes. Industry partnerships connect students with respected artists and arts educators on the judging panel, who act as critics, mentors and role models, while also linking young people to professional networks such as Te Karanga Trust, the Pacific Music Awards and more recently Aesium Music House.

SUSO is part of an ecosystem, it sits with the connections we have, with our judges, it's the people we bring in... everyone has that same ownership of what we do at SUSO and wanting to help the young artists. - Gavin Downie, Production Lead

SUSO also leverages partnerships across Auckland Council to extend pathways into paid and professional opportunities for alumni. These include collaborations with regional arts and culture programmes such as Music in Parks, the Parnell Festival of Roses and Ka Mua Ka Muri, a live and digital performance series filmed in Auckland Central Library's basement space. Alumni are also programmed into events like Summer in the Square, the Pasifika Festival and other public performances delivered by Auckland Live and Tātaki Auckland Unlimited as a result of industry partnerships through SUSO.

Finally, the intentional curation of SUSO's crew and judging panel is key to shaping the programme's unique culture and energy. They come from the same communities as the participants, bringing both professional expertise and a shared cultural understanding that fosters organic mentoring relationships grounded in care and passion for the performing arts.

It's all because of that team that are the heart and soul of it and their own music appreciation/experience are the reason that it is as good as it is... Gene has built a strong entity that is just going to get better. - Cherie Mathieson, SUSO Judge

Prioritising community aspirations and mātauranga in design

SUSO is a responsively designed initiative that reflects the aspirations and needs of its young artist community, especially Māori and Pacific rangatahi. Although the programme has expanded over time, it remains firmly grounded in the cultural values that shaped its original vision. For staff and participants of SUSO, a standout feature of the programme's design is its celebration of culture and diversity. All creative expressions are welcomed and celebrated within the same competition categories, without the need for culturally specific segments.

Because it exists as a platform that was effectively created by our people for our people, it just feels different... everyone's included, and everyone wins because of it. - Gene Rivers, Programme Lead

This inclusive approach is also reflected in the wide range of performance genres supported by the competition. SUSO adapts its categories each year in response to the creative interests of its participants. The addition of the SUSO electronic category for example, ensures that SUSO remains reflective of the diversity of young artistic practice entering the competition each year, from beat-making to opera. By designing in partnership with communities and staying responsive to their aspirations, Auckland Council demonstrates good stewardship of resources by ensuring investment remains relevant, inclusive, and impactful for those it is intended to serve.

SUSO has really evolved since the beginning... really listening to the rangatahi and meeting them where they are with popular culture... that it's not just playing the piano and writing a song, it's making beats and that's the way that things are moving.
- Cherie Mathieson, SUSO Judge



Building artistic, social and cultural capital

SUSO builds artistic, social, and cultural capital by bridging secondary education with the creative industries, providing young people with professional-level experiences and networks often unavailable in school settings. The competition develops artistic skill and confidence while also fostering community, inclusivity, and pathways into creative careers for the next generation of artists.

Bridging secondary education with the creative industry

Teachers involved in SUSO describe the programme as delivering learning opportunities that extend far beyond what is typically available in a secondary school setting. It offers early and realistic exposure to the demands of creative career pathways, supporting students to develop the resilience, preparedness, and adaptability needed to manage the pressures that define work in the creative industries. Through its simulation of professional environments, SUSO equips participants with practical experience in live performance, technical production, and industry etiquette, while teaching young people to receive and apply feedback.

It does get harder and more difficult, there's more critique as you progress and as you make it through each heat. It's all part of that growing process and then coming out of SUSO, being able apply those skills. - Gavin Downie, Production Lead

It's very easy, especially at a young age, to feel overwhelmed... It's a cutthroat industry and a lot of those lessons I learnt through SUSO have really helped me a lot as I have progressed. - Arjuna Oakes, SUSO alumni

While structured as a competition, teachers emphasised that SUSO is equally a learning experience designed to complement the secondary school environment. It is open to all students, regardless of skill level or career aspirations, and focuses on creating positive performance experiences that build confidence and encourage ongoing artistic development.

Building a creative community for young artists

SUSO was praised by evaluation participants for its strong sense of community. Alumni highlighted the uniqueness of the competition, seen in how contestants from different schools support and encourage one another and are less focused on individual success. The programme facilitates cross-pollination of regional and multicultural talent, helping participants to build lasting networks with fellow young creatives. For all alumni interviewed, this peer connection has continued beyond the competition, with many going on to collaborate with other SUSO alumni on creative projects.

Community is the key thing in any musical environment that supports growth. Having access to community early as a creative is massive. You've got a network instantly, that's not just your school but that's region-wide. - Cherie Mathieson, SUSO Judge

While not formally offered as part of the SUSO programme, informal mentoring relationships have emerged between judges and participants beyond the competition. In several cases, these connections have supported young artists to take their next steps in their careers.

Now that I'm friends with these other artists who already release music and are pretty well known in Auckland, they will sometimes ask me to open for their shows or pull up for a gig that they want to do. - Jazmin Ugapo (Juga), SUSO alumni

Improving rangatahi arts participation

SUSO is recognised for its inclusivity, making arts participation accessible to a wide range of rangatahi across Tāmaki Makaurau. Students can enter the competition even if their school has no prior relationship with the programme, a process alumni describe as straightforward and often the catalyst for future participation by other students from their school. The programme also improves access by embracing a wide range of musical and cultural practices. SUSO welcomes original compositions, cover songs, and culturally specific forms of expression, fostering a space where diverse styles and interests are celebrated and judged equally.

Individuality is celebrated. There are no boxes that you have to stay within, and I think creativity needs that fluidity. When you have a space like this it gives everybody that opportunity, to explore their own sound. - Erin Geraghty (Erin G), SUSO alumni

SUSO actively supports equitable participation for Māori and Pacific communities. Teachers and programme staff acknowledge that additional systems and support are required to ensure these students receive the same level of visibility and opportunity as their peers who may benefit from extra creative resources in higher decile schools, pre-existing connections to the creative industries and whānau support. This approach creates opportunities for equitable participation and plays a role in shifting perceptions of the arts as a legitimate potential pathway for Māori and Pacific rangatahi.

Especially in our demographic, the concept of creative industries as being a legitimate pathway is not recognised on a whānau level... SUSO opens pathways that otherwise wouldn't be open. - Manurewa High School Teacher

Supporting SUSO alumni into creative careers

SUSO has played a formative role in the creative careers of many of its alumni. Interviews with past participants identified SUSO as a key turning point in their professional journey, particularly through opportunities such as recording original songs. For all interviewees in this evaluation, this was their first time accessing a professional studio environment and receiving technical support from paid engineers.

They helped me record my first unofficial EP when I was 17... It was my first time recording in a studio and with a paid audio engineer... that allowed me to do quite a bit after that... Gene got me a job at OMAC teaching piano and I developed my practice as a music teacher. - Arjuna Oakes, SUSO alumni

Programme staff and judges have observed a rising calibre of talent among participants progressing through the competition each year. One clear indicator of SUSO's growing influence is the increasing presence of alumni performing on festival stages across Aotearoa, signalling the programme's role in nurturing the next generation of artists.

I know the faces from the last 13 years... when I go to festivals now, I am seeing more SUSO alumni on that stage... so the impact is being felt by the industry. - Gene Rivers, Programme lead

Several alumni credited SUSO with providing exposure to industry opportunities, leading to meaningful career pathways and collaborations as they become more established in their career. By embedding guest performances and engagement with industry personnel in the competition programme, long-term opportunities have emerged for some participants. For Soakai Malamala, performing on the SUSO stage enabled his discovery and he is now a touring band member of legendary reggae band Three Houses Down:

SUSO has been a launching pad for a lot of us... it showed me that there is a life for a musician here in Aotearoa and even outside of Aotearoa. Through Three Houses Down, I've been to Canada, we went to L.A, we've been all the way up from the top of the North Island right down to Invercargill... I attribute that to SUSO. - Soakai Malamala, SUSO alumni and secondary school teacher

Delivering value for the people of Tāmaki Makaurau

SUSO's alumni culture contributes to Auckland's broader cultural vitality by fostering pride, visibility, and long-term engagement in young musicians. As part of Auckland's designation as a UNESCO City of Music, SUSO reinforces the city's commitment to preserving and investing in its musical and cultural identity and brings communities together to celebrate artistic expression.

Creating an alumni culture of excellence

According to staff, SUSO cultivates an alumni culture and a reputation for excellence that carries weight within the creative industries. It was felt that SUSO was initially met with quiet resistance as a platform primarily for Māori and Pacific rangatahi in South Auckland; there is a



clear view that SUSO has since then overcome early prejudice to become a recognised and valued part of the city's creative industry. Their goal is to ensure that association with SUSO becomes a mark of quality that opens doors for young musicians as they move into their careers. This sense of excellence and shared pride contributes to Auckland's cultural identity, signalling that the city is a place where talent is recognised and celebrated.

We're wanting to establish a reputation of excellence of Tāmaki musicians so that every young musician that comes out of Tāmaki and SUSO, has excellence attached to them... that opens doors for them. - Gene Rivers, Programme Lead

The programme also recognises the risk that many young creatives disengage from their practice after leaving school. As a result, SUSO is intentional about maintaining relationships with alumni well beyond their time in the competition. Alumni shared the significance of being acknowledged and supported as they reached milestones in their careers. By sustaining these connections, SUSO fosters a sense of belonging that ties alumni back into Auckland's creative community, reinforcing the city as a cohesive and supportive place for artists to grow.

After I had left the competition... I thought that I was long gone. Then I went to Stand Up Stand Out one year and I see this clip of me performing... I'm thankful that Stand Up Stand Out has that... They value the people that come through, they make sure they stay in touch. - Soakai Malamala, SUSO alumni and secondary school teacher

Contributing to Auckland's creative identity and future

As part of Auckland's designation as a UNESCO City of Music, SUSO reinforces the city's commitment to preserving and investing in its musical and cultural identity. The programme is an example of how investment from local government can nurture local talent and embed music as a valued part of civic life. The calibre and diversity of talent emerging from the competition are widely recognised as reflective of the next generation of artistic leadership.

Cultivating individual talent contributes to broader social cohesion by bringing together rangatahi and audiences across Tāmaki Makaurau, creating shared experiences that cut across school, cultural, and geographic boundaries. The programme fosters pride of place and belonging, particularly for Māori and Pacific young people, while giving wider audiences a chance to celebrate and affirm their creative expression.

As a secondary school initiative, SUSO also highlights the long-term value of early, formative investment in young creatives. By supporting artists at the beginning of their journey, stakeholders believe the programme contributes to a future arts and culture sector that is more vibrant, diverse, and embedded in the identity of the city.

It starts at the school competitions and Stand Up Stand Out's just a great piece of that puzzle that's building towards a brighter future for Aotearoa and South Auckland. - Soakai Malamala, SUSO alumni and secondary school teacher

Case Study 4: Basement Theatre

01 About

Basement Theatre is an artist-led multidisciplinary performing arts venue located in the central Auckland arts district. Originally developed by a group of young creatives, Basement Theatre began as a grassroots initiative in 2009 and quickly grew into a hub for artists and producers. Basement Theatre currently runs roughly 160 productions each year.

02 Working in partnership to deliver value through investment

Basement Theatre is sustained through a number of discreet investment streams, including Auckland Council and other creative funders. Basement Theatre partners with a diverse range of organisations to enhance its offerings for both artists and audiences and utilises an equity programming approach, platforming urgent, experimental, and diverse work within the arts ecosystem.

03 Building artistic, social and cultural capital

Basement Theatre fills a gap in the post-tertiary ecosystem as one of the few venues in Tāmaki Makaurau designed to bridge the transition from graduate to professional creative practice. The venue acts as a hub for artistic collaboration and provides welcoming and inclusive spaces for audiences and artists alike.

04 Delivering value for the people of Tāmaki Makaurau

Basement Theatre has a reputation as a home for marginalised and experimental artistry that creates space for a broader range of social and cultural perspectives and experiences to be presented on stage. The theatre is regarded as a vital arts institution in Tāmaki Makaurau, contributing to a more liveable, diverse, and creatively rich city through accessible, community-focused programming. Described by stakeholders as a “radical” initiative, Basement Theatre is seen as a reliable presence as broader urban changes unfold in the city centre.

01

About Basement Theatre

Located in the heart of Auckland’s arts district, Basement Theatre is an artist-led venue that programmes a wide range of multidisciplinary performing arts. Basement Theatre is widely known as the home for emerging artistry in Tāmaki Makaurau, with a clear presence in the city’s arts eco-system. It is located close to larger venues including the Civic Theatre, Aotea Centre and Q Theatre. Originally developed by a group of young creatives, Basement Theatre began as a grassroots initiative in 2009 and quickly grew into a hub for artists and producers.

It is the most accessible part of Auckland to get to... everyone knows where it is... and not only is it visual for artists but it's visual for audiences, it's keeping art in the CBD. - Basement Theatre staff

Despite a relatively small core team and venue capacity, Basement Theatre runs a high volume of programming at roughly 160 productions per year, around half of which are developed under

the Hire-For-Nothing initiative. The theatre shows performances across diverse artistic genres and offers flexible support infrastructure to feature works from new and emerging artists through to established performers. In addition to functioning as a venue, the space is also an artist and producer incubator, with dedicated support resources, a well-established audience and a diverse year-round programme that prioritises 'urgent and adventurous' artistry. Basement Theatre has presented thousands of performances, many of them debuting local talent, and has played a formative role in the early careers of prominent New Zealand artists including Rose Matafeo, Chris Parker, and Morgana O'Reilly.

It's solidified its status as a space for the community and for creation, regardless of what point of the process that be...for artists to create actual productions but to also residency in developing those ideas. - Basement Theatre staff

Basement Theatre operates with a formal commitment to Vital Voice Artists, including tangata whenua, people of colour, rainbow communities, immigrant communities, and disabled communities; all of whom are creatives who have historically been marginalised within the arts due to systemic barriers in programming, access, and funding. This commitment is embedded across programming, operations, and strategic decision-making, with Basement Theatre's Vital Voices policy ensuring that diverse cultures and communities are represented and prioritised.

We are making sure that artists who may not feel comfortable working with larger, professional theatre... and possibly their communities who don't feel comfortable coming and being an audience, have equitable access. - Basement Theatre staff

Basement Theatre provides a unique platform for independent artists by removing many of the traditional barriers to staging new work. At the heart of this is the *Hire-for-Nothing programme*, which gives artists access to two fully equipped performance spaces free of venue hire costs, while allowing them to keep 100% of their ticket revenue. This kaupapa is complemented by wraparound production support, including technical expertise, venue management, and targeted marketing that leverages Basement Theatre's established audience base.

Basement Theatre also invests in artist capability and long-term growth. The Artist Base digital toolkit offers publicly accessible resources such as budget and project templates, marketing guides, access and inclusion checklists, and wellbeing support. Development opportunities extend to structured initiatives like the Producer Pals residency, which provides paid mentorship for emerging producers, and Makers Week, a series of free workshops on creative and practical topics. Commitment to accessibility and equity is also central, with options such as 'Choose What You Pay' ticketing and support for accessible performance formats ensuring that diverse communities can participate in and enjoy the work.



Working in partnership to deliver value through investment

Basement Theatre is sustained through a number of discreet investment streams, including Auckland Council and other creative funders. The most significant contribution from Auckland Council is free venue leasing and venue subsidies, complemented by modest operational

funding to support artistic development in Tāmaki Makaurau. Together, these investments ensure artists and audiences have access to an affordable central city venue anchored in the arts precinct.

Funding infrastructure

Basement Theatre receives a range of leases, supplements and grants from Auckland Council entities that complement investment from other creative organisations. These include:

Community lease: Most significant among Auckland Council's investments is the community lease of Basement Theatre's 1921 heritage venue on Lower Greys Avenue, managed by the Auckland Development Office (formerly Eke Panuku). While the ageing building presents infrastructure challenges, according to the venue's manager, Auckland Council support through a fire safety rebuild and ongoing advocacy has been critical to keeping the theatre in its much-loved location at the heart of the city's arts precinct.

This building is a bit of a head sore for everyone just because of how old it is... they [Auckland Council] are able to actually keep advocating for it to not fall out of people's priority after so many years and it is really, really appreciated. - Basement Theatre staff

Peppercorn lease and accommodation supplements: Auckland Council also provides a peppercorn lease for the Makers Space at 313 Queen Street, giving the Basement Theatre community access to a dedicated rehearsal venue for show development, workshops, and residencies. In addition, Basement Theatre received an accommodation supplement of \$10,000 from the Waitematā Local Board to offset office tenancy costs on Queen Street.

Multi-year operational grants: In 2024, Basement Theatre received a renewal of the Regional Arts and Culture Strategic Relationship Grant, a three-year operational grant of \$65,000 per annum. This is one of the few multi-year funding streams supporting its operations, alongside Tōtara organisational funding from Creative New Zealand (\$435,000) and a grant from Foundation North (\$147,000).

City centre revitalisation funding: Auckland Council has recently supported the venue through the City Centre Activation (CCX) Fund, designed to revitalise CBD vibrancy and foot traffic during major developments. This funding enabled the added delivery of free public programmes including Makers Week, No Drama Nights, and the Forage Music Festival.

Revenue and donations: Basement Theatre generates some income through box office sales, bar revenue, and venue hire, but this covers only a small share of its budget. To bridge the gap, it runs digital fundraising campaigns, most recently raising nearly \$50,000, and receives ongoing support from around 20 patrons through its Basement Mates membership programme.

Strategic partnerships

Basement Theatre partners with a diverse range of organisations to enhance its offerings for both artists and audiences. These partnerships span the arts sector, education sector, and commercial spheres, helping to strengthen the creative ecosystem around the venue. These include:

Industry partners to support venue sharing, co-programming, and the creation of artist development pipelines. Longstanding collaborators include Proudly Asian Theatre, Prayas Theatre, Black Creatives Aotearoa, Tuatara Collective, FAFSWAG, as well as major institutions such as the New Zealand Comedy Festival, Silo Theatre, Auckland Live, and Auckland Theatre Company.

Education partners provide pathways for emerging artist development, upskilling, and early exposure to careers in the creative industries. These include relationships with Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School, the University of Auckland, Performing Arts Network New Zealand (PANNZ), and Western Springs College.

Commercial partners operate on a more informal, mutually beneficial basis. Basement Theatre maintains a longstanding partnership with iTICKET, and also collaborates with Tanuki's Cave, a neighbouring restaurant that supports the theatre through referrals, catering, and prioritised service for audience members attending local performances.

Basement Theatre maintains close, values-based relationships with other venues in the Aotea Arts Quarter, providing a natural pathway for artists as their careers develop. Partners such as Auckland Live, which manages several central city theatres, described a longstanding open-door collaboration, sharing space, coordinating festival programming, and exchanging knowledge to collectively navigate sector-wide economic challenges and support the progression of talent into larger venues.

We engage with Basement as part of the Aotea Arts Quarter... the kind of circle of creative communities that wrap around Aotea Square... we've used Basement for showings, residencies, or when they don't have space... it's been a mutual support system over the years. - Auckland Live

Equity-based programming

Basement Theatre's programming approach acknowledges the broader influence of platforming urgent, experimental, and diverse work within the arts ecosystem, with programming staff recognising themselves as 'tastemakers' within the sector. A recent shift to a horizontal programming model reinforces this kaupapa, with programming decisions now made collaboratively by a panel of staff, centring community need over profit and promoting equitable resource allocation in decision making.

We're thinking much broader on programming... sometimes the decisions are not what will sell? ... but is this a good fit for community? - Basement Theatre staff

The Vital Voice mandate guides programming decisions, demonstrated by the 87% of Hire-for-Nothing productions that were developed by Vital Voice artists in 2024. Thematic analysis of artist survey responses suggest that the Vital Voice programming is experienced by many artists as a powerful and affirming mandate, with respondents describing feeling welcomed, supported, safe and visible.

Basement has communities they deem to be Vital Voices, and they work to amplify those, which is appreciated by artists in those communities. - Artist survey respondent

Evidence gathering

Basement Theatre takes a reflective and adaptive approach to its operations, regularly using artist debriefs and artist surveys to self-evaluate the effectiveness of its programming and support. Insights gathered through these channels directly inform practice, allowing the team to respond to artist needs and refine delivery. In addition to internal evaluation, Basement Theatre actively participates in sector-facing innovation, serving as a testing ground for new models such as 'Choose What You Pay' ticketing, improving affordable access to artistic performance for audiences and providing valuable learning for the wider performing arts sector seeking to adopt similar initiatives.



Building artistic, social and cultural capital

As a long-standing fixture in the city's arts infrastructure, Basement Theatre continues to enable accessible arts engagement for a wide range of artists and audiences, operating as a venue run by and for the city's vibrant community of young and emerging creatives.

Creating a platform for emerging artistic development

According to tertiary partners and artists, Basement Theatre fills a gap in the post-tertiary ecosystem as one of the few venues in Tāmaki Makaurau designed to bridge the transition from graduate to professional creative practice. By offering accessible, low-risk opportunities to create, it supports new work while absorbing much of the financial risk faced by emerging artists. Stakeholders see this as a vital steppingstone for artistic careers, providing practical experience and a pathway to larger venues, with many artists crediting their success to formative years at Basement Theatre.

It's the only venue currently... that so many people can trace their artistic incubation to. I learned more from having shows there than I did doing an entire three-year [university] paper. - Basement Theatre artist

Basement Theatre has become a hub for artistic experimentation and discovery, with several artist-led shows evolving into established weekly events. A notable example is Snort (now Bull Rush), an improvised comedy show that built a loyal following at Basement Theatre while launching the careers of many prominent New Zealand comedians. Basement Theatre artists often cite it as evidence of the theatre's role in supporting emerging talent through consistent, low-barrier opportunities to perform, developing their audiences and progressing into larger venues.

Look at the Snort crew... all of them started at Basement and they had a weekly space to hone their craft. All of them have flown hugely... that could only happen at Basement, it's the only venue that would support it. - Basement Theatre artist

A hub for artistic collaboration, connection and community

Basement Theatre also plays a vital role in fostering a cross-disciplinary artist community, where the diversity of its programme enables relationships that often grow into future collaborations and lasting friendships.

I've made nearly all of the industry connections that I have through that venue... I have met all my closest friends through that space. - Basement Theatre artist

Stakeholders see the theatre's greatest strength as its trusted relationships with Auckland's grassroots artist community. Industry partners described the theatre as a go-to hub for new talent, creating opportunities to connect with independent artists and identify the next wave of creatives who will likely appear in theatre circuits in years to come.

Creating welcoming and inclusive access to performances and experiences

Stakeholders consistently identified Basement Theatre's accessibility and affordability as key features of their kaupapa. The Hire-for-Nothing model, risk-sharing approach, and embedded support structures enable early-career and self-funded artists to create work without institutional backing, industry connections or financial pressures, lowering barriers to produce work that is authentic to them.

The Hire for Nothing Programme enables me to try my hand at producing in a way that was low risk; it fully enabled me to be able to do this and, as a result of its success, has given me the encouragement to do it again. - Artists survey respondent

According to Basement Mates and audience survey respondents, Basement Theatre attracts diverse audiences through its central location, inclusive programming, and accessible pricing. Audiences also highlighted the venue's welcoming atmosphere as distinct from other venues, describing it as a casual community space with approachable staff that foster a strong sense of belonging regardless of their involvement in the theatre's artist community.

I really like the inclusive vibe; I just feel really safe there. It's just a beautiful space and that's down to the staff and what they're programming... I refer to the space as my living room because I live really close by... I like I go hang out at the Basement and meet my mates there. - Basement Mate

I feel so much more connected to my community at large when I am at Basement. There is a sense of "homegrown-ness" that I feel specifically at Basement that I don't feel at every other performance theatre in the city. - Audience survey respondent

Creating early career arts administration roles

In line with its kaupapa of supporting emerging talent, Basement Theatre creates jobs for early-career administrators, addressing the scarcity of junior roles in the New Zealand creative sector. This approach has proven effective, with many former staff moving into creative roles. Several current staff are also practising artists who first connected with Basement Theatre through its programmes or tertiary partnerships. Flexible working arrangements enable them to pursue their own projects alongside their roles, ensuring programmes are artist-led, shaped by lived experience, and remain responsive to the evolving needs of the creative community. As one staff member described:

It's a great way to learn how to be in the arts sector without losing the spirit of being a practitioner... it's an opportunity to still be really deep within the artist community and learn about the arts industry, lobbying and advocacy. - Basement Theatre staff



04 Delivering value for the people of Tāmaki Makaurau

As a key stakeholder in the arts ecosystem as well as place-making in the central city urban infrastructure, Basement Theatre contributes to the social and economic health of arts and culture in Tāmaki Makaurau.

Fostering social cohesion and civic engagement through performance

Artist and audience survey data show that Basement Theatre attracts a diverse, atypical theatre audience. Its reputation as a home for marginalised and experimental artistry creates space for a broader range of social and cultural perspectives and experiences to be presented on stage. This is reflected in survey results, with 92% of respondents agreeing that Basement Theatre helps them encounter perspectives they might not otherwise see platformed elsewhere.

I go to some shows that resonate with my background, and some to learn about other cultures... that educative value is super important. - Basement Mate

Audience survey respondents noted that Basement Theatre provides exposure to the diverse voices and perspectives that make up Tāmaki Makaurau. This includes Māori artforms alongside a wide range of cultural experiences, and representation from women, non-binary, and rainbow communities. Audiences valued the chance to step outside their own ‘bubble,’ engaging with underrepresented voices and learning from the performances they attended.

I've been able to see a range of affordable shows about different cultures that give me snippets into other communities. It always feels unpretentious, affordable, encourages open minds, and is a safe space. - Audience survey respondent

Representing and affirming diverse communities in Tāmaki Makaurau

Audiences and artists reported seeing themselves reflected in the theatres diverse programming, enabled through its Vital Voice mandate. According to the artist survey, 88% felt that Basement Theatre fosters new community relationships, while 87% said their show at Basement Theatre created pride and affirmation for their community. This sense of representation motivates artists to continue producing work that strengthens wellbeing, connection, and relevance within their networks.

I enjoyed every single performance because they have been reflective of our diverse communities, they are always authentic. - Audience survey respondent

Making Auckland a creatively rich and liveable city

Across stakeholder groups, Basement Theatre is regarded as a vital arts institution in Tāmaki Makaurau, contributing to a more liveable, diverse, and creatively rich city through accessible, community-focused programming. Described by stakeholders as a “radical” initiative, Basement Theatre is seen as a reliable presence that houses independent artistry as broader urban changes unfold in the city centre.

It's one of the reasons I moved to Auckland... I love being able to walk or bike there and Basement is part of what makes the city worth living in. - Basement Mate

[It produces] huge amounts of artistic value as well as a real connection to the night-time economy. It keeps Queen St relevant and alive. - Audience survey respondent

Audiences and artists regard Basement Theatre as essential to sustaining Auckland's creative economy, helping to prevent 'brain drain' by providing development opportunities and reasons for artists to stay in the city. Many highlighted the commitment and enthusiasm of the Basement Theatre team as key to keeping artists engaged and contributing to the region's cultural life despite economic pressures.

The enthusiasm that the Basement team has for these artists and the extra mile that they can go...contributes to people being able to give that extra part of themselves and get themselves over the line. – Basement Theatre artist

A stable institution in the face of sector turbulence

Stakeholders consistently described Basement Theatre as a revitalising force for Auckland's arts sector, particularly in the aftermath of COVID-19 when many artists had lost access to funding and performance opportunities. The theatre played a critical role in helping artists and companies recover, for example by providing letters of support for funding applications that enabled shows to remount and organisations to resume activity.

We got a massive amount of help from Basement in terms of letters of support ... without that, we wouldn't have been able to get the show back. – Basement Theatre artist

The pandemic exposed the fragility of the arts ecosystem, underscoring the importance of cross-organisational collaboration. Basement Theatre continues to play a key role in this space, engaging in regular strategy and insight-sharing with sector counterparts in Auckland and other emerging artist venues across the country, including BATS (Wellington), Meteor (Hamilton), and Little Andromeda (Christchurch). This collaboration is particularly important as ongoing urban regeneration projects such as the construction of the City Rail Link continue to disrupt central city arts and hospitality businesses.

We're all having the same challenges... Supporting the personnel who support the artists is also important. So, they don't feel like they're alone. - Auckland Live

Despite sector-wide pressures, including reduced disposable income affecting audiences, fluctuating funding, and the vulnerability of artists in a difficult market, Basement Theatre has remained a resilient and reliable presence. It continues to deliver a consistent, high-volume year-round programme that surpasses other local venues in both stability and output, providing artists and audiences with confidence and continuity amidst uncertainty.

Case Study 5: Te Oro

01 About

Te Oro is a multi-functional rangatahi and community arts facility located in the heart of Glen Innes town centre, East Auckland. The facility offers a wide range of creative offerings, including visual art exhibitions and installations, performing arts and theatre spaces, a fully equipped music studio and recording suite, and regular workshop programming.

02 Working in partnership to deliver value through investment

Te Oro demonstrates good stewardship of resources by leveraging Auckland Council funding, staff expertise, and community partnerships to maximise impact for Glen Innes and the wider region. Its collaborative approach with mana whenua, local organisations, and Auckland council teams ensures investment is shared, responsive, and anchored in community aspirations.

03 Building artistic, social and cultural capital

Te Oro builds artistic, social, and cultural capital by nurturing emerging arts leaders, strengthening the practice and networks of local artists, and providing culturally grounded programmes that reflect and affirm community identity. Designed by and for Māori and Pacific communities, it is recognised as a space that reflects the identity and values of its local community.

04 Delivering value for the people of Tāmaki Makaurau

Te Oro enhances the built environment of Glen Innes through its distinctive, culturally grounded design, which serves as both a community facility and a work of art that strengthens local identity and contributes to transformation of public spaces through art. Its presence supports vibrancy in the town centre while also generating economic opportunities for local businesses, vendors, and community partners.

01

About Te Oro

Te Oro is a multi-functional rangatahi and community arts facility located in the heart of Glen Innes town centre, East Auckland. Strategically positioned alongside key community facilities such as Ruapōtaka Marae and the Glen Innes Library, the facility stands as a central hub in the suburb known for its diverse cultural profile of largely Māori and Pacific communities, and ongoing urban development.

The vision for Te Oro was shaped by mana whenua Ngaati Pāoa, supported and blessed by Ngaati Whātua Ōrākei and Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki, in partnership with the Glen Innes community and Auckland Council. Opened in 2015 following nearly two decades of community advocacy and planning, its design is deeply rooted in local aspirations, particularly the desire to create a safe, accessible, and inspiring space for tamariki and rangatahi to explore their creativity, connect with their culture and seek pathways into creative education and employment.

Te Oro is an Auckland Council facility of which core funding is received through the Maungakiekie Tāmaki Local Board. The facility offers a wide range of creative offerings for the community, including visual art exhibitions and installations, performing arts and theatre spaces, a fully equipped music studio and recording suite, and regular workshop programming. It also supports emerging talent through artist residencies and community outreach.

Our main kaupapa here is a place for storytelling... it's being presented in different shapes and forms, from dance, to music, to visual arts... its mainly free programming and our vision is always to be developing gifts for the community. - Te Oro staff

Facilities and programming

Te Oro offers a range of facilities and programming to the Auckland community, including venue hire, artist residency programmes, and accessible creative programming:

Venue hire: Te Oro provides a range of purpose-built, affordable spaces that support creative activity, cultural events, and community use. These include a 150-seat performance and rehearsal space, a sprung-floor dance studio, three professional music and recording studios, visual arts and workshop rooms, and two community meeting spaces. The facilities are flexible and accessible, hosting everything from arts programming to health and wellbeing events, job fairs, and training workshops. Discounts and in-kind support ensure the centre remains financially accessible for community-led activity.

Artist residency programmes: Te Oro has recently re-established its artist residency programme, hosting four artists for residencies ranging from three to five months. During this time, residents use Te Oro spaces to create new work, with the aim of developing an exhibition, community workshops, or work-in-progress showings. While residents self-invest in their own performances or outputs, Te Oro provides support in venue space provision and seeking funding through creative organisations such as Creative New Zealand. Residents also benefit from access to Te Oro's professional network and receive capacity-building support in areas such as creative development and production.

Free or low-cost creative programming: In 2024/25, Te Oro delivered around 188 creative programmes, engaging approximately 20,000 participants. Most activities are free or low-cost and led by local artists spanning visual arts, dance, music, digital media, and cultural programmes tied to Pacific and Māori language weeks. The centre also runs community wellbeing activities, such as yoga and Arts and Tea for seniors, alongside school holiday programmes that provide accessible creative opportunities for tamariki and rangatahi.

Regional arts and culture programming: Te Oro plays an active role in Auckland Council's regional arts and culture programming, regularly delivering events and partnerships that align with Auckland Council initiatives and major cultural celebrations. Working closely with the Council's regional arts and culture team, Te Oro hosts a number of Council-led or funded initiatives, including the annual Stand Up Stand Out secondary school performance competition heats, and partnerships with groups such as Wheke Fortress, an Indigenous artist-led space in Onehunga. Other examples include supporting the Matariki Te Ara Rama Light Trail, hosting performances for the Auckland Arts Festival, running workshops and events for Auckland Pride Month and running programming for the Diwali Festival.

Te Oro has evolved to provide inclusive creative programming that serves all community members, while maintaining a particular focus on supporting Māori and Pacific whānau, tamariki, and rangatahi. The facility generates wide-ranging benefits, not only for the local Glen Innes community, but also regionally by participating in and hosting Auckland-wide arts and culture initiatives.

02

Working in partnership to deliver value through investment

Te Oro demonstrates good stewardship of resources by leveraging Auckland Council funding, staff expertise, and community partnerships to maximise impact for Glen Innes and the wider region. Its collaborative approach with mana whenua, local organisations, and Auckland Council teams ensures investment is shared, responsive, and anchored in community aspirations.

Working in partnership with Auckland Council

Te Oro sustains a strong working relationship with Auckland Council's regional arts and culture team, acting as an activation site that delivers shared benefits while receiving regular support, visibility and advocacy from the wider Auckland Council arts and culture department. The teams work together and maintain regular communication to ensure the centre is actively integrated into regional events, festivals, and programmes, as well as guiding Te Oro users toward Auckland Council funding opportunities.

We have those strong internal relationships of understanding what they [Regional arts and culture programming team] are wanting to achieve and finding ways as a facility that we can help them, and they immensely help us. - Te Oro staff

Te Oro receives core operational funding each year through the Maungakiekie-Tāmaki Local Board, with an annual allocation of approximately \$386,000 to support programme delivery and facility operations. This funding is supplemented by venue hire income and modest programme entry fees, which together ensure affordable access to the centre's programmes.

Engagement with mana whenua

Alongside the early design of the centre, Te Oro continues to benefit from the sustained support and a working relationship with Ngāti Pāoa, the mana whenua of Glen Innes and the wider Tāmaki region. Adjacent to the centre, Ruapōtaka Marae is a well-established community service hub in the area with deep ties to the local Māori community. Together, the centres contribute to shared events, co-use of space, and collaborative community initiatives. A representative of Ngāti Pāoa who works closely with Te Oro describes a strong foundation of manaakitanga and reciprocity in the relationship, noting that the centre consistently upholds tikanga Māori and works hard to support their kaupapa in various ways, particularly in the support provided to deliver the annual Te Ara Rama Matariki Light Trail.

They definitely platform Māori tikanga by always having Ruapōtaka involved... if they have a kaupapa, Te Oro is the first to put their hands up. - Mita Tupaea, Ngāti Pāoa representative

The success of the centre's relationships with mana whenua over many years is attributed to the in-kind support and open-door relationship that has been consistently maintained, working together to deliver programmes and advance shared aspirations for the community. As described by staff, Te Oro is "sitting in the space between two waka", working with both iwi and urban marae to ensure the centre supports outcomes for local Māori communities.

We always do our best not to be the big tree in front of the small tree. We always honour them, and we always serve them as much as we can - Te Oro staff

Drawing on skills and knowledge of staff and key community partnerships

Te Oro is operated by a small, diverse team with connections to the Glen Innes community and the wider creative sector, including the recent recruitment of a Central/East arts programmer to lead the redevelopment of the centre's artist residency programme. All Te Oro staff are arts practitioners themselves, bringing their own well-established networks with artists and community organisations to their role. As a multi-role team that work across many responsibilities with a number of part time staff, they navigate the challenges of limited capacity with strong leadership and a shared commitment to bring local aspirations to life.

We're all creators, whether musically, artistically, performance. That draws people to places like this... we're here as artists because we can advocate with an understanding of what our communities need. - Te Oro staff

Located in the heart of Glen Innes, Te Oro is uniquely positioned within a central civic hub, neighbouring key community assets such as Glen Innes Library, Tāmaki College, the Glen Innes Business Association, Reserve Tāmaki (business hub), and the Tāmaki Regeneration Company. This proximity enables collaboration with local stakeholders, allowing Te Oro to co-host events, share space, and deliver joint programmes that draw on collective strengths and advance shared community outcomes.

Ruapōtaka might design programmes that Te Oro are happy to host and it's a great collaboration. - Glen Innes Business Association

Te Oro operates as a multi-purpose space, available for community hire or provided in-kind to support programmes run by groups such as Pacific Dance New Zealand, the Rise Group, the Niuean Community, and the Tongan Green Harp group. This approach reflects an investment that services multiple civic purposes, sustaining strong, trust-based relationships with the community programme run in the Glen Innes community.

We have a pretty cool partnership with the people at Te Oro... [the centre] is a community connector. - Rise Group representative

A representative from Ngāti Pāoa viewed Te Oro as a key convening space for community providers, including iwi, library staff, Local Board members, local business owners, and other stakeholders, to align strategically around shared community goals.

I have definitely met so many people through Te Oro... Local Board members, librarians... local shops owners, iwi... Te Oro is a space for us to come together. - Mita Tupaea, Ngāti Pāoa Representative

Adapting to align with community needs

Collaborating since its inception, the Glen Innes Business Association felt as though the centre has demonstrated its growth, introducing workshops that move with the interests of its rangatahi community and ensuring they don't have to travel far to experience its high-quality offerings.

It has a vital role because the youth in the wider area can access programmes and workshops that they wouldn't even normally be able to access... the staff are very passionate about the arts and it shows... they know what the community wants. - Glen Innes Business Association

Te Oro has continued to adapt its strategic direction by expanding programming to a broader cross-section of the community. For example, in response to the social isolation experienced during COVID-19 lockdowns, the centre introduced programmes for older adults and expanded its digital and in-person offerings to incorporate a broader wellbeing focus, seeking to remain responsive to changing priorities.



Building artistic, social and cultural capital

Te Oro builds artistic, social, and cultural capital by nurturing emerging arts leaders, strengthening the practice and networks of local artists, and providing culturally grounded programmes that reflect and affirm community identity. Designed by and for Māori and Pacific communities, Te Oro is recognised as a space that reflects the identity and values of its local community.

Fostering emerging arts leadership

Te Oro supports the development of emerging arts programmers, producers and administrators, intentionally employing members of the user base who show potential to contribute meaningfully to the centre's development. Many current and former staff at Te Oro possess ties to the facility as past participants in its programmes. One example is the manager of Te Oro, who first joined the centre as a newly graduated audio engineer. Starting in a technical support role, he gradually moved into programming, driven by his ability to build lasting relationships with the Te Oro community and his enthusiasm for the centre's kaupapa.

The networking and the connections that I gained here are incredible. I started here as a techy doing sound and lights from School of Audio Engineering and I knew no one in the industry... the people that use this space are really well connected and I've been able to build my personal network and broaden my skills. - Te Oro staff

Capacity building opportunities for local and regional artists

Te Oro supports grassroots to mid-career artists through its residency programme, which aims to strengthen professional practice, build funding capability, and expand artists' networks. Current resident Villa Junior Lemanu is a movement and visual artist from South Auckland, using their residency as an incubation period to explore new ways of engaging the local community and its rangatahi, including monthly intensives and performances with Q&A

components. They note the growing challenge of connecting meaningfully with audiences in a time of increasing social isolation and digitisation of the arts, aligning their residency goals to focus on community engagement.

I'm using the residency as an incubation period to find something different and challenge myself... artists are always making for artists and there's a sort of lack of connection between us and the community. - Villa Junior Lemanu, artist in residence

Among the many benefits Villa experienced through the residency, such as expanding his professional network, he particularly valued seeing his work resonate with the local community. He shared that this experience affirmed the worth of his artistic practice as a worthwhile pursuit, even in a context where creative careers are often undervalued.

When my work is shared amongst people... who really take it on and really get into it... I think that's the biggest thing that I got out of this. - Villa Junior Lemanu, artist in residence

Highlighting local stories and improving access to cultural knowledge

Designed by and for Māori and Pacific communities, Te Oro is recognised as a space that reflects the identity and values of its local community. This is evident in its engagement with mana whenua, diverse staffing, and culturally grounded programming delivering around 42 programmes each year that meet Māori outcomes. Users describe Te Oro as a welcoming and affirming place, one that uplifts local stories and feels genuinely connected to those who use it.

If you look at the exhibitions and the communities that it pulls in... it's definitely reflective of what the community values... there's a strong sense of identity in Te Oro. - Artist in residence

Staff and programme partners shared that Te Oro provides a space for community members to connect beyond their usual networks and to reconnect with cultural identity. Recognising the diverse diaspora communities in Glen Innes, including Pacific and East Asian groups, many of whom have experienced cultural disconnection, staff see Te Oro as a place where people can both explore new cultures and reclaim their own through culturally relevant programming.

Other people can come and share in their culture, come and learn what they do. We have a huge diaspora community here. - Te Oro staff

A future focus for Te Oro is to attract more regionally programmed events and locally led initiatives that reflect the growing diversity of Glen Innes, particularly its migrant communities. The aim is to ensure that new and emerging populations can access programmes that are relevant to their communities and experiences, without needing to look beyond their own neighbourhood.

Wide reaching benefits for the wellbeing of local rangatahi

Te Oro hosts a range of youth-focused programmes spanning creative skill development, school holiday programmes, dance workshops and rangatahi development programmes. Staff and community stakeholders describe Te Oro as an important site for engaging local rangatahi to develop their creative skills, while also supporting their wellbeing and connecting them to

wider opportunities. Stakeholders shared that this is particularly significant in the context of the suburb where young people face a range of increasing social and economic challenges. Staff refer to the centre as a “lighthouse” within the community, acting as a consistent presence that supports rangatahi to explore their creative potential while also linking them to relevant local services and support networks.

This place is really important for rangatahi and tamariki. We've got programmes which are not going to cost you anything... that keeps everyone off the rocks when it comes to wellbeing. - Te Oro staff



04 Delivering value for the people of Tāmaki Makaurau

Te Oro enhances the built environment of Glen Innes through its distinctive, culturally grounded design, which serves as both a community facility and a work of art that strengthens local identity and transformation of public spaces through art. Its presence supports vibrancy in the town centre while also generating economic opportunities for local businesses, vendors, and community partners.

Enhancing the build environment of Glen Innes

Te Oro enhances the built environment of Glen Innes, with community members recognising its culturally rich, thoughtful design as a key asset to the area. The facility is art in itself, named ‘Te Oro’ by local iwi Ngāti Pāoa, relating to the tonal reverberation of sound in te reo Māori. The architecture draws inspiration from ngā toi Māori form taonga pūoro (wind instrument), designed as a sound cone that captures the wind sweeping across Maungarei/Mt Wellington and producing an audible hum. Built without right angles, the structure's curves and timber elements act as sound baffles, allowing for natural acoustic performance in nearly any part of the building. Six ‘sound sites’ surround the perimeter of the building, offering integrated audio-visual artworks. Combining soundscapes, carved timber columns, and kōwhatu, they weave local stories, such as the legend of Parehuia, into a unique, multi-generational expression of place and identity.

When you look at our land... when we take off the building, there was a massive artwork actually under the building and it symbolises connection of Te Oro to the community with the arts. - Te Oro staff

Positioned alongside key civic facilities such as the library, police station, and community hall, the centre enhances the safety, vibrancy, and identity of the town centre. Community stakeholders shared that its presence contributes to both placemaking and supporting local businesses and vendors by drawing people into the area.

Te Oro is an incredible asset to the business community. We all benefit environmentally from having such a magnificent building and the magnificent programmes inside it. We're very lucky. - Glen Innes Business Association

By embedding the cultural narratives in place, the centre as a venue, and the people that use it are highly representative of the Glen Innes and Tāmaki community.

They [the community] don't see monuments out there that reflect us. The building is so beautiful it does look like a piece of art... next to the library and the police station and the old community hall. - Pacific Dance New Zealand

Generating opportunities for the local business economy

Te Oro contributes to the Glen Innes economy by partnering with local businesses and community organisations to create opportunities for vendors and service providers. For local vendors, this includes hosting job fairs, markets, and collaborative events that generate shared benefits and opportunities to engage community members. Future partnerships, such as with Reserve Tāmaki, and ongoing collaboration with the Glen Innes Business Association, aim to further support economic development through community markets and business workshops.

Te Oro long-term programming partners, community organisational partners, and artists that use the space recognise the facility as a consistent supporter, helping to deliver programmes and performances through free venue hire and risk-share models. By covering venue costs, Te Oro helps ensure programme continuity regardless of shifts in external funding, a challenge staff identify as a key barrier for many of the centre's community partners.

We're always going to be dictated by the amount that we get each year and what we can deliver but working with Te Oro is a highlight for us. It means each year we know that we've got a venue and we just focus on the programme delivery. - Pacific Dance New Zealand

Case Study 6: The Dragon Boat Festival

01 About

The Dragon Boat Festival is a traditional Chinese cultural festival that is celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, typically in May or June. It commemorates the patriotic poet Qu Yuan with dragon boat races and the eating of zongzi (sticky rice dumplings). The day-long celebration includes cultural performances, arts and crafts and zongzi demonstrations.

02 Working in partnership to deliver value through investment

The Dragon Boat Festival was delivered through a partnership between the Chinese Association of West Auckland, Auckland Council and Corban Estate Arts Centre (CEAC). With modest financial investment leveraged from multiple sources, the festival created a significant cultural celebration and laid the groundwork for the delivery of future events.

03 Building artistic, social and cultural capital

The Dragon Boat Festival brings Chinese traditions, food, and art into a public setting where people of all backgrounds can participate and learn. The festival is a platform for artists and performers to share their cultural artforms with large audiences, while also creating opportunities for older and younger generations to connect through shared celebration.

04 Delivering value for the people of Tāmaki Makaurau

The Dragon Boat Festival fosters intercultural connection by creating opportunities for West Auckland residents of many backgrounds to experience and celebrate Chinese traditions together. Its inclusive approach encourages curiosity, participation, and a stronger sense of belonging across communities.

01

About the Auckland Dragon Boat Festival

The Dragon Boat Festival (Duanwu Festival) is a traditional Chinese cultural festival that is celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, typically in May or June. It commemorates the patriotic poet Qu Yuan with dragon boat races and the eating of zongzi (sticky rice dumplings). The festival, which originated at least 1,500 years ago, is now celebrated around the world. When the Waitakere Chinese Association and the Chinese Association of West Auckland sought to hold the festival in Auckland, they hoped to provide a platform to celebrate and uplift Chinese culture, alongside other cultures in Tāmaki Makaurau.

Dragon Boat Festival is quite important in China, and we want to bring this activity here to integrate the Chinese culture into New Zealand culture. - Chinese Association

The Auckland Dragon Boat Festival was hosted by the Waitakere Chinese Association, the Chinese Association of West Auckland, and the Corban Estate and Arts Centre (CEAC) in 2025. The 2025 events attracted over 1000 attendees, with many cultural food vendors, community

groups and local leaders in attendance. The festival is free and family-friendly, drawing participants from a variety of ages and cultural backgrounds.

They know how to run an event. They have all of their different groups do different dances with particular costume. We had over 30 that were just one after the other, they do ballroom dancing, they do cultural dancing, it's all a mix of everything. – Corban Estate staff



Working in partnership to deliver value through investment

The Dragon Boat Festival was delivered through a partnership between the Waitakere Chinese Association, the Chinese Association of West Auckland, Auckland Council and Corban Estate Arts Centre (CEAC). With modest financial investment leveraged from multiple sources, the festival created a significant cultural celebration and laid the groundwork for the delivery of future events.

A partnership approach to festival delivery

The Waitakere Chinese Association is the largest Chinese organisation in the region and is administered by a committee comprising a chair, secretary, treasurer and other elected members. When designing and planning the Dragon Boat Festival, the organisation identified a need for a partnered approach to support their own event management capabilities and resourcing. Public events require a complex range of organisational requirements, including health and safety, permit administration, traffic management, first aid and security, and Auckland Council were able to provide support to navigate some of these requirements.

Here's a group that really wants to be a part of community, they're really struggling in the sense that they're trying to understand the ins and outs of Council, event permits, TMPs, all of that sort of thing. – Corban Estate staff

Auckland Council, through the Corban Estate and Arts Centre (CEAC), saw the opportunity presented by the festival, and looked to build their capacity to host events such as this in the future. In 2024, CEAC brought in a senior event manager to work alongside the Chinese Association to plan, apply for permits and run the event through a team of volunteers and contracted support. They worked to build an understanding of each step of the event management process and developed capability to undertake this for themselves in the future.

It was to enable that community to feel like 'I can do this' and that's what we ultimately wanted to achieve. – Corban Estate staff

Once we created the blueprint, then it was kind of like, okay do you guys want to do this again and [what] do you want to do. We were establishing a commitment to support them throughout this process and educate everybody in that space. - Auckland Council

Leveraging modest financial investment for a significant cultural event

The Dragon Boat Festival draws on investment from a range of sources to bring about a culturally significant event that can be repeated in future years. Regional Arts and Culture contributed \$30,000 in financial resources and the Chinese Association contributed \$3,000 of their own funds, and CEAC itself receives significant operational funding through the Henderson-Massey local board. Other funds were also leveraged through local community trusts.

Of equal significance was the investment of time and expertise by CEAC and experienced event managers to develop the skills of the Chinese Association to run the event in subsequent years. The guidance and support given to the Chinese Association enabled them to organise the festival for themselves in 2025, together with a larger Chinese food and culture festival in late 2024, which is similarly planned for 2025.

The Corban Estate provided the venue and sometimes assisted us to apply for event permits and they give us a lot of very good advice. - Chinese Association



Building artistic, social and cultural capital

The Dragon Boat Festival brings Chinese traditions, food, and art into a public setting where people of all backgrounds can participate and learn. The festival is a platform for artists and performers to share their cultural artforms with large audiences, while also creating opportunities for older and younger generations to connect through shared celebration.

Celebrating community diversity and cultural art forms

The Dragon Boat Festival celebrates cultural diversity in Auckland. Rooted in Chinese cultural traditions, the festival brings a vibrant expression of Chinese identity into the Auckland community. By holding the event in a public venue with activities that are accessible and engaging, such as kite making, dragon spotting, calligraphy, Chinese painting and shared food, the festival provides a space where cultural practices are shared openly with people of all backgrounds. The opportunity to share cultural artforms with the broader community was particularly meaningful for stallholders and those from the Chinese Association who were proud of the teamwork to make the event possible.

This event provides a platform for the Chinese community, people can join each other and it's a big contribution to the Chinese community... It has historic meaning for Chinese. - Event stallholder

We attracted a lot of people to come to enjoy the food and the performance and they learned about a lot of Chinese culture and tradition. We feel proud because it's not just one or two people, we work together. - Chinese Association

Opportunities for artists to feature their work and share traditional artforms

The festival created opportunities for artists to share their own cultural art with the wider community, providing visibility and exposure for traditional artists. Performances included

Chinese traditional dances, songs, music, choir, instruments, Tai Ji, Cheongsam (or Qipao) show, dragon dance and lion dance. Event performers appreciated having significant audiences to share their art with.

They provide opportunity for our dance group to perform in front of the main audience. When we danced, there are two to three hundred people watching. I think that's quite exciting for us. - Event performer

In a separate on-site venue, Chinese arts and crafts could be learned and practiced, including calligraphy and kite making.

We were doing kite making, traditional calligraphy and we had people there that were skilled in calligraphy and showing people how they did it, brush marking, cutting, paper cutting. - Corban Estate staff

Bringing together multiple generations

The festival's delivery also generated multi-generational benefits. Some of the performers were older Chinese migrants who had settled in Auckland after their children had established themselves. Through participating in cultural celebration, they were able to build connections and networks with other older Chinese migrants, while also contributing to the wider community. As one attendee reflected, the festival provided a meaningful way of "giving back to the country that hosts them."

We have the stores outside, and Chinese arts, and the children's play areas, not just for the adults, for the three generations of a whole family. - Chinese Association

They are not only for adult, for older people, they also for children, for young generation to participate in some performance. - Event performer



04 Delivering value for the people of Tāmaki Makaurau

The Dragon Boat Festival fostered intercultural connection by creating opportunities for West Auckland residents of many backgrounds to experience and celebrate Chinese traditions together. Its inclusive approach encouraged curiosity, participation, and a stronger sense of belonging across communities.

Creating community cohesion across different cultures

The Dragon Boat Festival illustrated an opportunity to strengthen community cohesion by bringing the wider West Auckland community together. Creating a touchpoint for multicultural engagement encouraged curiosity from attendees of different ethnic backgrounds and an opportunity to experience Chinese culture in a meaningful and celebratory way. Interviewees reflected on the impact that was felt from Samoan and Māori performance groups attending in 2024, as well as the longer lasting dragon-spotting artistic display at the Centre that fostered interest from local school groups and rangatahi.

I think what makes it special is it's not only for Chinese people, I know the organisers give invitations to all the people around the West Auckland area. – Event performer

Our artists and even ourselves, we made dragons of every shape and description, and they were placed all around the Centre and you had to find them... And funnily enough, we had school groups that would come in, saying we came here to look for the dragons. – Corban Estate staff

Performers and event organisers strongly valued how the stalls and festival offerings provided ways for the West Auckland community to deepen their knowledge of Chinese culture. The importance of the Dragon Boat Festival in China fostered a desire to share this celebration with Auckland residents. Members of the Chinese community shared their cuisine through free food stalls, zongzi and sticky rice demonstrations. Calligraphy sessions and arts classes delivered insight into traditional art forms, and free entry created an educative experience that was inclusive.

When we make the sticky rice, the zongzi or dumpling, we demonstrate in front of people, and they learn how to do that too. – Chinese Association

There was a sense of hope that the ongoing delivery of cultural celebrations like the Dragon Boat Festival form a way to break down cultural divides and contribute to wider senses of belonging and ownership felt among Chinese residents across Tāmaki Makaurau.

I think it's always hard if you are a community from another country that are trying to feel safe and secure in a space. – Corban Estate staff

Section 2: In what ways does investment in arts deliver value for Tāmaki Makaurau?

This section draws out the wider benefits of Auckland Council’s arts and culture investments. The previous section highlighted different types of investment and together the sections demonstrate how Auckland Council investment creates value beyond the immediate activities supported. These benefits are social, cultural, economic, and civic, contributing to the wellbeing of Aucklanders and to the city’s identity as a place where creativity is celebrated.

Festivals and programming

Festivals and programming opportunities such as celebrations and competitions bring communities together at scale. Being temporary in nature means that they can be run within a scoped timeframe, enabling delivery through collaboration with interested communities. Both *Pride Fest Out West* and the *Dragon Boat Festival* are examples of festivals that were brought together through collaborative efforts with specific communities (*Auckland Pride Festival* and the *Waitakere Chinese Association*). When designed in true partnership with communities, festivals can bring diverse communities together, create platforms for the sharing of significant cultural stories and ultimately bring Aucklanders together in safe and enjoyable ways.

Festivals and performances can also create opportunities to contribute to local economies by drawing people to towns or suburban centres, creating demand for small businesses and providing opportunities for artists to reach new audiences. The *Dragon Boat Festival* is a clear example of providing opportunities for small, local food vendors to share their cuisine with wider audiences and *Pride Fest Out West* drew audiences from across Auckland suburbs and from as far as Palmerston North to parts of Western Auckland. *Stand Up Stand Out* connects alumni into paid gigs through Council-run events such as Music in Parks or Summer in the Square, ensuring that the visibility created by the competition leads directly to professional, economic opportunities.

Rangatahi and talent development

Rangatahi and talent development opportunities such as performances, mentoring, leadership development and investments in infrastructure focus on nurturing current and future artistic talent. Four of the case studies in this evaluation worked in the rangatahi and talent development space: *Basement Theatre*, *Stand Up Stand Out*, *Te Manu Ka Rewa* and *Te Oro*. All of these examples created opportunities for emerging artists to develop their talent and worked to build or support sustainable pipelines into arts careers.

Auckland Council supported programmes such as *Stand Up Stand Out* to bridge gaps in secondary education and post-tertiary entry points into creative careers, with youth-focused programming and residencies specifically designed to incubate emerging talent. Initiatives like *Basement Theatre* make it realistic for first time producers or young artists to “have a go” without prior industry connections or financial capital to support them in the establishing phase of their careers. This was seen as a way to retain talent in New Zealand by offering viable pathways for artists to build sustainable careers and continue contributing to arts and culture in Tāmaki Makaurau.

Infrastructure and spaces

Investment in infrastructure and spaces such as theatres, arts centres and public areas installed with artworks create the foundational architecture for artists to develop and feature their talent. Auckland Council has invested in custom-build infrastructure in the case of *Te Oro*, with the purposeful and inclusive design making the facility a well-used venue for artistic design and performance. *Basement Theatre* is an example of subsidisation of independent arts infrastructure, which enables the organisation to provide affordable access to performing spaces and production support, generating significant value with a modest financial investment.

Investment in infrastructure and spaces also enables the development of artistic communities by creating hubs where people can come together and collaborate, share ideas and build lasting relationships. Venues like *Basement* and *Te Oro* create safe environments where communities can gather, networks can be established and strengthened, and cross-pollination can take place. For some venues, such as *Basement*, the spaces draw communities into public places, which has the potential to boost activity for surrounding cafes, restaurants, and small businesses. These spaces are active partners in their local business networks, demonstrating how creative venues and events activate both central and suburban areas.

Public art and public space transformation

Investment in public art, and transforming public space through art as a result, creates lasting taonga that reflects the values of communities. Works such as *Te Manu Ka Rewa* show how public art can embed whakapapa, mātauranga, and iwi narratives into Auckland's built environment, making Māori identity visible in everyday spaces. These works can contribute to a stronger sense of place, giving communities landmarks that reflect who they are.

Public art also enhances the look and feel of public spaces, making town centres, libraries, and parks feel welcoming, vibrant and authentic. By placing art where people live, work, and gather, Auckland Council investment ensures that creative expression is accessible to all Aucklanders, not only those who visit galleries or performance venues. These works invite reflection and spark conversation while strengthening community pride and the cultural distinctiveness of Tāmaki Makaurau. The *Te Oro* building is a clear example of this, being described as an artwork in itself, with its design weaving Māori cultural narratives into the fabric of the space and creating a strong sense of identity for Glen Innes.

Cultural heritage and identity

Investing in a range of artforms and events that promote cultural heritage preservation and expressions of identity support the participation of specific communities and allow diverse cultural artforms to be shared with the public in ways that are meaningful, celebratory and accessible. Centring the diverse communities of Tāmaki Makaurau in arts and culture activities ensures broad representation across the city's arts offerings. Audiences and participants throughout the region are able to be exposed to ideas, expressions, and artforms beyond what they encounter in their everyday networks.

Festivals and public artforms that celebrate specific cultural traditions help to strengthen social cohesion by promoting the public visibility of different cultural groups in everyday spaces. *Te Manu Ka Rewa* and the physical infrastructure of *Te Oro* are examples of how arts programming can successfully uplift ngā toi Māori, honouring cultural knowledge and affirming

artistic traditions and belonging for future generations. Events like the *Dragon Boat Festival* offer safe and welcoming places for cultural expression and connection across migrant communities and encourage opportunities for curiosity and cultural education for local residents from other cultural backgrounds.

Section 3: To what extent does Auckland Council’s arts investment demonstrate value?

This section explores the extent to which Auckland Council arts and culture investment meets evaluation criteria and demonstrates good value for arts investment.

In collaboration with Auckland Council during the design phase of this evaluation, three key value areas were identified. Each case study was treated as data and was used to make assessments about Auckland Council’s stewardship of resources, contribution to building artistic, social and cultural capital and generation of social and economic value. Assessments were made against the standards from “below expectations” through to “excellent”.

The intention is not for any single case study to meet all criteria, but rather to highlight exemplars of strong investment practice against Auckland Councils’ specific standards of success. An overview of evaluative judgements is provided in Figure 3.

For the full evaluation rubric which details the full criteria at each level of performance, please see *Appendix 1: Evaluation rubric* of this report. Beyond this evaluation, these criteria will provide a useful framework for assessing value for future arts and culture investments.

As indicated in *Figure 3* below, performance against criteria is generally strong with all meeting expectations, and most either on a pathway to excellence or at excellence.

Figure 3: Overview of performance of investment against criteria

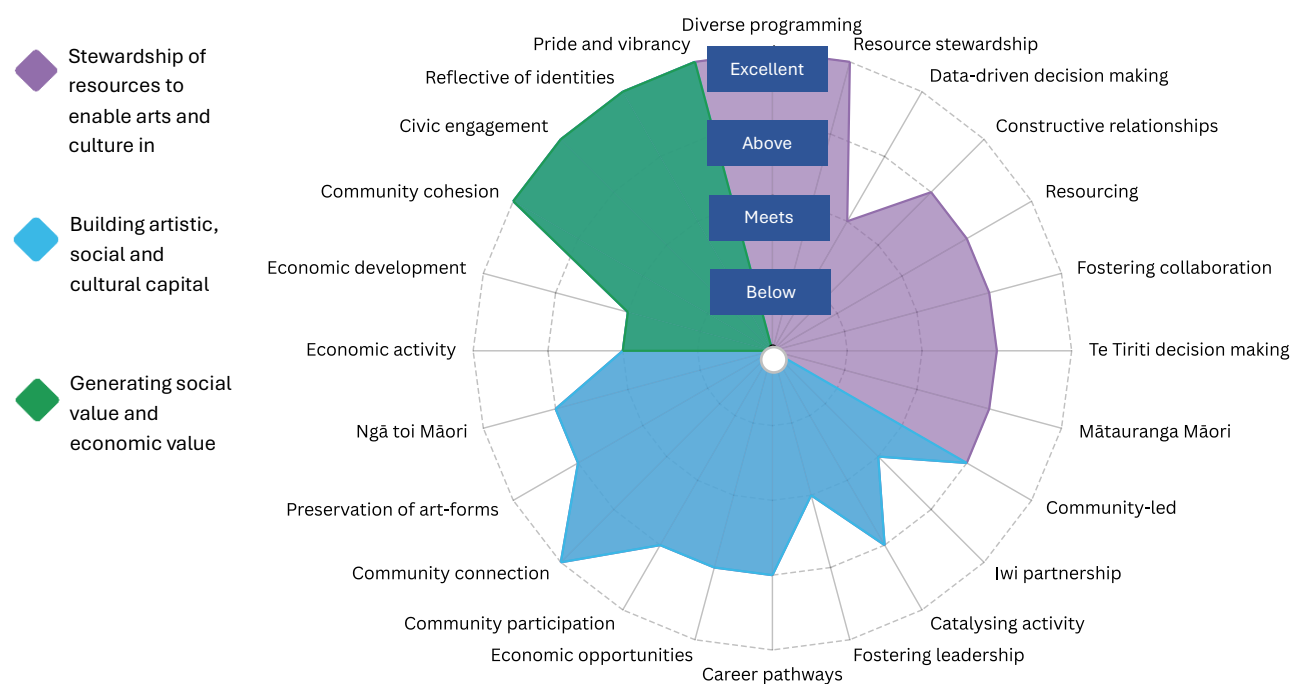


Table 2: Evaluative judgements against criteria








To interpret the following tables, each column represents the level of value derived from Auckland Council’s arts investment, from meeting expectations to excellent, and the size of the circles represents the strength of evidence for meeting those standards across case studies (for which the criteria was applicable).











Stewardship of resources to enable arts and culture in Auckland

Auckland Council’s arts and culture investments, as assessed in this evaluation, demonstrate transparent and well-targeted use of funding to support a wide range of sector objectives. The case study exemplars highlight strategic investments that are tailored to the needs of communities, recognise community diversity, and generate value for groups in Tāmaki Makaurau that are often underrepresented in programmed arts activities. All case studies show how resources are intentionally directed towards the creative outputs of tangata whenua, Pacific, Rainbow, disabled, and migrant communities, and by investing in programmes and events that uplift these communities, their artforms and cultural expressions become highly visible within arts programming. Apparent across many of the investments is the strong constructive, respectful, and mutually beneficial relationships that have developed between Council leads and case study sites. The themes below highlight the key enablers of relational integrity observed throughout the case studies.

Strengthening responsible stewardship of resources will mean supporting accountability and data collection approaches within organisations that Auckland Council oversees or invests in. While Te Tiriti was evident in the design of some of the case study examples, there is an opportunity to provide more support for organisations who want guidance on doing this in meaningful ways.














Criteria topic	Not yet meeting expectations	Meeting expectations	Above expectations	Excellent	Comments
Transparent and strategic investment that is aligned with priorities, needs and evidence					
Programming activities that reflect Auckland's diversity					Case studies collectively show a strong representation of the diversity of Auckland, designed and delivered with community mandate and participation.
Resource use for intended purposes, co-investment and partnerships					Case studies collectively draw on co-investment, strategic partnerships and in-kind leveraging of resources within and outside Council to support the delivery of their programmes.
Data collection approaches					There is evidence of some data collection across all case studies, but approaches are generally inconsistent. One case study had built their own reasonably well-developed data collection processes; however, most could benefit from support to understand what to collect and how.
Relational integrity and working in partnership					
Constructive and mutually beneficial relationships					There are generally good and cohesive relationships between Auckland Council and case study sites and alignment of investment with Council goals. This is particularly evident with lead contacts within Council.
Provision of funding and support to enable arts to thrive					Funding enables activities to take place, but the extent to which other forms of support such as capacity-building and brokering of relationships and other resources are visible vary across case studies and tend to be developed within case study sites, rather than as a discreet resource investment from Auckland Council.











Council contribution to relationships and partnerships					There are some excellent examples of sector connections and collaborations being brokered. Brokering appears highly person-dependent and is often reliant on existing sector relationships and experience that staff bring to their roles.
Te Tiriti-based practice					
Te Tiriti guiding and underpinning design					There are three clear exemplars of genuine commitment to Tiriti-centred practice, including in partnership with mana whenua and culturally grounded practice. Others could benefit from clear guidance from Auckland Council around what it means to be guided by Te Tiriti in practice.
Protection of mātauranga					
Utilising and uplifting mātauranga, and mana-enhancing and culturally grounded practice					There are three clear exemplars of mana-enhancing and culturally grounded practice. Others prioritise cultural responsiveness in a variety of ways, which includes being responsive to the specific communities they are looking to uplift.

Building artistic, social and cultural capital

By supporting initiatives that are community-led, Auckland Council investment creates opportunities for local voices to shape programming and ensure activities are relevant and meaningful. Consulting with iwi and embedding tikanga in design has been a strength in some areas, with authentic expressions of mātauranga Māori enriching the cultural life of the city. Though, there is scope to deepen and extend this practice across more initiatives. Investments highlight the many ways that Council support has expanded the capability of individual artists and organisations, either through direct capacity-building initiatives or capacity building programmes enabled by Council funding, displayed in case study activities such as the upskilling of Tāmaki Makaurau creatives through artistic residencies, mentorship, and skills workshops.

Investments also support the development of artistic careers, offering platforms and pathways for emerging and established artists to grow their practice and contribute to the sector. While progress in this area is evident, there is potential for even greater impact through more targeted career development and leadership opportunities. This evaluation found that investment consistently fostered community connection, creating safe and inclusive spaces for people to gather, celebrate, and share their stories.






Criteria topic	Not yet meeting expectations	Meeting expectations	Above expectations	Excellent	Comments
Mana enhancing, authentic and equitable relationships across communities and iwi in Tāmaki Makaurau					
Council funding or co-designing activities or supporting community led design					There are some strong examples of community-focused design and led initiatives. Strengthening community feedback systems will ensure the continuity of community voice in planning and delivery in other investment sites.
Council consulting and partnering with iwi					Clear examples of engaging or partnering with iwi are evident in some investments. The extent to which this followed through across all sites is an area where Council can provide further support.
Catalysing creative activity					
Enabling initiatives and providing capability and capacity support					There are some clear examples of catalysing activity through Council-funded and run initiatives. In instances where Council is providing partial funding, there is an opportunity to provide capability and capacity building in areas like data collection, marketing and Te Tiriti honouring practice and design.
Ngā toi Māori is enabled and fostered and Tamaki Makaurau is rich with Māori identity and culture					
Showcasing mātauranga Māori authentically and grounded in te reo Māori					There were three excellent exemplars of authentic showcasing of mātauranga Māori. Some organisations are actively working toward this, while others may need additional support to feel confident working in this space.
Artistic development, self-expression, resilience and leadership are fostered in the arts					
Fostering and cultivating arts leadership					There are examples of case studies fostering and cultivating leadership indirectly through artist development and residencies. There remains an opportunity to strengthen future investments by more intentionally incorporating arts leadership development into case study activities.






Supporting arts career pathways and developing creative workforce					There are exemplars in which organisations are supporting or providing platforms for artists' development and brokering network relationships which may lead to future career opportunities. There are opportunities to formalise this as a strategic objective for Auckland Council, investing in understanding ways that this can be further supported.
Pathways to employment and economic opportunities					There are some economic opportunities that are created through investments, specifically relating to supporting small businesses, vendors and stall holders through events and festivals. Two case studies contribute to building the foundations for future careers in the arts, which may also contribute to economic benefits in more significant ways.
Communities are enabled to participate and engage in the arts and appreciate its value					
Community participation, co-design and leadership					Community-led exemplars are evident in some case studies of which draw heavily on local knowledge and community voice to deliver and adapt initiatives.
Community connection, shared and inclusive spaces that celebrate local identity					All case studies are strong examples of community connection, uplifting and bringing together diverse communities and artforms that make up Auckland.
Taonga for future generations					
Preserving and celebrating taonga in dynamic ways that are accessible and relevant					There are some clear examples across case studies of intergenerational, diverse programming that supports cultural identity, including through the use of storytelling, language, dance and ngā toi Māori.

Generating social value and economic value

Council investment in arts and culture generates important social and economic value for Tāmaki Makaurau. A key strength has been enabling ngā toi Māori to be uplifted and maintained by Māori, ensuring cultural integrity and visibility in the city’s creative life. Investment has consistently delivered strong social value by fostering connections across communities, encouraging cultural exchange, and making public spaces more liveable and welcoming. Investments have also created some opportunities for economic activity, particularly through stalls, event performances, and in-kind support for smaller artists, though the evidence suggests the wider economic impact is modest.

These investments have also played an important role in encouraging community conversations on identity, inclusion, and belonging, creating safe spaces for dialogue and understanding. Communities described feeling seen and heard through programming that reflected their experiences, which in turn fostered pride and strengthened collective wellbeing.

Criteria topic	Not yet meeting expectations	Meeting expectations	Above expectations	Excellent	Comments
Te Ao Māori embedded in Tāmaki Makaurau					
Ngā Toi Māori features, and/or is produced and maintained by Māori					There are some strong examples of centring Māori ownership, design and participation, testament to the engagement with mana whenua and intentional use of ngā toi Māori in design for these examples.
Fostering economic growth					
Generating economic activity that creates jobs and enables organisational growth and development					Case study sites are a catalyst and platform for some artists to gain economic value and advance careers; but this is not a core or distinct outcome that can be attributed directly to case study programmes.
Benefits for associated sectors and integrated into economic development strategies					There are some general economic benefits from artistic activity although these are disparate and not a primary driver of activity across all case study sites.

Cohesive communities					
Creating connection across communities					All case studies show strong evidence of community connection, offering exposure to new ideas and artforms as well as intergenerational and cultural connection across communities.
Healthy, well, engaged and informed citizens					
Encouraging community conversations and tools for fostering civic engagement					There are key exemplars of investment resulting in starting community conversations and creating tools that foster civic engagement, and these were seen to be effective.
Communities feel seen, heard, and valued in how arts and culture reflect their communities					All case studies are firmly grounded in and reflect and represent their communities.
Healthy, well, engaged and informed citizens					
Arts and culture initiatives celebrate local communities, activate public spaces, and foster belonging, pride, and vibrancy					All case studies are seen to add vibrancy to their communities, and offer a range of value that supports, fosters and showcases art of various forms in Tāmaki Makaurau.

Section 4: Lessons for future investment

This section answers the final key evaluation question: *What have we learned for future arts investment so that it can maintain and deliver increased value?*

Enabling success

Based on insights gathered through discussions with each case study site, a range of reflections emerged regarding the nature and scale of Auckland Council's investment in their respective contexts. The key investment features that enable success are:

- **Diverse investment types:** The types of support and investments made by the council in arts and culture programmes are multifaceted beyond operational funding, and include staff resources and support, lease of venues and facilities, rent subsidies and capability building support. A mix of resources and investments supported in achieving value from investments.
- **Partnerships and relationships:** Sustaining strong, mutually beneficial relationships with programme partners remains key to leveraging investments, and where brokering connections with other organisations or parts of council can be highly beneficial.
- **Co-investment:** Co-investment is a key enabler for arts organisations in the region. Auckland Council funding is often a critical funding stream, but the reality for arts organisations is that their sustainability, even at a project level, often depends on securing funding from a range of sources.
- **Cultural responsiveness:** Cultural responsiveness and mana-enhancing practices have been an important foundation for success, across organisations, events and venues. These provide a welcoming and supportive environment for different cultures, including Māori, to undertake their activities, art and performance.
- **Community co-design:** Activities and venues that drew on community input and co-design also demonstrated a high-level of cohesion and participation with their communities (whether ethnic, geographic or communities of interest). All case studies are strong examples of community connection.
- **Ngā toi Māori and Māori ownership:** It was evident in case studies that drew on ngā toi Māori that centring Māori ownership and design is a key enabler of art that resonates with and has the support of wider hapori Māori and iwi.

Opportunities to improve

Leveraging core funding to support growth and innovation

Some case study sites have observed that core operational funding had remained static over time and, in some cases, was insufficient to respond to growing demand and the need for increased scale in recent years. Short-term or one-off funding rounds were not seen as adding to the already thinly stretched capacity of teams that require support to deliver and maintain their core activities which have often grown in demand post COVID-19.

For example, *Basement Theatre* staff noted that their Hire-for-Nothing initiative was in high demand, particularly among artists rebuilding their practice post-pandemic. The level of tailored support needed by artists to bring shows to production had also increased. While additional investment from Council has supported new initiatives such as capacity-building workshops and festival programming, sustaining core activities remains an ongoing challenge for theatre staff who feel limited in their ability to grow and innovate.

Areas of potential development:

- Look to ensure that operational investment keeps pace with the costs of maintaining and expanding programme delivery.
 - Prioritise multi-year operational grants over short-term or one-off project funding.
 - Enable funded organisations to direct investment flexibly toward core functions rather than limiting funds to new or short-term initiatives.
 - Provide support to organisations to generate sustainable funding streams.
-

Supporting newer initiatives with capacity development, system navigation and administrative support

In the case of newly established programmes and community-led projects working with Council for the first time, artists experienced challenges navigating administrative tasks, timelines and project milestones, with limited dedicated project support, drawing on their community networks on an in-kind basis to support the development of their projects. This was particularly experienced by those working parttime or voluntarily, with administrative tasks taking time away from community engagement and delivery.

This was evident in feedback across *Pride Fest Out West* and *Te Manu Ka Rewa*, where artists were working on a project of this nature for the first time. Some smaller or lower capacity venues participating in *Pride Fest Out West*, for example, were reported by one community partner to have required more support to manage programming and promotion to the same extent as larger hubs.

Areas of potential development:

- Include, where possible, dedicated project coordinators or administrative roles in contract/grant funding to support the capacity building of community-led projects.
-

Bridging creative practice, iwi relationships and Council systems

Projects such as *Te Manu Ka Rewa* illustrate the ongoing challenge of working between tikanga-based, iterative creative processes and the time-bound, often rigid structures of council systems. A member of the project team for *Te Manu Ka Rewa* noted that the compressed timeframe for delivering the public artwork constrained the depth of engagement the team had hoped for with local kura and iwi. They described a broader misalignment at the interface of

kaupapa Māori approaches and council processes, where the team had to adapt their ways of working to fit contracting, budgeting, and reporting requirements.

Areas of potential development:

- Co-design more culturally responsive contracting and accountability frameworks, recognising the time, values, and approaches of creative and Māori-led delivery.
 - Dedicated ngā toi Māori administrative support roles within Auckland Council to enable authentic Māori-led approaches.
-

Ensuring capability within Council to broker sector relationships

The success of several initiatives was often attributed by participants and stakeholders to the skills, relationships, and reputations of individual Council or organisational staff leading the work. There was concern that the legacy and sustainability of programmes such as *Stand Up Stand Out* and *Te Oro*, both of which draw on extensive sector relationships to enhance delivery, could be at risk if key programme leads were to step away from their roles.

Stakeholders acknowledged the highly relational nature of arts administration and the value of employing staff with deep ties to the creative sector. Some suggested that brokering sector relationships could be more intentionally embedded within these roles to reduce dependence on individuals and support long-term continuity.

Areas of potential development:

- Formalise the brokering of sector relationships as a recognised component of key arts administrative roles within council.
-

Guidance to support Te Tiriti-centred practice

Although many case study sites demonstrated a commitment to honouring Te Tiriti in spirit and intent, there was uncertainty for some sites around what it means to resource, govern, and partner in a truly Te Tiriti-centred way across diverse contexts. Among initiatives focused on specific cultural or social communities, such as *Pride Fest Out West*, there was a clear appetite to explore how a commitment to Te Tiriti could be meaningfully embedded and guidance from Council on how to do so in practice.

Areas of potential development:

- Develop clear, practical guidance and support mechanisms for programme partners to embed Te Tiriti-centred practice in a meaningful and contextually appropriate way.
-

Strengthening evidence-gathering capacity and resourcing

Basement Theatre has a well-developed evaluation system, driven by the need to report regularly to multiple funders, each with distinct objectives and reporting requirements. In contrast, other case study sites have limited feedback mechanisms for collecting robust data to inform programme delivery. Many attributed this to a lack of time and capacity to collect and analyse feedback, as well as limited tools and resources for systematic data collection. While there was clear interest in gathering feedback, stakeholders stressed the importance of accessible methods, for example, *Te Oro* trialling the use of paper-based surveys to ensure all users could respond in a format that suited them. Across the sites, there was a shared desire for a simple, easy-to-implement feedback mechanism that could meaningfully inform programme development.

Areas of potential development:

- Where appropriate, draw on the evaluative surveys developed for the purpose of this work for further implementation at case study sites and more widely.
 - For additional data collection, support Council-supported programmes to develop simple, accessible feedback mechanisms to collect consistent feedback from participants. This can include paper-based or digital surveys and capacity building support for programmes to analyse and apply feedback for programme development and funder reporting.
-

Building pathways into arts employment and leadership

While many programmes offered by case study sites provide creative industry exposure, capability building and connection to creative communities, there were limited bridges into paid long-term employment or arts leadership development pathways facilitated by case study sites. Case study sites such as *Basement Theatre*, *Te Oro* and *SUSO* have expressed a desire to reestablish or further resource residencies, internships and employment pathways; programmes that have been impacted over time by investment changes but seen as critical to advancing artist capacity building objectives.

Areas of potential development:

- Strengthening pathways into employment and arts leadership by supporting case study sites to build residencies, internships and employment pathway programmes. This will provide clearer progression for emerging creatives and build future sector leadership.
 - Resource sustainable artist development initiatives by establishing or scaling up paid programmes that reduce financial barriers for emerging artists and provide equitable access to residencies and professional development opportunities.
-

Strategically leveraging economic benefits

Some case study sites including *Pride Fest Out West*, *Dragon Boat Festival*, *Basement Theatre* and *Te Oro* generate some local economic activity by involving local small business owners in

event delivery, but these benefits are not systematically tracked and therefore leveraged as key aspects of case study investment and activities.

Areas of potential development:

- Develop consistent economic tracking tools for Council-supported initiatives to measure local business involvement, including vendor participation and hospitality spend.
 - Embed local economic impact as a formal objective for Council-funded programmes, ensuring that contributions to the local economy are regularly reflected in case study site activities and are recognised as part of the overall value for investment.
-

The above themes are reflections across case study sites and represent learning that can be applied to future design, delivery and monitoring of Auckland Council investments.

Section 5: Alignment with key Auckland Council strategies

In this final section, we review the contribution that the case studies, as leading examples of arts investment, make to the goals of key Council strategies. Through a variety of mechanisms, these case studies demonstrate that arts investment is making a range of strategic contributions to the arts-specific Toi Whītiki strategy and to more overarching strategies and frameworks: Ngā Hapori Momoho – Thriving Communities Strategy; Tāmaki Ora 2025-2027: Māori Outcomes Strategy; and the Auckland Plan 2050.

Toi Whītiki – Auckland’s Arts and Culture Strategic Action Plan

[Toi Whītiki](#) sets out the contribution over a ten-year timeframe that arts and culture can make to the central goal of the Auckland Plan 2025: becoming the world’s most liveable city. There is strong alignment of the investment in arts and culture with each of the six goals of Toi Whītiki.

Toi Whītiki – Auckland’s Arts and Culture Strategic Action Plan	
Area	Alignment
All Aucklanders can access and participate in arts and culture	<p>The case studies demonstrate a strong commitment to inclusive access, through a range of approaches that support community involvement and enjoyment of the arts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiatives such as <i>Pride Fest Out West</i> and <i>Stand Up Stand Out</i> remove barriers through free programming, localised delivery, and culturally relevant content. • <i>Basement Theatre</i> and <i>Te Oro</i> offer low-cost, central and suburban venues, while <i>Dragon Boat Festival</i> and <i>Te Manu Ka Rewa</i> engage communities through public celebration and storytelling.
Auckland values and invests in arts and culture	<p>Each case study reflects strategic investment that is aligned with community needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Te Manu Ka Rewa</i> and <i>Basement Theatre</i> reveal how targeted funding and infrastructure support can build artist capability and support sustained presence in communities. • <i>Stand Up Stand Out</i> and <i>Te Oro</i> illustrate how ongoing investment fosters long-term arts participation for rangatahi and local artists. • In some case studies, particularly <i>Basement Theatre</i>, the application of community feedback mechanisms and monitoring processes both capture and reinforce the value of these investments.
A network of vibrant arts and culture organisations and facilities	<p>The case studies highlight a diverse ecosystem of facilities, events and organisations. <i>Basement Theatre</i> anchors the central city arts scene, while <i>Te Oro</i> and <i>Pride Fest Out West</i> activate suburban and regional spaces. These venues are complemented by event-based initiatives like</p>

	<i>Dragon Boat Festival</i> , which extend reach and vibrancy to diverse cultures.
Arts and culture is intrinsic to Auckland's placemaking	Public artworks like <i>Te Manu Ka Rewa</i> embed cultural narratives into the urban landscape, while <i>Te Oro</i> enhances Glen Innes' civic identity through architecture and arts/performance programming. <i>Basement Theatre</i> and <i>Pride Fest Out West</i> contribute to the vibrancy and safety of their precincts, reinforcing arts as a core element of Auckland's identity.
Auckland celebrates a unique cultural identity	<p>All six case studies celebrate Auckland's cultural diversity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Te Manu Ka Rewa</i> and <i>Te Oro</i> bring to the fore Māori identity and mātauranga. • <i>Dragon Boat Festival</i> and <i>Pride Fest Out West</i> feature Chinese and Rainbow communities respectively. • <i>Basement Theatre</i> and <i>Stand Up Stand Out</i> elevate a range of community voices, particularly across Auckland's multicultural and rangatahi populations.
Auckland has a robust and flourishing creative economy	<p>The initiatives make a positive contribution to creative careers and economic participation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Stand Up Stand Out</i> and <i>Basement Theatre</i> provide platforms for emerging artists to develop professionally and personally. • At a small scale, <i>Pride Fest Out West</i> and <i>Dragon Boat Festival</i> enable small businesses and creatives to reach new audiences. • <i>Te Oro</i> fosters local economic activity through venue hire and partnerships.

Auckland Plan 2050

[The Auckland Plan 2050](#) is a long-term spatial plan to ensure Auckland grows in a way that will meet the opportunities and challenges of the future. There are six key outcomes specified in the Auckland Plan: belonging and participation; Māori identity and wellbeing; homes and places; transport and access; environment and cultural heritage, and opportunity and prosperity.

Auckland Plan 2025	
Area	Alignment
Belonging and participation	Belonging and participation is evident across all initiatives. Programmes such as <i>Stand Up Stand Out</i> , <i>Pride Fest Out West</i> , and <i>Basement Theatre</i> create inclusive spaces where diverse communities can express themselves, build confidence, and connect through shared experiences. These initiatives reduce barriers to participation and affirm the value of creative expression for all Aucklanders. The <i>Dragon Boat Festival</i> supports the belonging and participation of the Chinese community and those that it partners with through the festival. <i>Te Oro</i> as an arts facility supports participation and identity for young people and residents of the local community.

Māori identity and wellbeing	Māori identity and wellbeing are advanced through <i>Te Manu Ka Rewa</i> and <i>Te Oro</i> , which embed Māori narratives, design, and leadership into public spaces and programming. These initiatives support cultural reclamation, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and the visibility of Māori identity in everyday life.
Environment and cultural heritage	The goal of environment and cultural heritage is reflected in the preservation and celebration of cultural stories, particularly through public artworks and festivals that honour ancestral knowledge and community traditions.
Opportunity and prosperity	Opportunity and prosperity are fostered through capability-building, career pathways, and economic participation. Artists and small businesses benefit from exposure, income, and professional development, contributing to a more vibrant and resilient creative economy.

Ngā Hapori Momoho – Thriving Communities Strategy

[Ngā Hapori Momoho](#) sets out the outcomes for Auckland to achieve over the next decade, to ensure all our communities can thrive. It does so through four key priorities.

Ngā Hapori Momoho – Thriving Communities Strategy	
Area	Alignment
Manaakitanga: All Aucklanders enjoy the essentials of a good life and fulfil their potential	Under manaakitanga, initiatives such as <i>Te Oro</i> , <i>Stand Up Stand Out</i> , and <i>Basement Theatre</i> provide inclusive, low-cost access to creative spaces and programmes that support wellbeing, identity, and personal growth. These initiatives enable Aucklanders to fulfil their potential through skill-building, career pathways, and cultural expression.
Whanaungatanga: All Aucklanders are connected and feel as though they belong	Whanaungatanga is fostered through community-led events like <i>Pride Fest Out West</i> and <i>Dragon Boat Festival</i> , which bring diverse communities together in celebration and shared experience. These events create safe, welcoming environments that strengthen social bonds and affirm belonging, particularly for Rainbow, migrant, and intergenerational communities.
Kotahitanga: All Aucklanders can participate and take collective action to meet common goals	Kotahitanga is evident in the collaborative design and delivery of all six initiatives. From iwi partnerships in <i>Te Manu Ka Rewa</i> to artist-led programming at <i>Basement Theatre</i> , communities are empowered to lead, shape, and participate in arts and culture. This collective action builds resilience and ensures that creative initiatives reflect local aspirations.
Kaitiakitanga: Aucklanders are connected to and care for the natural environment	While Kaitiakitanga is less explicitly addressed, projects like <i>Te Manu Ka Rewa</i> embed deep connections to whenua and whakapapa, honouring ancestral knowledge and place-based identity.

Tāmaki Ora 2025-2027: Māori Outcomes Strategy and Performance Measurement Framework

Tāmaki Ora 2025-2027 is a framework to measure Māori wellbeing outcomes and performance for the region. Seven ora outcomes pou are identified, of which three have resonance with the case studies, particularly *Te Manu Ka Rewa* and *Te Oro*, but also other case studies to a lesser degree.

Tāmaki Ora 2025-2027: Māori Outcomes Strategy	
Area	Alignment
Cultural identity wellbeing	The goal of reflecting Māori heritage and identity in Tāmaki Makaurau is exemplified by <i>Te Manu Ka Rewa</i> , a public artwork created through deep collaboration with mana whenua. It embeds pūrākau, whakapapa, and mātauranga Māori into the urban landscape, enhancing visibility and pride in Māori narratives. Similarly, <i>Te Oro</i> is grounded in Māori design and tikanga, serving as a cultural hub that celebrates and sustains Māori identity through programming and partnerships.
Whānau and community wellbeing	Whānau Māori are connected, included and thriving, with Māori-led spaces across the city, and are given effect through initiatives like <i>Stand Up Stand Out</i> , which provides performance and career pathways for rangatahi Māori. The programme fosters confidence, skill development, and industry exposure, with many alumni progressing into creative careers. <i>Te Oro</i> also nurtures rangatahi through accessible arts programmes and mentorship, helping them explore identity and leadership.
Economic wellbeing	Intergenerational wealth and a thriving resilient Māori economy are supported through capability-building investments. <i>Te Manu Ka Rewa</i> enabled an emerging Māori artist to develop skills and launch a career in public art, while <i>Te Oro</i> supports Māori artists through residencies and professional development.

Conclusion

Auckland Council's investment in arts and culture generates cultural and social value for communities across Tāmaki Makaurau, with modest economic benefits also captured through this evaluation. Through an exploration of six case studies of Auckland Council investments, this evaluation has explored how targeted, equitable investment in arts and culture activities can foster increased community engagement and participation, uplift diverse communities, strengthen community cohesion and build pathways for artists to sustain careers in the creative industries.

Investment sites show that value is not achieved through operational funding alone, but through a mix of resources, relationships and culturally responsive approaches. Looking to the future, the opportunities to generate further value from investment hinge on a number of areas for improvement that have been outlined in this report.

Appendix 1: Evaluation rubric

This appendix outlines the criteria and standards (i.e., the rubric) for the evaluation of the arts and culture case studies. These were used when responding to and making judgements around the KEQs.

During the evaluation design phase, stakeholders identified levels of performance for the programmes that were **just good enough** or **excellent**. Anything that does not meet just good enough is by definition not meeting programme expectations; and anything that is above just good enough but below excellent can be categorised as on a pathway to excellence. Detailed criteria are outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Evaluation rubric

Stewardship of resources to enable Arts & Culture in Auckland

Not yet meeting expectations	Meeting expectations	Above expectations	Excellent
Transparent and strategic investment that is aligned with priorities, needs and evidence			
<i>Performance is below the level outlined in the criterion for Meeting expectations</i>	Arts and culture activities are programmed for the needs of communities, enabling their participation and engagement	<i>Performance is more advanced than the criterion for Meeting expectations but less than what is outlined in Excellent</i>	Arts and culture activities are tailored to communities and comprehensively reflect Auckland's diversity
	Council/case study sites are able to demonstrate that arts investment have been used appropriately and for intended purposes		Council/case study sites co-invest with other groups, leveraging partnership approaches to optimise benefits for the community and region
	Some data collection occurs, but the application is inconsistent, and insights are not shared widely across stakeholders		Comprehensive, high-quality data informs arts decision-making, with findings used for advocacy, strategic planning, and shared learning
Relational integrity and working in partnership			
<i>Performance is below the level outlined in the criterion for Meeting expectations</i>	Relationships are constructive project/organisation delivers work that supports councils' strategic goals	<i>Performance is more advanced than the criterion for Meeting expectations, but less than what is outlined in Excellent</i>	Relationships are mutually beneficial and funded projects/organisations are enabled to deliver activities, initiatives and infrastructure that are authentic to them
	Council provides funding to enable arts and culture activities		Council provides funds and other support as needed

	Council brokers and contributes to relationships in the sector		Council contributes to collaboration between artists, organisations and other institutions and is seen as a connector in the sector
Te-Tiriti-based practice			
<i>Performance is below the level outlined in the criterion for Meeting expectations</i>	Te Tiriti guides the design of Council-supported initiatives	<i>Performance is more advanced than the criterion for Meeting expectations, but less than what is outlined in Excellent</i>	Te Tiriti underpins design, practice and delivery of Council-funded arts and culture initiatives
Protection of mātauranga			
<i>Performance is below the level outlined in the criterion for Meeting expectations</i>	Case studies utilise, uplift and protect mātauranga Māori	<i>Performance is more advanced than the criterion for Meeting expectations, but less than what is outlined in Excellent</i>	Case studies show mana-enhancing and culturally grounded practices and ways of working

Building artistic, social and cultural capital

Not yet meeting expectations	Meeting expectations	Above expectations	Excellent
Mana enhancing, authentic and equitable relationships across communities and iwi in Tāmaki Makaurau			
<i>Performance is below the level outlined in the criterion for Meeting expectations</i>	Auckland Council funds or co-designs initiatives and activities with communities	<i>Performance is more advanced than the criterion for Meeting expectations, but less than what is outlined in Excellent</i>	The community leads initiatives and activities, with Council support where mutually agreed
	Auckland Council/case studies consult iwi on Arts and Culture investment, programming and activities		Auckland Council, case studies and iwi work together in mana enhancing and authentic ways to contribute to shared aspirations
Catalysing creative activity			
<i>Performance is below the level outlined in the criterion for Meeting expectations</i>	The council provides funding to support creative initiatives, enabling projects to proceed or be sustained	<i>Performance is more advanced than the criterion for Meeting expectations, but less than what is outlined in Excellent</i>	Auckland Council acts as a catalyst for creative activity by providing funding and capability and capacity-building support, so that projects have the potential to scale and inspire further creative endeavours
Ngā toi Māori is enabled and fostered and Tamaki Makaurau is rich with Māori identity and culture			

<i>Performance is below the level outlined in the criterion for Meeting expectations</i>	Programmes, initiatives and infrastructure incorporate te Reo and some Māori concepts in an appropriate way	<i>Performance is more advanced than the criterion for Meeting expectations, but less than what is outlined in Excellent</i>	Mātauranga Māori is showcased authentically in programming, grounded in te ao Māori
	Te Tiriti informs arts and culture activities in Auckland		Te Tiriti is centred in decision making, execution and maintenance of arts and culture activities
Artistic development, self-expression, resilience and leadership are fostered in the arts			
<i>Performance is below the level outlined in the criterion for Meeting expectations</i>	Auckland Council supports organisations and initiatives in the community which may organically foster arts leadership	<i>Performance is more advanced than the criterion for Meeting expectations, but less than what is outlined in Excellent</i>	Council actively cultivates a diverse and dynamic leadership ecosystem, such as through mentorship, capacity-building programmes, and partnerships that support emerging and established leaders
	Projects or initiatives support some pathways into arts and culture careers, but they are not widely accessible or promoted, and uptake is limited		Clear, well-supported career pathways are in place, attracting diverse participants, retaining local talent, and fostering a thriving arts and culture workforce
	Some arts and culture initiatives provide limited employment or freelance opportunities for local creatives		Arts and culture initiatives drive economic opportunities for local creatives, offering pathways to employment, capacity building, and careers
Communities are enabled to participate and engage in the arts and appreciate its value			
<i>Performance is below the level outlined in the criterion for Meeting expectations</i>	Communities participate in shaping arts and culture through occasional consultation, with limited influence on decision-making or programme design	<i>Performance is more advanced than the criterion for Meeting expectations, but less than what is outlined in Excellent</i>	Communities are actively involved in co-designing and/or leading arts and culture initiatives, with evidence of strong ownership and participation
	Cultural programmes and initiatives foster some community connection, but engagement is sporadic or limited to specific groups		Arts and culture initiatives provide inclusive spaces for all residents to connect, share stories, and celebrate local identity
Taonga for future generations			
<i>Performance is below the level outlined in the criterion for Meeting expectations</i>	Key cultural assets, stories, and practices are preserved and catalogued, but these efforts are primarily archival, with limited engagement or access for communities	<i>Performance is more advanced than the criterion for Meeting expectations, but less than what is outlined in Excellent</i>	Taonga is celebrated through dynamic, intergenerational initiatives that make cultural treasures accessible, relevant, and alive in contemporary and future contexts

Generating social and economic value

Not yet meeting expectations	Meeting expectations	Above expectations	Excellent
Te Ao Māori embedded in Tāmaki Makaurau			
<i>Performance is below the level outlined in the criterion for Meeting expectations</i>	Ngā toi Māori features in Auckland Council arts and culture programming	<i>Performance is more advanced than the criterion for Meeting expectations, but less than what is outlined in Excellent</i>	There is devolved leadership and responsibility for Ngā toi Māori which is produced and maintained by and for Māori
Fostering economic growth			
<i>Performance is below the level outlined in the criterion for Meeting expectations</i>	The council provides funding for arts and culture projects that generate some economic activity, enabling communities to continue to do what they do	<i>Performance is more advanced than the criterion for Meeting expectations, but less than what is outlined in Excellent</i>	Arts and culture initiatives are an economic driver, create jobs, and provide room for organisations to experiment, innovate and grow
	Arts and culture initiatives generate some economic benefits for related sectors (e.g., hospitality, retail)		Arts and culture initiatives are integrated into broader economic development strategies, driving sustained growth across related sectors such as tourism, hospitality, and retail
Cohesive communities			
<i>Performance is below the level outlined in the criterion for Meeting expectations</i>	Arts and culture initiatives provide opportunities for family and close social network connection	<i>Performance is more advanced than the criterion for Meeting expectations, but less than what is outlined in Excellent</i>	Arts and culture initiatives create connection across communities beyond their immediate social and whānau networks
Healthy, well, engaged and informed citizens			
<i>Performance is below the level outlined in the criterion for Meeting expectations</i>	Arts and culture activities, initiatives and infrastructure are encouraging community conversations about important topics	<i>Performance is more advanced than the criterion for Meeting expectations, but less than what is outlined in Excellent</i>	Arts and culture are leveraged as tools for fostering civic engagement and exploring key social challenges
	Communities have opportunities to contribute to the development of arts initiatives		There are clear signals that communities feel seen, heard, and valued in how arts and culture reflect their identities and experiences
Sense of place, identity and vitality			
<i>Performance is below the level outlined in the criterion for Meeting expectations</i>	Arts and culture initiatives occasionally showcase local stories and communities, creating moments of connection and recognition	<i>Performance is more advanced than the criterion for Meeting expectations, but less than what is outlined in Excellent</i>	Arts and culture initiatives celebrate local communities, activate public spaces, and foster belonging, pride, and vibrancy across diverse communities