

Metro Tunnel Creative Program

Retrospective Study



Creative
Program

+ Gehl

Wrap Report — 2025



Purpose

What's in This Document?

The Metro Tunnel Creative Program was an initiative launched in 2016 to deliver temporary artworks, events, and placemaking activities around the Metro Tunnel Project construction sites in Melbourne, Australia.

As the Metro Tunnel Project nears completion in 2025, this report offers a timely reflection on the Creative Program's strategy and impact through key findings unearthed via various evaluation methods. Moreover, it aims to inspire and support the integration of creative interventions in future infrastructure and construction projects.

Using a multi-method approach — including stakeholder interviews, focus groups, surveys of collaborators, artists, and community members, and a review of program documentation — this retrospective study provides a comprehensive overview of the Creative Program's development, implementation, successes, and lessons for similar construction mitigation initiatives in Australia and globally. Enclosed are the findings from this process.



Cover: *Memory Lane* presented in partnership with Midsumma Festival, State Library Station 2021

Bottom left: *Your best is good enough for me* by Jon Campbell, Town Hall Station hoardings, City Square 2022

Bottom right: *The Gloriousness of Age* by Jane Fitzgerald, Town Hall Station hoardings, Scott Alley 2022

Acknowledgements

People Who Brought This Document to Life



Cross Yarra Partnership – Project Co is delivering the Metro Tunnel Creative Program for the Victorian Government, as part of the broader construction program. The primary intention of the Creative Program is to offset the impacts of construction on stakeholders including residents, business owners, City of Melbourne and its visitors.

Teresa Scalise
Director Communications & Stakeholder Engagement

Sarah Robins
Metro Tunnel Creative Program Manager

Riley O'Farrell
Marketing, Digital & Activation Advisor



Gehl is a networked urban strategy and design consultancy, with offices in Copenhagen, New York, and San Francisco, offering expertise in the fields of architecture, urban design, landscape architecture, and city planning. We address global trends using empirical analysis to design for social behaviour that drives meaningful change.

Sofie Kvist
Director

Eamon O'Connor
Senior Project Manager

Candice Ji
Designer & Researcher

Helena Wolf
Designer & Researcher

Akana Jayewardene
Designer & Researcher

Study Participants

Contributors to this document include:

Metro Tunnel Project Office (MTPO - formerly known as Rail Projects Victoria or RPV)

Capella Capital

Cross Yarra Partnership - Design & Construction

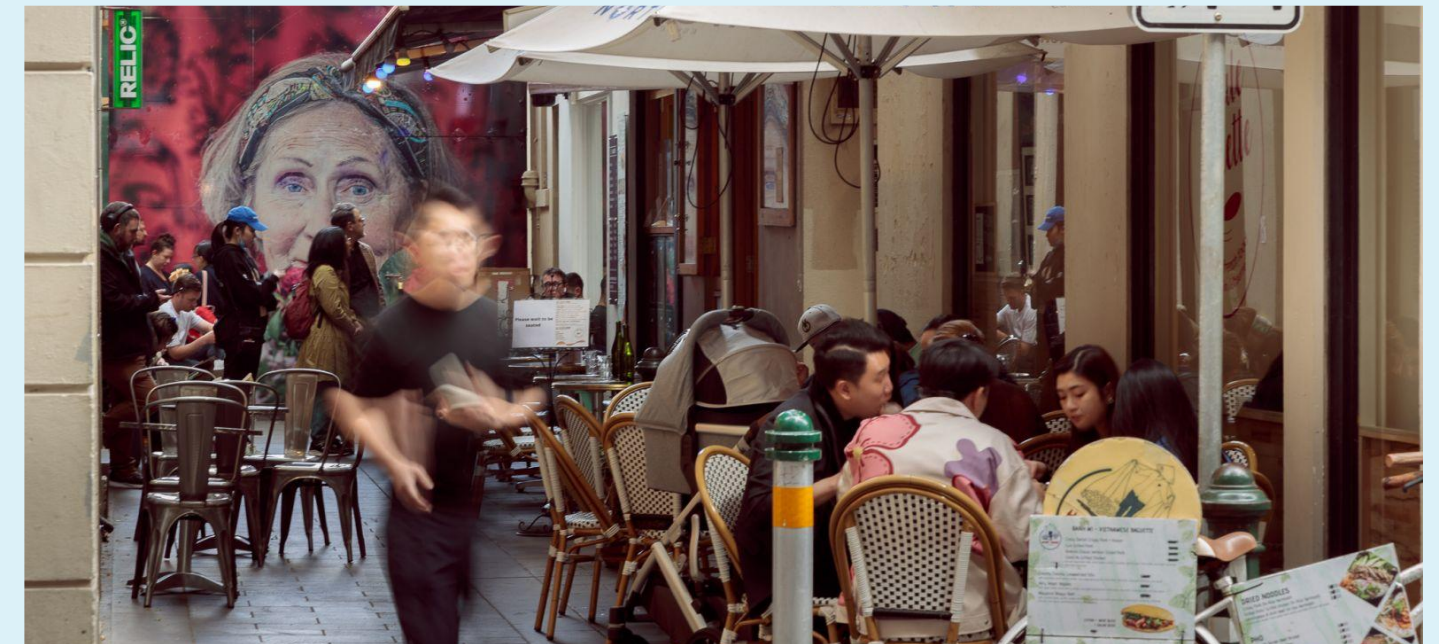
City of Melbourne

The Place Agency

Creatives who have participated in the Creative Program

Partner organisations including PHOTO Australia, RISING and Melbourne Fashion Festival

Community Reference Group members including Colin Stuckey, Karen Baynes, and Peter Gerrand



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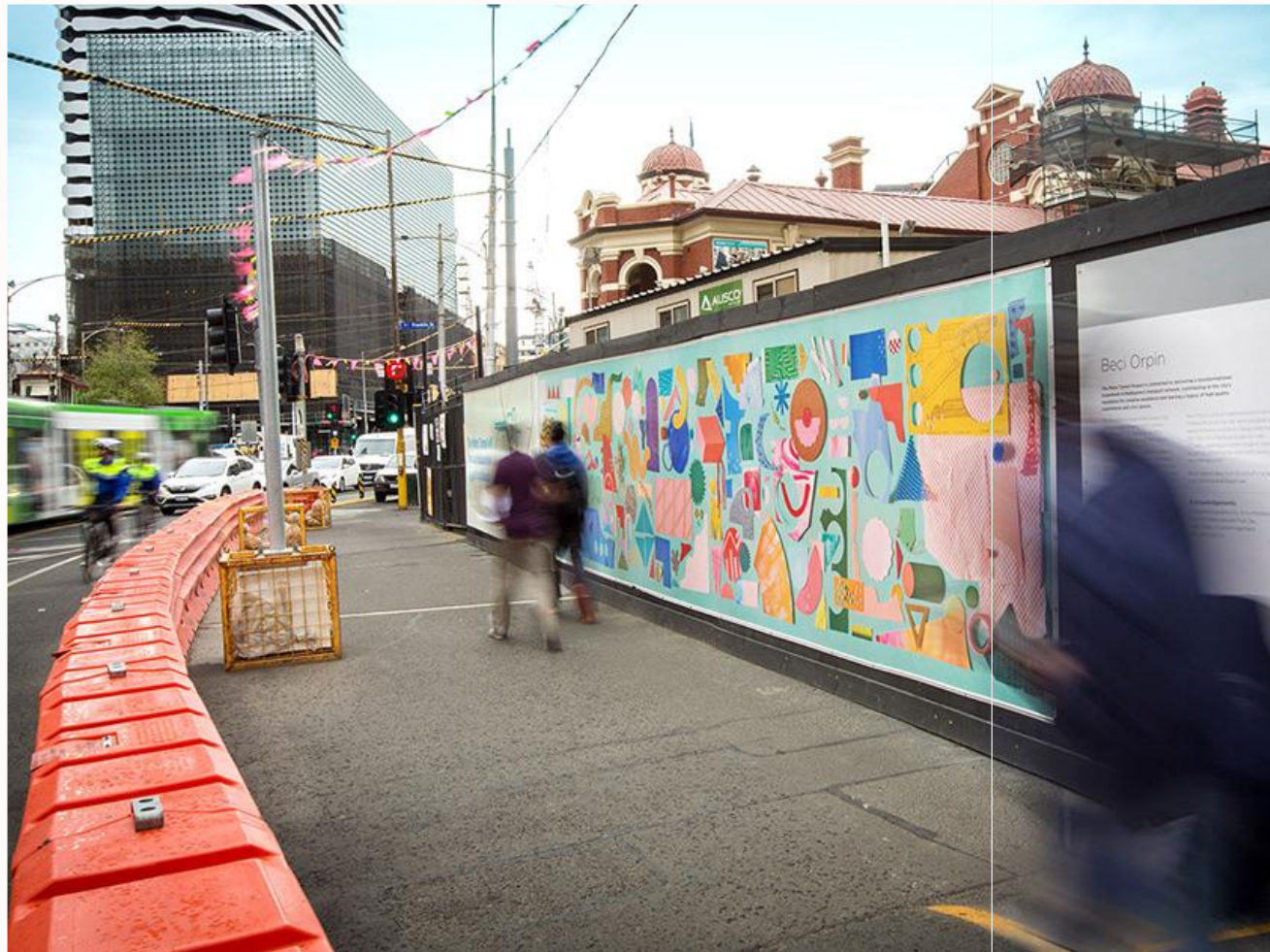
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Top: Creative Signage by Weekdays Design Studio, Town Hall Station hoardings 2020

Bottom left: Collage by Beci Orpin, State Library Station hoardings 2017

Bottom right: Domain Road Pop-up Parklet, Anzac Station pop-up 2019



Executive Summary

The Metro Tunnel Project is a city-shaping rail project, aimed at enhancing Melbourne's transport infrastructure. Spanning from Sunbury in the west to Cranbourne/Pakenham in the southeast, the project will introduce a new 9-kilometre rail tunnel system under Melbourne's central business district, alongside 5 new underground stations. The project is designed to accommodate larger, modern trains and will offer direct access to key Melbourne destinations, including St Kilda Road (Anzac Station), Parkville's health and education precinct (Parkville Station), and North Melbourne (Arden Station). Launched in 2016 and set for completion in 2025, the project is poised to reshape Melbourne's public spaces and transit system.

In the meantime, the 8-year construction phase has caused temporary disruption to the areas near the designated worksites. The Metro Tunnel Project Office (MTPO) faced the complex task of mitigating construction impacts, minimising congestion, and helping people navigate construction sites. In response, the **Metro Tunnel Creative Program** was created as a way to offset disruption through temporary creative interventions. By softening the experience near construction sites through art and design, the Creative Program supported local residents and businesses while promoting Melbourne's creative talent and industries. Since its inception, the program has gained widespread public recognition and garnered accolades such as the

Melbourne Design Awards, the GOV Design Awards, the Good Design Awards, and the Victorian Premier's Design Awards.

"Behind joy is a whole lot of pragmatism," said Mary Parker, former Director of Communications and Creative at CYP-Project Co.

The 2025 completion of the Metro Tunnel Project presents an opportunity to reflect on the legacy of the Creative Program. To uncover these insights, the program commissioned Gehl Studio — a global

urban strategy, design, and research practice — to conduct a retrospective study of the program's inner workings, external impacts, and keys to success.

Rooted in the program's longstanding commitment to data-driven evaluation and continuous learning, the multi-method study gathered qualitative and quantitative insights from 32 key stakeholders. The study found that the Creative Program team and partners transformed sites of disruption into places for art, civic pride, and public life. A commitment to creative excellence,

relationship-building, and well-executed strategies made this transformation possible.

Specifically, the study uncovered five key factors that shaped the program's impact, each of which is detailed on the following pages:

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Operating Model: Sufficient funding, a clear governance structure, and a skilled team gave the program a strong foundation. This allowed the team to work in a streamlined way, with the resources and flexibility needed to implement dynamic installations in ever-changing construction sites.

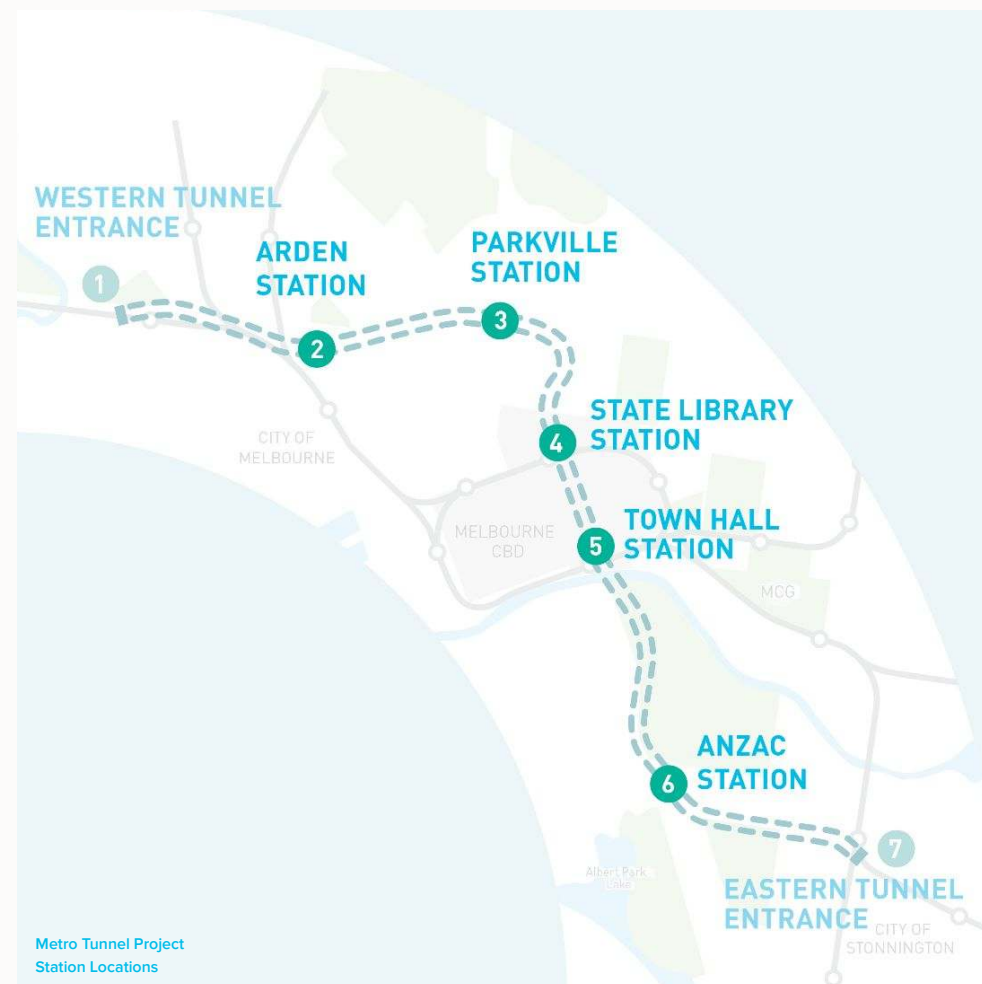
Community Impact: Creative design of installations, place-based activations, and consistent maintenance provided a welcome distraction from construction disruption and improved Melburnians' everyday experience. Projects were designed to be deeply rooted in its community, celebrating culturally significant events and the Melbourne spirit. Moreover, many of the installations made thematic connections to transport and infrastructure, reinforcing the importance of the ongoing Metro Tunnel Project to Melbourne's future.

Artist & Creative Engagement: The Creative Program adhered to thoughtful artist engagement practices through commissioning, compensation, and diverse representation. For example, the Program provided professional and collaborative opportunities for artists of different backgrounds: LGBTQIA+; First Nations; people living with disability; and those with underrepresented art practices like botany and embroidery. By including these groups, the program created new platforms for artistic representation and recognition.

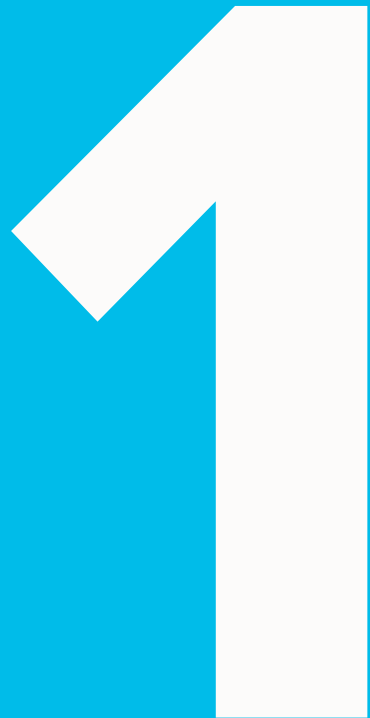
Stakeholder Engagement: An adaptive and co-creative approach built trust with neighbours (local institutions, small businesses), government, and on-the-ground construction teams. For the Metro Tunnel Creative Program, these strategic partnerships helped expand its reach and raise public awareness. For partners, it offered a unique opportunity to be part of a creative initiative linked to a major infrastructure project, allowing them to contribute in ways that extended beyond their usual programming.

Evaluation & Monitoring: Ongoing evaluation and monitoring through Public Life studies and artist and community surveys gave the program clear, evidence-based direction for continuous improvement. This Retrospective Study concludes the evaluation process, in hopes of inspiring other organisations to embed creative strategies, installations, and activations into their infrastructure projects.

As one of the first programs of its kind, the Metro Tunnel Creative Program shows how creative interventions can turn urban disruption into opportunities for public engagement, vibrant public life, and diverse artistic expression. With the Metro Tunnel project nearing completion, the program's success offers valuable insights for future infrastructure projects, highlighting the importance of creativity during the "meanwhile" construction period of urban developments.



Creative Program Overview

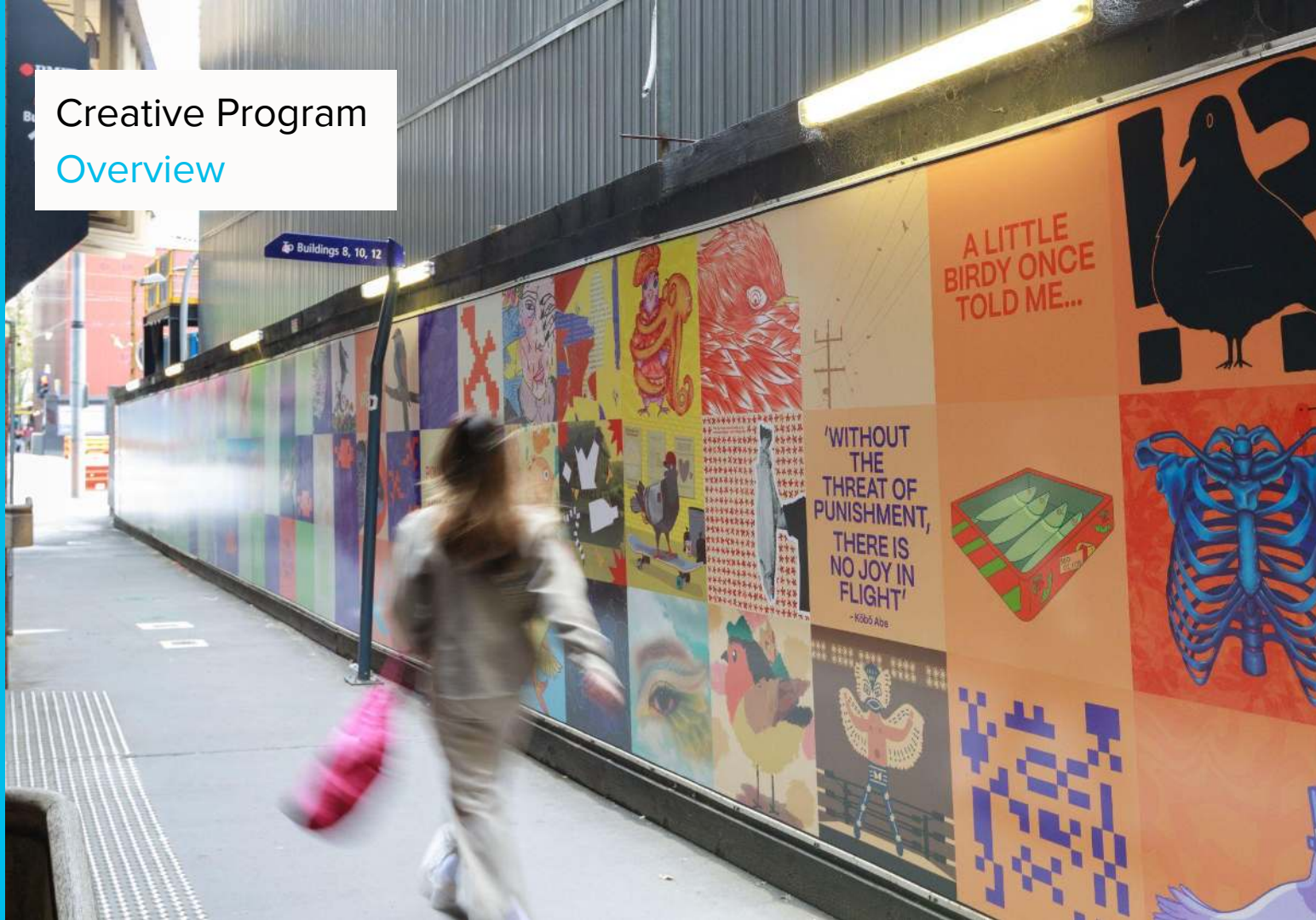


In Common.

The Creative Program partnered with Melbourne Fringe to present 3 performances of *In Common* outdoors at Federation Square, near the new Town Hall Station in Melbourne's CBD as part of the 2023 Fringe Festival.



Creative Program Overview



The Metro Tunnel Creative Program is a program of temporary creative works curated to enhance everyday life in Melbourne throughout the Metro Tunnel construction period.

It fosters community engagement with construction sites and supports local businesses and institutions — particularly where site boundaries meet the city fabric.

Rooted in Melbourne, a city celebrated for its dynamic art and design culture, the program is seen by Metro Tunnel Project Office (MTPO) — the Victorian Government agency overseeing major rail infrastructure — as an opportunity to celebrate creativity while delivering major infrastructure. It aims to connect people, places, stories, and ideas that honour Melbourne’s past and inspire its future.

In 2018, as station construction began, MTPO established the [Creative Strategy](#) to guide the Program’s approach. It outlined six key objectives:

1. Dynamic sites of creativity
2. Manage construction impacts
3. Line-wide identity
4. Welcoming and people-focused places
5. Creative opportunities and engagement
6. Showcase Melbourne

Developed in collaboration with state and local government stakeholders, the Creative Strategy acknowledges the the Metro Tunnel Project’s role in supporting Melbourne’s cultural identity and ensuring the project leaves a lasting civic legacy.



Top: *Flock Off, School's Out* by RMIT Bachelor of Design 2022 students, State Library Station hoardings 2022

Bottom: *RAILway* by Peter Atkins, Town Hall Station hoardings 2018

Middle: *Momentum* by Women's Circus, Arts Centre Melbourne 2022

Organisations Structure

The Metro Tunnel Creative Program is a function of Cross Yarra Partnership (CYP) - Project Co, a private consortium contracted by Metro Tunnel Project Office (MTPO), the state agency overseeing Metro Tunnel’s planning, design, and stakeholder engagement. The Creative Program is led by a core team and supported by a two-tiered governance structure charged with signing off on projects, and providing strategic direction for the program.



Metro Tunnel Project Office (MTPO)

The state government agency acting as the conduit for public funding within the Public-Private Partnership, effectively serving as the client for CYP - Project Co.



Cross Yarra Partnership (CYP) - Project Co

A private consortium (Lendlease, John Holland, Bouygues Construction, Capella Capital, and John Laing) contracted by MTPO as “Project Co” to manage the public-private partnership.

Subcontractor
CYP
Design & Construction



Subcontractor
CYP
Maintenance – John Holland

Core Team

- 1-2 employees (varied over program duration)
- Consultant curator for 5 hours a week
- Placemaking agency for 20 hours a week
- Other suppliers include graphic design, print, install, and photographers

Steering Committee

- Meets every second month
- Signs off on projects over \$20,000
- Provides strategic guidance for the program
- Signs off on annual implementation plan and budget

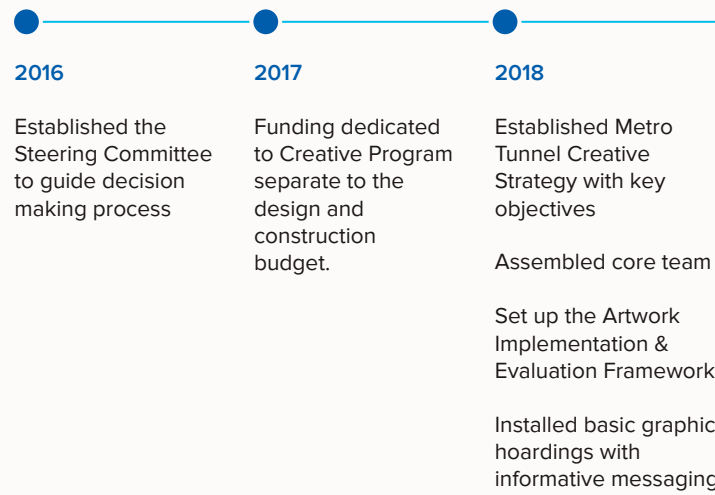
Art & Activation Working Group

- Meets fortnightly
- Signs off on projects up to \$20,000
- Members include marketing, stakeholders, business support, creative staff from client and contractor

Creative Program Timeline

Setup

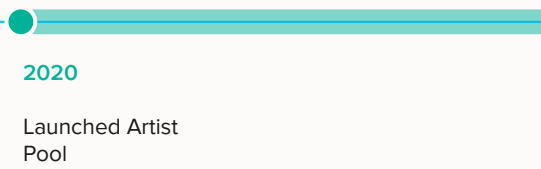
Establishing program goals, defining evaluation criteria, and preparing the team for launch



The Little Things by Lemon Chicken Por Favor also known as Tonia Composto, Town Hall Station hoardings, Scott Alley 2023–2024

Peak Construction

Curating and delivering artwork installations and activations around construction sites to improve the public experience

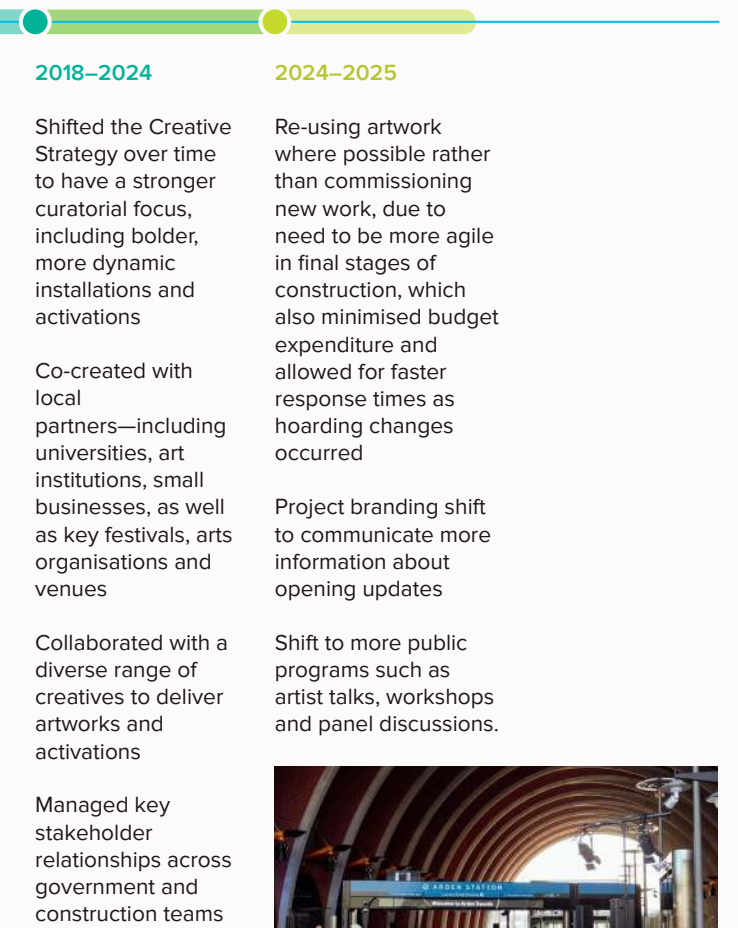


400,000+
weekly encounters with the installations across all sites

Gravity System Response by Ash Keating, Town Hall Station hoardings, Swanston Street 2023–2024

Pre-Opening

Supporting station opening activities through tailored messaging and the strategic reuse of existing artworks



Arden Sounds, presented in partnership with the Melbourne International Jazz Festival, Arden Station 2024

Retrospective Study Overview

2

“

This report demonstrates that creativity is not just an embellishment to infrastructure, but a vital thread in the fabric of public life bringing meaning, connection, and identity to shared spaces. By capturing the insights and experiences of those who have contributed to and been impacted by the program, this report offers a valuable resource for other organisations seeking to embed creativity into the heart of civic infrastructure development.”

Metro Tunnel Creative Program team

Sovereign Seconds, by Kent Morris,
Town Hall Station hoardings 2023



“

Having the opportunity to produce my work on such an enormous scale and in this context in the centre of Melbourne really provided the opportunity to showcase my work across a diverse range of audiences — from the everyday public to the wider arts community. It opened the door to a whole range of opportunities for my practice and it continues to be a significant milestone in my career.”

Emma Coulter



spatial deconstruction #23 (resilience) by Emma Coulter, Town Hall Station 2020–2024

Melbourne-based artist Emma Coulter created a large-scale public work for the exterior of the temporary acoustic shed in City Square.

“My work is an offering to the people and streetscape of Melbourne, post-COVID-19 lockdown,” says Emma. “It’s a gesture of resilience, and a way to help this space become a celebrated community place once again.”

Installed by Melbourne studio Juddy Roller in early 2021, the artwork spanned over 100 metres and wrapped around the Swanston Street and Flinders Lane sides of the shed.

Retrospective Study

Evaluation Methods

The Retrospective Study employed a multi-method approach, including interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and desktop research, to gather both quantitative and qualitative data from key stakeholders involved in developing, collaborating on, and implementing the Creative Program. By engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders through multiple methodologies, the Retrospective Study explores the behind-the-scenes processes essential to the Program's success, assesses the impact of its processes and projects, identifies areas for improvement, and informs strategies for enhancing future initiatives.

The Retrospective Study is part of the Creative Program's ongoing, data-driven evaluation approach, established from the outset to support continuous learning and improvement. It draws on broader evaluation methods, including behavioural observations and stakeholder feedback, with findings from those studies also informing this report.

1 Interviews

16 interviewees

Gehl held interviews in a 60-minute semi-structured format designed to gather in-depth insights from stakeholders involved in the Creative Program. The interview began with a brief opening and exploration of stakeholders' perceptions of the Creative Program's effectiveness against its six strategic objectives. The main discussion covered operational models, stakeholder relationships, community and artist impacts, construction management coordination, and public opinion. The session concluded with reflections on how the Creative Program influenced personal professional practices, advice for future initiatives, a one-word description capturing the Creative Program's impact, and final questions and next steps.

2 Focus Group

One 90-minute discussion

The focus group with Metro Tunnel Project Office staff, facilitated by Gehl Studio, was a structured qualitative discussion aimed at exploring staff experiences and perceptions of the Creative Program's impact. Participants discussed their roles, reflected on which of the program's key objectives succeeded or fell short, and evaluated critical factors such as operational models, stakeholder and community engagement, artist involvement, and collaboration with construction teams. The session concluded by ranking these factors for their importance to program success, discussing successes and areas for improvement, and gathering key advice for similar future programs.

3 Questionnaire

25 responses

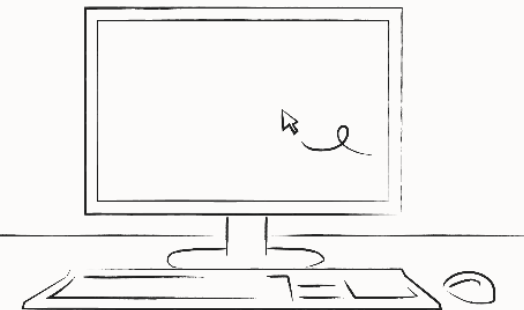
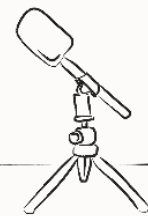
A structured survey was distributed to both participants of earlier interviews and focus groups, as well as additional key stakeholders unable to participate previously, to collect qualitative and quantitative insights on the Creative Program's impacts. It includes general questions assessing affiliation, program impact, and alignment with strategic objectives, alongside tailored branching sections that address audience-specific experiences, such as impacts on communities, stakeholders, contributing artists, and internal project staff.

4 Desktop Research

7 years of research

Documentation reviewed as part of the desktop research included materials covering the Creative Program from initial concept development through two rounds of Public Life evaluations*, community surveys, media coverage, and accolades. Additionally, responses from artist surveys conducted between 2019 and 2024, involving 90 participating artists, were analysed.

* The Creative Program commissioned Gehl to observe patterns of behavior and activity at program sites, offering insights into how people engaged with the activated spaces and identifying opportunities for improvement. These observations informed recommendations for future program design and programming. In 2019 and 2022, data was collected on one weekday and one weekend day across five station zones and more than 25 designated count locations, capturing both stationary activities and movement patterns.



Retrospective Study Findings & Lessons Learned

3

The Twelve Days of Christmas, by
Robert Michael Young, Town Hall
Station hoardings 2023-2024



Empowering a Community of Everyday Artists

As part of the Creative Program’s collaboration with PHOTO 2022 International Festival of Photography, British artist Jenny Lewis showcased her expansive project that captured 101 people from the age of 0 through to 100 in her local community of Hackney. This work was displayed along 148 metres of construction hoardings on Barry Street, Parkville.

Inspired by Lewis’s installation and motivated to foster a local response, the Creative Program launched a companion initiative: an open call for Victorians to submit portraits of friends, family members, and neighbours representing each age from 0 to 100. This participatory effort culminated in the *101 Victorians* project, an online exhibition that welcomed contributions from across the community — amateurs, hobbyists, and professional photographers alike.

The project celebrated the extraordinary diversity of the Victorian community and offered a platform for everyday citizens to contribute creatively. By capturing individual stories across generations, it created a collective portrait of life in Victoria. The project became one of the program’s most popular projects, resonating widely with the public and underscoring the power of community-led storytelling in public art.



101 Victorians, online 2022-2023

This community-driven project was brought to life by a diverse group of photographers from across Victoria. Through their lenses, these participants created a collective portrait of the state — celebrating the diversity of everyday life across generations.

Introduction

To Retrospective Study Findings

This chapter presents the **Retrospective Study findings, which assess the impact of the Metro Tunnel Creative Program using the multi-method approach outlined in the previous chapter.** By triangulating both qualitative and quantitative data — including stakeholder interviews, artist and community surveys, observational studies, and program documentation—the study offers a comprehensive view of how the program functioned and the results it achieved.

The analysis revealed that the Creative Program’s strategies and tactics generated outcomes across five key areas:

- Operating Model
- Community Impact
- Artist & Creative Engagement
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Evaluation & Monitoring

Each of these areas played a critical role in the program’s overall success and offers valuable lessons for similar construction mitigation initiatives in Australia and around the world.


This chapter explores each domain by detailing the strategies implemented, the outcomes achieved, and the key lessons learned — highlighting insights that can inform future creative programs delivered alongside major infrastructure projects.

Overall, the Creative Program effectively fulfilled its main goal of mitigating construction impacts through a site-specific, creative approach tailored to the unique needs of each location and community. Over nearly eight years of major infrastructure works across Melbourne, the Creative Program played a key role in making disruptions more manageable — and engaging — for those affected. It received overwhelmingly positive feedback from a broad range of participants, including community members, artists, stakeholders, and collaborators.

The program reinforced Melbourne’s creative identity during times of disruption and demonstrated the value of a creative approach to construction impact mitigation. Today, it stands as a best-practice case study for cities and infrastructure projects around the world.

1,150
registrations in
the Artist Pool

67%
of artists based in
metropolitan Melbourne




5,600 kg
of vinyl diverted from
landfill by upcycling
artworks into tote bags

252
total projects
delivered

The Creative Program by the numbers

220+
artworks produced



79
First Nations
artists supported

Tanderrum Dancers by James Henry, Town Hall Station hoardings, Scott Alley, 2025

Outcome

During the Metro Tunnel construction period, the Creative Program transformed sites of disruption into places for art, civic pride, and public life.

96%

of questionnaire respondents rated the program positive impact as high or very high.

(n=25)



Overall, the Creative Program was successful in enhancing city life and mitigating the impacts of construction. When asked to rate the magnitude of the Creative Program's positive impact on a scale of 1 to 5 — an overwhelming majority of respondents across all affiliations rated the program as having a high or very high impact. Contributing artists gave the program the highest average rating, with 5 out of 6 of whom ranked it as 'very high impact' — a testament to the program's in valuing and working with artists.

This sentiment was echoed in interviews with stakeholders, including representatives from the City of Melbourne, event coordinators, and placemaking agencies, who consistently praised the Creative Program for achieving its goals of making construction sites feel calmer, less confronting, and more joyful for the public.

When asked to describe the Creative Program in one word, most respondents highlighted its quality and impact, while others noted its emotional resonance, vibrancy, and ability to drive personal and systemic change.

Highlighting access and generosity

3 mentions

“

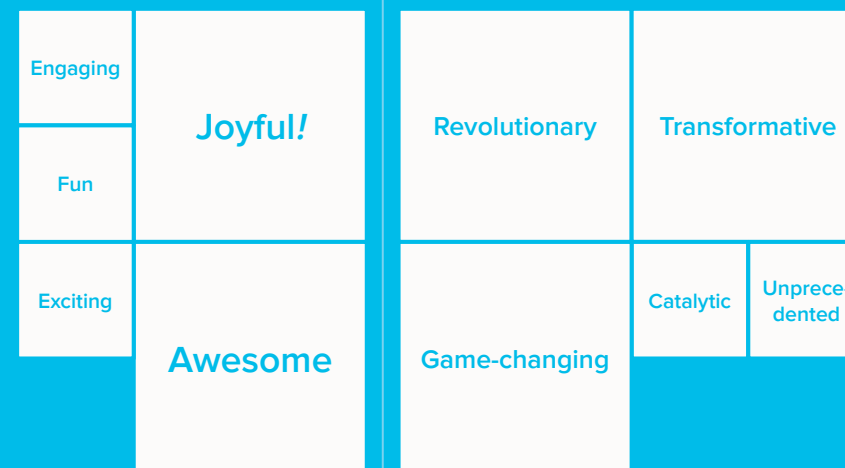
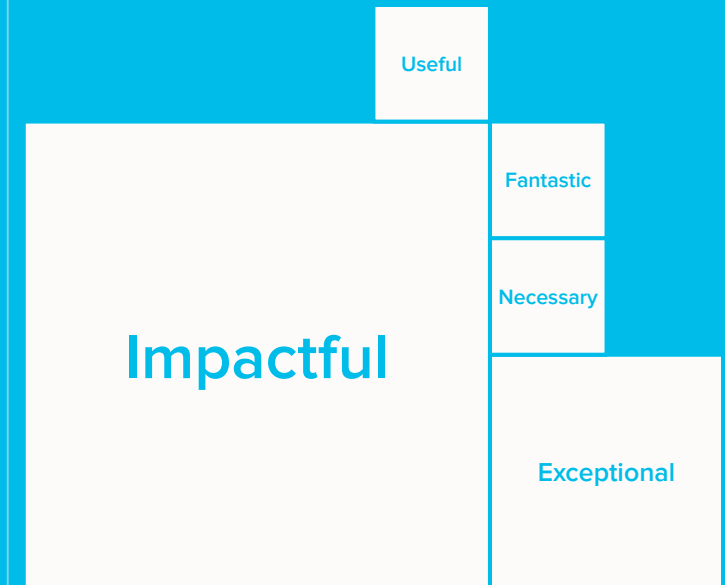
I think people found the Creative Program to be quite a generous thing — it was unexpected and some would say unnecessary but it was also constantly referred to as a highlight of the project.”

Impacted Stakeholder



Reflecting high quality, importance, and usefulness

8 mentions



Capturing emotional engagement and vibrance

7 mentions

Words that suggest deep personal or systemic change

8 mentions

“

Groundbreaking! We use this word in infrastructure projects a lot, but here was something that really hadn't been done before at this scale — and something that delivered on what it promised.”

Peter De Luca, former Director of Corporate Affairs & Strategy, Metro Tunnel Project Office (MTPO)

Key Findings

Summary

The Retrospective Study reveals that the Creative Program strategies and tactics delivered outcomes across five key areas—each playing a critical role in the program’s success and offering valuable lessons learned.



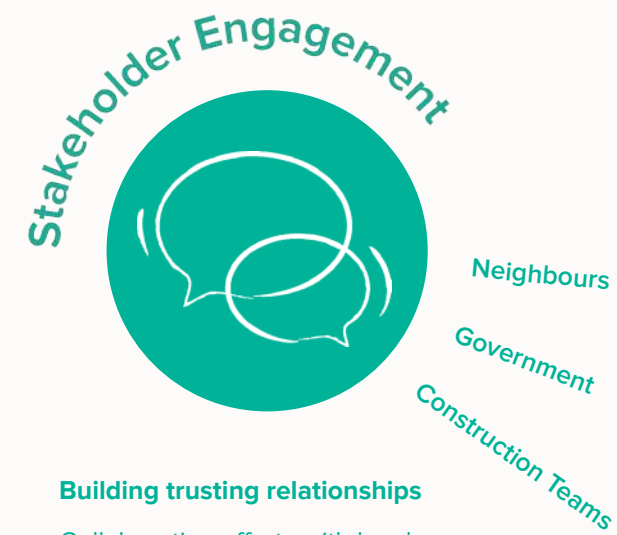
Improving everyday lives

Design impact of two-dimensional artworks and site activations that were context-specific, timely, responsive to community needs, and supported by ongoing maintenance.



Empowering the creative community

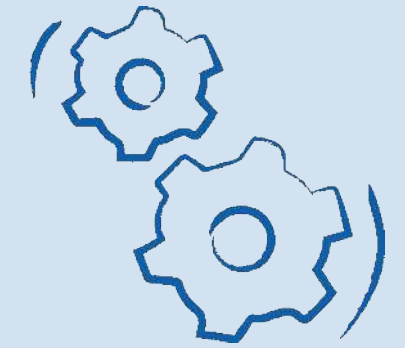
Result of the inclusive and effective commissioning processes, fair compensation, and professional development opportunities for creatives.



Building trusting relationships

Collaborative efforts with local institutions, small businesses, public sector stakeholders, and on-the-ground construction teams.

Operating Model



Definition

An operating model defines how a program organises its funding, decision-making structure, and team to deliver its goals effectively. The Creative Program's operating model was assessed by examining how financial resources were secured and utilised (funding), how decisions were made (governance), who executed the work (team), and how effectively the work was delivered.

Focus

Funding

Allocating and managing financial resources to support program operations and ensure long-term sustainability.

Governance

Establishing systems for decision-making, accountability, and oversight to guide program management.

Team

Assembling skilled creative managers with the capacity to deliver and execute the program's work.

What worked well?

A strong foundation of a **well-funded** program, clear **governance** structure, and skilled **team** set the program up for a streamlined workflow.

Creating a Community Hangout

Built opposite the Anzac Station construction site, the Albert Road Reserve pop-up park was created in response to the 2019 Public Life Survey and community engagement — in which 84% of respondents (n=93) supported a temporary park during the expected two-year occupancy due to Metro Tunnel construction. The initiative addressed the need for more welcoming public space, adding seating, greenery, and furnishings that encouraged people — particularly women and seniors — to spend time in an area previously lacking in access to public spaces.

The space became a well-used, award-winning community asset, hosting events such as dog grooming, Anzac Day commemorations, live music, fundraisers, and a farewell celebration in November 2022. It was decommissioned later that month as construction continued to build a new station entrance and permanent park.



The many times friends commented on a pop-up park or activation without realising it was part of the Metro Tunnel Project — that gave me real satisfaction. It showed we were achieving our goal of seamlessly integrating into Melbourne's everyday life.

Jack Amies, Managing Director,
The Place Agency



Albert Road Reserve pop-up park, opposite Anzac Station 2021

The temporary pop-up park in Albert Road Reserve featured timber decking, generous seating, solar lighting and new drought tolerant plantings to improve the aesthetic and amenity of the reserve.

The Creative Program ...

... secured a funding stream independent from design and construction.



Strategy

Dedicated funding was allocated to the Creative Program, outside of the design and construction project budget. This dedicated funding stream was key because it ensured that the program could consistently deliver on its mission. For several years, this insulated the Program from any risk of budgets shifting for changing design and construction needs.

Outcome

With its own funding and a clear tie to the Metro Tunnel Project, the Creative Program was recognised as a core initiative — not a side project. As a result, the program preserved its operational and creative autonomy.

... set up a clear governance structure with a Steering Committee to guide decision-making.

“Setting up a governance structure was key to making decisions. You need this structure to make decisions about something like art that is subjective.”

Tom Shield, former Senior Manager, Urban Strategy MTPO



Strategy

A Steering Committee, made up of four members from MTPO, one CYP-Design and Construction and three CYP-Project Co staff, was set up to provide oversight and collaborative decision-making during the program.

Outcome

Stakeholders found the committee structure effective in keeping the program focused on its objectives. The committee adapted well to changing conditions, notably during the COVID-19 pandemic, when it shifted the program’s focus from the CBD, where foot traffic had dropped, to areas with more local residents and essential workers. This included a photo wall thanking hospital workers and displaying local student artworks.

... allocated sizable but sufficient funding.

Strategy

The funding allocated to the Creative Program, as interviewees revealed, was sufficient to cover expenses from staff to fair artist compensation to artwork materials, as well as installation and maintenance costs over the eight-year construction period.

Outcome

The right level of funding enabled the team to do their job effectively and responsibly, without the perception of overspending.



Chris White, former CEO, CYP-Project Co

... defined clear program targets to anchor decision-making.

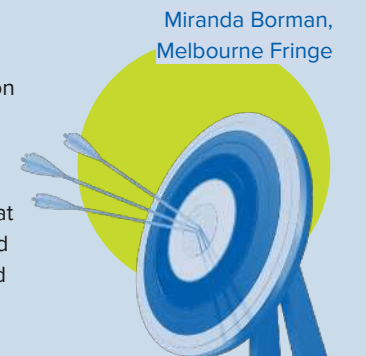
Strategy

From the outset, the Creative Program had a clearly defined purpose: to deliver temporary creative works to offset disruption, maintain vibrancy at work sites, and support Melbourne’s identity as a creative city during major construction.

Outcome

These clear objectives provided a strong foundation for decision-making and helped mitigate conflicts driven by personal artistic preferences – alignment that ensured the program stayed focused on public value and collective impact.

“Integrating capital works into the cultural fabric of a city is challenging. The Metro Tunnel Creative Program supported projects by Melbourne Fringe that embraced artistic innovation to encourage connection and dialogue around works that could otherwise have felt disruptive.”



... hired the right team with strong expertise and demeanor for curation, partnerships, stakeholder relations.

Strategy

The core team was selected for their experience in stakeholder engagement, curatorial practice, communications, and event management—equipping them to manage complex relationships and deliver a high-quality program.

Outcome

The team’s knowledge, professionalism, and understanding of working with creatives helped build trust with diverse stakeholders. Their ability to balance creative needs with practical limits was crucial in bridging relationships across government, construction, and creative sectors — in coordinating effectively.

“The Creative Program team just got it. They had the right skillset, and could bridge between creatives, government, construction, and marketing.”

Elias Redstone, PHOTO Festival



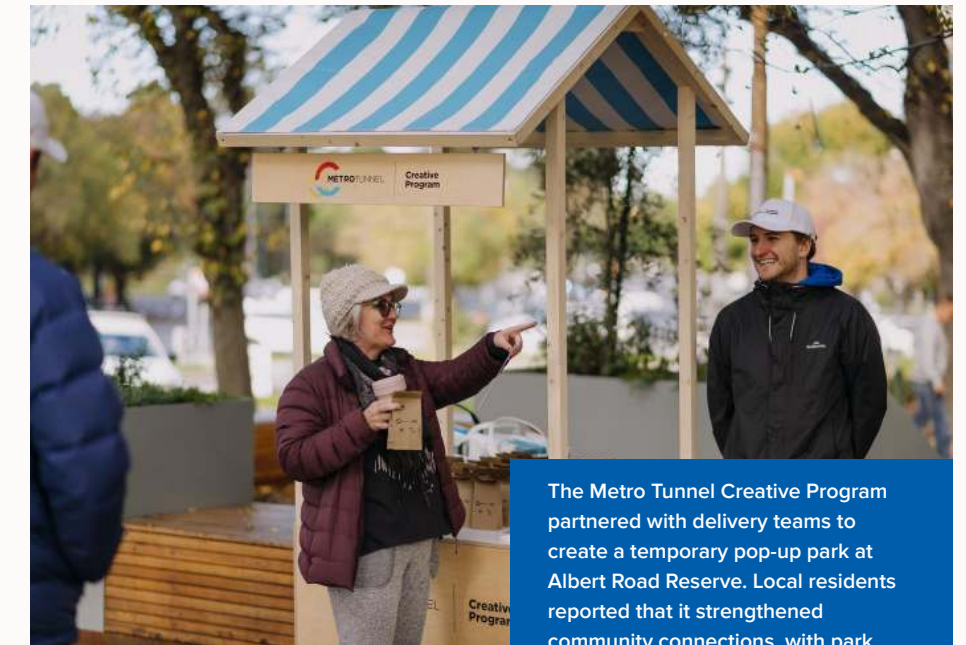


Establish a **clear governance structure** with a team to guide decision-making. Ensure that when decisions are made by the client outside of this body, it is clearly communicated to all relevant parties and aligned with the program’s objectives.

Ensure **dedicated funds**, giving the program **flexibility** to adapt at short notice.

Appoint **key personnel** with strong expertise in multi-sector stakeholder engagement, curation, and implementation to ensure successful delivery.

Embrace **partnerships** as a path to co-creation and authentic place-based installations.



The Metro Tunnel Creative Program partnered with delivery teams to create a temporary pop-up park at Albert Road Reserve. Local residents reported that it strengthened community connections, with park activations also aiming to engage local businesses for catering, dog grooming, and provision of items such as plants for giveaways.

While funding for the Creative Program was robust, a notable portion was redirected in the latter stages to a permanent artwork program. As a result, a more agile approach was adopted to ensure the program's integrity and overall success.

The Creative Program established a Steering Committee that effectively aligned creative projects with program objectives and ensured oversight of budget spends at specified levels. This structure reduced decision-making friction and enabled smooth collaboration with program staff and key stakeholders. Some interviewees, however, cited times when important decisions were made outside of the Steering Committee. Ultimately the ‘client,’ MTPO, directed the program's activities.

Key stakeholders interviewed consistently highlighted the strength of the core Creative Program team, noting that their professional demeanor helped navigate tensions between competing interests. Their credibility within the creative community was also instrumental in launching the program effectively and maintaining the consistent delivery of high-quality work throughout its duration.

Some interviewees highlighted the success of partnering with local creative organisations to curate the hoardings and activate the areas around the sites. Building on this partnership model, some interviewees suggested the possibility of “handing over” certain hoardings to local institutions and organisations to curate themselves (i.e. museums, galleries, theaters). A version of this approach was implemented at Federation Square, with one prominently located hoarding rotating between the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), Koorie Heriate Trust (KHT) and National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) approximately every four months.

“Being at arm's length from the government certainly allowed for more agility and quick turnaround times. In my opinion, having a defined budget and clear governance structure are essential factors in success for a program like this.”

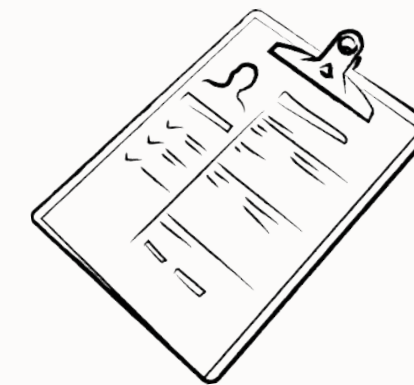
Sarah Robins, Metro Tunnel Creative Program Manager

Some interviewees reflected a shift in priorities toward more conservative use of government funds. Some suggested that operating at arm's length from government, such as through an independent curatorial body or consultancy, could have provided even greater resilience, flexibility, and creative autonomy.

Future programs might benefit from structures that balance public accountability with the independence needed to effectively plan activities and sustain artistic integrity — especially when navigating non-arts environments.

“The Creative Program worked with residents, businesses, and other impacted organisations to strengthen precinct identities — improving navigation and making the areas more attractive and safer for local communities.”

Lisa Warrener, Consultant Curator, Global Art Projects



Community Impact



Definition

Community impact describes how a program's activities influence the daily lives of local people, enhance the public environment, and foster stronger community connections. The Creative Program's community impact was assessed by examining how well-designed artworks (Design), locally tailored events and experiences (Activation), and consistent upkeep (Maintenance) helped to distract from construction disruption and improved Melburnians' everyday experience.

Focus

Design

Motif, concept, and aesthetic of the artworks that respond to the local environment, culture, and community character.

Activation

Events, installations, and experiences that engage the public and activate spaces around construction sites.

Maintenance

Upkeep and repair of installations to maintain quality, safety, and a welcoming public environment.

What worked well?

Creative **design** of artworks, locally tailored **activations**, and consistent **maintenance** provided an effective distraction from construction disruption and improved Melburnians' everyday experience.

Centering Local Community

The success of the Creative Program is rooted in the versatility of its core team — combining creativity, stakeholder engagement, coordination, and the agility to adapt based on evidence and feedback. These strengths were evident in its collaboration with PHOTO 2021 International Festival of Photography, which presented over 500 metres of free photographic art across construction hoardings. Throughout the project, the team demonstrated strong curatorial leadership, staying aligned with the program’s vision to empower artists in creating people-focused, site-specific work with a high standard of reproduction. When COVID-19 delayed the festival’s original 2020 launch, the team successfully rescheduled for February 2021. A standout project was the *Thank You* photo essay in the Parkville Biomedical Precinct — a tribute to healthcare workers that resonated widely with the public.

“

The program brought joy to the community involved. During COVID-19, doctors and nurses received global attention — but the project also meant so much to hospital cleaners and other staff to have their own stories acknowledged and understood. They felt happy to have been seen.”

Linda Cantan, former Director,
Metro Tunnel Project Office



Thank You by photographer Phoebe Powell, Parkville Station hoardings, 2020

The photo essay tribute to healthcare workers received international attention, appearing on the front page of the *New York Times*. The impact for the participating organisations was extraordinary — with many of them stating how thrilled they were to see their medical heroes recognised for their tireless work on COVID-19.

The Creative Program ...

... curated an engaging mix of activations and two-dimensional artworks.

“

Artworks made the city a more interesting place to visit, even amid disruption.”

Spencer Harrison,
Contributing artist

70%

of 2022 survey respondents did not think the construction had significantly disrupted their daily lives.



Strategy

Alongside bright, colourful two-dimensional artworks by Melbourne-based artists installed on construction hoardings, the Creative Program presented a wide variety of public events — from large-scale performances with thousands of viewers, to creative wayfinding for impacted businesses, custom activations like roving performances, and activations at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT)'s Open Day.

Outcome

These vibrant installations softened construction zones and shifted attention away from disruption, turning sites into engaging public spaces. Creative activations encouraged residents, who might otherwise not have engaged with the project, to take interest, ask questions, and connect with an infrastructure initiative set to reshape how Melbournians navigate their city.

... ensured sites were kept clean and well-lit throughout the day and night.



1 in 4

interviewees mentioned the importance of graffiti removal in maintaining a perception of safety and care.

(n=16)

Strategy

The program managed hoarding maintenance, including graffiti prevention and removal, regular cleaning, and enhancements such as lighting and CCTV to improve safety and site presentation, especially at night.

Outcome

Ongoing upkeep, lighting, and visible care helped make the spaces feel safer and more welcoming, encouraging pedestrians to continue using and enjoying the areas despite nearby construction activity.

... created clear design briefs that outlined the scope for each installation based on local needs and context.



“

Sometimes the greatest impact of the Creative Program was that it went unnoticed as a construction mitigation effort — it felt like a wallpaper for the city.”

Interviewee

Strategy

Each creative project was guided by a detailed design brief tailored to the local context, outlining constraints, goals, and site-specific considerations to draw out relevant, impactful proposals from artists and collaborators.

Outcome

Government stakeholders and creatives noted the briefs helped streamline decisions, focus effort on feasible ideas, and deliver work that felt genuinely connected to its location. The approach was so effective that some even said the work felt seamlessly part of the city — not just a response to construction.

... maintained a level of artistic quality that was bold yet still accessible to the general public.

400,000

people are estimated to have encountered Creative Program installations in an average 2022-2024 week, across 5 precincts.



Strategy

The program prioritised artwork that was bold yet approachable, ensuring broad appeal for workers, residents, and visitors. As one interviewee noted, “Art should be accessible, not esoteric — even when it’s layered.”

Outcome

By placing art in public spaces, especially during COVID-19, the program democratised access to art for people who might not otherwise engage with galleries or art institutions.

...refreshed the installations regularly to spark intrigue, while offsetting the risk of wastefulness by adopting sustainability practices.

Strategy

The curatorial approach included updating hoarding artworks about every 2-3 months. This steady refresh maintained public interest and was a visual marker of construction progress. In addition, the program repurposed approximately 10,865 square metres of artwork into giveaway bags.

Outcome

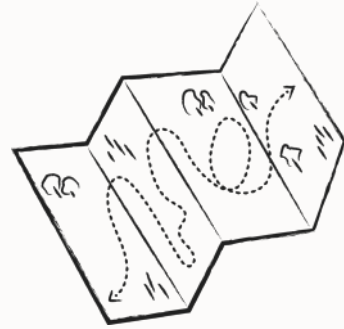
Frequent changes in the visual landscape sparked intrigue and excitement, helping to maintain community engagement throughout the long construction period. It also reinforced a sense of ongoing progress. Simultaneously, upcycling the artwork significantly reduced landfill waste generated by the program.

“

People look forward to seeing what’s there [on Swanston Street].”

Questionnaire respondent





Develop a **curatorial strategy** to ensure artworks and event activations are tailored to place.

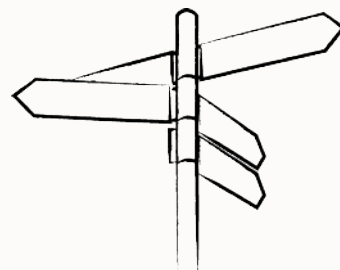
Design public art for **accessibility and broad appeal**.

Even though an early objective of the Creative Program was to “create a line-wide identity,” the Creative Program was successful because its identity adapted to its surroundings. A thoughtful curatorial strategy tailored installations to each Metro Tunnel construction site.

In the CBD (i.e. Town Hall and State Library Stations), artworks were designed for broad public appeal to both visitors and locals. In Arden, the focus shifted to place-specific interventions like enhancing site visits and co-creating history panels with local residents and historical societies. At Flinders Street, where small businesses were heavily impacted, wayfinding artworks were introduced, while in darker construction zones, creative lighting installations improved safety and ambience.

The Creative Program balanced artistic quality with public accessibility, allowing the installations to resonate with a broad audience — including those less likely to engage with formal art institutions and during the COVID-19 pandemic, when museums and galleries were closed for extended periods.

In a public infrastructure setting, the team deliberately chose art that was people-centered, bright, and approachable, avoiding explicit work or political themes to foster spaces that felt relatable and engaged everyday passersby.



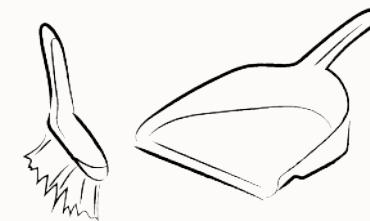
The NOLA (North of La Trobe Street) project is a painted artwork by Weekdays Design Studio, enhanced with neon lighting by Carla O'Brien, designed to brighten the previously dark area affected by construction at Swanston and La Trobe Streets.

Regularly **refresh installations** to sustain public interest and engagement.

Establish a **maintenance and stewardship plan** so both the construction areas and artworks feel safe and cared for.

Frequent updates to the two-dimensional artworks on construction hoardings created moments of wonder, conveyed a sense of progress, and transformed passive foot traffic into active engagement with the evolving infrastructure project.

The Creative Program contracted a dedicated team for maintenance and graffiti removal, helping to maintain sites.

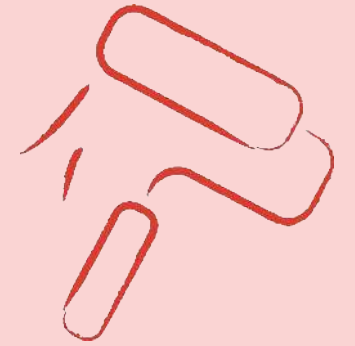


“

◀ The graffiti removal team was essential to keeping the space clean and cared for. The bright colours, reflecting ambient light, added to a sense of security and gave the impression that the area was actively maintained — making it feel safer to navigate.”

Blythe Chidgey, former Communications & Stakeholder Engagement Manager - CYP Design and Construction

Artist & Creative Engagement



Definition

Artist and creative engagement refers to how a program supports, collaborates with, and builds opportunities for artists and creatives. The Creative Program's artist engagement was assessed by examining how artists were selected and supported (Commissioning), how they were financially recognised for their work (Compensation), and how their skills and careers were strengthened (Professional Development).

Focus

Commissioning

Selecting and inviting artists and creatives to contribute original work aligned with the Program's goals.

Compensation

Providing fair financial payment for creative work, recognising both time and expertise.

Professional Development

Offering opportunities for artists to grow their skills, experience new mediums, and expand their professional practice.

What worked well?

Thoughtful artist engagement — through **commissioning**, **compensation**, and diverse **representation** — offered professional and collaborative opportunities.

For Artists, a Creative Inflection Point

With its prominent public locations, the Creative Program provided artists a unique canvas to exhibit their work in the heart of the city. This initiative allows residents, commuters, and visitors to experience artworks by emerging, mid-career and established artists.

For Dr Deanne Gilson, a proud Wadawurrung artist, collaborating with the Creative Program has made for a “thriving” practice. She highlighted the positive impacts of the program, including showcasing diverse First Nations art styles (not just traditional work), offering highly visible locations to engage large audiences, and brightening the urban environment during construction periods. This initiative sparked meaningful public interaction and raised Dr Gilson’s profile as an artist.

“

The program gave my practice a massive boost and literally brought people to my exhibition, which actually has turned my art practice into a thriving one with paid work. As an artist, that turning point has inspired me to work very hard on this ongoing series.”

Dr Deanne Gilson, participating First Nations artist

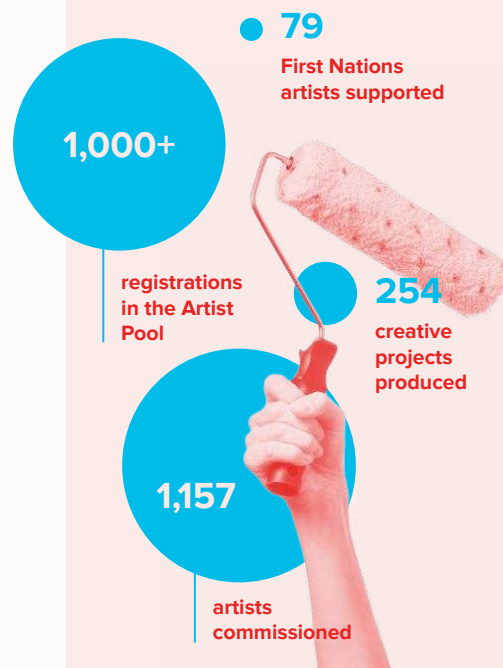


Karrap Karrap Beenyak Mundi-gurrk/Baskets of Knowledge by Dr Deanne Gilson, Town Hall Station hoardings 2023

Artist & Creative Engagement Strategies & Outcomes

The Creative Program ...

... established the Artist Pool, which served as a database of local creative talent to tap into as opportunities opened up.



Strategy

When the program first launched in 2016, artists were commissioned on an ad hoc basis. In 2020, however, the Creative Program introduced an Artist Pool — a flexible, pre-vetted roster of Melbourne-based creatives — to better respond to volatile construction timelines and fast-turnaround hoarding. The pool streamlined commissioning and was periodically reopened to include new talent. Artists received monthly updates on opportunities, events, and giveaways.

Outcome

The Artist Pool helped to ensure that a diverse range of artists had access to creative opportunities throughout the program lifecycle by making it easier for creatives to express interest and be considered for projects. It also fostered a sense of community and transparency in the selection process.

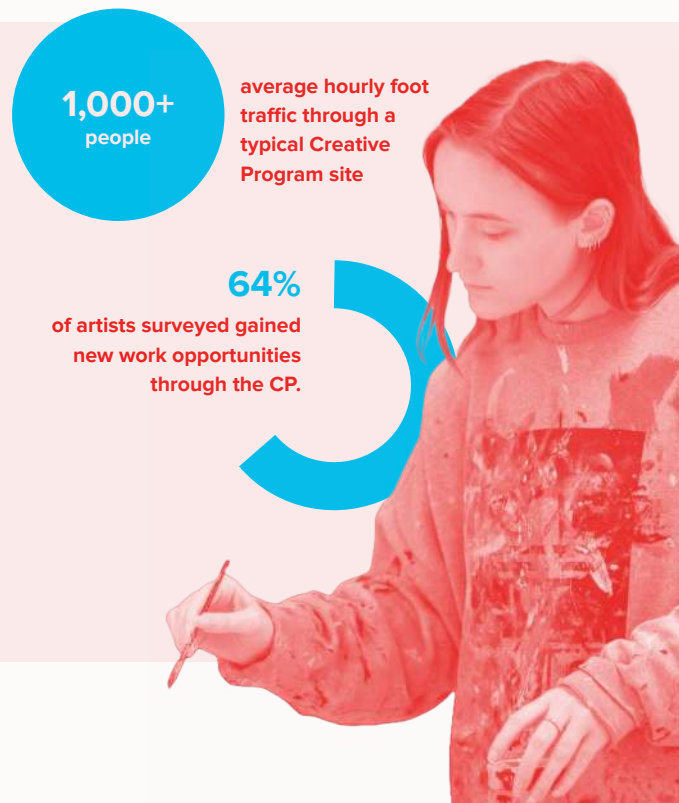
... provided a highly visible canvas for artwork.

Strategy

The Creative Program transformed high-foot-traffic edges of construction sites across Melbourne into open-air galleries, giving artists a unique opportunity to exhibit their work to wide, everyday audiences.

Outcome

Many participating artists noted that the exposure they gained through the program led to new commissions, collaborations, and professional growth beyond the scope of the project.



... compensated artists at every stage of the process.



85% of artists surveyed rated their experience with the Creative Program as good to excellent.

Strategy

From concept development through to production and installation, the Creative Program ensured all artists were paid. Commission fees paid to artists aligned with National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) rates to ensure fair compensation for artists dependent on career level, and whether solo or group projects.

Outcome

Artists consistently expressed appreciation for being fairly compensated at all stages, including the concept development stage — something not always guaranteed in the public art sphere. Valuing artist contributions led to high-quality, professional outcomes.

... supported artists from across disciplines and geographies within Victoria.

Strategy

The program engaged creatives across genres — from graphic artists and photographers to theatre performers and audio artists — offering a platform for emerging and established talent to contribute meaningfully to a major infrastructure project.

Outcome

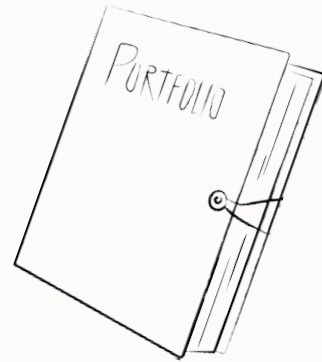
Artists reported learning to work at scale, experimenting with new materials, contexts, and gaining valuable insight into public interaction with their work — broadening their creative and professional development.



Lisa Warrenner, Consultant Curator, Global Art Projects

Artist & Creative Engagement

Lessons Learned



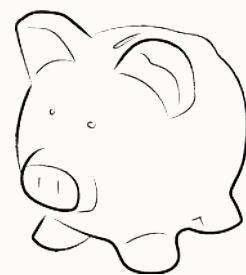
Establish a clear, equitable, and scalable artist selection process.

While artists were initially engaged through a more organic and opportunistic process, when the Creative Program introduced the Artist Pool, it became a key mechanism for engaging creatives in future commissions. This approach successfully attracted a diverse range of artists — particularly emerging artists — and became a key tool for sourcing talent. The Artist Pool also reopened at key intervals, allowing new artists to apply and helping to continually expand and diversify the pool.

However, some participants felt the Artist Pool created an expectation of guaranteed opportunities. Future programs should consider clearer communication about the purpose and limitations of selection frameworks.

Allocate funding to compensate artists fairly across all project phases from concept development, to creation, to materials reimbursement.

Compensating artists for concept development, creation, and materials was a defining feature of the Creative Program, setting a standard for valuing creative labour throughout the process.



Create space for community members to contribute creatively.

The Creative Program has delivered projects like the *101 Victorians* initiative, which was open to all community members — amateurs, hobbyists, and professionals alike — and made participation accessible through digital photo submissions. The project celebrated the extraordinary diversity of the community. Similarly, projects were undertaken with local historical societies, university students and school groups.

Greater inclusion of local, non-professional creatives can help foster a sense of community ownership and demonstrate that everyone has the potential to be an artist in public space. Some survey respondents noted that more of these opportunities could have been made available to the public.



The 120 metre long JJ Holland Park mural was painted in the summer of 2019 and shaped by community input. It celebrated local life and was created in collaboration with the Kensington Community Children's Co-Operative (KCCC).

After three years on display, it was removed in May 2022 as construction works concluded. Several panels were donated to KCCC, who helped install them.

“

“[For organisations looking to adopt a creative program], I'd recommend taking a similar route — partnering with established organisations that have curatorial expertise, whether that's a museum, festival, or local institution. Tapping into existing cultural platforms can engage audiences in a meaningful way while supporting the local arts ecosystem.”

Elias Redstone,
PHOTO Festival

Stakeholder Engagement

Definition

Stakeholder engagement refers to how a program collaborates with and builds trust among key partners, including local communities, government agencies, and project delivery teams. The Creative Program's stakeholder engagement was assessed by examining how it worked adaptively and co-creatively with impacted communities (Neighbours), coordinated effectively with authorities (Government), and collaborated closely with construction teams on the ground (Construction Teams).

Focus

Neighbours

Building trust and maintaining open communication with local institutions, small businesses, and residents impacted by construction.

Government

Coordinating with government bodies to align creative activities with broader city and infrastructure goals.

Construction Teams

Working closely with construction teams to integrate creative installations and activations safely and effectively adjacent to active construction environments.



What worked well?

An adaptive and co-creative approach built trust with **neighbours** (local institutions, small businesses), **government**, and on-the-ground **construction teams**.

DANGER
LIVE CABLES BEHIND

Story of Impact

Working Hand in Hand

As part of its approach to engaging meaningfully with institutions affected by construction, the Creative Program partnered with RMIT University on several large-scale artwork installations. Displayed on the acoustic shed along Franklin Street, the 80-metre installations featured work by graduating students from the RMIT Bachelor of Design (Communication Design).

Teaming up with the RMIT School of Design, the project required sustained coordination to align institutional objectives with the program's goals. The project offered students hands-on experience in developing a large-scale public installation. Several took on leadership roles in shaping the final installation, and for many, seeing their work scaled up and displayed in a prominent public space was a thrilling and impactful moment in their early careers.

Beyond showcasing student work, the initiative served as a model for stakeholder engagement — demonstrating how creative partnerships can be built upon a shared vision and mutual investment.



Artwork by RMIT School of Communication Design graduating students, State Library Station hoardings 2022

The images shown are personal responses to the theme Flock Off, School's Out and the students' return to campus after 2 years of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Creative Program ...

... started with smaller concepts before scaling up the number, size and ambition of installations and activations.

Strategy

The Creative Program began with modest, high-impact installations — primarily two-dimensional graphic artworks at the most affected locations in the CBD area — to demonstrate proof of concept. As support from stakeholders grew, the program expanded in scale and ambition, adding place-based activations like pop-up parks and partnerships with major festivals such as the Melbourne International Jazz Festival and Melbourne Fashion Week.

Outcome

As the program demonstrated positive results, support grew from government agencies and neighbouring property owners — transforming initial skepticism into support and advocacy for the Creative Program.



“**Being able to deliver on the commitment to the stakeholders was one of the successes of the program. It demonstrated to the government that the program was a key way to manage construction impacts and deliver business support.**”

Peter De Luca, former Director of Corporate Affairs & Strategy, Metro Tunnel Project Office (MTPO)

... established an effective day-to-day coordination model with construction teams.

“**[The program] worked so professionally across an enormous tricky construction site and thought of so many different ways to bring art to the people.**”

Dianna Wells, Contributing artist



Strategy

In a fast-changing construction environment, site conditions often shifted with little notice. The Creative Program stayed in close contact with delivery teams and adjusted plans as needed to install (and sometimes change) artwork without compromising quality or impact.

Outcome

Through strong coordination and flexibility — including adapting and reusing existing artworks — the program successfully installed pieces despite challenges and built valuable relationships with site staff who became strong allies.

... co-created installations with neighbours.

“**The Creative Program engaged with impacted stakeholders and businesses and set a new benchmark for disruption management.**”

Interviewee

Strategy

At times, the Creative Program collaborated with neighbouring stakeholders — including small businesses, community groups, and educational institutions — to shape and inform the design and content of artworks and activations.

Outcome

Creative Program projects were thoughtfully tailored to their surroundings. For instance, families, children, and the young-at-heart joined Polyglot Theatre artists and construction workers to build a cardboard ‘city’ in Parkville as part of Melbourne Fringe; artworks by design students from Victorian College of Arts, RMIT, and Melbourne University were showcased near campuses; behind-the-scenes photographs displayed on hoardings gave the public a glimpse of construction progress; and small businesses benefited from creative wayfinding, enhanced lighting, and customised hoardings that improved visibility and safety and were well-received by the community.

73

projects created with neighbouring stakeholders



... kept the lines of communication open to different stakeholder groups.

Strategy

In a constantly evolving and complex big-build construction environment like the Metro Tunnel, site conditions changed frequently and rapidly — creating logistical and coordination challenges. The Creative Program responded with a flexible approach, maintaining regular communication with delivery teams to stay informed about available spaces and adjust installation plans without compromising the program’s impact.

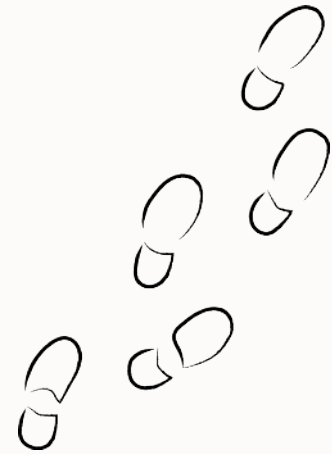
Outcome

The team’s open communication allowed them to react quickly to time-sensitive issues as they came up — such as adjusting artwork sizes when hoarding configurations changed without notice. Having smaller-scale pieces (4-5 metres long) and ongoing licence agreements with artists and artwork of repeating pattern ready to install helped ensure a continuous art presence at key construction sites and to minimise disruptions.



Stakeholder Engagement

Lessons Learned



Start small to build trust, then **scale up**.

Maintain clear, open-lines of communication with construction teams to ensure ease of day-to-day coordination — and stay nimble.

Bring surrounding communities on the project journey, so they too feel a sense of pride in and ownership over them.



Informed by community consultation, the Domain Road pop-up park was built in 2019 and expanded in 2020 to enhance the area and create a shared space for residents, businesses, and visitors. This enabled businesses to continue operating during COVID-19 and to foster a sense of connection. In January 2025, the Creative Program gifted the parklets to local businesses to own and maintain.



There was skepticism within the broader government about using project money for creative activities and therefore a hesitancy to promote the program externally. This was overcome through demonstrating how the program benefited impacted stakeholders.”

Peter De Luca, former Director of Corporate Affairs & Strategy, Metro Tunnel Project Office (MTPO)

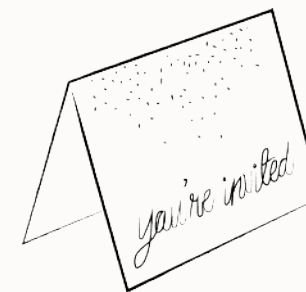
Public art and construction mitigation efforts can face early skepticism, especially in capital-heavy infrastructure environments. To build internal support, the Metro Tunnel Creative Program began by securing buy-in across various parts of the project—engaging teams from Design and Construction, Marketing and Promotion, and Stakeholder and Community Engagement to ensure alignment and cooperation.

The program also gained trust through a gradual, evidence-based approach. It started with small, low-risk interventions — like two-dimensional artworks and activations in highly impacted areas — and, after demonstrating success, earned the support needed to implement larger, bolder activation projects like a public circus show by artists living with disabilities, and pop-up parks in Albert and Domain Roads, located near Anzac Station.

While many construction team members appreciated the Creative Program, some were wary of its value. Early discussions that outlined the program’s benefits and clarified the required workflows between the creative and construction teams helped establish alignment. These conversations also laid the groundwork for ongoing communication — particularly regarding changes to available installation sites and responses to instances of graffiti or vandalism.

Given the evolving nature of construction sites, the Creative Program’s flexibility and its strong relationships with design, print and install teams to action jobs quickly were also key to keeping the program active and consistent.

Co-creating with institutions and businesses most impacted by construction helped shift perceptions — from fatigue and frustration to collaboration — giving local stakeholders a stronger sense of investment and buy-in for the project.



The program had the greatest impact on both stakeholders and local communities. It focused on identifying what was lost during construction and replacing it with thoughtful, temporary interventions. The response was overwhelmingly positive — just look at the Domain Road parklet we introduced at the start of the project. It received around 90% approval from residents and nearby businesses.”

Jack Amies, Managing Director, The Place Agency

Evaluation & Monitoring



Definition

Evaluation and monitoring refer to how a program measures its impact, tracks performance, and uses feedback to guide continuous improvement. The Creative Program employed monitoring and evaluation to understand everyday behaviour and activity (Public Life), gather artist feedback (Artist Survey), and listen to broader community perspectives (Community Surveys), ensuring the program's strategies evolved and remained responsive based on evidence.

Focus

Public Life

Studying how people move through and spend time in the spaces around Creative Program sites to understand activity patterns.

Artist Survey

Collecting feedback from participating artists about their experiences, challenges, and opportunities for growth.

Community Surveys

Gathering input from the broader community to identify needs and ideas, and to measure satisfaction, engagement, and perceptions of the program's value.

What worked well?

Ongoing evaluation and monitoring through **Public Life studies** and **artist and community surveys** gave the program clear, evidence-based direction for continuous improvement.

Using Data to Drive Decision-Making

From the start, the Creative Program team partnered with urban design, strategy, and research firm Gehl to develop an Evaluation Framework to assess whether the Program was meeting its goals — minimising construction impacts and using disruption to foster creativity, support artists, and engage communities. The evaluation combined field research, including observations and photo documentation, with public engagement methods such as surveys, focus groups, social media analysis, and artist feedback. Together, these approaches offered a people-centered understanding of how public realm projects shaped daily life and informed continuous program improvements.

“

The Public Space Public Life surveys provided very clear insight into how people interacted with the spaces we were embellishing and activating — why they were there, what they did in the space, and how much they interacted with the program.”

Sarah Robins, Metro Tunnel Creative Program Manager



Public Life Study surveyor on Swanston Street observing and documenting movement in front of a Creative Program installation

Visitor movements and stationary activities were observed and recorded anonymously by trained volunteers using the Gehl Public Life App. These studies were conducted on both a weekday and a weekend day at each Creative Program site to capture a representative snapshot of public life.

The Creative Program ...

... conducted regular public life evaluations, to understand movement and activity by and near the sites.

“
You need to measure what you’re doing — the evaluation toolkit was one of the most valuable things to have.”

Mary Parker, former Director of Communications and Creative, CYP-Project Co.

Outcome

The studies revealed insights into which types of two-dimensional artworks — such as those with a bright tone highlighting human stories — were most effective in different settings, from narrow construction detours and alleyways to expansive civic plazas. They also gauged public perception, including sentiment, acceptance, and favourability toward both the Metro Tunnel Project and its creative experiments.

Additionally, the studies captured how people interacted with events and pop-up activations, assessing whether these spaces encouraged social activity and felt welcoming to a mix of ages and genders. These findings informed subsequent curatorial decisions and supported the program’s ability to clearly communicate its impact.

Strategy

At roughly three-year intervals throughout the eight-year construction period, the Creative Program partnered with evaluation partners to conduct observational studies around station precincts. These studies assessed pedestrian movement, stationary behaviour, and activities near Creative Program sites. The findings informed ongoing programming during the temporary construction period, supporting evidence-based improvement decisions.



... regularly surveyed artists to understand their experiences with the program.

92%
of artists surveyed rated their experience with the Creative Program on their profile as good to excellent.
(n=90)

Strategy

Participating artists were regularly surveyed to share their feedback on challenges, opportunities, and the program’s impact on their practice, profile, and future endeavours.

Outcome

Artist survey results helped the program understand how it contributed to artists’ professional development, while also highlighting common challenges—such as tight deadlines, working with unfamiliar materials, and navigating stakeholder input. These insights enabled the program to refine its processes to better support artists of all experience levels.



... engaged community reference groups to understand resident experiences with the program.

Strategy

In each precinct along the tunnel route, the Creative Program worked closely with community reference groups as well as nearby businesses and institutions. Feedback was gathered through one-on-one meetings, presentations, and online surveys. This input was then reported back to the community.

Outcome

Stewards of the Creative Program noted that public feedback was instrumental in understanding local perceptions of the creative interventions, enabling place-specific tweaks to artwork type, content, and tone. Transparent engagement, particularly share-backs of what was heard, helped build trust, encouraged co-creation, and kept the program responsive to community needs.



... maintained a real-time overview of program performance.

Strategy

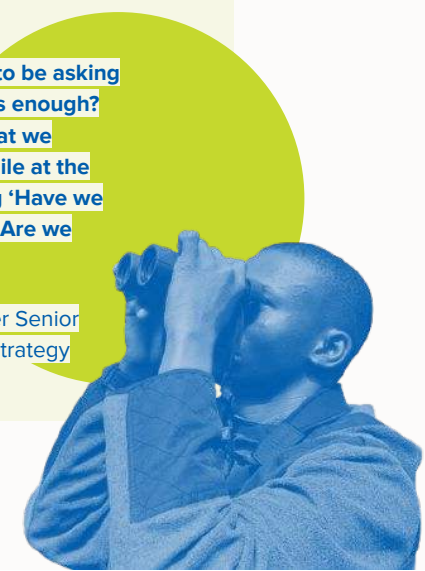
The Creative Program held an annual performance review to guide planning for the year ahead, starting in September, refining through October–November, and presenting to the Steering Committee in December.

Outcome

Ensured that the program was meeting its stated goals while pushing the boundaries.

“
Someone needs to be asking ‘Are we ambitious enough? Are we doing what we promised to?’ While at the same time asking ‘Have we made a misstep? Are we eroding trust?’”

Tom Shield, former Senior Manager, Urban Strategy MTPO



Evaluation & Monitoring

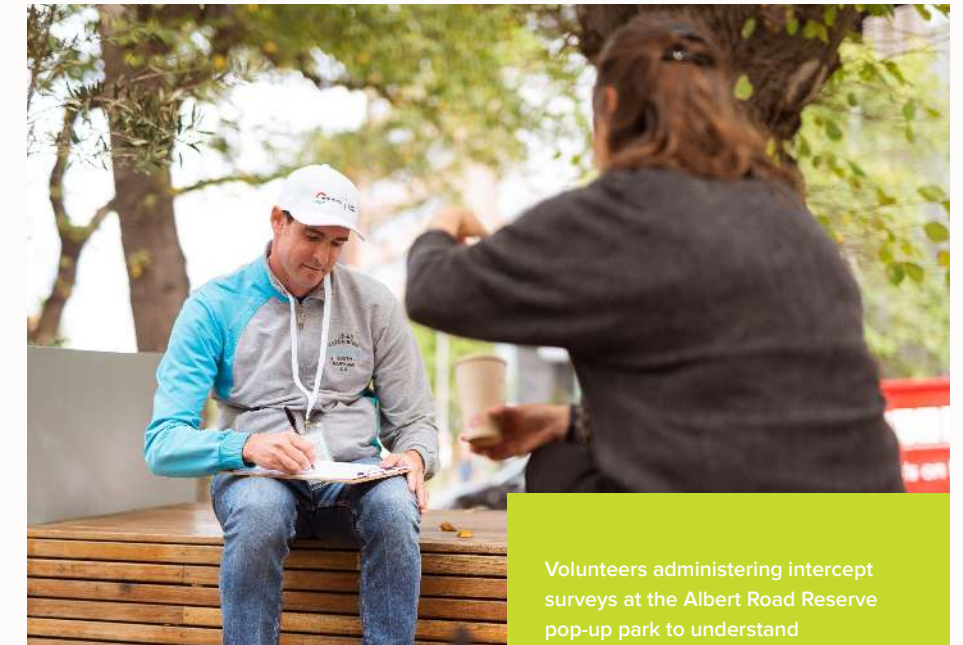
Lessons Learned



Anchor the program to a guiding north star — and revisit objectives regularly to ensure that the program stays true to its goals.

Establish a routine of regularly monitoring installations and maintaining on-the-ground visibility to quickly identify and address any issues with quality or upkeep.

Measure, test, refine — Build in evaluation from the start and use it to ensure the program is evolving to meet needs.



Volunteers administering intercept surveys at the Albert Road Reserve pop-up park to understand perceptions of the activation.

“

The temporary Creative Program and the Legacy Artwork aimed to give each station its own unique visual identity based on its location. Each site featured an activation and art that had its own distinct character. The program was very much [focused on asking questions like:] How do we highlight the area? How do we highlight the station? How do we highlight Melbourne?”

Inpamathi Natkunasingam, CEO, CYP-Project Co.

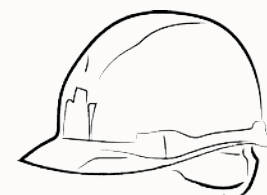
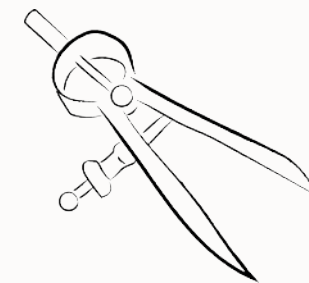
The Creative Program was guided by clear goals — most notably managing construction impacts, creating dynamic, people-focused places, and enabling creative opportunities — which were consistently reinforced throughout the program.

Interviewees also reflected that the program’s strength came from responding to local context, rather than enforcing a uniform “line-wide identity” — an insight that may be useful for peer cities or organisations developing similar programs.

The Creative Program subcontracted a dedicated graffiti removal team that also conducted daily site monitoring. Issues were typically identified within 24 hours and addressed swiftly. While vandalism and graffiti are inevitable when displaying artworks in the public realm, the key is having a responsive maintenance team in place. This includes regularly repairing or even reusing artwork when needed.

While the removal team was effective once issues were flagged, some interviewees suggested that involving construction teams in reporting issues could further strengthen the program’s ability to maintain site quality.

From the outset, the Creative Program embedded a framework for evaluation, allowing it to adapt and improve throughout 5–8 years of construction. Regular feedback from community members, artists, and stakeholders ensured the program remained relevant, responsive, and never “set and forgotten.”



“

If there was one consistently positive thing in this whole Metro Tunnel process, it was the Creative Program.

Chris White, former CEO,
CYP-Project Co



The Melbourne Map by Melinda Clarke, Lewis Brownlie, Deborah Young Monk, Sean Rodwell, Scott Alley, 2022

“Illustrated maps define the places we love by the things we love about them and what we hold to be true about our sense of place in our collective imagination,” said Melinda Clarke.

The Melbourne Map showcases recognisable landmarks from the Flinders Quarter area. The creators took thousands of photographs and spent more than three years hand drawing and colouring to produce the map, of which a small section was displayed in Scott Alley. They accurately researched and documented countless buildings, waterways, streets, gardens and quirky things discovered during the research. This type of project, rooted in local content, resonated strongly with viewers, as noted in surveys and online feedback.

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Anne-Marie De Boni: page 5 (lower), pages 27-28, 63

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Kate Disher-Quill: page 10 (middle)

Kit Edwards: pages 9, 12, 15, 21, 26 (lower), 38, 55, 66-67, 71, 73

Mighty Films: page 47

Pete Glenane: page 10 (top)

Phoebe Powell: page 26 (centre), pages 42-43

Shannyn Higgins: Back (top left)

Theresa Harrison: Cover, Back (top right and lower)

Featured On End Cover

Top:

Acid Brass performances at RISING, June 2024

The Metro Tunnel Creative Program partnered with RISING 2024 to present 2 performances of *Acid Brass*, next to the 2 new Metro Tunnel CBD stations – Town Hall Station and State Library Station.

Acid Brass is the creation of Jeremy Deller and presents a fusion of acid house and techno music played by community brass bands.

Middle left:

Making the Metro Tunnel exhibition, Domain House, 2023

Making the Metro Tunnel, reflections by contemporary Australian artists was an exhibition that aimed to explore and celebrate the construction milestones of the Metro Tunnel Project. It comprised commissioned artworks that responded to the project's construction, taking inspiration from archaeological digs, heavy machinery, the aesthetics of worksites, worker's equipment and other aspects of the project. Pictured is *The Instrumental* by Daniel Agdag, a sculptural work that embodied his interpretation of a tunnel boring machine, crafted from boxboard. Held at Domain House, the exhibition also featured work resulting from a creative partnership with Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria.

Bottom:

We Built This City by Polyglot Theatre, Parkville Station, University Square, December 2021

We Built This City by Polyglot Theatre first emerged 20 years ago in Melbourne's City Square – now home to the Metro Tunnel Town Hall Station site. It returned to the city for a special 20th anniversary presentation, in collaboration with Melbourne Fringe.

The architectural playground took over Parkville's University Square for 2 days of fun for the family (or groups of mates) in December 2021. The area became an energetic space filled with thousands of cardboard boxes and a DJ spinning tunes all day long.

Families, kids and the young-at-heart joined the Polyglot artists and construction workers to build a 'city' of boxes from scratch in just 60 minutes. Then, at the end of the hour, it was handed over to a new team of builders to create anew. The large-scale cardboard construction site was designed to bring communities together and spark creativity and connection.

Middle right:

As Camp as Christmas by The Huxleys, Town Hall Station, City Square and Scott Alley, December 2019, 2021, and 2022

With *As Camp as Christmas*, The Huxleys continued their escalating escapist trip beyond the yellow brick road. Celebrating surrealism and exaggerated glamour, this work brought an androgynous spectacle to the merriment of Christmas.

The Huxleys aimed to bring some joy, humour and queer love to the city. Christmas can so often be focused around the Northern Hemisphere and the The Huxleys wanted to instead celebrate the glory and beauty of Australian flora and fauna.

